

Touching and Making: Encounters with Matter

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A Thesis In The
Special Individualized Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Special Individualized Program) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September, 2012

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ABSTRACT

Touching and Making: Encounters with Matter

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This interdisciplinary thesis offers an account of the sense of touch, from the point of view of the artist. The analysis is concerned with the tactile aspects of art production, and pays particular attention to the physical characteristics of the materials used to generate artworks. Taking my own studio based art practice as its point of departure, this thesis is further interweaved with anthropological, art historical and technical approaches to the analysis of material culture, including art.

This thesis is an exercise in research creation. It consists of two sections: one written and one drawn. The series of drawings served simultaneously as research, and to articulate touch.

Throughout my research, I have encountered contradictory attitudes towards touch and materials: while there is an increasing attention given to the senses, tactility, and materiality in the social sciences, art history, and the discourse of artists, concrete material characteristics and technical processes of art making are treated as secondary. Priority is given to theoretical, social, and otherwise abstract notions.

I attend throughout my thesis to the material and sensual qualities of art works, by for example focusing on the size, thickness and weight of books; the sonic qualities of words; the inclusion of tools (used in the production of the work) as part of the work; and, artists who seek to accentuate or cure neuroses.

This thesis is otherwise informed by a perspective which seeks to overcome the classical separation of the material and the abstract. This perspective developed from the works of Gilbert Simondon and Martin Holbraad. Their work both helped to frame the research, and furthered my conceptualisation of Conceptual art as manipulable.

Conceptual art is said to be dematerialized art, prioritising thinking, with an end result that need not be an object. This suggests a lack of interest in the sensate on the part of Conceptual artists. However, my encounters seek re-materialise and re-sensualise Conceptual art, by attending to material and techniques.

The encounters with matter recounted in this thesis are informed by an autoethnography of my studio practice, which sensitised me to the relationship between bodily postures and the art making. The autoethnography explored the consequences that comfort, or discomfort can have on art making, as well as the variable results from the speed of the drawing hand, the quality of the paper, ink, and pen. These findings were used as a basis for the in-depth analyses of other artwork in the thesis.

The original question that led the undertaking of this interdisciplinary research, an interest with manipulating materials, became a method of comprehending art objects.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of many people, starting with Martha Langford and Elaine Paterson, who both got me writing after my twelve years out of school. The generosity, patience, and criticism of my three advisors convince me of the relevance of my project. Thank you Gisele Amantea for helping those records to be made; thank you David Howes for getting me to articulate the sensed; and thank you to Johanne Sloan, your enthusiasm and sharp criticism made this thesis go beyond my initial assumptions. And finally, all these doctoral years could not have been possible without the constant presence and help of Eo Sharp.

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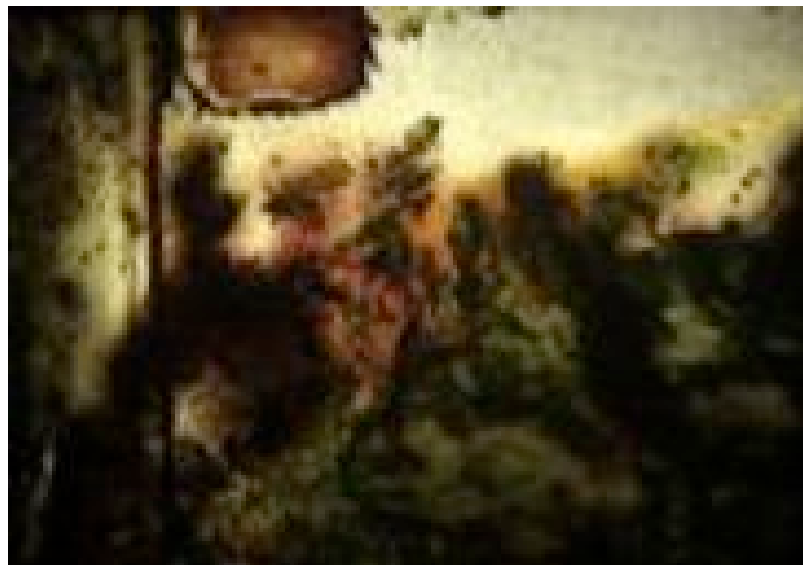


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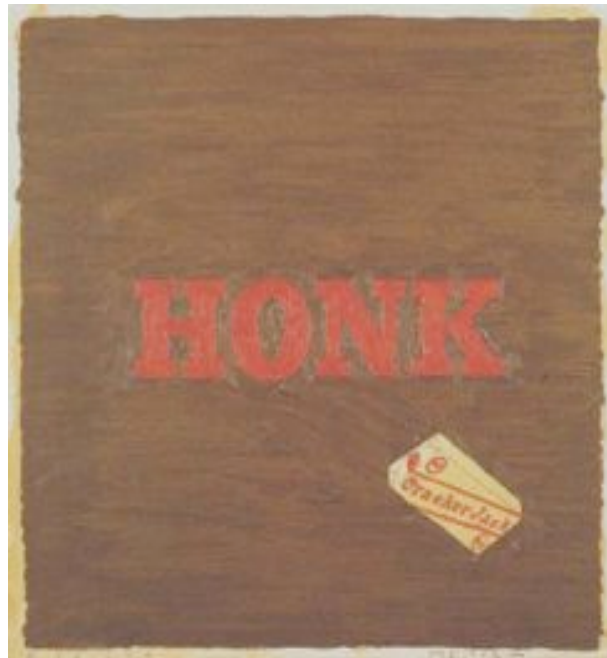


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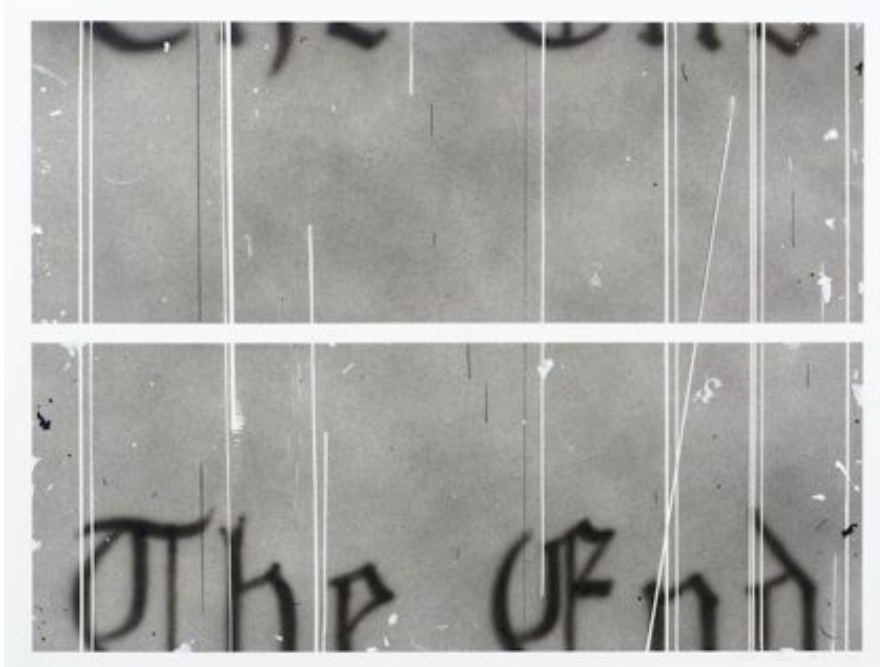


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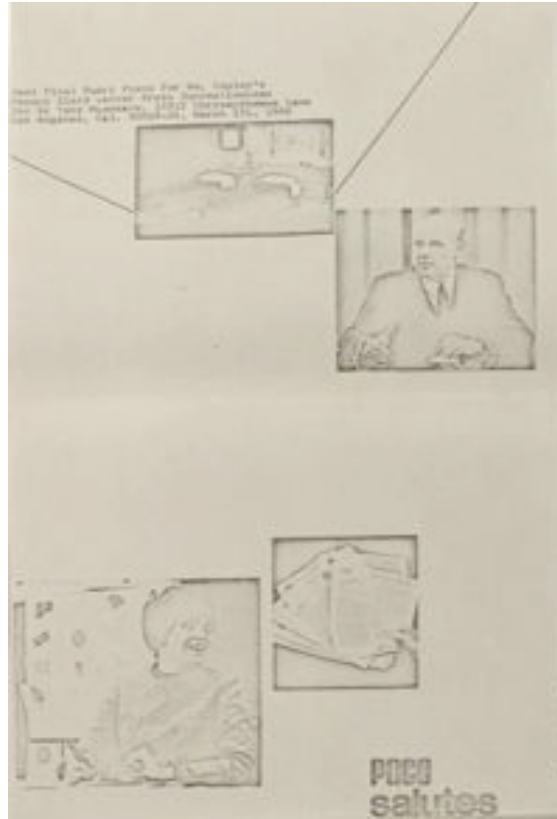


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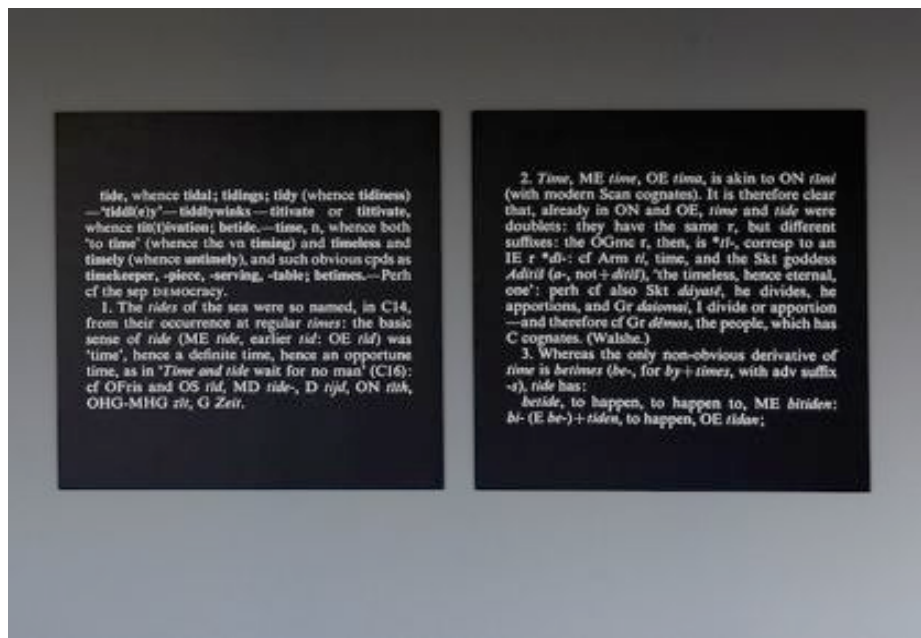


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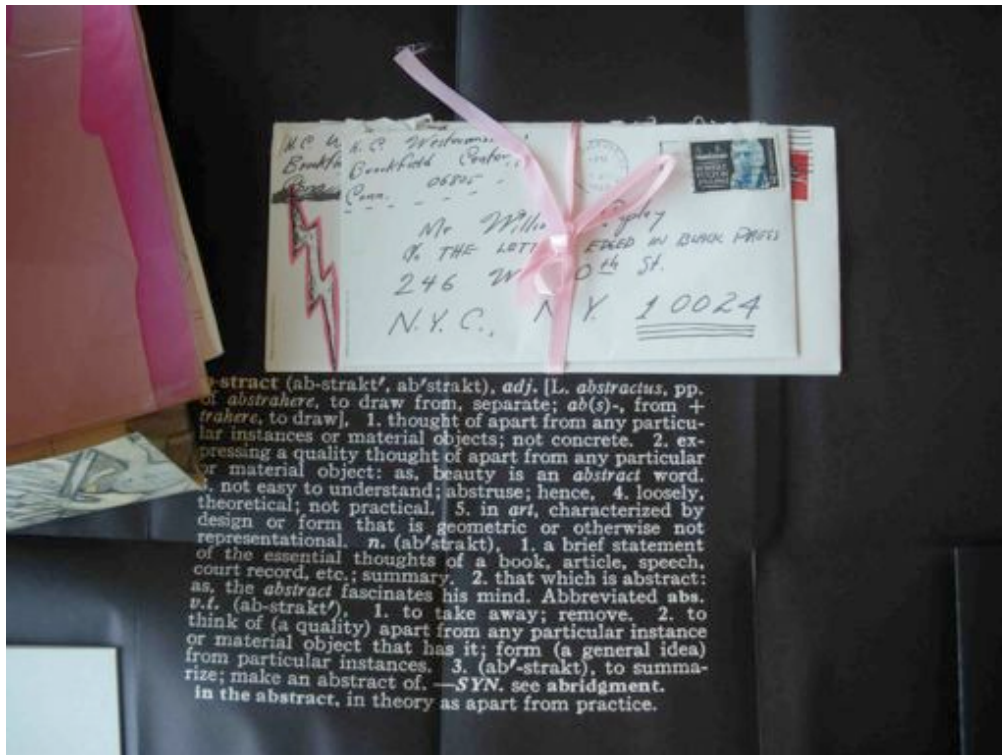


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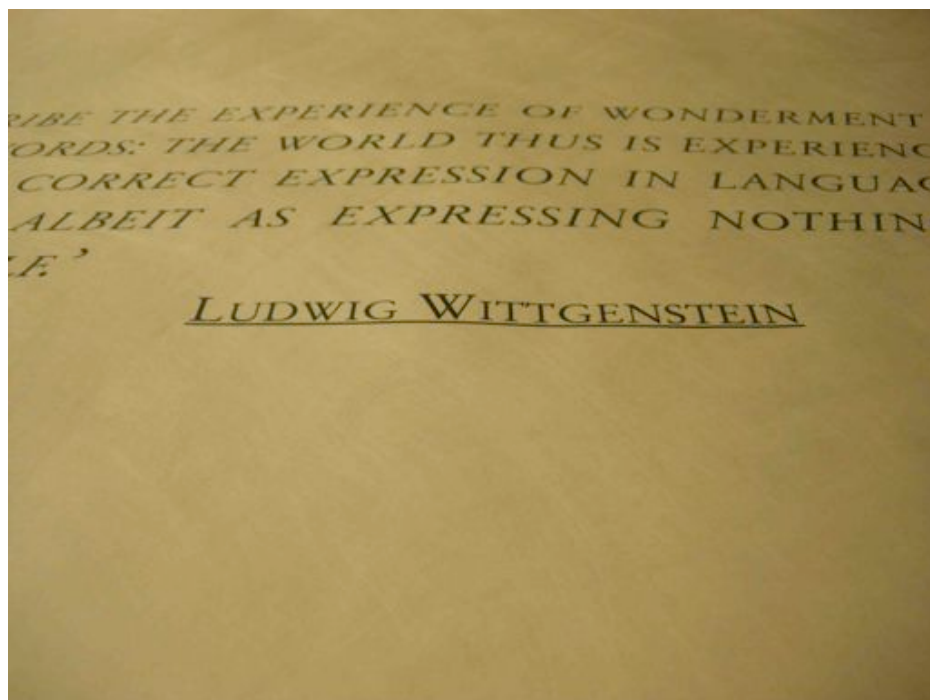


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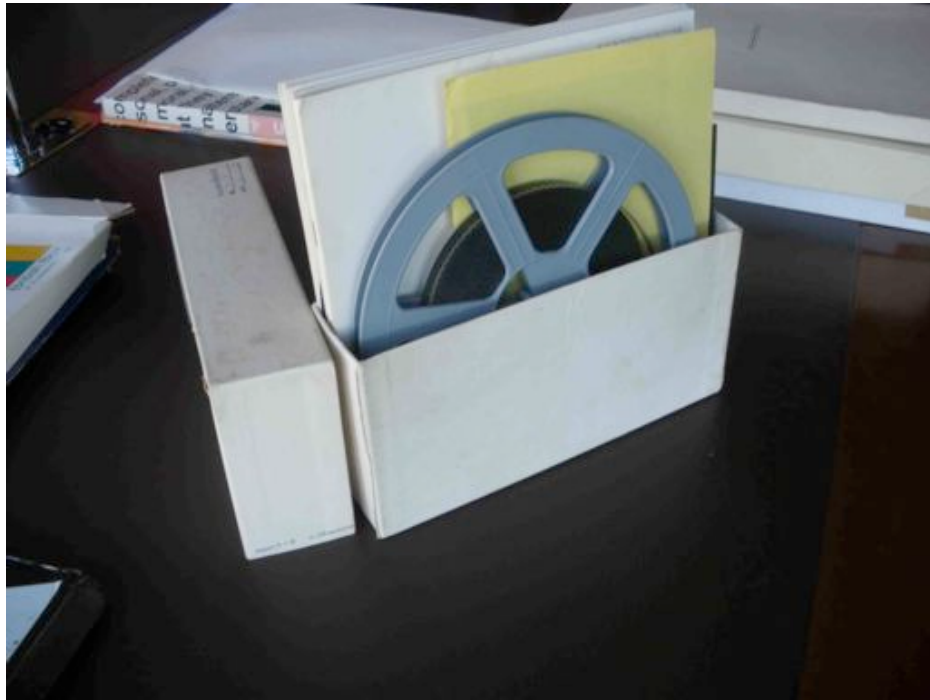


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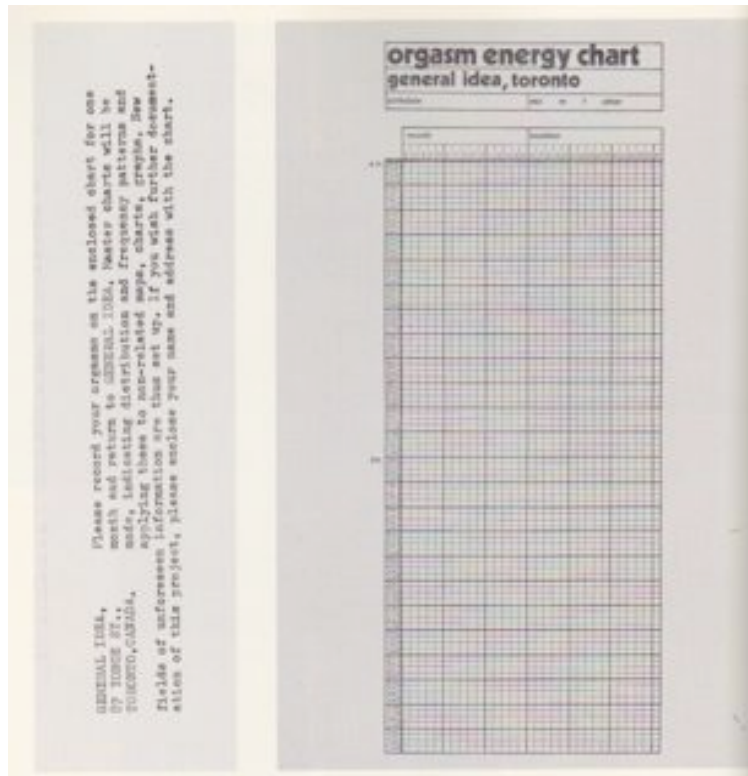


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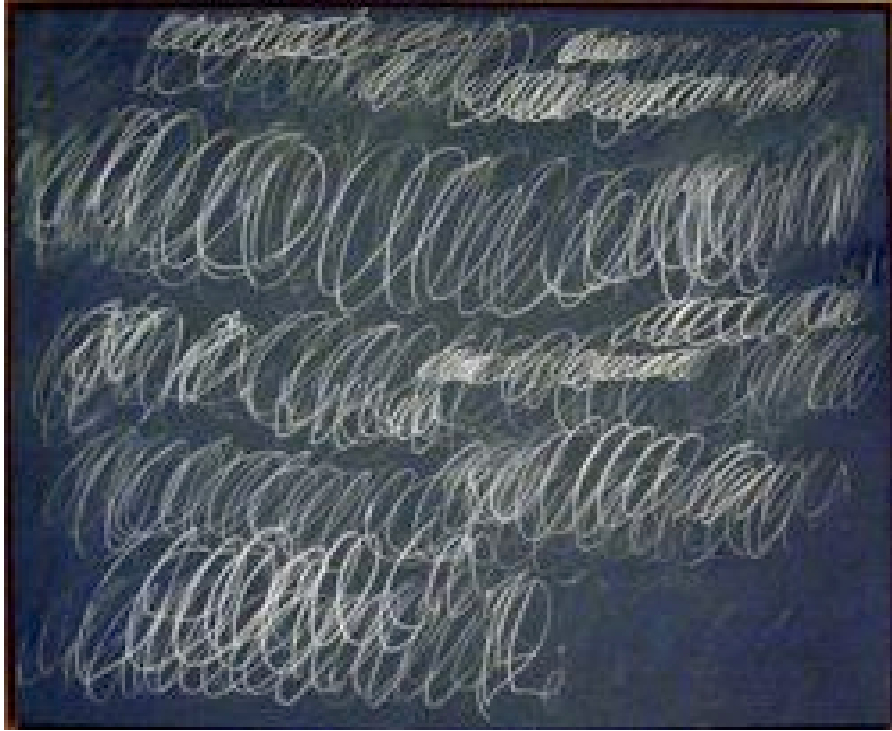


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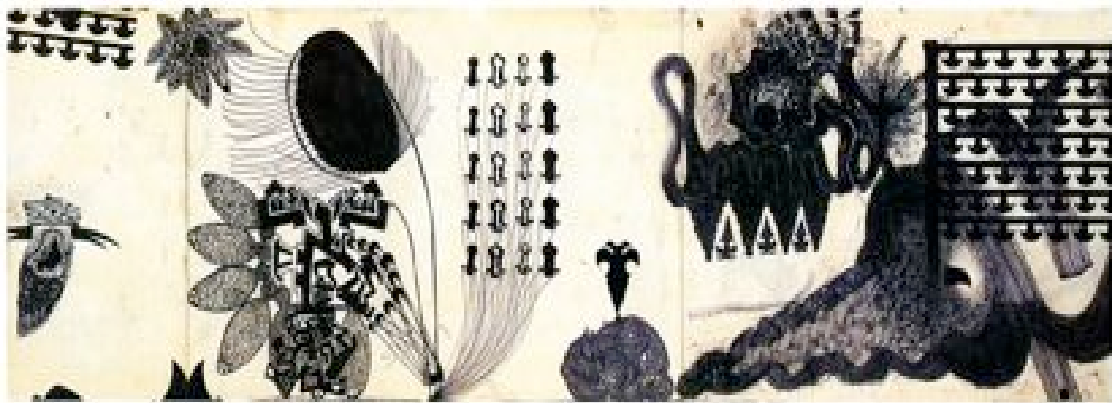


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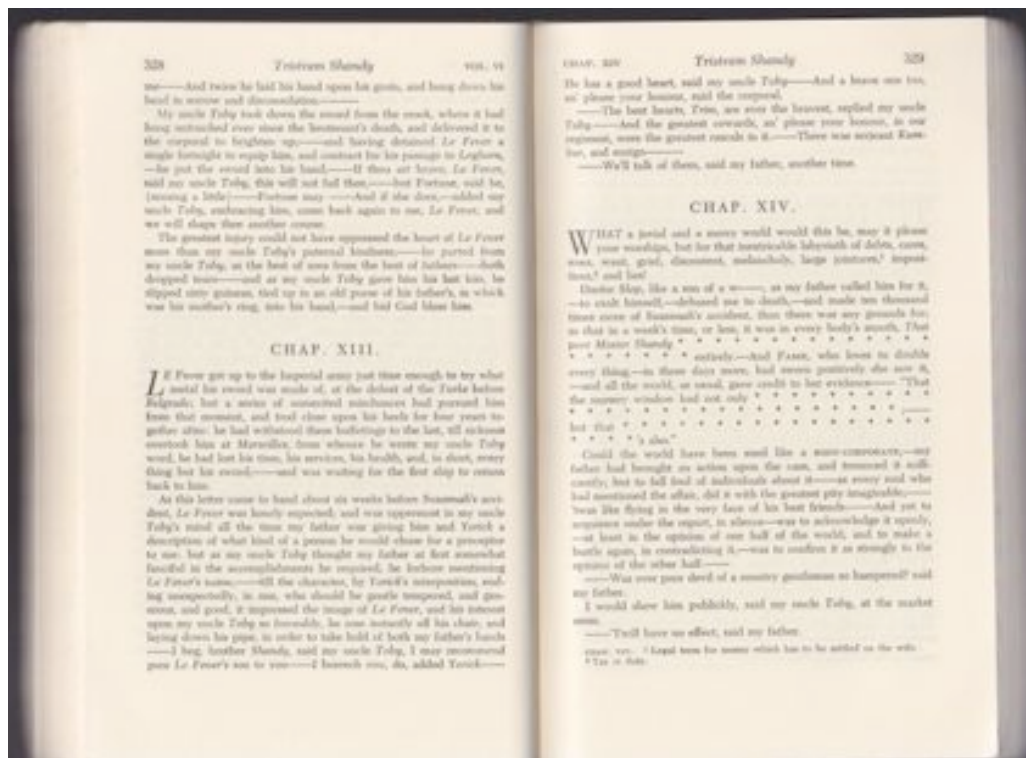


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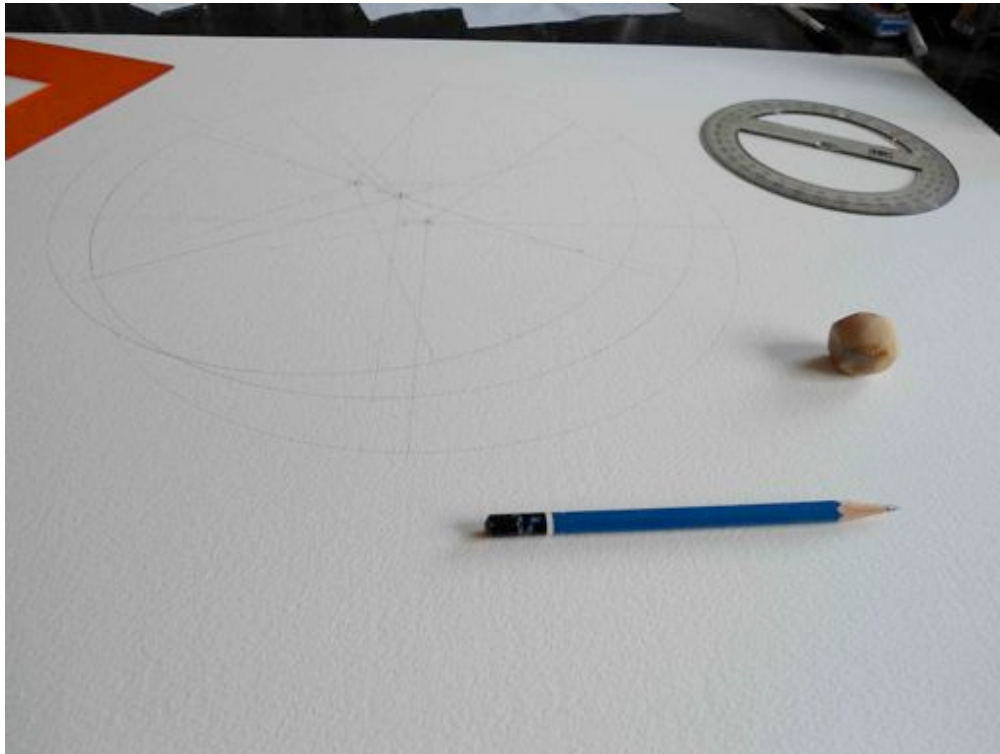


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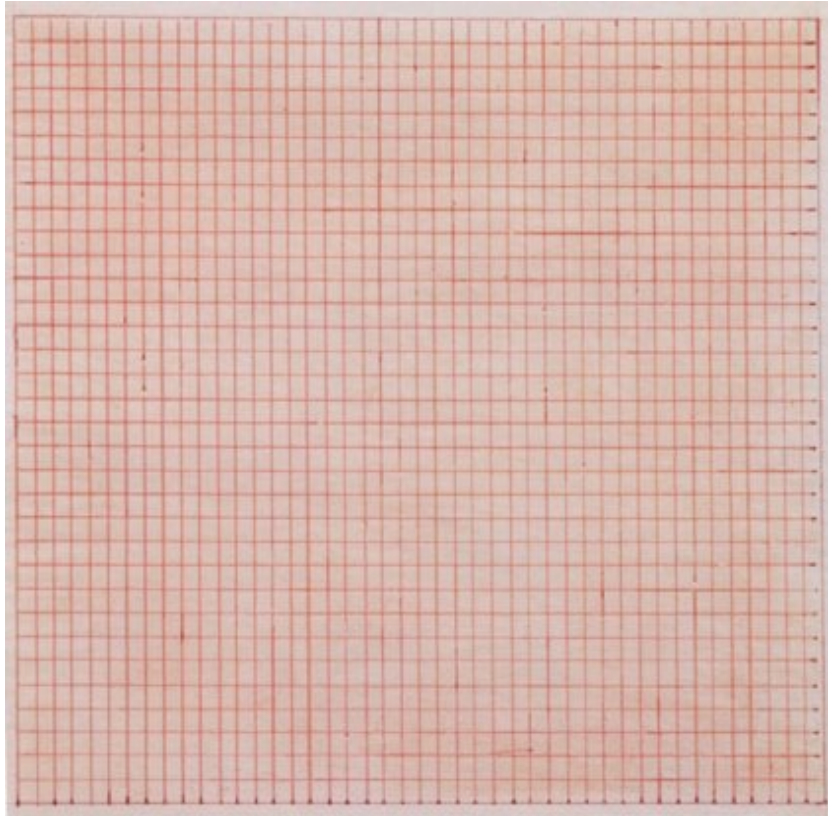


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Introduction

Working as a sculptor, I have repeatedly found that working with tangible, concrete materials allowed for new ideas to be generated, and made my work surprising to me. The encounters with the characteristics and potentials of the material at hand are what generate the terms of engagement. Working directly with matter, being able to *feel* a range of resistances that each type of material offers, with their specific formal potentialities, made for rich encounters from which to elaborate further works.

The research for my thesis arose out of my attraction to the specificities of direct contact, and explores how artists and art theoreticians have addressed this nexus. The terms interactivity and tangibility used by new media artists suggest an interest with contact. However, I feel that physical contact and concrete matter are often bypassed in much contemporary theory and practice in favor of images, or conceptual notions that suggest touch and matter, but do not deliver. As will become evident in the thesis, these tactile, and suggestive images produced by new-media works are reminiscent of the ones offered by the nineteenth century notion of *Einfühlung*, or empathy. Interactivity and tangibility, though about touch, seem to belong to the metaphorical, removed from concrete encounters. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, touch as metaphor is part of a philosophical tradition, a metaphysics that is mainly

spiritualist, invoking the ineffable.¹ A similar point was recently made by archeologist Bjørnar Olsen, noticing the avoidance of concrete everyday object by theorists of things, who prefer instead to speak of matter as dematerialising: where “things, objects and materials, are never allowed to be hard, stable, lasting or in place. Things are always blurred, unstable, porous, scattered and mobile.”² One would think that we live with un-recognisable and un-graspable objects.

Of a similarly nature is Roland Barthes’ comment on de Sade’s use of the word shit: “Language has this property of denying, ignoring, dissociating reality: when written, shit does not have an odor; Sade can inundate his partners in it, we receive not the slightest whiff, only the abstract sign of something unpleasant.”³ The encounter remains abstract.

While resisting abstraction, I also did not want my thesis to oppose works that are hand-made to manufactured ones, or that belong to new medias. Touch exists in all. Yet, as I said, I want to write about concrete encounters similar to my own methods of working, to linger over what is at hand in my studio. The thesis is as much about touching as it is about materials, emphasising the sensual aspect of art making, and of producing art analysis.

¹ Claire Marin, “L’oeil et la main: la “métaphysique du toucher” dans la philosophie française, de Ravaisson à Derrida,” *Les Études philosophiques*, 1, (2003), p. 100.

² Bjørnar Olsen, “The Return of Things and the savagery of the Archeological Object,” *Savage Objects*, Godofredo Pereira, ed. (Guimarães: INCM, 2012), p. 77.

³ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans., Richard Miller (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 137.

All works of art discussed in this thesis elicit the senses, while reciprocally the senses have to be activated, turned on, paid attention to as a mode of access to the works of art. The encounter with art involve more than mere looking. Besides the various works of artists that I have used for this thesis, providing information about the senses, touch, and matter, the research of several theoreticians are considered, due to their attentiveness to material culture and to the senses. They are principally anthropologists François Laplantine and Martin Holbraad, and philosopher Gilbert Simondon. Art historian Henri Focillon is momentarily considered, specifically his text *The Life of Forms in Art*, which includes his famous essay *In Praise of Hands*.

Of particular importance to this thesis is Simondon's critique of hylomorphism explored in chapters 1 and 4. For Simondon, matter does not passively receive its shape, but acquires it through a dynamic meeting of form and matter. For him, an organism is not passive. For it to receive an external stimulus, it must not only encounter it, but must have the ability, or be prone to encounter. Whereas the passive body does not exert any energy, the sensitive organism is an organism that carries its own energy, one that is potential, and upon perceiving an external signal, is able to react. The spontaneous awaits the external signal. "We cannot oppose irritability to spontaneity, as irritability itself implies a relative usage of the receptive system's spontaneity" [*Il ne faut pas opposer irritabilité et spontanéité, car l'irritabilité elle-même implique un usage relatif de la spontanéité de système récepteur*].⁴

⁴ Gilbert Simondon, "La sensibilité," *Bulletin de psychologie*, tome xx, no. 5 (1966-67), p. 287.

This brings Simondon to associate stimulations with motivations. He mentions that interoception brings on stimulations due to the body's internal needs, adding that "need is the source of motivation" [*le besoin est source de motivation*].⁵ He also wonders if there is a sense of pleasure, like there is one for heat, or pain.⁶ These comments resonate with me, as my interest with handling, touching becomes in Simondon's terms a biological need.

Simondon comments on the lack of terms to properly express the varieties of tactile encounter. Only terms pertaining to the world of textile and furniture seem to be used, such as silky [*soyeux*] and brushed [*velouté*]. The reason for this lack of terms, he offers, is "that our civilisations are hardly manual" [*que nos civilisations ne sont guère manoeuvrières*].⁷ Helpful to describe the sensation of touch are tactile images that evoke various types of matter, such as sand, dust, wood, and various consistencies of earth. These details are taken from our everyday, concrete encounters with matter, often through modalities of work.⁸ Later, in chapter 4, the work of Lygia Clark with its direct contact with the body, allows for further tactile terms to describe various types of cutaneous touching.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gilbert Simondon, *Cours sur la perception: 1964-65* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2006). The course was initially published as 'La perception' in *Bulletin de psychologie*, nos. 238, 239, 241, 242, 1964-65.

⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2008), p. 117. The course was initially published as "L'imagination et l'invention" in *Bulletin de psychologie*, nos. 247, 247, 249, 250, 1965-66.

⁸ Ibid.

Matter, it seems, needs to be taken into account, not only to articulate various types of tactile encounters, but as a way *to encounter* various types of tactilities. Matter is not an abstraction, but exists in the form of materials, objects, and things each with their own characteristics. To make art is to make use of these characteristics.

Coming back to the use of the terms interactive and tangible in recent art, I would like to give two brief examples from the 2007 exhibition *e-art: new technologies and contemporary art*⁹ at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. These are examples of artworks where matter and direct contact is by-passed.

First, Philip Beesley's *Hylozoic Soil* (2007) is described as a reactive space, where synthetic quasi-plant life reacts to the presence of visitors. The plant-structure explores "interactive geotextiles and reflexive and responsive membranes", using sensors to inform the structure to move as visitors walk-by. The structure does move (if the sensors function), but no one is allowed to touch the work. The interaction is limited to seeing an inorganic structure behave as if it were alive.

Though uncanny to see plastic move as it senses a physical presence, it is only the work that interacts, not the viewers, as it is only their presence that is required.

A second example is Marie-Chouinard's *Cantique 3* (2004), which offers the viewer the ability to control a series of on-screen grimaces and voices, through an

⁹ <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/e-art/e/index.php>

interactive device: “*Cantique 3* is an interactive apparatus that allows spectators to play with the images and sounds of a choreography of heads, facial expressions and onomatopoeia.”¹⁰ Much pleasure is derived from this ability to produce various facial expressions and sounds, often humorous ones, yet the encounter becomes facile and formulaic. Contact with the interactive device is displaced towards viewing images. In both cases the individual work emphasises itself as a thing to be looked at, not as a thing to manipulate. Contact is experienced, felt, yet without actual cutaneous touching, thus evoking a sense of touch that is highly mediated, attenuated, and controlled.

By-passing matter while insisting on the interactive is also commonly evoked in connection with relational art (*l’art relationnel*), a poorer version of new media art, as it relies primarily on relationships established with by-passers, often outside of institutional walls, whereas new media is dependent on a larger technological and budgetary framework to bring forth the work. The term “relational art” was coined by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the early 1990s. He saw in the art of the period an insistence on forcing things to move, to be in circulation, or work indicating the appearance of art from social encounters. The static object, the object that one works on, was to be relegated to the past, and go the way of manuscript illuminations, or mosaics, as if lacking tangibility and interactive potential.

¹⁰ <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/e-art/e/marie-chouinard.html>

Consider also the 1980s debate concerning the death of painting.¹¹ Its after effects can be interpreted as making painting, the once prime technique of high modernism, a handicraft. The seeming irrelevance of painting modifies a 1957 comment by Meyer Shapiro on modern paintings and sculpture as “the last handmade, personal objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass, and through a high division of labor. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names.”¹²

Parallel to these considerations, was the increasing amount of theoretical work exploring the senses, often with an emphasis on the relationship between new media and tactility, or the haptic, including *The Senses of Touch* by Mark Paterson, a lecturer in Human Geography.¹³ Haptic, from the Greek *haptesthai*, meaning “of, pertaining to, or relating to the sense of touch or tactile sensations.” In his book Paterson distinguishes between immediate touching, and what he calls deep touching. The immediate is understood as what our body feels directly, immediately, cutaneously. It is the everyday touch, materially and spatially limited, whereas deep touching is to be understood as metaphorical, like empathy. It is an emotional touching.

¹¹ Douglas Crimp, “The End of Painting,” *October* 16 (1981), pp. 69-86.

¹² Meyer Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art,” *Art News*, 56, 4 (1957), p. 38.

¹³ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007).

The term haptic widens the definition of touch. Touch becomes more than the conventional schematization of tactility. Paterson relies on the work of philosopher Edith Wyschogrod, a Levinas scholar, to expand his definition, and make touch manifold. He writes: “So, as the book [*The Senses of Touch*] progresses, the seeming immediacy of touch on the skin surface unfolds into deeper, more distanced, even metaphorical senses of touch.”¹⁴ His study is one of recuperation, one that locates the sense of touch, and its affective presence in us. Unfortunately, the further one reads, the more Paterson’s descriptions of the many ways of touching feel disembodied. Touch comes to the reader through an array of philosophical quotes, addressing the relevance of touch, while avoiding contact; it remains abstract.

As Paterson makes evident in his book, all types of touching are present simultaneously. Yet, direct cutaneous contact is only considered momentarily, as with Chouinard’s grimacing images, sensations are viewed as facial and guttural expressions, while skin contact is minimal. For my part, I want to insist on multiple, separated encounters, to be able to slow down my encounters, and notice variations in direct contact. I am concerned with an encountered resistance, one that is but a moment for Paterson’s haptic considerations: matter.

Touch is for some a “trial of our finitude” [*épreuve de notre finitude*]¹⁵, a resistance encountered by our body, while for others touch becomes a continuous contact between our finiteness and infiniteness: the divine, the spiritual. One cannot ignore

¹⁴ Mark Paterson, p.3.

¹⁵ Claire Marin, pp 99-112.

the effects and power of metaphor, yet this research wants to attend to the physical that allows thinking, metaphorical as well as analytical. While working, handling and manipulating various materials, sensations occur, are felt, and all the while ideas unfurl, including metaphors, empathic feelings, and theories. As will become evident later, the physical may not need to be separated from the conceptual.

*

It is this encounter between skin and everyday matter that intrigues me, and which I hope to articulate by exploring four approaches to the experience of touch in art. In chapter 1, the theoretical basis of my investigation is discussed, through a close attention to material culture, as much of contemporary art makes use of materials that are raw, fabricated or commodified. The distinction is effaced as I treat these as matter. Further my use of the work of both Gilbert Simondon and Martin Holbraad is due to their use of direct encounters, and encourage a theorisation stemming from the things encountered. Simondon's critique of hylomorphism is important, as it explicitly demonstrate the importance of attending to concrete phenomena. The emotional aspects of touching are considered, including the notion of *Einführung*, along with the physicality of touching.

In chapter 2, I take a look at the representation of touch, specifically, how touch is often suggested in art through excessive materiality or texture. By looking, and at times handling the work of Ed Ruscha, and his exploration of surface scratches, I will address how these serve as indications of touch. This tension at play in Ruscha's

work, between textured surface and pristine surface, explored here mainly through vinyl records and celluloid film, help elaborate a history of our relationship to touch and objects. The scratches illustrate as well as problematise the haptic, functioning as ersatz of concrete encounters.

Chapter 3 explores the materials used in Conceptual art, which are often paradoxically described as absent, or “dematerialised.” The majority of the discussed works were handled at the National Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa, part of the archived Art Metropole collection, collected by the members of General Idea. The research in the archives suggests that Conceptual art was in fact proposing encounters with matter and the sense of touch, realised through an abandonment of touch as image. Following Ruscha’s own interest with the tactile aspect of words, I approach Conceptual art’s interest in language by looking at its representation, and its presentation through the use of techniques such as the hand written, the typewritten, typographical choices, xeroxing, or the use of the photostat in the case of Joseph Kosuth, one of the most vocal theorist of the movement.

Chapter 4 considers three contemporary artists whose work involves an exploration, or celebration of both matter, and the sense of touch: Liz Magor, Lygia Clark, and Franz West. This choice of artists serves at first as contrast to the previous chapter on Conceptual art, replaying again the tension existing between texture and smooth surfaces, but the chapter is dedicated towards an attention to the physical aspects of working with matter. These artists all celebrate materials, as

well as the sensorial and temporal aspects of making and encountering art. The work of a fourth artist, Donald Judd will also be discussed, as my three artists' work are often responses to Judd's work. Judd plays within this thesis a paradoxical role, as he insisted on the preservation of his sculptures' surface by emphasising that they should not be touched, even though they demand to be touched. As my thesis is concerned mainly with to the making of art, touch may be forbidden for the spectator, but not to the sculptor.

Chapter 5 is an autoethnography of the act of drawing draws on my own studio practice. This focus allows for various descriptions of meetings between body, tools, materials, and subject matter. This field research consequently revealed to me the importance of attending to subtle details, to notice slight variations, as each bodily movement was ultimately registered on paper for me to view. I could then make use of these considerations as a paradigm for my encounters with other works of art described in this thesis. The chapter examines various interpretations given to the marks of drawings, a contact that is described as either expressive or notational, depending on the source that produced it, as either human or non-human. In both the notational and the expressive the notion of spontaneity is called upon to suggest direct, un-mediated contact. The notion of spontaneity, along with process, is further explored through the work of the German and English Romantics, and its relevance with today's art making.

The thesis moves from a superficial encounter with matter and touch, first through a surface image of a scratch, proceeding through more direct tactile encounters with artworks, and ending with an attempt to enter into and feel matter, become matter, articulated as empathy.



Chapter 1- Direct contact

Methods

Basically two analytical movements drive this thesis: on the one hand, the thesis strives to articulate the roles touch has in the making of a work of art. Various types of artwork are analysed to locate and articulate specific aspects of touching. On the other hand, it is the sense of touch itself, along with the whole sensorium, which becomes a method to apprehend, and eventually speak of a work of art. To speak of touch, as well as to make use of touch to speak, are both methods to understand the world, where the panoply of sensations and feelings need to be able to run their gamut.

A first aspect that I want to insist upon is the importance of attending to, of noticing details, variances, and subtle perturbations, as from these a rich world of play can open. François Laplantine encourages such attention, suggesting that we apprehend the objects of study as a continuum, not as stable objects. Laplantine insists that social sciences have approached their subject matter as support for an order, where the subject disappears, now only known as a type, or of a culture, or of a structure. He considers that the subject is seldom mentioned, speaking instead in terms of actors (social), or agents (social), taking on roles, statuses, or functions. What counts with these types of research is the position of the 'agent' within a system, evolving as if separated from the rest of humanity: "(The subject) tends to evolve in confined

ways, in its separation from the rest of humanity” [(*Le sujet*) *tend à évoluer de manière confinée dans la séparation d’avec le reste de l’humanité*].¹⁶

What he proposes is an encounter that is to be attentive to emotions and to the “experience of the shared perceptible” which is to be experienced in the ethnographic field [*L’expérience du terrain est une expérience du partage du sensible*].¹⁷ An encounter experienced without haste, slowly, one that attends to small details and to the “details of detail” [*détails du détail*]¹⁸ insists Laplantine, to small variations such as the various ways one can prepare a meal, or of touching, or avoiding each other when walking in a crowd, or of finding a seat in a bus.

This type of attention demands not only a keen eye but needs to include “an awakening of all the senses” [*une mise en éveil de tous les sens*].¹⁹ Therefore to be able to seize touch, *to touch* touch, with the purpose of articulating its function, this needs to be done using various approaches, while paying attention to small details, differentiating various ways of touching and of being touched, from the felt to the optical tact, taken independently and simultaneously.

As my interest with touch grew out of my studio practice, I decided to use my own studio practice as an ethnographic field, to identify and attempt an articulation of

¹⁶ François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible: introduction à une anthropologie modale* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2005), p. 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

touching. Inversely, the autoethnography²⁰ served as well as a basis from which touch becomes a tool for the interpretation of artwork. While drawing, I paid attention to movements and gestures, which I repeated and modified onto new drawings, considering changes as well as persistence. The paper registered these various tasks, producing a record of the activity, as well as being the depiction of a vinyl record. These drawings are made to explore and inform touch, while enticing the viewer to negotiate with their own sense of touch, and hearing.

The shape I have given to this thesis is derived from my past work as a mosaicist. Each chapter can be thought of either as a tessera, an individual stone from a mosaic, or as a detail from a mosaic, comprised of several tesserae. But, let us not forget that an individual tessera is of a specific type of stone, and can either be positioned besides a similar type of stone, or near another type of stone, with its own characteristics. For example, a piece of slate placed beside a piece of onyx is perceived differently as if it was positioned near a slate tessera. The chapters are independent of each other, and while functioning as a whole to bring forth various notions of touch, can at times offer contradictory, or should I say, textured points of views. Each chapter makes use of different modes of touching to approach its subject, like inspecting a body for a lump, or verifying the size of a gland; the fingers need to move around, feel, rub, applying various pressures and compare. Touch is to become a subject matter, or a “center of attention”, as art historian Richard Schiff

²⁰ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Autoethnography –Making Human Connections,” *Review of International Studies*, 36 (2010), pp 1047-1050; Iver B. Neumann, “Autobiography, Ontology, Autoethnography,” *Review of International Studies*, 36 (2010), pp. 1051-1055; John Hockey, “Sensing the Run: The Senses and Distance Running,” *Senses and Society*, 1, 2 (2006), pp. 183-202.

writes, from these various approaches, revealing various facets, that, as I've realised, are "never fully grasped,"²¹ though belong to the constancies of the everyday.

Gilbert Simondon and Martin Holbraad

The work of these two thinkers offered me further examples of concrete encounters with objects, where the physical encounter becomes the source of conceptualisation. In the case of Gilbert Simondon, there are three major reasons for my interest in his work. First, his close analysis of various tools, machines, materials, and technical processes to which he gives important tactile considerations. The second reason is his analysis of the technical object, to which he ascribes its own mode of existence, or ontology. The technical object for Simondon evolves from the artisanal to large technical ensembles, due to internal technical needs that are resolved and produce an efficient technical object. This is important for me, as his analysis locates the hand in both traditional working methods and in large technical ensembles. To articulate touch is not a concern that belongs only to the artisanal, but also belongs to new technologies. Yet, as mentioned before, my concerns are with simple tools and matter, not with new technologies. The third reason is his critique of the hylomorphic schema, from which touch is rethought as being not a force applied to inert matter, but as a mediated encounter, between two material forces.

²¹ Richard Schiff, "Handling Shock: on the Representation of Experience in Walter Benjamin's Analogies," *Oxford Journal of Art*, 15, 2 (1992), p. 98. Schiff uses this phrase to describe Benjamin's method of viewing the objects of his criticism from various positions. "These objects thus become centers of attention, approached repeatedly and variously, but never fully grasped."

From the Greek *hyle*, meaning wood, or matter, and *morphe*, meaning form, hylomorphism since Aristotle is used as paradigm to demonstrate the composition of things, and by extensions, human beings. “In this respect, the hylomorphist maintains that human beings are like every other organism, for every organism is a composite of form and matter.”²² This composition though is hierarchical, for it is form that orders matter, with matter categorised as passive, under the imprinting force of form. Aristotle proposes that a living being is produced similarly to art, illustrated by his embryology, that the father is form (sperm) and the mother matter (coagulated matrix blood) is put into shape by the sperm. In his *Physics* it is said that matter desires the form “as the female the male, and the ugly the beautiful.”²³

The hylomorphic scheme (*schème hylémorphique*) is an operation that Gilbert Simondon criticises, because it does not pay close enough attention to what actually happens in this technical operation of matter taking form. For Simondon, the “technical paradigm is not without value, and that it permits to a certain degree to think the genesis of an individuated being” [*Nous voudrions montrer que le paradigme technologique n’est pas dépourvu de valeur, et qu’il permet jusqu’ à un certain point de penser la genèse de l’être individué*].²⁴ The emphasis given to both the technical and the machine by Simondon allows the technical within the realm of

²² Gordon P. Barnes, “The Paradoxes of Hylomorphism,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, 56, 3 (2003), p. 501.

²³ Georges Didi-Huberman, “Viscosités et survivances: L’histoire de l’art à l’épreuve du matériau,” *Critique*, 54, 611 (1998), note 3, p. 139.

²⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d’information* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2005), p. 47.

the philosophical, and by extension, to the study of art, two disciplines that have favored abstractions and ideas.²⁵

The example Simondon uses to criticise the hylomorphic schema, the casting of a clay brick, becomes a paradigm for his further thinking about large technical ensemble. His example shows the role and place of the maker's hand throughout various technical procedures, from the artisanal to the technological.

For Simondon, the hylomorphic couple form-matter cannot properly explain the dynamic reality that exists within the technical operation that actually produces the clay brick. What has been overlooked, and should be evident is that the form and the matter of the hylomorphic scheme are both in fact abstract notions: "The defined being that can be indicated, that brick, drying on that plank, does not result from the meeting of some matter with some form" [*L'être défini que l'on peut montrer, cette brique en train de sécher sur cette planche, ne résulte pas de la réunion d'une matière quelconque et d'une forme quelconque*].²⁶ To use moist sand inside of a brick mold will not produce a brick; to pass clay through a sieve will not give long shaped forms, but crumbling lumps of clay. Simondon states that for a brick to be a real existing individual, there needs to be an effective technical operation, to institute a mediation between matter and form, between the clay and the mold.

²⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, "Viscosités et survivances."

²⁶ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation*, p. 40.

Simondon further stipulates that the technical operation cannot achieve its result directly between form and matter. The mediation needs to be prepared in advance by two chains of operations, which will merge matter and form towards a common shared operation. To form clay is not just to apply a form to raw matter; both clay and mold need to be prepared. The mold needs to be built with specificities so that it can be filled, and later be able to release the clay, without breaking the surface, ensuring that the brick can dry without cracking. A variety of molds exist depending on the material to be casted. This observation is similar to Simondon's description of touching, mentioned earlier, where each body's energy needs to be able to register an external signal for a reaction to occur.

Clay taken directly from the soil can contain various detritus, such as sand, pebbles, or twigs. It needs to be dried up, ground, passed through a sieve, cleaned, kneaded, to become a homogenous paste with enough elasticity and plasticity that it can follow the contours of the mold. The prepared clay is a preparation at the molecular level, not so that it can be formed, but so that it can *retain* a form. The clay is not in this case perceived as passive, but actively plastic, states Simondon.²⁷ The moment the artisan starts preparing the clay, it is already taking form, before its insertion into the mold. This pre-forming of the clay is only the exploitation of the colloidal characteristics of the clay, which already exists in its raw state. It is with the use of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

this elemental characteristic that the artisan comes to produce clay, which is able to become a brick.²⁸

Inside the mold the clay takes form. It is not clay *as matter* that the mold shapes, but clay *as form*. Simondon emphasises that the mold *limits* and *stabilises*, instead of imposing a form. The mold modulates the clay, by helping the prepared clay to achieve its form, interrupting its expansion. For the clay to completely fill the mold it needs more than plasticity; it needs to transmit the pressure that the worker initially imprinted on it. “[L’]argile se pousse dans le moule qu’elle remplit; elle propage avec elle dans sa masse l’énergie de l’ouvrier. Pendant le temps du remplissage, une énergie potentielle s’actualise.”²⁹ Simondon emphasises the fact that it is the clay that fills the mold, propagating the worker’s energy within its mass. During the time it takes to fill the mold, an actualisation of potential energy occurs.

Here we understand that it is not the mold anymore that dictates to the clay the shape it should take. The materiality of the mold helps to limit the prepared clay’s own propagation. The pressure within the clay, of each molecule towards another, makes it expand towards the walls of the mold. The mold plays a similar role as the molecules: it exerts pressure. The difference is that the clay molecules are moving, and that the mold is stationary. The hands of the artisan, which have become the force of the clay, meet the stationary forces of the mold, which Simondon describes as hands: “The mould acts as a fixed ensemble of stationary kneading hands” [*le*

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

moule joue le rôle d'un ensemble fixe de mains pétrissantes arrêtées].³⁰ This is not only an example of anthropomorphism, but of signaling the presence of the maker who has prepared the mold.

The technical operation brings together the two ends of the chain-of-operation; at one end, matter is prepared, at the other, it is the mold that is prepared, so that there can be a meeting, through their energetic conditions. The hylomorphic schema ignores this meeting and the importance of the role energy plays, as it only pays attention to the two extremities of the chain-of-operation. Simondon says that there is a hole, [*un trou*], or an obscure zone [*zone obscure*] in the hylomorphic representation. The schema corresponds to someone “who would stay outside of a workshop, only seeing what enters and what comes out” [*Le schéma hylémorphique correspond à la connaissance d'un homme qui reste à l'extérieur de l'atelier et ne considère que ce qui y entre et ce qui en sort*].³¹ To actually understand the real hylomorphic relation between the clay and the mold, Simondon surprisingly, proposes that one should penetrate inside the mold itself, to follow the form-taking operation. In his *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, this suggestion of entering the mold is reinforced by an urge “to become simultaneously mold and clay, and to live and feel their communal operation, so as to be able to think the formation of the brick” [*il faudrait pouvoir entrer dans le moule avec l'argile, se faire*

³⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

³¹ Ibid., p. 46.

à la fois moule et argile, vivre et ressentir leur opération commune pour pouvoir penser la prise de forme en elle-même].³²

The origin of the hylomorphic schema is to be found, Simondon proposes, in social life, as a socialised representation of labour and of living beings. He writes that the technical operation is not only the imposition of a form on a passive and indeterminate matter, or an operation considered from afar, where something enters a workshop and comes out, without knowing what happened inside, but is an operation ordered by the free man and executed by the slave. This relation extends to the influence of the soul on the body: “It is also through the social conditioning that the soul is opposed to the body; It isn’t through the body that an individual becomes a citizen, participates in collective judgments, common beliefs, survives in the memory of his, or her fellow citizens: the soul is distinguished from the body as the citizen is from the living human being” [*C’est aussi à travers le conditionnement social que l’âme s’oppose au corps; ce n’est pas par le corps que l’individu est citoyen, participe aux jugements collectifs, aux croyances communes, se survit dans la mémoire de ses concitoyens: l’âme se distingue du corps comme le citoyen de l’être vivant humain*].³³ The distinction between form and matter, between soul and body, reflects a city [*cité*] that contains citizens, not slaves.

Recently, anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has categorised the anthropologist as a hylomorphist, as she or he “explains and interprets, translates

³² Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1989), p. 243.

³³ Gilbert Simondon, *L’individuation*, p. 51.

and relates, textualises and contextualises, justifies and signifies [the native's] meaning. The relational matrix of anthropological discourse is hylomorphic: the anthropologist's meaning is form to the native's matter."³⁴ Today, for Viveiros de Castro, to open the city to the slave would mean to allow "the ontological self-determination of the world's people,"³⁵ and resisting the imposition of an exterior, pre-determined point of view; in other words, our own ontology. Through his theory of perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro considers that the anthropologist should "take the point of view of that which must be known."³⁶

Working from the point of view of an indigenous Amazonian model of the self, which postulates that the original common condition of both humans and animals is humanity, not animality, making animals and other species, humans underneath their everyday appearance, Viveiros de Castro writes: "This idea is part of an indigenous theory according to which the different sort of persons—human and non-human (animals, spirits, the dead, denizen of other cosmic layers, plants, occasionally even objects and artifacts)—apprehend reality from distinct point of view."³⁷ Each sort of person, including objects and artifacts, has a specific point of view, a distinctive ontology. To attempt to take the point of view of an object, as proposed here by Viveiros de Castro, resembles a lot Simondon's own prescription

³⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "And," p.5
(http://abaete.wikia.com/wiki/%28anthropology%29_AND_%28science%29_%23E._Viveiros_de_Castro%29) accessed 02/04/08

³⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives; The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Animism*, Anselm Franke (ed) Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), p. 228. Originally published in *Common Knowledge*, 10, 3 (2004), pp. 463-484.

to become clay and mold, as a way to know “that which must be known.” What Viveiros de Castro is in fact proposing, is a plurality of ontologies. Martin Holbraad, a student of Viveiros de Castro, similarly locates an ontology, or a mode of existence as identified by Simondon for the technical object, to things encountered in an ethnographic field. These encountered things are in this thesis art objects.

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Art belongs to material culture while material culture is used as art. Recent studies in material culture have attempted to allow things to “speak”. Martin Holbraad, one of the editors of the book *Thinking Through Things*,³⁸ writes that artefacts have always been defined through their interpreter, the anthropologist, who often dismisses the informant’s imaginative interpretations. Holbraad wants to engage with what is encountered on its own term, without recourse to “more familiar conceptions—not least the presumption that these artefacts are analytically separable from the significance informant seem to ‘attach’ to them. What would happen, we ask, if this wonderment was held in a state of suspension so as to resist the urge to explain it away?”³⁹ This sense of wonderment is what the anthropologist might feel upon hearing that an artefact can, for example, bring one to other planes of existence.

³⁸ Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, Sari Wastell, *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Holbraad insists on keeping the conceptual attached to the material. To assign a meaning from above to the thing encountered, he writes, is to reiterate the classic opposition of the concrete and the abstract, the physical and the mental, the material and the social. With *Thinking Through Things* the attention was turned “to the relationship between concepts and things in a way that questions whether these ought to necessarily be considered as distinct in the first place.”⁴⁰ The method proposed is to take things, or phenomena as they are encountered in the field, rather than trying to find what these things stand for. *Thinking Through Things* wants to think things through themselves, letting the things produce their own theory.

Historians of science Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison in their study on objectivity have discussed the nineteenth century atlases as perfect examples of the application of meaning onto a scientific subject. Nature’s specificities are replaced by a working object, one that replaces the specific raw encounter with a digested one, a stable one: “All sciences must deal with this problem of selecting and constituting ‘working objects,’ as opposed to the too plentiful and too various natural objects.”⁴¹

In anthropology, to allow things to produce their own concepts gives importance to the informants’ claims, and allows their voice to be taken seriously. Yet, Holbraad still sees it as things that speak through an informant, for whom these things are important. Holbraad has recently criticised his own work for *Thinking Through*

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴¹ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, 40 (1992), p. 85.

Things, wondering if it is actually possible to let things speak on their own, adding a question that I find resonates with my art practice: “what might their voices sound like?”⁴² Or, to put differently: how is one to awake, or as Simondon would say, prepare the senses to be able to hear things?

To let things speak, Holbraad suggests we consider “the contingent material characteristics that make things most obviously thing-like.”⁴³ This vague description is made more precise by Holbraad’s own ethnographic analysis of Cuban divining powder, defined “thing-like” by “its pervious quality as a pure multiplicity of unstructured, amenable to intensive movement, like displacement of water, in reaction to the extensive pressure of the diviner’s fingers...”⁴⁴

Holbraad seems to contradict the initial definition of ‘things’ given in *Thinking Through Things* –that things ought not to be delineated in advance– by identifying them through their material characteristics. Why this seeming move backward?

Two main reasons: Holbraad advocates a return to the material because, basically, material or matter is ignored in material culture, in favor of the term materiality. He first points to the recent work of Bruno Latour and his ‘parliament of things’, where things are identified through their human bindings, as assemblages, collectives, or networks. For Latour, there are no things, only networks, which prompts Holbraad

⁴² Martin Holbraad, “Can the Thing Speak?,” *Working Papers Series*, 7 (2011), OAC Press, p. 3. www.openanthcoop.net/press

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

to muse about the loss, or the muteness of what seems peculiar to things—their material qualities, “lost in the Latourian translation.”⁴⁵

The second reason is to answer anthropologist Tim Ingold’s own call for a return to materials, where he states: “It is that the ever-growing literature in anthropology and archaeology that deals explicitly with the subjects of materiality and material culture seems to have hardly anything to say about materials. I mean by materials the stuff that things are made of...”⁴⁶ For Holbraad the data we use should not be “what we hear and see people say and do around things, but rather what we hear, see, smell, taste and touch of the thing as we find it (heuristically) as such.”⁴⁷ Concepts are dictated, or generated by the material characteristics of the thing encountered. For Holbraad, this theory is to help him and other anthropologists to eventually understand various notions put forth by informants about things. But what of the archeologist who is without any informants, stuck with only things?

Holbraad names this sort of inquiry ‘pragmatology’, a term he borrows from archeologist Christopher Witmore.⁴⁸ Holbraad acknowledges that he doesn’t really know how such a discipline removed from human mediation would function. Looking for a model to follow for his new discipline, and following the eventual exclusion of both archeology (too anthropo-centric) and theoretical physics (too

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁶ Tim Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” *Archeological Dialogues*, 14, 1 (2007), p.1.

⁴⁷ Martin Holbraad, “Can the Thing Speak?,” p. 18.

⁴⁸ Christopher Witmore, “The Realities of the Past: Archeology, Object-Orientations, Pragmatology,” *Modern Materials: Proceedings from the Contemporary and Historical Archeology in Theory Conference*, B.R. Fortenberry and L. McAtackney, eds. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), pp. 1-29.

much of a demand for causality), Holbraad settles on the practice of art: “In fact, I suspect the closest one might get to the kind of inquiry pragmatology could involve would be an inverse form of conceptual art—construed, of course, very broadly indeed. If the labour of the conceptual artist is supposed to issue in an object that congeals in concrete from a set of conceptual possibilities, the work of the pragmatologist would be one that issues concepts that abstend in abstract from a set of concrete realities. Pragmatology, then, is art backwards.”⁴⁹ Art backwards!!

Reading his conclusion was a revelation, as it suggests that art making can become a methodology to conduct anthropological research. Holbraad invokes a bi-directional movement, going from the conceptual to the concrete (the conceptual art work), or from the concrete (things) to the conceptual. In both cases, concept and material function as a unit, but Holbraad is seeking concepts issued from concrete realities, where things are not of a concept, but as a concept.

*

Allowing things to speak, as Holbraad suggest, is an opportunity to encounter them. Though we have fabricated objects, they still elude us, plus things as raw material differ from things as manufactured objects. To choose a specific material, raw or manufactured, demands contact. There is an emotional aspect involving objects that can be described at times in term of addiction. A need is created at times to work

⁴⁹ Martin Holbraad, “Can the Thing Speak?,” p. 23.

with stuff, a specific material, or objects. One way to answer this need is to surround oneself with material to work with; a collection needs to be built from which to test and choose appropriately the material needed to make art. Matter calls on to be handled.

Stuff

As I said, the research for this thesis began as a reaction to what I perceived as an increasing tendency on the part of galleries to become places for viewing moving images. Ironically, during this period of research, ongoing since 2006, matter re-appeared in art spaces. A resurgence of interest in materials and their presence in our lives made its way back into art spaces. Recent exhibitions, such as *Animism* in 2010, curated by Anselm Frank in Bern, or the 2012 Kassel *Documenta 13*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, take great interest in recent anthropological studies of things. Another exhibition, the 2007 exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the Twenty First Century*, at the then newly reopened New Museum in New York City, considers works that can be described for the most part as concrete and immobile when compared to moving images, or what is often termed interactive art. It was an exhibition that put forth recent sculptures as assemblages of materials.⁵⁰ Visiting *The Object in the Twenty First Century* I considered how the end of last century had broadcast art as resembling the service industry, interested in relations, information

⁵⁰ <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/3>

and systems, while the young century was already trying to deal with what had been ignored: matter. (fig. 1)

Unmonumnetal can be used as an initial encounter with matter, due to the diversity of materials used, such as rocks, gravel, plywood, cardboard, rope, strings, artificial flowers, old books, old clothes, old furniture, dripping wax, photocopies, ripped magazine and newspaper pages.

Here manufactured goods become prime material for art making, comparable to Simondon's clay; they are able to reveal themselves not only as products, but as matter, and therefore can evoke touch. My treatment of manufactured goods as raw material recalls the differentiation Henri Focillon made in the 1930s between material from nature and art material. Taking wood for example, even if un-worked, Focillon identifies a transformation as it is moved from the forest to the gallery, belonging in each case to different realm: "A new order is established, within which there are two distinct realms. This is the case even if technical devices and manufactures are not introduced. The wood of the statue is no longer the wood of the tree; sculpted marble is no longer the marble of the quarry; melted and hammered gold becomes an altogether new and different metal; bricks that have been baked and then built into a wall bear no relation to the clay of the clay-pit. The color, the integument, all the values that affect the sight have changed"⁵¹ [*Ce sont deux règnes, même si l'on ne fait pas intervenir les artifices et la fabrique. Le bois de la*

⁵¹ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc: 1948), pp. 32-33.

statue n'est plus le bois de l'arbre; le marbre sculpté n'est plus le marbre de la carrière; l'or fondu, martelé, est un métal inédit; la brique, cuite et bâtie, est sans rapport avec l'argile de la glaisière. La couleur, le grain et toutes les valeurs qui affectent le tact optique ont changé].⁵²

Unfortunately, the English translation does not consider the subtleties of the original text. The last sentence of the previous quote reads in French as *les valeurs qui affectent le tact optique*. The translation reads “the values that affect the sight,” eliminating the reference to *tact-ility*. Focillon’s use of the expression *tact optique* acknowledges the importance the sense of touch plays in vision providing valuable information about depth, volume, and textures. The surface appears to the eye as felt. Focillon’s optical tact owes much to the theory of empathy, which I will discuss later.

Matter for Focillon is not to be thought in opposition to form; they belong together. Form and matter are not terms that are meant to illustrate abstract notions, but to depict the ability of matter to take on various aspects due to its formal abilities. When matter receives a specific treatment it reveals a certain destiny, Focillon states. As will be considered later, Simondon expands Focillon’s criticism of the separation of form and matter, and changes the term “destiny” into “potential” to portray matter’s transformational abilities.

⁵² Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1981) p.52.

The work described as *Postproduction* play and make use of the various cultural meanings that are applied to materials and objects. Both cultural and optical tact transformations become part of the genealogy of the object, of the process that brings forth the work. These are techniques employed by the artist to make the work, and insert it in the world. Focillon writes: “if technique is indeed a process, we must, in examining a work of art, go beyond mere craft techniques, and retrace an entire genealogy”⁵³ [*si la technique est un processus, nous devons, en examinant l’oeuvre d’art, franchir la limite des techniques de métier et remonter toute l’ampleur de la généalogie*].⁵⁴ The maker’s technique individualises the work. Technique is not only the techniques of technology, or the usage of tools, but as well the manner in which the artist makes use of these techniques, a technique of the body instead of a technique of instruments as Marcel Mauss would say, which leaves its mark, even if imperceptible.

This imperceptible mark of touch, in a machine-made context has been translated as a lack since the rise of industrialism. Anxiety has surrounded the relationship of art and the technological, from Friedrich Schiller’s fear of the mechanisation of art, in the eighteenth-century, to the digital as being immaterial, body-less,⁵⁵ and invisible.

Focillon in his 1936 essay *In Praise of Hands* evokes the close relationship existing between the hand and the tool. Focillon hesitantly includes the mechanical, while

⁵³ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ Tess Takahashi, “After the Death of Film: Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age,” *Visible Language*, 42, 1 (2008), p. 63.

Simondon insists on it. For Focillon the working hands are involved in the transformation of materials leading to art: “The hand contrives astonishing adventures in matter. It not only grasps what exists, but it has to work in what does not exist... carving wood, hammering metal, kneading clay, chiseling a block of stone, keeps alive for us man’s own dim past, something without which we could not exist”⁵⁶ [*La main*] combine d’étonnante aventures de la matière. Il ne suffit pas de prendre ce qui est, il faut que qu’elle travaille à ce qui n’est pas... coupe du bois, bat son métal, pétrit son argile, taille son bloc de pierre maintient jusqu’à nous un passé de l’homme ancien, sans lequel nous ne serions pas].⁵⁷

While sensing a close relation between the hand and tools to produce great works, he is reticent to include photography: “Such will be the future of the hand, until the day when artists paint by machine, as with an air-brush. Then at last the cruel inertia of the photograph will be attained by a handless eye... Even when the photograph represents crowds of people, it is the image of solitude, because the hand never intervenes to spread over it the warmth and flow of human life”⁵⁸[*Tel est l’avenir de la main, jusqu’au jour où l’on peindra à la machine, au chalumeau: alors sera rejointe la cruelle inertie du cliché, obtenu par un oeil sans main... Même quand il représente des foules il est l’image de la solitude, puisque la main n’y intervient jamais pour y répandre la chaleur et le fluide de la vie humaine*].⁵⁹ Works produced either with a camera or an air-brush become still, static, stimulating a vision that is

⁵⁶ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, pp. 114-115.

⁵⁸ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, p. 119.

divorced from the tact, a handless eye. Ironically these two tools, the camera and the airbrush are taken years later by Ed Ruscha to produce work that reconfigures the traces of the artists touch.

More recently, Tim Ingold in his book *Lines* (2007) commented on his inability to find human expression in typed words: "Thus it is that the writer today is no longer scribe but wordsmith, an author whose verbal assemblies are committed to paper by way of mechanical processes that bypass the work of the hand."⁶⁰ Ingold cannot find, cannot perceive a relationship between the hand and the typed sentences. There is no sense of agency. The machine-made is deemed to be un-human, unable to produce art, whereas art is conjured through humanness, leaving perceptible marks.

With the rise of digital techniques, past techniques and obsolete technologies, mainly analog, have been explored by artists who have imbued them with a new sense of the artisanal.⁶¹ Recent experimental filmmakers have been less interested with the indexical nature of images, and more with the ability of the medium itself, the celluloid strip, to register the effects of the material world on its body, such as Ken Paul Rosenthal putting a film in a mason jar with cooked berries, and placing it near a window for a whole year, or Louise Bourque's *Jours en fleurs* (2003) (fig. 2), who made use of menstrual fluids to modify the celluloid. "*Jours en fleurs* is a

⁶⁰ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 3.

⁶¹ Christian Thorne, "The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded," *October* 104 (2009), pp. 97-114. See also Tess Takahashi, "After the Death of Film: Writing the Natural World in the Digital Age," *Visible Language*, 42, 1 (2008), pp. 4-69.

reclamation of flower-power in which images of trees in springtime bloom are subjected to the floriferous ravages of menarcheal substance in a gestation of decay. The title is based on an expression from my coming-of-age in Acadian French Canada where girls would refer to having their menstrual periods as *être dans ses fleurs*.⁶² When viewed, the marks seen on the screen function as a type of writing “in which abstract images come to stand for hands, sun, rivers, ground and weather that made those marks.”⁶³ The insistence towards these marks as indications of contact are discussed in chapter two, where I consider their nostalgic role in the work of Ed Ruscha.

Material Encounter

To say that something is touching implies that it is emotional, perhaps sentimental, nostalgic at times, evoking or elicits tender feelings. Simondon gives the emotional a role that is similar to the one he gives the technical operation that the hylomorphic schema had obscured. Emotions, like the technical operation that allows clay and mold to produce a clay brick, allow the individual and the social to meet and continue to transform themselves, for Simondon “becoming is a dimension of a being” [*le devenir est une dimension de l’être*].⁶⁴

⁶² <http://www.cfmdc.org/node/2601>

⁶³ Tess Takahashi, p.45.

⁶⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation*, p. 31.

On the other hand, touching matter might only suggest contact, resistance, without any emotional consequences, unless one accounts for what, how or who is touched. The word matter and material are both abstract, without any specificity. Certain types of matter have been categorised as problematic, as in Plato's *Parmenides*, where Socrates mentions his inability to believe that things such as mud and hair would have a form: "Yet, after all, before now I have been troubled by a suspicion that what is true in one case may be true in all, though when I come to that point, I am put to flight by the dread of falling into an ocean of nonsense and losing myself there." Closer to us, Jean-Paul Sartre, in *L'être et le néant*, speaks of the fear of touching the viscous, as it could make us dissolve into viscosity.⁶⁵ For Georges Bataille, this fear of uncertain matter informs his theory of the heterological, which is to stand against homogeneity, what he sees as philosophy's ultimate aim of creating a System, where all has been assimilated and identified. Bataille writes of the heterological as the science of what is completely other,⁶⁶ rejected by the System.

Laplantine expresses a similar point of view with contemporary society, which prioritises logic; a denotative logic, a univocal logic, uniformed, unilateral, monological, monocultural, monolingual, where thinking needs to be "clear and distinct" [*C'est la pensée claires et distinctes*].⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, "Viscosités et survivances," p. 138.

⁶⁶ Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 133.

⁶⁷ François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible*, p. 187.

Bataille's views on matter have been used by art historian Rosalind Krauss, as a way to explore what she calls the Optical Unconscious, insisting on the sexual aspect of opticality as a way to demonstrate the underbelly of Clement Greenberg's own theory of opticality. Art historian Hope Mauzerall suggests that Greenberg's approach is "tied to basic, idealist tenets of Western metaphysics: the privileging of form over matter; a concern with transcendence; a stress on abstraction, purity and essence, as well as on intelligibility, clear definitions, and distinctions."⁶⁸ Matter is of this world, while form belongs to a higher, abstract realm. Mauzerall indicates how Greenberg is followed later by Michael Fried, as well as Rosalind Krauss, all continuing through their writings to prioritise the abstract, the idea, to the detriment of matter.

Rosalind Krauss's project on the formless, *l'informe*, elaborated in conjunction with Yve-Alain Bois, is to be a critique of Modernism and the notion of form. The term *informe*, taken from Georges Bataille, is to serve as a method to achieve a state of being that is not rational, or that has not been assimilated into a logic, or a system. Through his fiction and theoretical writings, Bataille tries to break the grip of pure thought, of philosophy, by "making reason shit or vomit".⁶⁹

For Bataille, horizontality is to be equated with dirt and matter, distinct and in opposition to the ascending verticality, which points towards abstract forms.

⁶⁸ Hope Mauzerall, "What's the Matter with Matter? Problems in the Criticism of Greenberg, Fried, and Krauss," *Art Criticism*, 13, 1 (1998), p. 81.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Bataille saw in Alberto Giacometti's early horizontal sculptures a display of this horizontality, while later Krauss locates it in the work of Jackson Pollock, where his floor-made work become a sign for the unconscious. By analyzing its making as stemming from its horizontal placement on the floor, appropriate for all types of rebus to become incrustated on Pollock's painted surface, Krauss gives his work the power "to undo form by knocking it off its sublimatory pedestal, to bring it down in the world...."⁷⁰ The emphasis on Pollock's initial floor placement was meant by Krauss to separate herself from Greenberg's views, for whom a painting needs to be positioned vertically, belonging on a wall, and meant for the eyes.

Krauss' attention to materiality is temporary, as it was for Greenberg. Matter for Krauss is but a vehicle, a method to move back into the abstract. Pollock's poured paint does not signify itself; "rather its significance derives from what it covers but points towards—the chaotic, subversive, submerged realm of the unconscious... she looks *through* matter,"⁷¹ not into it. Matter retains its place within a polarised concept of the world, between good and evil, bright and dark, mind and body, ideas and matter, resulting with matter becoming associated with, and the embodiment of all these negative poles. Matter is not characterised by its thing-like qualities, from which concepts can be theorised, but is *informed* by a concept: as rebus.

Matter as rebus implies that matter *is* a rebus, containing its own disgustingness. Accompanying disgust is often a sense of uneasiness, or panic, emotions that Bataille

⁷⁰ Krauss quoted by Mauzerall, p. 91.

⁷¹ Ibid.

favours. Yet, is it really the matter that we are in contact with, that is disgusting, or how the contact with matter is achieved? Mary Douglas suggested that things get polluted by being out of place, such as soup smeared on my beard.⁷² The soup itself is not disgusting, nor the beard. It is the fact that the soup has not been incorporated cleanly in my mouth. The soup on the beard is out of place. Disgust can also occur when something that is moist becomes dry, or something supple becomes disgusting, as it gets hard. William Ian Miller asks if “disgust itself has a structure that it imposes on cultural ordering?” Once a culture has erected a classification of pure/impure “the clear and free-flowing will be valued as against the slimy and viscid.”⁷³ Purity cannot exist on its own; it needs its impurity to define itself against.

Repulsion may come from the fear of contaminating something, or myself becoming contaminated. It can also come from items that resemble our own skin, such as the skin produced from heated milk, famously described, analysed, and categorised as the abject by Julia Kristeva⁷⁴. Touching a surface that has a temperature close to our own body temperature, mainly if it is slightly cooler, and somewhat clammy, can produce disgust. Extreme temperatures, cold or hot, do not. “We will sit on a public toilet seat with less upset when it is cold than when it is warm from the warmth of a prior user” comments Miller.⁷⁵ Interestingly enough, this type of left over heat is positive for Marcel Duchamp, fitting well into what he calls *l'inframince*, the

⁷² William Ian Miller, “Darwin’s Disgust,” David Howes, ed. *Empire of the Senses*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 337.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 339.

⁷⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980).

⁷⁵ William Ian Miller, p. 341.

infrathin, a space that is both physical and abstract.⁷⁶ For Duchamp, the direct contact that initially warmed the touched surface, can be felt again. The infra-mince is the fact that the heat is first retained before dissipating, while still available through the imaginary, and perhaps at some imperceptible level.

Science historian Joachim Schummer writes of the linguistic turn in 20th century scholarship, where matter, or stuff as he says, is eliminated in favor of form. Taking as an example Willard Van Orman Quine, a philosopher of language, who insisted that a term like “water” referred not to stuff, but “a specific form that comprises all water *particles* in the world.”⁷⁷ It dematerialises the world, yet we do know that drinking water from the ocean is different from drinking tap water. Matter has various properties, often distinguishable through direct contact, through taste, or touch. At other times the direct encounter may not reveal the specific properties of matter, mainly at the nanometer scale, where chemical forms are modified, to the point where for example, a silver nanoparticle may be treated as a different chemical substance from silver. On a more dangerous level, gold as bulk is non-toxic, whereas gold particles are cytotoxic, or toxic to cells, depending on the particles’ size.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Bryoni Fer, *The Infinite Line: re-making art after modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 37.

⁷⁷ Joachim Schummer, “Matter Versus Form, and Beyond,” Klaus Ruthenberg and Jaap van Brakel, eds. *Stuff: The Nature of Chemical Substances*, (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2008), p.8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Another way to approach matter's specificities will be through the work of Donald Judd, in chapters 3 and 4. Judd's reticence to having his sculptures touched is as revelatory of his attitude towards contact, as it is about individual material, and their ability to resist or absorb fingerprints.

Einfühlung

There are two reasons for my attention to the notion of *Einfühlung*. The first one is the resemblance it has with the new-media works, concerning the tangibility of these haptic experiences. The second reason is to ask ourselves if the attempts of both Simondon and Holbraad, are as well recent versions of *Einfühlung*, of empathy?

Empathy as theorised by Robert Vischer, in his short text *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*⁷⁹ (1873), results from the rise of subjectivity in aesthetics, advanced by Arthur Schopenhauer in his *The World as Will and Representation* (1819-1844). The text shaped nineteenth-century aesthetics, by endowing the aesthetic act of viewing with mental animation, and emphasised the physiological nature of perception. But Vischer's text is also the result of the work of the early German Romantics writers, such as Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Jean-Paul Richter (1763-1825), and Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg better known under his pseudonym as Novalis (1772-1801).

⁷⁹ Robert Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics," *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), pp. 89-123.

Of importance with Vischer's empathy is the importance given to the spectator, acknowledging the subjective contents he or she brings to the aesthetic contemplation. Vischer differentiates between feeling and sensation, the former being the body's physical response to exterior stimuli, while the later implies the mental and emotional.⁸⁰

Vischer's text describes various types of seeing. One is called *Sehen*, where the viewing activity is conditioned by two features: the observer's standpoint, such as the position of the head, direction of the eyes, the visual angle, and by "the salient feature of the object itself (light)."⁸¹ Another one is scanning, or *Schauen*, a more active process than simple seeing, involving imaginary touching. The process involves two approaches: a linear one, "whereby I run the contours with my fingertips, so to speak; the second, (this is the natural and less reflective approach of the two) is a mapping of the masses, whereby I run my hands, as it were, over the planes, convexities, and concavities of an object, the path of light, the slopes, ridges, and hollows of the mountain."⁸² The viewer becomes aware of the surface seen. There is a conscious effort to explore what is encountered, as if one was touching it, either with one's fingertip, or with the whole hand. These two modes of seeing create a unit of the object that is present to us.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁸² Ibid., p. 94.

The hand for Vischer is sensitive and mobile, while being the eye's indispensable *associé* and corrector. Yet, there is no contact between the viewer's body and the observed object. Though the eye and the hand are said to have an intimate connection, touching is described as a "cruder scanning at close range", and seeing "a more subtle touching at a distance." The eyes need the hand so as to understand depth, and tangibility, but once this initial help is memorised, the eye can proceed, pretending to touch.

But seeing is not a disembodied activity for Vischer, as the whole body responds to an observed object. The whole body is engaged through vision, such as putting on sunglasses during a very hot day, can give the "momentary impression that my skin is being cooled off."⁸³ He also discusses the body responses in terms of pleasant and unpleasant, depending on the relationship between the formed observed, and the structure of the whole body. For example, a horizontal line is said to be pleasing because our eyes are positioned horizontally, whereas the single vertical line can be "disturbing... it contradicts the binocular structure of the perceiving eyes and forces them to function in a more complicated way." What is intriguing about this dialogue between the eyes, horizontality and verticality, is that in this case, Vischer's verticality is said to be disturbing, while for Bataille and Krauss, horizontality is to be the source of unsettledness.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 98.

In the section titled *Imagination*, Vischer shows a strong affinity with Simondon's comment on entering into a mold, as he articulates what we have come to know as empathy, or literally, in-feeling. "It does not matter whether the object is imagined or actually perceived; as soon as our idea of the self is projected into it, it always becomes an imagined object: an appearance. The way in which the phenomenon is constructed also becomes an analogy for my own structure. I wrap myself within its contours as in a garment."⁸⁴ Vischer imagines moving along the range of hills, of flying on clouds. Vischer is watching [*Zusehen*], imagining moving along.

Vischer gives life to the inanimate by imagining it. One is to imagine the projection and incorporation of the body's physical form into an objective form; our personality projected into a thing. Does it mean that one takes over the other, or becomes the other? Vischer mentions that there is an adaptation to the object, and then an attachment, like one hand holding another, "and yet I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other."⁸⁵ Could this be an earlier version of Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism?

Vischer was influenced by Karl Albert Scherner's book *The Life of the Dream* (1861), where it is "shown how the body, in responding to certain stimuli in dreams, objectifies itself in spatial forms. Thus it unconsciously projects its own bodily form

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

-and with this also the soul -into the form of the object. From this I derived the notion that I call 'empathy' [*Einfühlung*]."⁸⁶

Vischer's *Einfühlung* presents a curiosity towards the encountered thing. There is an overall wish to project one's body into the form of the object, yet, Vischer's quest remains superficial; empathy explores forms and space, not textures, nor matter. It functions as within a dream. Vischer never describes the encountered object in material terms. All is imagined, yet without references to any characteristics of the object. What is important though about empathy is the importance given to the emotions in relation to the images, or objects encountered. Plus, it is the relationship that is posited to exist between the unconscious and the encountered form, as existing for each other, resulting with certain forms acquire symbolic signification.

Several examples put forth by Simondon do indeed resemble Vischer's in-feeling. From his *Imagination and invention*⁸⁷ course of 1965-66, while discussing the notion of the corporal schema, Simondon writes that to have the concrete intuition of an object's movement, is in a way to put ourselves in its place and in its situation, as if our body was this object. He uses as an example, an airplane taking off, which we can imagine, because it is closely analogous to running before jumping over an obstacle. It is an activity that is possible for our body, an activity we have

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 92.

⁸⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)* Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2008).

experienced, whereas it is harder for us to imagine the landing of a plane, because both its slowing down and its angle to the landing strip do not correspond to a use of the human corporal schema.⁸⁸

This associative process produced by forms that Vischer explored, greatly influenced art historian Aby Warburg in the early 1900s, with his own research into cultural symbolism. Empathy offered him the possibility to demonstrate that the intensity of images is a more profound phenomenon than simple aesthetic pleasure.⁸⁹ Images for Warburg continue to live, transformed through time, as they are recuperated, modified, and re-occur in culture. Images survive not through academic transmission of knowledge, but expressed by hauntings, survivals, residuals, ghostly return of forms, writes Georges Didi-Huberman, whose own work is very much influenced by Warburg.⁹⁰ We can ask if images can result from spontaneous biological movements, movements that Simondon has identified to suggest that motricity precedes perception, preparing the body to react to external encounters.

Simondon wonders about the activities of a living being, if these activities can all be the effect of external causes, contacts from outside the body, or “should we admit the existence of spontaneous activities besides the provoked activities” [*La question*

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

⁸⁹ Carlo Severi, “Warburg anthropologue ou le déchiffrement d’une utopie. De la biologie des images à l’anthropologie de la mémoire,” *L’Homme* 1, 165 (2003), p. 81

⁹⁰ Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante: histoire de l’art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), p. 28.

qui se pose est de savoir si l'on peut ramener toutes les activités d'un être vivant à des activités provoquées, ou si, au contraire, on doit admettre l'existence d'activités spontanées à côté des activités provoquées]?⁹¹

The mysterious attraction between viewer and form explored by Vischer is theorised by Simondon at a biological level, while for Warburg, it helped with his own search beyond the kantian pure abstract form. All forms have content, they are vital, and therefore can survive and reappear through time as movement itself. Warburg found evidence of this, with the live snakes inserted in the mouth of a shaman in New Mexico, around the Laocoon's struggling body, and as the wind within the folds of draped figure that Warburg named *Ninfa*.⁹² Images are haunted by symbols that are working within them. Didi-Huberman states that “for now on, we need to understand the empathic experience –this symptomatic moment— as a ‘contact’ with symbols, apprehended through their temporal thickness, their haunting and revenant power” [*Il faudra désormais comprendre l'expérience empathique –ce moment symptomal –comme un ‘contact’ avec les symboles appréhendés dans leur épaisseur temporelle, leur pouvoir de hantise et de revenance*].⁹³

Didi-Huberman's own history of contact brings forth the question about imprinting: is it a contact with an origin, or a loss of origin? Is it authentic presence, or the loss

⁹¹ Gilbert Simondon, “La sensibilité,” *Bulletin de psychologie*, tome xx, no. 5 (1966-67), p. 284

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

of uniqueness, and the possibility of reproduction? Could ancient symbols survive even within mass produced items of machines?

Unable to enter inside a mold, Simondon still pays close attention to matter and their various technical characteristics. The importance that energy plays in the forming of the clay brick allows Simondon to compare the casting operation of the brick to the functioning of an electronic relay. I will not venture into his lengthy descriptions, which can be both confusing and mysterious, but his texts invite us to pay attention to various technical operation, as if we were either carving a wooden handle for an adze, or travelling within an electronic field. The empathic urge is thickened by his attention to the resistance encountered at the technical level.

My interest with empathy is not to its visual tact, but to its occurrence during actual, physical contact. When casting a clay brick, knowing well my inability to enter within the technical process, inside the mold, I am not only working with my hands, and touching matter; I am also thinking. This is when the empathic feeling appears, reinforcing my contact with matter.

Reviewing *L'invention dans les techniques: cours et conférences*, an edited volume of Simondon texts about the invention, philosopher Elie During wonders why the need to go through a variety of technical descriptions, if it is about elaborating an ontology? "It is a simple answer: so we get a taste of 'practical tasks', with its descriptions of utensils, devices and machines... there is no other way to feel the

consistence of an intuition or of a concept than to work on each elements, following the thread of examples” [*La réponse est simple: qu’on prenne goût à ses ‘travaux pratiques’, à ces descriptions d’ustensiles, d’appareils et de machines... il n’y a pas d’autres moyens d’éprouver la consistance d’une intuition ou d’un concept que de travailler sur pièces, en suivant le fil des exemples*].⁹⁴ Thinking needs resistance, so it won’t spin into nothingness.

The body needs to encounter resistance, if only with gravity. Without gravity, our body starts modifying itself physiologically, such as losing muscle mass, the redistribution of body fluids, which can dehydrate the body, and bone deterioration.

“Gravity hurts: you can feel it hoisting a loaded backpack or pushing a bike up a hill. But lack of gravity hurts, too: when astronauts return from long-term stints in space, they sometimes need to be carried away in stretchers. Gravity is not just a force, it’s also a signal --a signal that tells the body how to act. For one thing, it tells muscles and bones how strong they must be. In zero-G, muscles atrophy quickly, because the body perceives it does not need them. The muscles used to fight gravity --like those in the calves and spine, which maintains posture-- can lose around 20 per cent of their mass if you don’t use them. Muscle mass can vanish at a rate as high as 5% a week.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Elie During, “Simondon au pied du mur,” *Critique*, 706 (2006), p. 1.
<http://www.ciepfc.fr/spip.php?article41>

⁹⁵ “Physiological Effects of Weightlessness,” *Astrobiology: The Living Universe*,
<http://library.thinkquest.org/C003763/index.php?page=adapt02>

The Individual Encounter

A given material reveals itself while one is working with it. Planning to work with wood, one soon realises that all types of wood do not behave in similar fashion. Some are denser, able to be carved and retain refined details, while softer ones break with ease, thus are only able to register simpler details. Simondon's interest with individuation leads him not only to the specificities of individual wood, but of individual trees, as each has grown as a specific individual, and has its own *eccéité*, haecceity. Haecceity is a concept that specifies a specific difference to all things.⁹⁶ A tree trunk on a building site is only abstract matter, if only its volume as wood to be used is considered. Its essence brings it to a more concrete level, indicating to the user its properties: a pine tree trunk is not a fir tree trunk. Simondon further designates each tree trunk as a specific individual, having acquired specific shapes, or angles. To choose a specific tree trunk becomes relevant for the job it needs to do. It becomes technically relevant, if for example, a supporting beam is needed at a specific place.

Simondon further states that at one moment carpenters used to go into the forest seeking specific trees, as their knowledge of the wood acquired through work gave them the ability to recognise which tree would be the best for specific projects.

⁹⁶ Stéphan Leclercq, "La présence de Jean Duns Scot dans l'oeuvre de Gilles Deleuze, ou la généalogie du concept d'heccéité," *Symposium*, 7, 2 (2003), pp. 143-158.

A strong piece of wood is one that the artisan would not cut through the fibers of the wood. By following the wood grain, the piece of wood retains its full stability. To cut a tree trunk in two lengthwise with a power saw, or a band saw, produces two beams, yet they are not as solid as if the beams had been made with a chisel that follows the fibers. The saw cuts the wood abstractly [*abstraction*], following a geometrical plan, without respecting the undulating fibers. We can imagine that to grow trees with their fibers geometrically aligned, would permit a circular saw to cut the tree trunk with less of a chance to damage the fibers, thus keeping the initial strength of the tree. This would be a genetically modified tree.

Learning to use a tool, Simondon adds, is not only to acquire the necessary gestures through practice; it is to recognise the implicit form elaborated by matter, through the signal provided by the tool to the worker, at the specific area where the tool is engaged. Tools give the user the ability to feel the various levels of resistance encountered while working, such as with the planer [*rabot*], allowing the user to feel if the wood is being removed with ease, or is starting to lift and break off.⁹⁷ Simondon defines the tool as what can extend and arm the body so it can accomplish gestures with more ease, while the instrument is what allows an extension and an adaptation of the body so it can obtain better perception. The instrument is a tool for perception.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation*, pp. 52- 55.

⁹⁸ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, p. 114.

When speaking of a tool, Simondon acknowledges the various industries that are needed for the possibility to construct the tool. The adze [*herminette*], a tool used for smoothing or carving rough-cut wood, is one of his favorite examples. He writes that even unsharpened and in a bad state, the tool is not necessarily bad; it is good due to a proper curve of the blade, and if this blade can retain its sharpen edge while working. These qualities result from an industry, or technical ensemble. Simondon emphasises the fabrication stage as a decisive factor in the quality of the tool, for the adze's blade "is not only a homogenous metal block, fashioned to a specific shape; it was forged" [*cet outil n'est pas seulement un bloc de métal homogène façonné selon une certaine forme; il a été forgé*].⁹⁹ The metal of the tool is made to be homogenous, by forging it, giving the metal at its molecular level, various directions, offering at place greater strength, while at other areas, a greater flexibility. A good adze depends on a foundry, a forge, and appropriate tempering.

A good tool is not only to be found in its use, but in its fabrication. Its technicity is more than the assembling of form and matter; it is what is added from this rapport. In another text, Simondon insists on the efficiency of a tool, such as the adze, being dependent to an appropriated mode of connection between the metal blade and the wooden handle. Even if a blade is made strongly and well sharpened, a bad connection to the handle will make the tool inefficient. It interferes with the internal functioning of the tool. A technical object is an object whose internal functioning achieves a low level of internal interference; "the tool 'works' within itself, between

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

its various parts acting one onto another” [*l’outil ‘travaille’ à l’intérieur de lui-même, entre ses différentes parties qui agissent les unes sur les autres*].¹⁰⁰

The technicity of a technical object may be considered abstract, yet it can only be known because of the object produced and at hand. As with Holbraad’s pragmatology, the technical object generates, or makes evident the conceptual. Technicity exists potentially, and is, in a way, allowed to reveal itself, through technical operations.

This close attention to material and technical procedures on the part of Simondon is richer and more informed than Focillon’s, as the former had an extensive scientific and technological knowledge. Plus it can be of use in the context of Holbraad’s pragmatology.

In cases such as tin made to look like marble, or of painted surfaces, as initially were ancient Greek sculptures, a close analysis needs to address these relations between materials, affecting each other, along with the choice of techniques that help forming the object.

Holbraad does not give any example for his pragmatology, therefore making it difficult to critique. His suggestion to let things speak might be difficult to differentiate from a description, or speaking for things as a form of ekphrasis. The

¹⁰⁰ Gilbert Simondon, *L’invention dans les techniques: Cours et conférences* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 91.

art historian Jaś Elsner writes that the ekphrastic moment is “the tendentious application of rhetorical description to the work of art”; difficult to ignore, perhaps inevitable in art history: “The problem is that what we adduce as formal is in fact not the object’s own object-hood and existence as matter but that ekphrastic transformation which has rendered it into a stylistic terminology.”¹⁰¹

Laplantine as well expresses a warning towards the use of the rhetorical in ethnographic descriptions. Encouraging, as I mentioned before, an attention to the “details of details”, Laplantine adds that there is a need to “free our perceptions the layer of rhetorical commentaries, of glosses, of paraphrases” [*dégageant nos perceptions d’une chape rhétorique de commentaires, de gloses, de paraphrases*].¹⁰² The attention to the encounter is an attention to material and to the senses. With ekphrasis expression comes from the form encountered; it does not attend to matter.

Simondon allows both matter and form to speak in his critique of hylomorphism, as they are inseparable. Touch I suggest is one way to encounter things, while things are one way to encounter touch. Touch and things working as form and matter does, each tending towards each other.

¹⁰¹ Jaś Elsner, “Art History as Ekphrasis,” *Art History*, 33, 1 (2010), pp. 10-27.

¹⁰² François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible*, p. 90.

Chapter 2- Scratched celluloid and polished vinyl: Ed Ruscha

*The physiological side of collecting is important. In the analysis of this behavior, it should not be overlooked that, with nest-building of birds, collecting acquires a clear biological function.*¹⁰³

Walter Benjamin

One of the ways touch is understood is through marks. Direct markings such as fingerprints or apparent seams, either left on or embedded into the surfaces of clayworks or castings, reveal a process and a fabricator. These marks are part of the making. The reasons they are left to be perceived in art work is often to emphasise both the materiality of the object and what is the result of human manipulation; it shows an intention. These left-over marks, as mentioned in the introduction, come to represent the human role in fabrication, standing in opposition to a pristine industrial product or environment that is often depicted as inhuman, impersonal or aseptic.¹⁰⁴ Laplantine expresses it in terms of a culture of univocal information, of recycling, where hardly anything is created and imaginary, “where hardly anything is a relation demanding attention, effort, and a lasting elaboration” [*presque plus rien n’est relation exigeant de l’attention, de l’effort, de l’élaboration dans la durée*].¹⁰⁵ Paul Valéry expressed similar feelings in the 1930s, perceiving a disinterest with lengthy processes such as embroidery, illuminated manuscripts, and the polishing of stones: “Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 210.

¹⁰⁴ Tim Edensor, “Sensing the Ruin,” *Senses and Society*, 2, 1 (2007), p. 219.

¹⁰⁵ François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, trans. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton university Press, 1989), p. 173.

In recent years, with the rapid growth of digital technology, analog technologies of reproduction such as the vinyl record and celluloid film have become the subjects of artistic explorations. This is due partly to their ongoing disappearance from mass-production. Both techniques have been part of art making since the early twentieth century, being at that time new technologies, and offering artists new ways to see and experience the world and produce art. Interestingly, these now outmoded technologies have recently gained a semblance of the artisanal, of something that both took time to make, and as having more authenticity than the new digital technologies.

American artist Edward Ruscha (b. 1937) has produced a body of work that takes into account the outmoded. This is particularly evident in several series of work from the 1990s, where scratches become subject matter. The scratches are not added to a finished painting or photograph, nor are they incorporated into the overall work to give it texture. The surfaces of the works are kept pristine, as the scratches exist not on the image, or under it, but *as* image. The gestural found in his early work has been refined into meticulous thin strips. Contact is not overt, but restrained, or covert.

His surfaces, as we will see, acknowledge touch, but as an image of a trace. The work sets up a difference between the sensation of touch and the image of touch.

While many artists find tactility through blurry images, such as Louis Bourque (fig.2), Ruscha situates this reflex as nostalgia, and makes use of it.

The senses at times become synonymous with the “ineffable, the unspeakable,” in works that valorise wanderings, flux, and osmosis, theorised as counter-models to rationalism. The tension between the sensual and the logical is replayed in Ruscha’s work, between the textured and the pristine, between the scratched and the polished.

* * *

Ruscha has been interested since childhood in the printed image, mainly comic books and stamps. His favorite comics were Dick Tracy, Blondie, Felix The Cat, and the drawings of both Basil Wolverton and Munroe Leaf. A neighbour of Ruscha drew cartoons with Higgins India ink; the ink spilling, drying and cracking fascinated him: “It was really interesting. I had a real tactile sensation for that ink; it’s one of the strongest things that have affected me as far as my interest in art.”¹⁰⁷

Stamps and envelopes were also of great interest: “I got a real feeling for envelopes, stamps on envelopes, cancellations, postmarks, typewritten type. Anything that had to do with clerical, typographical stationery items I got interested in.”¹⁰⁸ Many were

¹⁰⁷ Alexandra Schwartz, ed. *Leave Any Information at the Signal, Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages: Ed Ruscha*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 2002), p. 98.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99-100.

found in trashcans at his father's office. Stamps had two types of surfaces, a textured one produced by engraving, and a smooth one through offset lithographic printing. The difference between the two techniques fascinated him, as well as the range of scale and colour the offset machine could produce, all contained on small pieces of paper that were stamps. This interest in the technical aspects of making an image still informs his work.

At Chouinard Art Institute in 1956, Ruscha first enrolled in commercial art and animation classes, later followed by courses in painting, drawing, and watercolour. He was also very much interested in all the techniques of book making. He apprenticed for six months at Plantain Press with printer Saul Marks, learning to handset types and operate presses.¹⁰⁹ In 1960, he left Chouinard to become an artist, while working as a layout and graphic artist for several ad agencies. It was a conscious choice on his part to become an artist instead of a commercial artist. But, it is his training and interest in both the techniques and design aspects of commercial art, that are responsible for his gradual separation from the dominant art form of the late 1950's, Abstract Expressionism, and for his loose association with the emerging Pop artists of the early 1960's, and later with Conceptual art.

¹⁰⁹ Siri Engberg, "Out of Print," *Ed Ruscha: Editions 1959-1999 Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 2* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), p.15.

Abstract Expressionism and Graphic Arts

At the end of the 1950's in the US, there was a gradual shift away from the ideas of spontaneous gestures that was associated with the Abstract Expressionists. Ruscha felt that the initial strength and originality of abstract painting had become "shopworn and stylized".¹¹⁰ The movement had been momentarily exciting for him, but it had become clearly recipe-like. In a 1981 interview with Paul Karlstrom, Ruscha makes it obvious that many artists were working in similar fashion to the abstract painters. "We were all more or less piddling with paint the same way."¹¹¹

In his early paintings and prints, words are incorporated as a proposition to extend what he felt was limiting in painting at the time: the so-called spontaneity of Abstract Expressionism. By including the premeditated, such as words and images, Ruscha was able to do what he wanted: illustrate ideas. Following several sketches concerning the appropriate size, colours and choice of image, it was then a matter of realizing the preplanned. When he first started painting, two "ideologies" were coming together: "I had Abstract Expressionist modes, and also I was beginning to see the possibility of using non-subject for subject matter, like words and certain objects."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Lisa Pasquariello, "Ed Ruscha and the Language That He Used," *October* 111 (2005), p.82.

¹¹¹ Alexandra Schwartz, p. 117.

¹¹² *Ibid.* , p. 177.

Ruscha's approach was planned and preconceived, whereas he felt that the Abstract Expressionists approached their canvas as work to be done instantly. These early works can be seen as a dialogue between the "readymade" and the "handmade". The freedom in front of the canvas to apply paint directly, without any preconceived idea, was both oppressive and without challenge for Ruscha, and for many artists of the late 1950's. He felt that it offered no new avenues to explore painting any further. By incorporating preconceived images, Ruscha was able to feel a sense of freedom in the act of painting. He wanted more than just paint as material; he wanted to make pictures. There was an end result that needed to be realized, and this was more important than the means to the end.¹¹³ The fetish-like quality of paint itself did not interest Ruscha, and it is one of the reasons, that in the early 1970's he stopped painting, and started using unorthodox materials, such as fruit and vegetable dyes.

From his *Stains* series of 1969 to *News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews and Dues* of 1970, the choice to accentuate these traditional, yet peculiar materials turns Clement Greenberg's theory of flatness and pure opticality on its head. Writing about Morris Louis' soaked canvases, Greenberg conveys the immateriality of colour: "The effect conveys a sense not only of color as somehow disembodied, and therefore more optical, but also of color as a thing that opens and expands the picture plane."¹¹⁴ Ruscha's colours dye both canvases and papers, stating the flatness of the work, but

¹¹³ Fred Fehlau in Schwartz, p. 263.

¹¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 4*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 97.

the colours are achieved not with paints or inks, but with foodstuff. The optical that Greenberg emphasizes and separates from the other senses, cannot ignore the gustative aspects of the material, and, in the case of Ruscha's 1970 project *Chocolate Room*, the olfactory. *Chocolate Room* consisted of 360 chocolate-laden screen prints covering the walls of the American Pavilion at the 35th Venice Biennale.

Ruscha's work avoids what Caroline A. Jones has called the "bureaucratization of the senses," that is, the regulation of the senses as a mode of becoming modern.¹¹⁵ In fact Ruscha through his use of various techniques, subtly plays, mixes, and addresses the various senses.

He also conflates the procedures of fine arts with mass-produced printing; his love of typography and cartoons appears alongside the brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism: an image of Felix the Cat was surrounded "in a red and blue Franz Kline-like brushstrokes" in *Felix* (1960) (fig. 3), while in *Annie Times Six* (1961) (fig. 4), the word Annie is spelled six times just as it appears on the cover of the Harold Gray's *Orphan Annie* comic book. Each Annie occupies the top half of a rectangular space, what could be described as the sky part of a landscape. The word floats within a monochrome field, which itself is at the top of a lower monochrome space. Though the paint is applied in a painterly fashion, and the letters are obviously done by hand, the expressive nature of the brush marks is enclosed within a typographic form; the hand-painted existing within typography. This is what Gerrit Noordzij

¹¹⁵ Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005)

would refer to as *lettering*: “writing with built-up shapes. In lettering the shapes are more patient than in handwriting, as they accept retouching strokes that may gradually improve (or impair) the quality of shapes.”¹¹⁶ The supposedly non-expressive aspect of typography is as much writing as handwriting. The relationship between writing techniques will be discussed further in chapter 3, when I consider Conceptual art.

Ruscha insists to the fact that words have a temperature, a specificity, which can affect the senses. “Words have temperatures to me. When they reach a certain point and become hot words, then they appeal to me. ‘Synthetic’ is a very hot word. Sometimes I have dream that if a word gets too hot and too appealing, it will boil apart, and I won’t be able to read or think of it. Usually I catch them before they get too hot. I have, though, caught words in the dictionary instead of had them come to me via flashes.”¹¹⁷ Interestingly, the precariousness he finds in words is not unlike the qualities Abstract Expressionism appreciated in their methods of painting.

Jasper Johns

In a 2009 article for *Artforum*, curator Achim Hochdörfer¹¹⁸ explores how painters between 1958 and 1965 pursued their research into abstraction, while modifying their position towards Abstract Expressionism. Many artists around 1958 felt that

¹¹⁶ Gerrit Noordzij, *The stroke: theory of writing*, Peter Enneson (tr) (London: Hyphen Press, 2005), p. 9

¹¹⁷ Howardena Pindell in Schwartz, p. 57

¹¹⁸ Achim Hochdörfer, ‘A Hidden Reserve: painting from 1958 to 1965’, *Artforum*, Feb. 2009

Abstract Expressionism had to be overthrown: Jasper Johns, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly had their first successful solo exhibitions; Allan Kaprow organized his first Happening; Frank Stella began his “Black Paintings”; groups such as the Situationist International and Gruppe Spur formed, and soon Minimal art became the critical focal point of modern art discourse.¹¹⁹ Ruscha is not mentioned in the article.

Johns’ early work was influenced by both Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning, before gradually moving away from the painterly. A reproduction of Jasper Johns’ *Target With Four Faces* (1955) (fig. 5) in a 1957 issue of *Print*¹²⁰ served as catalyst for Ruscha’s incorporation of words and objects into his paintings. “The painting of a target by Jasper Johns was an atomic bomb in my training.”¹²¹ Ruscha was reacting to both the newness of the work seen, as well as to the medium of reproduction itself, as the artwork was a small black and white reproduction. Johns would choose and paint objects, images or words, transforming them, “enriching them by removing them from their original context and lavishing exquisite attention on them.”¹²² In those years, Ruscha was learning about current artwork by looking at images in magazines rather than by viewing actual work in museums or galleries.¹²³ For many artists and critics, Jasper Johns, along with Robert Rauschenberg, is one of the artists that paved the way out of Abstract Expressionism and towards Pop art.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.153

¹²⁰ *Print*, vol. 11, no. 1 (February—March 1957), p. 28

¹²¹ Schwartz, p.11

¹²² Neal Benezra, ‘Ed Ruscha: Painting and artistic License’, *Ed Ruscha*, Neal Benezra and Kerry Brougher (eds), (Washington: Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, 2000), p. 147

¹²³ Siri Engberg, p.15

What Abstract Expressionism stood for was the ability to articulate the subjective, the historical as well as an aesthetic transcendence; paint becomes transfigured.¹²⁴ Ruscha's food-as-paint work may be interpreted as responses to Greenberg's theories of painting, but the Abstract Expressionism Ruscha speaks of, is the one that critic Harold Rosenberg described, which "emphasized process, American exceptionalism, and existential conflicts," whereas Greenberg wrote of American abstract paintings as continuing a European modernist project and "purported a scientific, positivist approach."¹²⁵

Another critic, Robert Rosenblum, saw the American abstract painters, though having removed all imagery from their work, as having created a sense of pictorial space within their canvases, connecting the Abstract Expressionists to the painters of the nineteenth century American landscape, and their shared apprehension of the sublime rather than a similarity of style. Greenberg was not interested in such history, whereas for Ruscha's work this was relevant. Rosenblum evokes the geographical, in reference to the work of Clifford Still: "We move physically across such a picture like a visitor touring the Grand Canyon or journeying to the centre of the earth."¹²⁶ With Jasper Johns, what followed, was an interest by artists in substances, in things, an end to illusion and the presence of literalness, as Leo

¹²⁴ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confronting Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p.13

¹²⁵ Caroline A. Jones, p. 21

¹²⁶ Cécile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960's* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2006) p.43

Steinberg wrote, after his own encounter with the work of Johns: “There is no more metamorphosis, no more magic of medium. It looked to me like the death of painting, a rude stop, the end of the track.”¹²⁷

Jasper Johns paints flat what is flat: flags, targets, letters, numbers, while casting what is three-dimensional, such as the faces from *Target With Four Faces*. For Steinberg, this literalness was a beginning, not an end to art making. What he eventually saw is a series of positions offered by Johns’ work. I will mention two: first, the leveling of the organic and the inorganic; both faces and target relating to each other, addressing each other, existing together, the bull’s eye of the target with the blind faces; secondly, the fact that many works were in a state of waiting: drawers waiting to be opened, window shades waiting to be raised, and letters waiting to spell something out. All this, while knowing that their state cannot be changed. Steinberg asks of himself to respond to the work, by trying to understand how it might function; “it comes primarily as a challenge to the life of the imagination.”¹²⁸ The work asks for our response, almost as a tool waits to be put to use. Steinberg not only sees the work, but senses as well the movements that the work proposes.

Words as found on labels and newspapers have been part of art production for many years before Ruscha incorporated them in his own work. From the collages of Braque and Picasso of the 1910’s to the paintings of Stuart Davis and Gerald Murphy

¹²⁷ Leo Steinberg, p.13

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.23

in the 1920's, letters and words from the everyday appeared in artworks. But the attention that Jasper Johns had given to letters and words appealed to Ruscha. The symmetry found in the *Target* painting was exciting, as in art school Modernism ruled, and Modernism was asymmetrical. Johns' influence can be felt on many of Ruscha very early work. "Each thing I saw of [Johns] was staggering."¹²⁹

The emphasis on words became clearer for Ruscha in the early sixties, appearing as labels such as a box of Cracker Jack in *Honk (Cracker Jack)* (1962) (fig. 6), or a can of Spam in *Actual Size* (1962) (fig. 7). These labels are angled, with the containers depicted as moving diagonally from left to right, across the space. With both of these examples, Ruscha has added brush strokes to suggest movement. These movement lines in *Honk* are textured ones, breaking the monochrome space surrounding the Cracker Jack box. This becomes more evident as the painting is approached. One has the impression that the box is creating turbulence around it, existing in a space and not in front of a background. In the case of *Actual Size*, the lines become flames, shooting out of the Spam can. Here movement is depicted as an image, without texturing.

Occupying the space above these products are large words: HONK with the Cracker Jack box, and SPAM with the Spam can. In his prints, Ruscha also incorporates words along with objects. "The artist's manipulation and integration of the typeface in the prints lend the letterforms object status to the same extent that the depicted objects

¹²⁹ Paul Karlstrom in Schwartz, p.118

containing letters serve as language.”¹³⁰ The marks left by the brush still refer to gestures, with the falling Spam and Cracker Jack boxes, and to paint as matter, such as the heavy impasto of *HONK* and of *BOSS* (1961). In the print *Gas* (1962), the word “Gas”, depicted in **Cooper Black** typeface, hovers over a gasoline can, which is surrounded by a square, “heavily crayoned veil of tusche markings.”¹³¹

One interesting difference between Johns and Ruscha is their method for making words. Johns is described as a “stenciler, not a stamper,” by Harry Cooper.¹³² Ruscha did not make use of devices to produce his letters, but refers to them by imitating their results. One could say that it is Ruscha’s paint treatment, the textures he produces and the markings, which become the devices, able to be repeated at will.

Johns’ own brushwork was also a reference to Abstract Expressionism, but differing from those earlier pictures, writes Steinberg, “only in the variable subject matter, they seemed to accuse the strokes and drips of the de Kooning school of being after all only a subject matter of a different kind; which threatened the whole foundation of Abstract Expressionist theory.”¹³³ Here markings become both method and subject matter, informing the young Ruscha.

Several essays describe Johns as a painter who was interested in more than the visual aspects of painting: his words were meant to be both read, pronounced, and

¹³⁰ Siri Engberg, p.16

¹³¹ Ibid, p.16

¹³² Harry Cooper, ‘Speak, Painting: Word and Device in Early Johns’, *October* 127, 2009, note 22, p.61

¹³³ Steinberg, p.22

of having tactile aspects, as if he had “chiseled them into stone.”¹³⁴ Johns’ words do not limit themselves to the linguistic. They are meant to have a physical presence, like objects: “Thus the paradox lies in John’s reversal of the usual process of representation, by which a three-dimensional from the real world is represented as a two-dimensional illusion. Johns gives his two-dimensional signs greater substance, weight, and texture than they had in reality; in other words, he turns them into objects.”¹³⁵ Important is the fact that Johns does not use pure paint to make his work, but encaustic, where pigments are mixed with wax, giving the finished work a somewhat matt surface. The encaustic was applied in many cases unto a prepared surface, mainly consisting of newsprint. I would like to draw your attention at this point to the fact that the majority of the work I will be discussing make use of paper, what I have come to call a paper trail.

Ruscha initially might not have known how Johns had made his *Target with Four Faces*, as it was encountered through black and white reproductions. The caption in the magazine does not mention the material nor the size of the work, stating only: “Here again, the impact of new experience, new emotions, a whole new world to explore and become familiar with. And again there is no need to ‘like’ this, but there is the need to allow yourself to remain flexible and tolerant.”¹³⁶ But contrarily to colour reproductions, the black and white photographs accentuate the surface of John’s painting, showing that it is not totally flat, but slightly textured. Image and

¹³⁴ Harry Cooper quoting Richard Stiff, p.67

¹³⁵ Steinberg, p. 26

¹³⁶ *Print*, 1957, p. 28

material exist together: "Subject matter is back, not as a filler or adulteration, nor in some sort of partnership, but as the very condition of painting. The means and the meaning, the visible and the known, are so much one and the same, that a distinction between content and form is either not yet or no longer intelligible," comes to conclude Leo Steinberg.¹³⁷ Meaning is inseparable from the thing, as Holbraad would say.

The tensions between matter and image, between literalism and illusionism were investigated by many artists in the 1960's, along with "the use of the painted gestural mark beyond expressionism, and the semiotization of the mark itself". In the aforementioned article by Achim Hochdörfer, these investigations were done while painting had been put on the back burner, so to say, by the theories of the mid-1960s; though anti-Greenbergian, these theories did prolong his notion of opticality.

Hochdörfer identifies Michael Fried as the critic who eventually drew the line between "literalism and transcendence, painterly substance and optical immateriality, objecthood and art."¹³⁸ Initially Fried had seen in Johns, the artist that was indicating the problems and contradictions of Abstract Expressionism, while leaving them open, instead of creating a new synthesis. For Fried, the work of Frank Stella goes further than Johns, as "[T]he distinction between depicted and literal shape become nugatory.... Each, one might say, is implicated in the other's failure

¹³⁷ Steinberg, p. 26

¹³⁸ Hochdörfer, p.154

and strengthened by the other's success."¹³⁹ This dialectic will bring on a new art for Fried.

With the advent of Minimalism in the early 1960s, which took on literalism as its theoretical base, Fried eventually launched his now famous attack on Minimalism and all literalizing tendencies in contemporary art, giving up his early idea of a dialectic between literalness and transcendence.¹⁴⁰ In his 1967 text *Art and Objecthood*, Fried maintained that the survival of modernism depended on its ability to negate, or by-pass its own objecthood. Modernism and Minimalism became separated, with the literal therefore standing in opposition to illusion. For painting to be taken seriously in the late 1960's, it had to adopt an antimodernist perspective, "subjecting itself to the dictates of Minimal and Conceptual art."¹⁴¹ For Hochdörfer, this created a void for painters who were exploring the tension between these two positions, as they were pushed outside of the critical discourse at the time.

A detail that I haven't come across in my research on Ruscha, is the fact that in the aforementioned issue of *Print*, there are in fact two images of the Johns' *Target with Four Faces*; an open version, showing the faces, above the target, and a closed version, where only the target is visible, as the lid which is hinged at the top of the box holding the cast faces, has been closed. The two reproductions are able to show,

¹³⁹ Hochdörfer, p.154

¹⁴⁰ Hochdörfer, p.154

¹⁴¹ Hochdörfer, p.154

simultaneously, both variations of the work, which could only be done alternately in reality. This may have suggested to Ruscha, the possibility of having several versions of a single work, the various possibilities of a work, and ultimately, the serial. Aspects of the serial will be examined in chapter 3, as a notion explored by Conceptual artists, and in chapter 5, when I discuss my own drawing series.

Gradually the impasto paint and the evident brushstrokes disappear from Ruscha's work. This does not mean he turns his back on materiality and the pleasures of making and touching, but there is no impetus to use these painterly devices anymore, as they have been deemed to be as reproducible as any printing process. The repudiation of abstract painting in favor of the reproducible commercial image by Pop artists actually transfers the expressive onto the technical. To reproduce a label or a trademark does not necessarily stand for the reproducibility of images and the commercial aspects of objects. Each depicted subject is specific, individual, and not devoid of poetic possibilities. Ruscha wants to depict the physicality of words. As Johns is a *stenciler*, Ruscha is a *stamper*; not all his work can be said to have been stamped, but all do refer to the act of stamping, of making an imprint, a contact between surfaces, either by their subject matter or by their technique of production.

* *Crispness* *

The work of Ruscha after its eschewing of the painterly, takes on an aspect of crispness.

Crisp (krisp), adj.

1. hard but easily breakable; brittle.
2. firm and fresh; not soft or wilted.
3. brisk; sharp; decided.
4. lively; pithy; sparkling.
5. clean and neat; well-groomed.
6. invigorating.
7. crinkled or rippled, as skin or water.
8. in small, stiff, or firm curls; curly.

In 1962 Ruscha conceived his first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, and published it in 1963. The book was a departure from the handmade work he had been doing, as it was printed using commercial offset lithography. His previous experience in a print shop was being put to use. "I was a printer's devil for a while; I set type and did that sort of thing. I liked the slowness of the craft, and I liked printing... I... like books- not to collect them but to look at them, feel the pages."¹⁴² Though aware of the fine printing of William Morris's Kelmscott Press, and the homemade publication of fellow West Coast artist Wallace Berman, who produced a publication between

¹⁴² Clive Phillpot, "Twentysix Gasoline Stations That Shook The World: The Rise And Fall Of Cheap Booklets As Art", *Art Libraries Journal*, Vol.18, No.1, 1993, p.58

1955 and 1964 called *Semina*, Ruscha wanted a book that would be an industrial object, not done by hand press. He wanted a small book where size, shape and weight mattered as much as content.

All his books, though full of photographic images, were also things to be held, flipped, or to be used as one would a tool. Blank pages added both thickness and weight to the books, while presenting blank space between photographs, making us wonder if it was the image or the blank space that was to be considered as punctuation, or interruption. It is in fact his series of small bookworks that established Ruscha as an artist. This idiosyncratic object first appeared when artist's books were not very common, and, in Clive Phillpot words, considering how influential it has been, it "shook the world."

With this project, Ruscha was able to produce works that had the crispness he was looking for at the time. The book was in fact the result of working in series; something he was attracted to, and a method of production that was part of the culture. For him, even the abstract painters use a similar method of production, as is used in manufacturing cars¹⁴³. This is an important point, as critics have identified Abstract Expressionism as standing in opposition to mass culture and mass production such as Meyer Schapiro, previously quoted with his depiction of "modern" paintings and sculpture as "the last handmade, personal objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass, and through a

¹⁴³ Paul Karlstrom in Schwartz, p.146

high division of labor. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names.”¹⁴⁴ This view is still expressed today, as in a recent catalogue essay on contemporary abstraction by Garry Garrels: “Abstract painting is in many ways anathema to the society and culture in which we live. Mass media, electronic communication, and a deluge of information envelop us. The competition for our attention is ever more relentless, our attention spans ever shorter. Abstract painting, like all art, remains tied to lived experience. Reproductions will always fall short of the work itself. There is no description that is commensurate with one’s own relationship with the work.”¹⁴⁵

Pop Art

Pop art was identified as a group of artists who were attracted by both the products and methods of production found in popular culture. Ruscha’s own interests with popular products such as Spam, the 20th Century Fox logo and comics, plus his own knowledge and use of graphic design, had him included in a few exhibitions with Pop artists. He exhibited at the Ferrus Gallery, the same gallery where in 1962, Andy Warhol’s Campbell Soup series were first shown, and later that year was included in a show of Pop artists at the Pasadena Museum called *New Paintings of Common Objects*. Though labeled as such, Ruscha didn’t consider himself a Pop artist per se.

¹⁴⁴ Meyer Schapiro, ‘The liberating quality of avant-garde art’, *Art News*, 1956, Vol. 56, No. 4,

¹⁴⁵ Gary Garrels, *Oranges and Sardines: conversation on abstract painting* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2008), p.13

For him, subject matter is what distinguishes the Pop artist, not the style. He includes in his definition of Pop some of Picasso's work, and the Ashcan painters who also depicted popular culture.¹⁴⁶

The term Pop art originated in England in 1958 and was used by art critic Laurence Alloway to assess in a new way the products of the mass media. He used the term to refer to the products of the mass media, not to works of art that draw upon popular culture.¹⁴⁷ Alloway was part of a discussion group at the Institute of Contemporary Art, in London, called the Independent Group (IG) that was interested in "mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, Pop music."¹⁴⁸ Popular culture was embraced, or perhaps more precisely, there was no feeling of dislike of commercial culture, as was to be found with most intellectuals. Different topics, such as car styling, consumer goods, and fashion were discussed by the group, consisting of Reyner Banham, John McGale, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alison Smithson, Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson, Richard Hamilton, and Alloway himself. The group operated from 1952 till 1958. Pop culture, or expendable art, was taken as seriously as permanent art. The first Pop art in London grew out of the IG, where themes of technology were of important concern for this first phase of Pop art. British Pop had no influence on Ruscha, as he was not aware of it. The second phase of Pop art happened in the United States in the 1960's.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Karlstrom in Schwartz, p.145

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop', *Pop Art*, Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p.27

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.32

Writing about New York Pop, Lucy Lippard defines it as artists who “employ more or less hard-edge, commercial techniques and colours to convey their unmistakably popular, representational images.”¹⁴⁹ The two main groups are found in New York and on the West Coast. Canadians were also producing Pop works, such as Greg Curnoe and Joyce Wieland. Lippard identifies Jasper Johns as the real point of departure for Pop art in New York, with his introduction of objects into paintings. The use of a single two-dimensional popular motif as a painting opened the way for what she calls *hard-core Pop* artists, such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselman, James Rosenquist, and Claes Oldenburg.

It is mainly Ruscha’s interest in typography and printing that links him to the Pop movement. In 1961 Andy Warhol painted works based on advertisements, comic strips, and newspaper headlines, while Roy Lichtenstein, who had started painting in an Abstract Expressionist style, gravitated as well towards the incorporation of comic-book images, and references to commercial techniques, such as the application of benday dots, stenciling, and text bubbles.¹⁵⁰

Many of the objects Jasper Johns was painting at the time came from popular culture, such as his two Ballantine beer cans titled *Painted Bronze* (1960). But these still had a handmade look. Lucy Lippard sees in his work a similar tension to the one Fried had commented on, but here Lippard refers to it as *technical ambiguity*, as a conflict of “quasi-expressionist technique and commercial motif.” For her, the work

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, p.69

¹⁵⁰ Richard D. Marshall, *Ed Ruscha* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 9

looked old in comparison to the emerging Pop art. Johns' surfaces connoted use, which "in turn connotes the past, and the past, even the immediate past, evokes memories. Pop objects determinedly forgo the uniqueness acquired by time."¹⁵¹ Since these remarks were made, Pop art is not so much seen today as being in opposition to the expressive, but perhaps being an extension of it, as in many cases, each work was attended to manually. Even Warhol's series, though often repeating a single image, were printed without regards to technical consistencies, resulting in variations. We should not forget that Warhol's cans of soup belong to a specific brand, Campbell's, and that each can is a specific type of soup, supplying a variety of flavours to a repetitive meal.

Pop's interest with the present, the new, popular culture, was fed in large part by music and films, all products from California, mainly Los Angeles. It is ironic that New York is perceived as the home of Pop art, while Los Angeles was, and is still responsible for producing much of the popular culture on television and at the cinemas. But was Pop art celebrating or criticizing popular culture? As New York perceived itself as a critical art centre, Los Angeles with its entertainment business, along with the cult of the beach, was perceived as a city of leisure and pleasure, where important work could not be realized. In *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960's*, Cécile Whiting introduces her book with a sentence that describes how Los Angeles was perceived at the time: "Promising scholars and philosophers, the story

¹⁵¹ Lippard, p. 78

goes, move to California and then just play tennis and swim for years.”¹⁵² Ruscha himself has criticized the fact that outside of New York, art was thought as inferior, not attracting attention from museums and critics from the East Coast.

Los Angeles

Ruscha has said many times over the years, that what initially attracted him to Los Angeles were the LA stereotypes, “such as cars, suntan, palm trees, swimming pools, strips of celluloid with perforations; even the word ‘sunset’ had glamour. West was hot. East was cold.”¹⁵³ Ruscha has been described as an artist who made Los Angeles his main subject, paying attention to everything on the streets. Other cities could not produce a similar effect on Ruscha; Los Angeles takes on the form of a model, of being only surface, explored by driving along the streets. This idea of superficiality, positive for Ruscha, was considered negative for the writers of *Artforum*, who in 1967, decided to move from Los Angeles to New York: “There is a whole shallow, indulgent, Republic-of-Trivia aspect to [Los Angeles] which reminds us here in New York that not since the invention of bronze casting has anything of consequences happened in that climate.”¹⁵⁴

While New York was to be the main centre of contemporary art in the United States, the Pop artist’s interest in popular culture came from outside of New York. Warhol

¹⁵² Whiting, p.3

¹⁵³ Robert Landau and John Pashdag in Schwartz, p. 242

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Masheck, quoted by Whiting, p. 3

comments on a trip to Los Angeles in 1963: “The farther West we drove, the more Pop everything looked on the highways.”¹⁵⁵ One could say that ultimately arriving in L.A., the popular is perfectly realised.

Ruscha, along with other West Coast artists in the early and mid 1960s, were making art that made reference to surfing, the streets, and signs of the city. Artists like Billy Al Bengston, Vija Celmins, Judy Chicago and David Hockney, were all considered Pop. Surfaces and its reflective aspects were explored by a group of artists labeled Finish Fetish, Hard-Edge, or L.A. Cool, who were exploiting new materials like fiberglass, Plexiglass, polyester resin, and acrylics, to “form sleek, gleaming surfaces with radiant optical effects.”¹⁵⁶ These works were influenced primarily by the local hot rod and “kostum kar kulture”, whose main “painters” were Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, and Von Dutch (Kenneth Howard). The work of these two painters are included in Nancy Marmer’s *Pop Art in California* article, but not discussed. They are identified as a professional painter of custom cars, not artists.¹⁵⁷

Pop culture was also investigated by American sociologists, such as David Riesman in the 1950’s, and Herbert J. Gans in the 1960’s. A 1950 article by Gene Balsley, describes the hot rod culture in terms that are not very different to what Meyer Schapiro saw in modern art, with the hot rodder standing in opposition to American car production, through his remodeling of the car, making it a “magical and vibrant

¹⁵⁵ Whiting, p.5

¹⁵⁶ Whiting, p.57

¹⁵⁷ Nancy Marmer, ‘Pop Art in California’, *Pop Art*, Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974) p. 154

thing.”¹⁵⁸ The consumer here is not described as manipulated, but as a manipulator. Ruscha was himself interested in car and hot rods. After reading this article by Balsley, I reflected that Ruscha’s initial wish to make his own books was not unlike the hot rodder’s use of mass produced car parts, to appropriate and modify a Detroit-made car. It is to give specificity and aspects of the personal to the mass-produced, inserting a mark to an industry perceived as pristine.

Commercial painting techniques, such as aerosol painting, used to paint elaborate designs on hot rod cars, is borrowed by several artists in Los Angeles at the time. Billy Al Bengston, a friend of Ruscha, worked painting motorcycles, and started using the techniques and materials to create paintings and sculptures. Judy Chicago, a student of Bengston, produced paintings on car hoods, using techniques she had learned at auto body school. Another culture which had an influence on the use and application of shiny surfaces is the surf community, which had made Los Angeles its centre, after the invention of the shortboard, which revolutionized surfing in the mid-1960’s.¹⁵⁹ The so-called inventor of the shortboard, Bob Mctavish is quoted in a 2003 press release from the Franklin Parrasch Gallery, for an exhibition of the work done in the 1960’s by some of the Finish Fetish artists: “Let the mind unshackle; set it free. Let it stroll, run, leap, laugh in gardens of crystal motion and sun and reality. Weave and paint with the hand of your imagination, with the fingers of your body, brush of fiberglass.” Industrial techniques, once learned, become extensions of the

¹⁵⁸ Gene Balsley, ‘The Hot-Rod Culture’, *American Quarterly*, Vol, II, No. 14, Winter 1950

¹⁵⁹ Press release for *L.A.’s Finish Fetish* exhibition, at Franklin Parrasch Gallery, 2003.
http://www.franklinparrasch.com/exhibitions/2003_9_las-finish-fetish/pressrelease/

body, and the imagination. They are incorporated in one's motor habits, becoming part of the techniques of the body, which I will discuss further in chapter 5.

Ruscha knew and worked with some of these artists. The exhibition at the Parrasch Gallery on Fetish Finish artists included Ruscha, who is not usually considered part of the group. Techniques play an important role for these artists, to achieve the desired surfaces; the gallery press release mentions that Ruscha developed in 1966 a method of layering acrylic on canvas, which he called the "rainbow roll." This method was used to create his rendering of sunsets and dramatic atmospheric effects, by graduated applications of colour and texture.¹⁶⁰ Sunsets and atmospheric skies and space appear in many of his works. One could argue that he is pursuing the work of both the American landscape painters of the nineteenth century and of the space of the Abstract Expressionists as Rosenblum pointed to. Another correlation would be between his colourful sunsets and music with the early German Romantics' interest with temporality and landscape painting. This will be further discussed in the last chapter.

Records

Light, surfaces, reflections and plastic all come together, along with his love of typography, in one of Ruscha's last small books from 1971, *Records (fig. 8)*, the fifteenth of the seventeen books he produced between 1963 and 1978. Its simple title on a bright red cover, gives it a look of a small notebook, or ledger book, to

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

record or list items. The choice of type also gives it the look of a technical, or accounting manual, and, as with his other books, it has that factual kind of army-navy data look that Ruscha likes.¹⁶¹

Skimming through the book, we see on the left pages photographic reproductions of album covers, and on the right pages, the vinyl records. Opening the book at random gives us on the left page a square and on the right page a circle. The paired squares and circles seem to be a blending, as Clive Phillipot writes, of two small books by Bruno Munari, *Discovery of the Square* and *Discovery of the Circle*.¹⁶² *Records* contains sixty photographs: thirty of the covers and thirty of the vinyl records. There is only one set that breaks the uniformity of the lay out; the twentieth record, a double album by Merle Haggard. In this case, there is one album cover, with two vinyl records, one slightly over the other. Perusing through it, we can notice that some of the covers are still wrapped with plastic and covered with stickers.

American artist Eric Doeringer has recently reproduced “bootlegs”, or copies of Ruscha’s books, including *Records*, which depict the same records as Ruscha’s, but “the record covers in my book show different patterns or wear, price tags, and doodles and there is some variation in the record labels (mono/stereo versions,

¹⁶¹ David Bourdon in Schwartz, p. 41

¹⁶² Clive Phillipot, ‘Sixteen Books and then some’, *Edward Ruscha: editions, 1959-1999: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 2* (Minneapolis and New York: Walker Art Center and Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), p.74

reissues, etc.).”¹⁶³ While Ruscha photographed part of his own collection, Doeringer used the book as a task to fill, a list of items to find and gather.

There is practically nothing written specifically about *Records*, except by artist Eleanor Antin in her 1973 article for *Art in America*, ‘Reading Ruscha’. Antin considers it Ruscha’s most problematic book to read, as it is not a narrative, but a partial list. Why these records and not others? Ruscha says he selected them almost randomly from his collection. The list becomes a small collection culled from a larger one. What Antin then proceeds to do is to create her own readings of the records, imagining at one point a correspondence between each records and a Los Angeles artist, and also considering the relationship between the musicians and their other recordings. As conclusion she writes: “in the end, it is the omissions which most clearly define the range of his sensibility. It is ‘Pop’ sensibility and the collection delineates its deficiencies very precisely.”¹⁶⁴ She does not reveal what is meant by a Pop sensibility, except that its interest lies with the casual and the trivial, confronting high art.¹⁶⁵ Her knowledge of music allows her to hear the images, and categorise it as “Pop” because of it is a narrow choice out of an immense possibility. Though the records are from several genres, such as Rock, Rhythm and Blues and Country, these categories are not so precise, as certain musicians are said to belong to several categories, or in between. In fact, she adds, boundaries between musical genres have been “breaking down”, with several types of music coming together,

¹⁶³ <http://www.ericdoeringer.com/ConArtRec/Ruscha/Ruscha-Records.html>

¹⁶⁴ Eleanor Antin, ‘Reading Ruscha’, *Art in America*, Nov.- Dec. 1973, p. 71

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 66

such as with the Rolling Stones. If anything, to know Pop, one would need to refer less to a categorical analysis, and more to the listening of these records.

Looking at this book today, reminds me of records one might come across in a secondhand shop. These are records that span between the years 1957 (Sonny Rollins) to 1970 (Leon Russell; James Taylor; Mason Williams; Steppenwolf), while the musical styles referred to all belong to the twentieth century; there are no recordings of madrigals, for example.

The small book does not only refer to music, but to typography, where a panoply of styles are used on the album covers and the record labels. These words written in several styles, point to Ruscha's own interest in words and the way they are written. At this point, Ruscha had already produced one of his most famous series of words, written as if made of liquid, which he referred to as his romance with liquids.¹⁶⁶

Records also depicts two types of impressions: imprint or stamping, the method used to mass-produce vinyl records; and offset lithography, from which the album covers are produced, and the book itself. Ruscha has documented a mass-produced object, and reproduced through an industrial printing process, though at a smaller volume: *Records* was first printed in an edition of 2,000. He has mentioned his fascination to seeing a series of similar items, assembled together: "Look how well made and crisp it is. I am not trying to create a precious limited edition book, but a

¹⁶⁶ Yve-Alain Bois, *Edward Ruscha: Romance With Liquids, Paintings 1966-1969* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993)

mass-produced object of high order. All my books are identical. They have none of the nuances of the hand-made and crafted limited edition book. It is almost worth the money to have the thrill of 400 exactly identical books staked in front of you.”¹⁶⁷ Ruscha’s comment reveals the physicality of repetition, an accumulation that is sensed, yet unmanipulable.

Of his books, *Records* is the only one that depicts a decontextualised mass-produced object. His other books make use of photographic images that resemble snapshots, depicting various buildings or architectural constructions, such as parking lots and swimming pools. Most photographs refer to a place, whereas each record appears alone, specimen-like, as in an atlas, or belonging to a shopping catalogue. Yet, no information is given to the reader.

If something links these photographs of records to a place, though an unspecific, it is the plastic wrapping that surrounds several records. It locates each item as being under the photographers’ light, as a thing that is image. Ruscha’s early photographs of products allowed shadows to reveal the three-dimensional aspects of each item, whereas with the records, only the surface is photographed. The protective plastic is perceptible due to its reflective quality, revealing subtle wrinkles in the corners of the covers. The stickers on the plastic, for example on the James Taylor record, “\$2.99 at Vogue’s” offers the viewer the name of a store as a location, and as a type of store.

¹⁶⁷ John Copland in Schwartz, p. 27

The absence of wrapping in some cases, will allow covers to be damaged, either through constant rubbing with other records, or surfaces. This often results with an imprint, produced by the record inside the album cover. It becomes a rubbing, a method of transfer not so different from techniques of frottage used by artists; here it occurs “naturally” as with the polishing of sea pebbles. The covers are weathered.

The vinyl records for their part do not seem to have any scratches, as it is difficult to see clearly the actual surface of the records, from the small reproductions. What is evident about the photographed vinyl records is their reflective quality. Depictions of vinyl records appear in other works: a screenprint on paper titled *Music* (from *Tropical Fish Series*), from 1975 and a pastel, *Unidentified Hit Record*, from 1977 (fig.9). In both those cases, similar reflections are given to the records. From the light illuminating the surface of the record, the grooves are made apparent. Sound and music exist as grooves.

An early text by Theodore Adorno (1903-69) refers to the phonographic record as an acoustical photograph, due to its ability to record sound indexically. This relationship between sound and marks on the phonographic record is one of the reasons vinyl records have become popular once again in the digital age, making sound visible and textured, as lines. Though visible, these are illegible, mesmerizing series of lines, or hieroglyphs, to which I will return later. But first, some observations about vinyl records and Cds.

* * *

Most of us have owned and played records. Perhaps, in the last few years, a choice had to be made, either to keep them on view as things from our past, or to hide them in closets or basements, often the first step before getting rid of them. If the type of music is still of interest, it could still be purchased as a CD, or down loaded from the Internet. Once records have let go of their original relationship with their owner due to their outmoded state, they are written off and disappear. It is important to differentiate between a technology that is outmoded, and a type of music that is outmoded.

There are many reasons why music would become outmoded. Will Straw commented in 1999 on certain types of records “whose cultural value has decayed long before the physical objects themselves, is nevertheless signified through the sheer bulk of these records as they continue to fill the spaces of record stores, thrift shops and garage sales. While they remain valueless, their bulk nevertheless functions monumentally.”¹⁶⁸ These large amounts of used records are now slowly disappearing, replaced by new vinyl records. These are not only part of retro culture, but serve as a complement to the on-line digital music consumption.

New records are being manufactured on a small scale, and sales are augmenting. Several labels specialize in unearthing past recordings, unavailable for many

¹⁶⁸ Will Straw, ‘The Thingness of Things’, *Invisible Culture*, 1999, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue2/straw.htm

decades, and re-pressing them. As for the CD, sales have been declining rapidly for some years now, and with the increasing popularity of downloading, many wonder if the CD will find itself as unpopular as vinyl was in the early 1990's. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry announced in its 2008 report that "music sales via online and mobile channels have risen from zero to an estimated US\$2.9 billion – 15 per cent of industry sales - over the last five years, making music more digitally advanced than any entertainment sector except games."¹⁶⁹

The re-emergence of the vinyl record and its newfound popularity with a generation that didn't grow-up with it, allows for a reconsideration of the vinyl record. In fact, many of the reasons given by today's new consumers of records are very different from my own engagement with the medium.

David Hayes in his article 'Take Those Old Records off the Shelf: Youth and Music Consumption in the Postmodern Age', written in 2006, considers the mystique vinyl records have for teenagers today. For these youths, there is a sense of authenticity found with the medium, and with the music of past eras, as " offering more sincere, authentic observations on the human condition."¹⁷⁰ Hayes' observations come from interviews he conducted, and from representations of the interaction between the listener with music in films and television. These representations come into play for

¹⁶⁹ IFPI (*International Federation of the Phonographic Industry*) *Digital Music Report 2008*, http://www.ifpi.org/content/section_resources/dmr2008.html

¹⁷⁰ David Hayes, 'Take Those Old records off the Shelf: Youth and Music Consumption in the Postmodern Age', *Popular Music and Society*, 29:1, 2006, p. 52

the youth in their perception of playing records. Much emphasis is given to the care taken in removing the record from its sleeve, placing it on the turntable and the selection of a particular track and finally, to the dropping of the needle onto the record itself. By contrast, depiction of CD consumption in films is not romanticised at all. There are no direct shots of the CD being inserted in the sound system, though this may come soon. The films and interviews revealed a higher degree of participation with the act of playing records, existing in opposition with the relative ease to digital music playing.

For some of the youths, to own a vinyl record was like owning a piece of art, mainly because the images and text took more importance on the record cover than on the CD. The used quality of the cardboard imbues the cover and the listening experience with a sense of the past that creates a sense of completeness for the listener. Interestingly enough, Hayes does not mention the slow disappearance of images and information from music, now that the majority of music is available on-line. Much of the information has been replaced by videos or graphic animations, which can be viewed via computers.

The records discussed in Hayes article are for the most part from second-hand records. These are perceived as containing more authentic music than contemporary releases. In fact for the few record young collectors he interviewed, there is dissatisfaction with much contemporary music, due to the perception of the

artists as music industry puppets. For them, pre-CD era recordings are believed to be free from such tensions between creativity and capitalism.

The mode of resistance to industry and mainstream culture that Hayes describes, is similar to the early findings of Gene Balesley, for the hot-rodgers, and of David Riesman towards popular music. With music in 1950, it was partly through one's choice of music listening that a polarization with the majority arose, by "a sympathetic attitude or even preference for Negro musicians"; an interest in jazz; a dislike of 'sweet' music; of music as background for dancing.¹⁷¹ Certain types of music were deemed more authentic than others.

The interests in past technologies and past recordings for these young collectors, though romanticised, was still seen by Hayes as a mode of resistance to an industry, and is also one of empowerment from his point of view. "[I]nvolvement in the culture of vinyl has enabled these young people to operate with a reinvigorated sense of agency in an arena of cultural production and consumption largely over-determined by corporate interest."¹⁷²

Today's records come mainly from small labels. Many came to the forefront in the early 1980's with punk and the underground tape-trading culture. Another important reason for the presence of vinyl records, or the 12-inch single in this case, is its place within the DJ culture. The 12-inch single, a tool for the DJ, was not

¹⁷¹ David Riesman, 'Listening to Popular Music', *American Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 4, 1950, p.366

¹⁷² David Hayes, p. 67

destined for the mass market. With CD and MP3 market appearing as other tools for DJs, “the 12-inch dance single has become a sign of distinction, a limited issue artifact, a mechanically reproduced sonic sculpture that requires connoisseurship.”¹⁷³

Hayes does not discuss the production of new vinyl records, which since the appearance of the article, has seen the opening of several small record manufacturers. The manufacturers are depicted as using a non-commercial medium, due to its low production, and of being arcane: “In an age of near-instant music downloads and entire libraries stored in gizmos the size of a cigarette lighter, the arcane process of making records defies convention.”¹⁷⁴

The vinyl record, both for Hayes’ youth and for the DJ, is an object to decipher, as each particular recording is not equivalent to the next one. The vinyl record is a medium, and within this medium, particular items become important and collected. I will first try to distinguish the particular from the whole as a way to understand from which point of view our understanding of vinyl records comes from.

Michael Thompson, in his book *Rubbish Theory*, points out categories into which objects are placed: the transient and the durable. The transient object devaluates in value and has a finite life-span; the durable object increases in value and has

¹⁷³ Hillegonda C. Rietveld, ‘The Residual Soul Sonic Force of the 12-Inch Dance Single’, *Residual Media*, Charles R. Acland (ed) Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) p. 98

¹⁷⁴ Sales of Vinyl Records on the Rise, <http://www.thesqueeze.net/All-Categories/Culture/Music/Sale-of-vinyl-records-on-the-rise>, January 2012.

(ideally) an infinite life-span. These assumptions are determined by world views, and give importance to an object, such as Thompson's example of a Queen Anne tallboy as a durable object, whereas the used car is perceived as transient; its value deteriorating as the years go by. But certain objects are not ruled by fixed assumptions. They are situated, in Thompson's nomenclature, in a region of *flexibility*, whereas worldviews do not determine the object's category, but where actions surrounding the object create the worldview. Therefore a vase can simultaneously be second-hand and antique, but it can only be antique if one makes it antique, through the eye of the connoisseur. This connoisseurship is not available to everyone: "Innovation and creativity arise within the region of flexibility, but access to innovation and creativity is not freely available to all members of our society."¹⁷⁵ The worldviews or control mechanisms, which determine the category of an object, seem determined by those in power.

Thompson perceives a third category for some objects: those with zero and unchanging value, which he calls, *rubbish*. Rubbish is the category that permits a passage from the transient to the durable, and is not subject to these control mechanisms. That is why we can have certain objects having lost their importance, existing in some sort of limbo, and accumulating, until they have a chance to come back. For many record collectors, the search for obscure records can be seen as a type of excavation project providing knowledge for them and ultimately for us too, while giving certain recordings a second life. This doesn't give all records a place

¹⁷⁵ Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The creation and destruction of value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 8

within the category of durable objects, but it does accentuate the potentiality of the medium to achieve that transfer. Particular records will become collectibles, thus giving all records a certain aura of possibilities and importance.

One point that has come up in several articles about vinyl records, and specified by Hayes, is the importance of the sound of the vinyl, the crackle and pop that previous collectors didn't necessarily want, but were stuck with. This sound is of great importance to many new consumers of vinyl. It gives "an atmosphere" to a room, it is "more rustic", "sounding better" and not as "clear as CD's." Clarity here is to be understood in a negative way, such as the term clinical, often used to suggest a lack of emotion. "Rather than interpreting these sonic defects as impediments, most youth regarded them as integral to their music, valorizing these blemishes for the seeming authenticity with which they imbued the recordings. Some musical groups have even added this "rustic" sound to their music, giving the listener a sense that she, or he is listening to something of the past. A popular example was the 1994 debut release by Portishead, *Dummy*.

These crackles and pops point to an inherency of the medium, which time and use make audible. One may purchase a vinyl recording where no such sound can be heard, as the Audiophile series advertised, but, again with time and repeated play, a single *¹⁷⁶ might come to register onto the record, to be heard each time the record

¹⁷⁶ I am using this asterisk to suggest interruption and noise, produced by the scratch on a record. For a study on graphic type and time see Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 5.

is played. There seems to be two ways to appreciate recorded sounds: first, when it seems to come from nowhere, with nothing but the pure sound of music, insulated from other types of sounds; and secondly, one can hear the apparatus bringing the sound to our ears. Interestingly enough, these notions of clarity, of perfection and fidelity, as reasons for the lost of subtlety and authenticity is to be found in three short texts by Theodore Adorno on records.

Adorno

A first text written in 1927 and published the following year, *The Curves of the Needle*, points at first to the phonograph having suffered a similar fate of the photograph at one point: the transition from the artisanal to industrial production.¹⁷⁷ What Adorno laments is the fact that the records of his day are not made as well as previous ones, wearing out faster. The result of this technical transformation is perceived by Adorno to have modified the relation to the recorded subject, a relation deemed to have suffered. A similar claim was made by Walter Benjamin in his *Little History of Photography* (1931), about the rise and fall of photography due to its industrialization and the subsequent interest in preindustrial photography, as a way to imbue new works with the “charm of old photographs”.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Theodore W. Adorno, ‘*The Curves of the Needle*’, tr. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 50, 1990, p. 49

¹⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘Little History of Photography’, tr. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 2, 1927- 1934* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 508

The technical improvement to capture a subject with more and more fidelity has transformed the subject: “In their early phases, these technologies (phonographic and photographic) had the power to penetrate rationally the reigning artistic practice.”¹⁷⁹ A relationship existed between these machines and the subjects, which was apparent in the results. Adorno compares the diffuse and atmospheric sound of the early gramophone to the humming gaslight and the “whistling teakettle of bygone literature.”¹⁸⁰ Early photographic portraits are described by Benjamin as retaining the innocence of the photographed -“or rather, without inscription.”¹⁸¹ That is, the viewer still responded to these early images as something un-coded, as images were not part of the everyday, and newspapers were still read mainly in public spaces. Benjamin also comments on the permanence of the image due to the need for long exposures, which demanded of the subject to stand still; “during the considerable period of exposure, the subject (as it were) grew into the picture, in the sharpest contrast with appearances in a snapshot...” The relationship between subject and apparatus is described in terms that suggest forms of contact. Adorno uses the term *penetrate*, while Benjamin writes *grew into*.

But as Thomas Y. Levin assures us in his essay, *For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproductibility*, Adorno does not mourn a pre-technological world¹⁸², but a certain quality, a subtlety and the authenticity of the

¹⁷⁹ Theodore W. Adorno, ‘*The Curves of the Needle*’, p. 49

¹⁸⁰ Theodore W. Adorno, ‘*The Curves of the Needle*’, p. 50

¹⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘*Little History of Photography*’, p. 512

¹⁸² Thomas Y. Levin, ‘*For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproductibility*’, October, 50, 1990, p. 30

recorded voice made present by older records and gramophones. Plus, it is the technical objects, the apparatuses, the phonograph, that “have sacrificed their former, unabashedly technological appearances for the pretense of bourgeois furniture.”¹⁸³ Today, speakers have been incorporated in the actual walls of new homes, inside and outside, from which continuous sounds can accompany the environmental ones.

In another essay first published in 1934, *The Form of the Phonograph Record*, Adorno investigates the record-object itself, its *thingness* [*Dinglichkeit*], without recourse to playing and listening. He starts with a most puzzling assertion: “One does not want to accord it any form other than the one it exhibits.”¹⁸⁴ It is as if this object, this black pane, as he calls it, was perfect as is. Noting its fragility and the small hole at the centre, it is mainly the marks covering the surface of the record that excite Adorno; curves, scribbles, a sort of writing, remaining illegible and “not readily intelligible.”¹⁸⁵ He then compares the phonograph record to the photograph, which he had already done in the previous essay. It is here that he refers to the record as an acoustic photograph. The possibility of playing the music at any time makes it an antithesis to the humane and artistic, which cannot be repeated, and are tied to their place and time of origin. As Thomas Y. Levin mentions, this is a striking anticipation of Walter Benjamin’s later discussion on the loss of the aura.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 30

¹⁸⁴ Theodore W. Adorno, ‘The Form of the Phonograph Record’, tr. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 50, 1990, p.56

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Y. Levin, ‘For the Record:’ p. 32

In the essay *The Work of Art In the Age of Its Reproducibility* (the first version written in 1935, the last one in 1939), Benjamin writes of the work of art as always having the ability to be reproduced through divers techniques. He mentions briefly records, while describing the reasons why the technical reproduction differs from reproduction made by hand. One reason is that technical reproduction is more independent than manual copying, as a photographic reproduction can bring out some aspects of the original piece by emphasizing certain details, which might not be evident to the naked eye. The second point has to do with the ability to bring the reproduction into situations where the original would never have found itself. "Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record."¹⁸⁶ Adorno in his essay writes of these recorded moments in terms of collectables, put into albums alongside the photographic and postage-stamp albums, "all of them herbaria of artificial life that are present in the smallest space and conjure up every recollection that would otherwise be mercilessly shredded between the haste and hum-drum of private life."¹⁸⁷

Adorno understands the phonographic record as an object that can give back music an authenticity lost to music writing, to notations on paper. He is willing to give up the immediacy of the musical performance for recorded music, because in this form, music has itself become writing: "music, previously conveyed by writing, suddenly

¹⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, J.A. Underwood, tr. (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 6

¹⁸⁷ Theodore W. Adorno, 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', p.58

itself turns into writing.” Adorno gives the writing of the phonographic record, the status of being “the last remaining universal language since the construction of the tower”, quoting Walter Benjamin’s *Origin of the German Baroque Drama*. The grooves on the record are the indexical traces of sound, of music. They do not stand for sound, as notations do for music; the grooves are the sound. The records are for Adorno acoustic photographs. The recorded music may have conveyed the live dimension of the performance, but this is of less importance to what has been gained in the process: the indexical traces of the musical event.

These necessary, yet unintelligible, ciphers are said to belong to a universal language, one that has become unknown to the present age. It is on this aspect that photography and phonography part ways, as the traces that generate the photographs are readily understandable, whereas the traces on the phonographic record are not. Levin explains that the record being both indexical and enigmatic, “can claim both of the contradictory qualities of the hieroglyph: ‘universal’ and ‘immediate’ by virtue of their ‘natural’, necessary relation of sign to referent, and also esoteric, recondite and requiring decoding, due to their surface inaccessibility.”¹⁸⁸ Now, why is this of importance for Adorno?

As mentioned earlier, Adorno commented on the relationship between phonography and photography, with the record realising Nadar’s wish for a

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Y. Levin, p.37

*“daguerréotype acoustique.”*¹⁸⁹ Phonography is sound writing. It also is a system of phonetic shorthand writing invented by Sir Isaac Pitman in 1837. Today it refers mainly to the activity of sound collecting and field recordings,¹⁹⁰ which is not unlike the snapshot. The visible grooves on the vinyl record are indexical mark of sound as much as the image on film, but unlike a photograph, they are not readily intelligible.

Thomas Y. Levin points out that the marks are simultaneously indexical and enigmatic, universal and immediate, comparing them to hieroglyphs. Discoveries made in 1787 by German physicist Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni provide the information needed for Adorno to see in the writing of sound, a language from nature: “Chladni’s experiments consisted in spreading quartz dust on various plates that were then made to vibrate. Depending on the rate of the vibration, the sand distributed itself into lines, curves and hyperboles, gathering in those areas that were free of movement.”¹⁹¹ This produced graphic figures, which were called tone figures [*Klangfiguren*]. Adorno extends his reading of the tone figure to an Ur-image of sound, like an ancient language, ultimately seeing records not as artwork but “the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulation capture the sound of creation, the first and the last sound, judgment upon life and message about that which may come

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 32

¹⁹⁰ www.phonography.org

¹⁹¹ Thomas Y. Levin, ‘For the Record’, p. 39

thereafter."¹⁹² For Levin, Adorno's reading is a prognosis of our relationship with technology itself, one that needs to be deciphered, as a hieroglyphic form demands.

Ruscha may not be interested in pursuing the relationship between ur-writing and nature, but he is nonetheless concerned by the passage of time, and recording it. Like recorded sound, a trace from past contact "a present marker of a past event which is radically past: determinate yet irrevocable," as Levin writes,¹⁹³ Ruscha's photographs, as we will see, are given new impressions, attempts to bring back the past.

* *

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Looking at *Records*, not only can we see Ruscha's varied musical tastes, but we are looking at what he liked to hear. The imagined touch of empathy becomes an imagined aural in this case. This haphazard selection can be thought of as a potential iPod play list, a mix tape or a compilation. *Records* is a collection in itself, one that resonates in the viewer's mind as it probably did in Ruscha's. Knowing the type of music that each of the albums contains, creates an aural sensation that is played in the mind, through a reading of the album cover images. The record covers in a sense are not unlike a written score, while the vinyl depicts that actual sound patterns described earlier by Adorno. Sound and vision are intertwined in Ruscha's work. The book doesn't have to be experienced in a traditional beginning-to-end

¹⁹² Theodore W. Adorno, 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', p.61

¹⁹³ Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record', p. 41-42

way; one can open it at random, and as Eleanore Antin does, imagine what is not included.

Encountering other works by Ruscha, this feeling of intertwinement of sight with both the aural and the oral becomes evident. His work is full of words and sentences that only demand to be read aloud. Single words like NOISE; SMASH; FLASH; or series of words like NEWS, MEWS, PEWS, BREWS, STEWS + DUES; or a sentence like, HEADLIGHTS ARE SIMILAR TO PEOPLE'S EYES SO THE LAST THING YOU NEED IS A PAIR OF BINOCULARS. HEAR ME; and early business card of Ruscha's reading ED-WERD REW-SHAY ARTIST. He hoped that viewers would get the urge to test the pronunciation, not necessarily aloud, but with a throat motion; both mouth and ears activated with vision. We can feel the movements required to speak by pronouncing words silently: "Meaning is not distinct from articulation—the very utterance *oof* is its meaning—and the more physical work required for enunciation, the more forcefully is linguistic palpability communicated by speaker and sensed by listener."¹⁹⁴ Ruscha also uses images depicting "sounding" objects: clocks, snapping pencils, even the 20th Century-Fox logo brings back to mind the short musical piece that accompanies this familiar image from films. Jack Goldstein with his 1975 film *MGM*, does the opposite, by looping MGM's roaring lion into a repetitive series of roars and lion's head movement. For Dave Hickey, critic and friend of Ruscha, the placement of records and their covers on the facing page in *Records* "juxtaposes the

¹⁹⁴ Lisa Pasquariello, 'Ed Ruscha and the Language That He Used, *October* 111, 2005, p. 101

tantalizing opacity of the aural world with the blunt, lucid and insufficient graphic package.”¹⁹⁵

The crispness that Ruscha seeks is to be found in the book as a thing, not in the photographs, as these are quite dull reproductions. By this I mean how the details of the records are not perceptible to the eye. We can see light reflected on the vinyl, but there is no sheen. Through my own work, I had come to think of the vinyl record as some sort of mirror due to the reflective quality of the vinyl, but in *Records*, the images don't convey reflection; they are visible, but are not emphasized. Other works do, such as the aforementioned *Unidentified Hit Record (fig.9)*, where light reflection is made evident, and the spaces separating each song band are well defined.

Evident from the contact sheets of *Records*, reproduced in the book *Ed Ruscha Photographer*,¹⁹⁶ is the shininess of the light reflecting on sections of the records. This way of visually representing the vinyl has become almost the norm. Like the crackle and pop meaning “vinyl record” for a listener, the clean nature of the record is but the flip side to crackling one. The two-sides of the record are not only its A and B-sides, but also it is a dialogue between authenticity and illusion.

¹⁹⁵ Dave Hickey, 'Wacky Molière Lines: a Listener's Guide to Ed- Werd Rew- Shay' *Parkett* 18, 1988, p. 32

¹⁹⁶ Margitt Rowell, *Ed Ruscha Photographer* (Göttingen, New York: Steidl and Whitney Museum of American Art, 2006), pp. 138-139

A third point view would be from the side. Ruscha has painted and photographed the spine of certain books, which would suggest the possibility to look at the record in such a way. Its depiction would look like a black line, a kind of perfect, authentic scratch.

For his books, Ruscha was not interested with the fidelity of the photographic reproduction. The use of photography was a way to fill pages. As mentioned earlier, in many of Ruscha's books, not all pages contain images. In the case of his 1968 book *Nine Swimming Pools and a broken glass*, most of the 68 pages are left blank or with captions. There are only ten photographic images; "the extra pages were valuable because they gave body to the book."¹⁹⁷ To experience Ruscha's work, one has to invest the encounter with all the senses.

In his monograph on Ruscha, Richard D. Marshall writes: "In addition to the musical and cultural references it contains, *Records* is a fascinating display of record-cover art and graphic design and the various ways that the designer of record labels attempt to overcome the monotony of the twelve-inch black disk, attesting to Ruscha's avid interest in design, color, and typography."¹⁹⁸ What Marshall fails to recognize is the interplay between looking and hearing, and between photography and phonography.

¹⁹⁷ Clive Phillipot, 'Sixteen Books and then some', p. 70

¹⁹⁸ Richard D. Marshall, *Ed Ruscha*, p.61

The reflections on the vinyl is part of its representation. They reveal and accentuate the sound grooves Adorno was so enthralled with. For the viewer, the representation depends on the pristine surface of the record, whereas for the listener, it is the dirt and scratches on the surface, the inherent crackle and pop which reveal the object.

* * *

Both photography and sound recordings preserve the past. For most of his career, Ed Ruscha thought of photography's place as belonging in the commercial world, "for technical and information purposes."¹⁹⁹ But this information was intimately tied to the notion of time. In an interview, Ruscha speaks of an early photograph he took of Toledo as a way to compare his image to one painted by El Greco; it was a comparison with what was happening here and what had happened in El Greco's time. This idea of documenting as a way to compare informs much of his work. Most of his photographic sources have only appeared in his books, never as a single photograph. All his photographic work were stored away, waiting for some future use. In 1989 Ruscha began retrieving old works to give them new life through new editions. His interest is not nostalgic, but acknowledges that everything succumbs to cycles and time: "I'm trying to do things that are happening now. Even if you go out

¹⁹⁹ Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography* (Göttingen, New York: Steidl, The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004), p.13

and take a picture of a gasoline station that is freshly built today, ten years from now, it won't look so old, but twenty and thirty years from now it will."²⁰⁰

Ruscha's use of earlier work to produce new ones, which he calls '*raiding the icebox*', was a wish to see them in a new and different way. In an early interview Ruscha ponders about the physical changes his work will undergo. He compares this to a collage by Kurt Schwitters, with its aged paper and ink, and tries to imagine it with fresh materials: "It would be strange to look at a collage done back in the 20's if you saw it like it was when it was made. You'd be disoriented."²⁰¹

Part of his raiding of the icebox, is the series *The Sunset Strip* (1995) (fig. 10), for which he made copies of early negatives and then marred with a razor blade and sandpaper to create scratches on the images. Ruscha says of these: "People look at those and they realize, '*that looks like scratches on film*,' and yet in the future, when there is no more film, people will say, '*what's that?*'"²⁰²

These scratches have appeared on many of Ruscha's work, starting in the 1990's and extending into the Twenty-first century; from actual scratches on negatives, reproduced as photographs, holograms, drawings and paintings. A few of these scratches appear on works with motifs taken from cinema; the numeral digits that are found on film leaders, showing, and counting the seconds before the actual film

²⁰⁰ Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, p.273

²⁰¹ Alezandra Schwartz (ed.), *Leave Any Information at the Signal, Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages: Ed Ruscha*, p. 358

²⁰² Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, p.216

starts, and the words *The End* (fig.11), again associated with the end of the filmed story. These scratches not only act as a representation for celluloid film, but can also be interpreted as another “sounding object” in Ruscha’s work. These scratches can be heard. A scratch on the space reserved for the soundtrack will be read as sound and be heard, when projected. Here we can think of the work Norman McLaren produced, creating films where the patterns seen were actually producing the soundtracks.

One can only wonder about this interest in scratches by both Ruscha and record consumers: do scratches domesticate the industrial products? They form a patina, referring not only the past, but indicating that we make contact with things, by inadvertently scratching their surface. Usage is perceivable visually and aurally.

It is a patina that results from usage and time. Patinas can be replicated to imitate old objects and indicate usage. Roland Barthes²⁰³ in the 1960 text ‘Préface à Brecht, “Mère Courage et ses enfants”’, mentions the importance the colouring of objects on stage had for Bertolt Brecht. He applied to these objects a paint treatment to imbue them with a sense of usage. Barthes describes Brecht’s stage as a refusal of colouring as symbol, insisting instead on the role of colour as substance. Brecht does not use pure colours, but greys and browns to evoke materials such as leather, bronze, canvas. For Brecht, the colouring is to make these objects exist, not as make-belief signs, but as utensils, mediator between man and his work.

²⁰³ Roland Barthes, ‘Préface à Brecht, “Mère Courage et ses enfants”’, *Oeuvres complètes* T.1 (Paris: Seuil, 1993), pp. 889-894.

The discolored aspect Brecht gives to his objects' surface emphasises a material and a usage. They need to look like they have been used, dirtied. This surface for Brecht and Barthes signifies a history. The surface is to be read by the spectator Barthes indicates, signifying the human who makes the world, and that the world is resistance. A clean, un-deformed object would not be able to indicate touch for Brecht. They need to look scratched.

Playing records slowly uses them, while giving them life again. The act of playing the record is described, by both collectors and the youth David Hayes interviewed, as special, almost creative. The youths perceive contemporary sound systems as simple and easy: one only needs to push a button! And here we can sense the relationship that is often associated between creating, labouring and authenticity. There is a need to see or to know that work has been done, to give it meaning.

Christian Thorne in his essay, *The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded*, analyses the links between retro and apocalypse culture. About the retro he writes: "Retro distinguishes itself from the more or less folkish quality of most national traditions in that it elevates to the status of custom the commodities of early mass production –old Coke bottles, vintage automobiles –and it does so by imbuing them with artisanal quality."²⁰⁴ This attentiveness to objects, a type of salvaging is unthinkable, Thorne writes, without the apocalypse, without a ruined landscape, "and in time of

²⁰⁴ Christian Thorne, 'The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded', *October* 104, 2003, p. 103

shortage alone, objects will slough off their commodity status.”²⁰⁵ But don’t we live in the land of plenty? Where is the scarcity Thorne speaks about? He sees it in the marketplace’s over production of redundant and misdistributed goods. There is no utopia of plenty. Our society of consumption must “however paradoxically, find utopia in its antithesis, which is dearth.”²⁰⁶ Things accumulate, creating heaps from which we can pick and choose, such as the work from *Unmonumental*.

In the global north world, digital culture has entered many facets of our lives. At this point, we could say that analog technology for the most part is obsolete, but hasn’t completely disappeared. Vinyl records are part of the obsolescence of analog technology, but their presence suggests that they exist as *residual media*, to use Charles R. Acland’s book title, accumulating to a static monumentality, dearth, only to come back and introduce new forms, as art, collectibles and memories.²⁰⁷ One has to rummage through it all, as a way to extract possibilities.

The artisanal qualities that some find in early mass production is also to be found in our nostalgic look at factory work, which is slowly moving to other countries. The presence of artisanally made industrial objects has become popular in recent years in the art world. We can think here of the work of Grayson Perry, Shary Boyle and Wim Delvoye. For other artists, it is the mistakes or the malfunctioning of machines

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 113

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ Charles R. Acland, *Residual Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xx

that act as gesture or mark, acknowledging its making; Ruscha mentions being fascinated by the mistakes made while printing.

Scrutinising again *Records*, I start noticing small printing errors. Small white spots or hairs appear on the black of the records. Certain marks, which do not look like light reflection, are apparent. Some of them look like finger streaks. The price tags on six of the thirty covers are not unlike scratches, as they do not belong to the original artwork of the album cover. They situate the record as at one point having been a commodity, before taking on a life of domesticity. In his series of photographs *Product Still Life* (1961), Ruscha isolates such items as a can of Spam, or a box of Oxydol. The objects are depicted in an un-pristine way. They are used: “If you look at them, they’re ratty around the edges, and they’ve been kicked around, and wrinkled. I liked them for that.” Of interest here is the fact that these images of scratched products, give us the impression of someone having used them. But by remembering Ruscha’s scratched negatives, one wonders about the difference between types of scratches: due to time or to an application. Authentic scratches are seen as a direct mark of time itself, not unlike Adorno’s view of the record grooves as an Ur-image of sound, but these are no more or less authentic than the precise markings Ruscha has painted or printed. Looking at them, one does think of old negatives, but they are not. These works are perhaps an intersection of two time frames, past and present.

Adorno's last essay about the record, *Opera and the Long-Playing Record*, from 1969, suggests that opera in the late twentieth-century has become like a museum, which neutralises the original works. But, the recordings of these operas "awaken a second life in the wondrous dialogue with the lonely and perceptive listener, hibernating for purpose unknown."²⁰⁸ The listener brings life to the past, by giving the music a new present.

Again, both Adorno and Benjamin allude to contact by making use of an instinct-related metaphor from nature to illustrate their points: Benjamin with nest-building and Adorno with hibernating, suggesting an intimate relationship between the body, technology and its products. Are we in such a state today, or still hibernating?

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As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Achim Hochdörfer's article *A Hidden Reserve* explores some of the strategies that were explored by painters between 1958 and 1965. These suppressed abstract possibilities have recently become part of the new abstraction, with painters such as Jutta Koether, Wade Guyton and

²⁰⁸ Theodore W. Adorno, 'Opera and the Long-Playing Record', tr., Thomas Y. Levin *October* 50, 1990, p. 66

Charline von Heyl. These artists continue to explore the mark on the canvas, beyond its limiting relationship to the notion of subjective expression.

A range of mark making exists, from the expressionistic, to erasure, repetition, and as cliché. Ruscha's painted scratches could be added to this list as *representative* of marks. Ruscha is representing the mark as a representation of touch; a representation of direct contact. Ruscha avoids the actual scratching that Brecht favours. He withholds it, while referring to it. His crisp scratches create a space between the viewer and the work, a strategy that acknowledges the power of the mark, while resisting its overuse, by displacing it

The use of typography in many works of contemporary art as distancing technique , of restraining the body's own markings, was used by many artists besides Jasper Johns and Ed Ruscha. Conceptual artists are often remembered as textual artists. The next chapter will look at several artifacts from the Conceptual art period, and the type of interaction they permitted, as well as the sensuousness to be found in typography itself.

Chapter 3- Two Types of Materials: a) ignored

“Qu’y a-t-il de plus engageant que l’azur si ce n’est un nuage, à la clarté docile?

Voilà pourquoi j’aime mieux que le silence une théorie quelconque, et plus encore qu’une page blanche un écrit quand il passe pour insignifiant. C’est tout mon exercice, et mon soupir hygiénique.”

*Francis Ponge, L’insignifiant*²⁰⁹

Making Conceptual Art

In 2006 I visited an exhibition at the National Gallery in Ottawa consisting of objects collected by Canadian artists known as General Idea. It was entitled *Art Metropole: The Top 100*, Art Metropole being a gallery and distribution center for artists’ work, established by General Idea. The exhibition consisted of books, postcards, vinyl records, videos, magazines, posters and small art objects, which have come to be known as multiples, as they are made in small editions. This collection, upon viewing, looked a lot like the stuff I collected; to someone who would not recognize the names of the artists, it might look like the things that simply just accumulate in one’s house or office.

Here were some items that are now considered part of art history; things that we read about, and see as photographic reproductions. These artifacts, now archived in the Art Metropole Collection at the National Gallery, had once been the private collection of three individuals who made up General Idea, artists who produced art

²⁰⁹ Francis Ponge, *Pièces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 7

between 1968 and 1994. These items were more than just examples of Conceptual art; they were full of memories. In the exhibition catalogue, each item on display is accompanied by a small descriptive text written by the curators, and by AA Bronson, the last living member of General Idea. Bronson offers a series of small texts about a few selected items, describing how they came to be part of the collection or how particular artists became friends with General Idea. What becomes apparent reading the whole catalogue, is that these objects vehicle an emotional, personal aspect that is not always evident when looking at the art of that period.

My handling of several “conceptual” pieces from the Art Metropole Collection revealed that these material items were not meant to be thought of individually as in a vacuum, or as a pure idea, as many would have us think of the products of Conceptual art, but rather to be circulated and made use of. In many ways these things propose, or, to make use of an old term from Etienne Souriau, they institute (*instaurent*)²¹⁰ a new way of making and encountering art. Instead of saying that the artist makes the work, we can say the opposite, by stating that the work of art is “instituted,” with the artist becoming the one who “welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores, invents –as one invents a treasure – the work’s form [*accueille, recueille, prépare, explore, invente-comme on invente un trésor-la forme de l’œuvre*].²¹¹

²¹⁰ Etienne Souriau, ‘Du mode d’existence de l’œuvre à faire’, *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*, janvier-mars 1956, pp. 4-24.

²¹¹ Bruno Latour, ‘Sur un livre d’Etienne Souriau: les Différents modes d’existence’, 2006 (<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/index.html>, accessed Nov. 3, 2009), p.9

Individual works of Conceptual art were in many cases experienced along with other pieces, as one of many, or part of a compilation, found within publications like *Aspen* (fig. 12), *S.M.S.* (fig.13), and *FILE* (fig.14), or through the various catalogues produced by the then gallery owner and publisher, Seth Siegelau, or again, in mail-art projects, an item amongst all other received items.

I spent six days at the National Gallery archives, manipulating and examining several works and artifacts amassed by Art Metropole, some of them having been part of the *Top 100* exhibition. What this encounter with the objects revealed to me is that Conceptual art is not only the result of what we have come to call the dematerialization of the art object, a term first proposed by Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler in their 1967 article for *Art International*, 'The Dematerialization of Art'.²¹² For artists and critics of the time, art was not to be found in the presentation of the art object; the material aspect was considered secondary information to the proposed idea, its primary information as Seth Siegelau affirmed.²¹³

In their article Lippard and Chandler define a new type of art, one that turns back on the emotional and intuitive processes of art making of previous decades, and towards "an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost

²¹² Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 1999)

²¹³ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 2003), p. 56

exclusively.” The end result need not be an object anymore, and perhaps this dematerialization may eventually result “in the object becoming wholly obsolete.”²¹⁴

With this chapter, I want to try to convey how Conceptual artworks can be experienced sensually, and bring out how many artists identified as conceptualists were interested in situating the body and its acts, gestures, and various makings, as a prime definitions of the art. One of the main aspects which links these artists together is their interest in exploring the limits of art, of defining art not as an object nor as form, but as idea. These ideas, to reach a public, nevertheless needed a support, to inform potential viewers of the acts that had been exercised, without an emphasis to an end product, except for the information contained within the medium chosen by the artist.

I will address these choices and the use of several supports, which will make apparent that Conceptual art depended on materials and techniques that were not considered at the time to be related to art practices, but were and are still within the realm of the sensual. In many cases, the techniques were chosen because they were deemed to be neutral, unexpressive, as they did not belong to the usual techniques of art making. This was expressed in Sol LeWitt’s ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’ stating that the conceptual artist’s idea becomes a machine that makes the art,

²¹⁴ Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, p. 46

making work that is to be mentally interesting to the spectator, and wanting it to become “emotionally dry”.²¹⁵

To re-sensualise Conceptual art, that is, to emphasize the role and place of the senses within the machinic, I will make use of the work of General Idea, including the Art Metropole collection, and of Gilbert Simondon, whom we mentioned earlier. His work was unknown to most artists of the period, but he was interrogating the machine, techniques and technology, starting in 1959 with the publication of his book *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*.

Contrary to many, Simondon finds in industrial production traces of making and, ultimately, of human touch. Human beings must relate to machines as a conductor relates to her or his musicians, directing them because playing like them. The conductor moderates or presses the musicians, but is also moderated and pressed by them. The conductor is amongst the group, operating together.

What resides within machines is the result of inventing, a relation between humans and nature. “What resides within machines is human reality, of fixed and crystallised human gesture in functioning structures [*Ce qui réside dans les machines, c'est de la réalité humaine, de geste humain fixé et cristallisé en structures*”

²¹⁵ Sol LeWitt, ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), p.12

qui fonctionnent].²¹⁶ The inhumanity perceived in machines is due to an inability to understand them.

In a 1960 article Simondon writes: “It is generally said that industrial production crushes man due to its production of objects that are not made to his measure; in fact, it would be better to say that industrial production confuses man, as it puts him in presence of objects that are not immediately understood by him... The constructive operation (of the industrial object) is illegible. It is foreign as a foreign language” [*On affirme généralement que la production industrielle écrase l’homme parce qu’elle produit des objets qui ne sont pas à sa mesure; en fait, il serait peut-être juste de dire que la production industrielle dérouté l’homme parce qu’elle le met en présence d’objets qui ne sont pas immédiatement clair pour lui... On ne peut lire en lui (l’objet industriel) l’opération constructrice. Il est étranger comme une langue étrangère*].²¹⁷ This emphasis on confusion is not without recalling Adorno’s own words towards the record and the technological, as needing to be deciphered.

Industrial production puts into our presence objects that are not immediately clear; one needs to learn how to understand the industrial object and perceive the operation that brought it into being. The industrial object is like a foreigner, speaking a language we cannot understand. Its lack of patina is identified as a revelation of an untouched object. As will become evident later, Simondon reveals

²¹⁶ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, p. 12

²¹⁷ Gilbert Simondon, ‘Psycho-sociologie de la technicité’, *Bulletin de l’École Pratique de Psychologie et de Pédagogie*, 15e année, no 2, nov. –déc. 1960, p.234

the presence of contact existing between machine and humans. We need to recognize its subtle details, which is also what the dematerialized artwork is said to lack according to Lippard and Chandler. Both General Idea and Simondon will become key figures in my interpretation of the artifacts produced by conceptual artists, identifying the relationship existing between idea and object.

One of the techniques used by Conceptual artists to disseminate their work was photography. It was used pragmatically as a tool to document and to be reproduced in publications. These images were not the art, but witnesses to the actual art event, which was now belonged to the past. The photographs of Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series* (1969) are a perfect example. It consists of Barry releasing different types of gas in the Mojave Desert. A photograph such as *Inert Gas Series: Helium* is accompanied by a caption, where one can read: "On the morning of March 6, 1969, somewhere in the Mojave Desert in California, 2 cubic feet of helium were returned to the atmosphere." The photograph is not the work of art. For Barry it is a document of the occurrence.

In other cases, written documents acted as cues or clues, as ways to think or apprehend the work of art. Art could exist only as ideas, and did not need to be constructed, such as with the works of Laurence Weiner and Sol LeWitt, who proposed instructions or systems as ways to make art, while indicating that the work did not need to be made. In 1969 Weiner in his "declaration of intent", writes:

1. *The artist may construct the piece*

2. *The piece may be fabricated*

3. *The piece need not be built*

*Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.*²¹⁸

The various artifacts produced, including recordings, videos and mainly photographs, have since become the “reluctant witnesses”²¹⁹ of that period. They have become as much part of the work. The difference between document and art has become blurred. Documentation was not used by all artists; for Joseph Kosuth “taking a photograph or bringing fragments of site-specific works into the gallery was nearly a blasphemous act that muddled the original premise and idea ‘into invisibility’.”²²⁰

Like Lippard and Chandler’s differentiation between the emotive and the ultra-conceptual, Alexander Alberro divides Conceptual artists into two categories: the rational and the irrational. Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Hanne Darboven, and Lee Lozano are designated as irrational, where the mode of production follows a logical sequence that does not require any decision making by the artist, once the process of making is set, while the linguistic inquiries of Joseph Kosuth are “characterized by

²¹⁸ First published in the catalogue for the exhibition *January 5-31* (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969), n.p.

²¹⁹ Darsie Alexander, ‘Reluctant Witness: Photography and the Documentation of 1960s and 1970s Art’, *Work Ethic*, Helen Molesworth (ed) (Baltimore, Md. : Baltimore Museum of Art ; University Park, Pa. : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003)

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p.58

a rational mode of artistic production that affirms the centered and authorial artist—the decision maker from beginning to end...”²²¹

For many, Joseph Kosuth’s name has become synonymous with Conceptual art. Kosuth, along with the work of Art & Language, all rely on texts investigating the nature of art and of the language used to make art appear. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language becomes important for these artists, and as we will encounter later, also for Franz West. Perhaps, we tend to associate conceptualism with writing, because, “[t]hose who supported the most theoretical tendencies in Conceptual art have remained the most vocal, with the result that much that was poetic, witty and humorous has been, in comparison, underrated or neglected,” writes Tony Godfrey.²²² Lippard and Chandler write of Kosuth’s works of art, which are words, therefore signs “that convey ideas, they are not things in themselves but symbols or representatives of things.”²²³

The decision to make Conceptual art was for many artists of the period, a political act. Perhaps not always taking an overt form, it was meant to stand in opposition to the current states of affairs in the mid 1960’s, standing against Clement Greenberg’s formalism, and in reaction to the Viet Nam war. For many, it also attempted to negotiate a space outside of the art market and of the museum. Conceptual art was the result of the different liberation movements that were becoming more vocal, and

²²¹ Alexander Alberro, ‘Reconsidering Conceptual art, 1966- 1977’, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), p. xx

²²² Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), p. 15

²²³ Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, p. 49

making use of the available medias as a way to communicate and undermine the status quo. Artists thought of ways to infiltrate the mainstream media, so as to create change. William Burroughs wrote of introducing viral images into the media, as a way to combat it. This idea of an image as virus would later become an impetus behind the work of General Idea.

Conceptual art has been portrayed as being of a different order than previous art, as if it had no antecedents, except for Marcel Duchamp and his readymades. By examining the making and handling of the artifacts produced by these artists, it becomes evident that there is an emphasis on ideas, but also on the use and the mimicking of mass media techniques of distribution, which is to interpose a barrier between the artist and the finished work, suggesting a removal of the artist's hand and touch, as it suggest a devaluing of the traditional technical manual skills that belong to the world of art making.

Often the artist is only responsible for the ordering of the work, but this does not mean that something has not been made. In many instances, the works come to resemble products of mass consumption. In fact as Alexander Alberro writes, these artists, "many with advanced degrees and middle-class aspirations, seemed to parallel developments in the world of business and the emergent managerial class,"²²⁴ a comparison that echoes the words of Benjamin H.D. Buchloh who has become perhaps the most often quoted critic of Conceptual art, with his text,

²²⁴ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p. 2

'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions'.²²⁵

Debates Regarding Conceptual Art

I am going to propose that Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, along with another critic of Conceptual art, Stephen Zepke, are wrong in their assessment of Conceptual art as a failure and as a dead end. Also, I will suggest that Joseph Kosuth himself chooses to ignore the materiality of his own work. This will be done by examining his use of the Photostat technique as support for his early work, instead of making use of Xerox. In fact, my criticism of Kosuth will make use of some of the points made by Buchloh, but only to show that they are all too myopic and have not acknowledged the whole sensorium as part of the making and experiencing of art.

A first myth that Alexander Alberro topples is the utopian gloss that was given to Conceptual art of being a movement that sought to negate the commodity status of art. Lucy Lippard in a later text from 1973, laments the fact that Conceptual art was not able to "avoid the general commercialization" and that all were surprised when people started paying money for "a xerox sheet referring to an event past or never directly perceived, a group of photographs documenting an ephemeral situation or condition, a project for work never to be completed, words spoken but not

²²⁵ First published for the retrospective exhibition catalogue *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989, and later in *October* 55, 1990, pp. 105-143

recorded.”²²⁶ Alberro makes it very clear that there was never any doubt about the marketing of Conceptual art. The challenge was to find methods to convince potential collectors of the validity of buying documentation.²²⁷

For Stephen Zepke, it is this very point that is problematic. Zepke, using the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, argues that Conceptual art takes as its material, linguistically defined concepts, and “dematerialises sensation by banalizing it”; by dematerializing art, it is “rendered indiscernible from everyday life,”²²⁸ by producing documents. In fact for Zepke, it is contemporary art in general that is primarily committed to the conceptual. He locates in Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* several conceptual strategies that they reject, said to be attempts of bringing art towards philosophy, a notion that they reject.

Their book explores the fields that pertain to the categories of art, philosophy, and science, insisting that each field proceeds with its own methods and materials. Conceptual art for them tends towards the neutral, therefore rejecting the compositional process. The strategies that permit such work are: ones that take on the form of mass publications, as with the catalogue as art, and of placing art directly in newspapers or magazines as advertisement; the ground covered by its own map, referring to the proliferation of map usage in Conceptual art; the use of non-sites, or abandoned sites, without architecture, which artists might call site-specific; and the

²²⁶ Lucy R. Lippard, ‘Postface, in Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966-1972’, in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, p.294

²²⁷ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p.4

²²⁸ Stephen Zepke, ‘The Concept Of Art When Art Is Not A Concept, Deleuze and Guattari Against Conceptual Art’, *Angelika*, Vol.2, No.1, 2006, p. 158

flat bed plane, a term coined by Leo Steinberg, referring to a surface that does not open itself to imaginary space, but offers the viewer paint as a thing, along with everyday objects.

The reason for this last rejection is that this strategy used mainly by painters, is said to dematerialise sensation into information. It is basically a rejection, on the part of Deleuze and Guattari, of all post abstract expressionist paintings. Zepke also identifies three points that are responsible for making art mundane. First, by prioritizing concepts, this means that any material can be used, with the result that anything can be art. Secondly, these artists are said to have enthusiastically embraced technologies of reproduction, transforming sensation into information that is reproducible to infinity. And finally, the ontological status of art is neutralized by making sensation depend on the viewer's own interpretation regarding if it is art or not.

So, what did these artworks of information "look" like? Zepke mentions the catalogue as a work of art, such as Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* (1966), and the different catalogues and books put out by Seth Siegelaub between 1968 and 1969, including the book that is now known as *The Xerox Book*, which I will discuss later. Zepke also mentions in a footnote, other works that could illustrate Deleuze and Guattari's notion of art that is indistinguishable from the "ordinary perceptions and affections of the viewer –John Baldessari's *The Back of All the Trucks Passed While*

Driving from L.A. to Santa Barbara, California, Sunday 20 January, 1963; art where the concept is reduced to a proposition stating an opinion- Cildo Meireles' *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* (1970); and art as a doxa confirming the generic subject of urban American social life- On Kawera's (sic) *I'm Still Alive* postcard project begun in the late 1960s."²²⁹

What Zepke, and Deleuze and Guattari see in these artifacts is a rejection of sensations. All that is offered is information for the viewer to think about. For the two French philosophers, art is to be visionary, while Conceptual art offers information that is not unlike what is used to document the world: diagrams, definitions, lists, photographs from image banks, and plenty of photocopied texts. The works take on the look of standartised office stationary or instruction manuals. Metrology,²³⁰ which is the scientific organization of stable measurements and standards, has taken over the making of art. This brings me to my second critique of Conceptual art, here described as an "aesthetic of administration" by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh.²³¹

Buchloh's essay first appeared in an exhibition catalogue for the first museum retrospective of Conceptual art, in Paris in 1989. A controversial essay, it explains Conceptual art through the work of Marcel Duchamp, while denying the "Utopianism of the artists and denigrated [Joseph] Kosuth for his covert

²²⁹ Stephen Zepke, footnote number 9.

²³⁰ Here we can think of the relationship between the term metrology, and the name Art Metropole.

²³¹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique', exhibition catalogue for *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989

formalism.”²³² At the end of the catalogue there are two responses to Buchloh’s text, one from Kosuth and the other from Seth Siegelaub. The essay was re-printed in issue 55 of *October*, while the responses were published in issue 57 of *October*.

Buchloh closely analyses the various strategies of Conceptual art, from the transformation of the format and space of exhibition, to an interest in random “sampling and aleatory choice from an infinity of possible objects” such as the different books produced by Ed Ruscha (*Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots*, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*) to the projects of Alighiero Boetti’s *The Thousand Longest Rivers*, or Robert Barry’s *One Billion Dots*, this last work included in *The Xerox Book*. Buchloh identifies the square and the cube as the visual forms “corresponding most accurately to the linguistic form of the tautology,”²³³ with tautology being at the time a concept favoured in many Conceptual artworks, mainly the work of Joseph Kosuth. Kosuth’s work is based on the fact that art can only show itself as art, and that art does not refer to anything beside itself. Whatever is offered as art is to be taken as art. I will come back to Kosuth’s work, but first I would like to continue with Buchloh.

He describes Kosuth’s project and his use of the concept of tautology as a continuation of both Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried’s formalism, both critics from whom Kosuth wished to sever his work. While making Kosuth’s work synonymous for all of Conceptual art, Buchloh associates Conceptual art with

²³² Tony Godfrey, p. 387

²³³ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique’, p. 48

advertisement, the middle-class, and having become part of an aesthetic of administration. Hard to swallow for Kosuth, who had said that it was impossible to understand what Conceptual art achieved “without understanding the sixties, and appreciat[ing] CA for what it was: the art of the Vietnam War era.”²³⁴

The insistence on the term administration is not without reason, as it is to underline the fact that Conceptual art wanted to blur the division existing between maker and audience, by eradicating the traditional “hierarchical model of privileged experience based on authorial skills and acquired and specialized competence of reception,”²³⁵ and try to create work that would result from the relationship between artist and viewer, exemplified by this Sol LeWitt project: “The aim of the artist would be to give viewers information... He would follow his predetermined premises to its conclusion avoiding subjectivity. Chance, taste or unconsciously remembered forms would play no part in the outcome. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the result of his premises.”²³⁶

For Buchloh, the artist as clerk illustrates the lack of a utopian vision, which he longs for, and finds in the early twentieth century work of the avant-garde movements of Russia. Conceptual art is portrayed as refusing any transcendence through its “bureaucratic rigor and deadpan devotion to the statistic collection of factual

²³⁴ Kosuth quoted in Blake Stimson, ‘The Promise of Conceptual Art’, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), p. xxxviii

²³⁵ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique’, p. 52

²³⁶ Ibid

information.”²³⁷ Buchloh states that Conceptual practice reached its height at the same moment that it started functioning similarly to the ruling culture of late capitalism and positivist instrumentality, “in order to liquidate even the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience in this auto-critical investigation, in that process entirely purging itself of imaginary and bodily experience, of physical substance and the space of memory, as well as of all residue of representation and style, of individuality and skill.”²³⁸ It is worth taking a brief look at what was logical positivism relationship with art, along with its concern to create a better world.

The Vienna Circle, a group of logical positivists, established in 1929, and had a great influence on the work produced at the Dessau Bauhaus. Peter Galison comments that both groups “sought to instantiate a modernism emphasizing what [he] calls ‘transparent construction,’ a manifest building up from simple elements to all higher forms that would, by virtue of the systematic constructional program itself, guarantee the exclusion of the decorative, mystical, or metaphysical.”²³⁹

Both the positivists and the Bauhaus were also facing common enemies: the religious right, nationalists, anthroposophists, *völkisch*, and the Nazis²⁴⁰. For the positivists making a ‘scientific’ philosophy, based on simple observation reports and logical connections, would keep nationalist historical features from being

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 53

²³⁸ Ibid

²³⁹ Peter Galison, ‘Aufbau/Bauhaus: Logical Positivism and Architectural Modernism’, *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Summer 1990), p. 710

²⁴⁰ Ibid

incorporated into philosophy. As for the Bauhaus, to make use of scientific principles along with primitive colour combinations and basic geometrical forms, would eliminate the decorative, and help to create a functionalist aesthetic. The technical and the scientific became driving forces behind the work produced by the Bauhaus, which was meant to shape the future form of life, “a new style of life” produce by a new architecture, remarked Walter Gropius in 1923.²⁴¹

Greenberg made use of Positivism to defend abstract art from being equated with the irrational, and perceived as un-American.²⁴² The positivists seek to eliminate the superfluous, which both Greenberg and the Bauhaus also aimed at. And what of positivist instrumentality and Conceptual art? Joseph Kosuth claims to have removed all superfluous references from his work, so as to communicate essentially an abstract idea: “The art is the idea; the idea is the art.” The materials that support the work are to be ignored.²⁴³ This simple statement by Kosuth has become the primary definition of Conceptual Art, even if other conceptual artist have contradicted Kosuth, such as Mel Bochner in his article ‘Excerpts From Speculation’ (1967-1970), who distances himself from the term dematerialization, and from the “original fiction” created by conceptualism, that ideas can exist without support: “There is no art which does not bear some burden of physicality. To deny it is to descend to irony.”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Ibid, p. 716

²⁴² Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's modernism and the bureaucratization of the senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 98

²⁴³ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p. 39

²⁴⁴ Mel Bochner, *Solar System & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965-2007* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 2008), p.75

Photostat and Xerox

Kosuth's early work were realized using Photostat, making them more akin to small textual advertisement found in newspapers, or the back of magazines. It also distanced them from the reproducible, lithography-based work of the Pop movement, particularly of Warhol. Though there were many similarities between Kosuth's work and Warhol, the use of the Photostat was to blur, yet again, the boundaries conventionally drawn between high art, with its emphasis on singularity and non-utilitarian objects, and the plethora of objects from mass culture. This is the boundary that Deleuze and Guattari want back.

The Photostat is a copying camera making a photographic reproduction directly onto sensitized paper. It was mainly used to copy originals for remote distribution, and for the preservation of documents. It was used from the 1910s until the mid 1980s. But since the mid-1950s, with the introduction of the "quick copy" services and the introduction of the Xerox 914, the use of the Photostat diminished. At the New York Public Library, the use of Photostats in 1962 was restricted to oversized and illustrated material. The Photostat became a burden, as it involved many procedures to make a single print; it was not as fast as the new Xerox 914; plus for many institutions, microfilms were chosen, as they were more compact. By the 1960s, the "photostat basically outlived its usefulness."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Thomas A. Bourke, "The Photostat-Microfilm War at the New York Public Library in the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s", *Microform Review*, vol.18, No. 3, 1989, p.149

Kosuth's choice of the Photostat over what was becoming the primary mode of copying in libraries, and businesses, seem to point to an interest in obsolete techniques, along with the wish to keep the appearance of the work as a semblance to both photography and to painting, which xerography does not have.

The Photostats does have a quality that is similar to a photograph, as it makes use of similar paper, and has a uniform, smooth surface, whereas a copy produced through an electrostatic process, such as by Xerox machines, retains its paper quality, except for certain areas that may become somewhat reflective, due to the excessive amount of dye that would be needed to create a very dark image. A completely black electrostatic copy would have sheen, but not to the extent that a photograph has; it would actually be textured, revealing a slight covering of the paper.

Two artists working with Xerox copiers in the late 1960s were Paul Bergtold and Toby Mussman (fig.15). The works, done on regular 8 x 22 sheets of paper, not only depict mundane subject matters, but also emphasize the cheap quality of the process, as they all lack definition and detailing. By today's standards, they look like they were retrieved from a recycling box, as below standard photocopies.

For his Photostats, Kosuth (fig.16) isolates each dictionary definition, literally removing them from their original source, by cutting them out. The Photostat camera captures the text; the definition now exists as a single, enlarged definition. Though Kosuth emphasized the anonymity of execution of their mechanical

reproduction, the work maintained a close relationship to art making. Alexander Alberro signals Kosuth's relationship with Warhol by comparing the former's first one-person exhibition at the Eugenia Butler's gallery 669 in Los Angeles in 1968, to Warhol's 1962 installation at the Ferrus gallery, also in Los Angeles. Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans, though looking similar, in fact depicted all the flavors available at the time. Kosuth, on his part, exhibited several definitions of the word *nothing*.

Contrary to Pop artists, Kosuth did not place his imagery on canvas. The Photostat process allowed for enlargements, which meant that the definitions could become an object, giving them an affinity with Minimalism: "An affinity with minimal art was considered meritorious by many in the mid to late 1960s art world. Minimal art, with its preference for prosaic, everyday material and its emphasis on anonymity, repetition, and equality of parts, was thought to possess a sense of rigor and seriousness of purpose, as well as an inherent noncommerciality, that gave it an edge of social criticism."²⁴⁶

The cleanliness of Photostats stands in opposition to xerography's artisanal-like quality, with the xeroxed image registering unwanted traces, such as dust, fingerprints, or other uncontrollable stains. Though both techniques are equally anonymous and mechanical, xerography, though used for several years as an institutional tool, as was the Photostat, is overlooked in favor of the later. Perhaps it

²⁴⁶ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p.34

is not only that the results are not easily controllable, but also because the xerographic process was indeed too anonymous, available to anyone, whereas the Photostat on its way out as a technique was becoming obsolete, and costly. Kosuth was in fact rescuing it, making it synonymous with his work. As Alberro states: “The new medium that Kosuth advanced in the context of 1960s art- the Photostat- quickly came to serve as his trademark, similar to the way lighting fixtures became associated with (Dan) Flavin and firebricks with (Carl) Andre. The medium comes to resemble a corporate logo, easily identifiable and recognizable.”²⁴⁷

By 1969 Kosuth put an end to his use of the Photostat, and prompted by fellow artists Lee Lozano and Dan Graham’s own artwork for magazine pages, inserted several works as anonymous advertisements in newspapers and periodicals. What initially took the appearance of a typographical text in the form of a large Photostat, took on its place in these publications, and affirmed itself as a typographical text. In 1969, for the Bern exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kosuth placed together newspapers containing his work *The Second Investigation*, and titled it *Spaces (Art as Idea as Idea)*. In the catalogue, he states that the work is not a precious object, and is accessible to many. It can brought either in one’s home or in a museum; “it can be dealt with by being torn out of its publication and inserted into a notebook or

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 41

stapled to the wall- or not torn out at all- but any such decision is unrelated to the art.”²⁴⁸

The possibility to either save completely the newspaper, or to tear out what one wants, is beside the point for Kosuth. The art is to be found in the idea, not in its materiality; “[a]rt ‘lives’ through influencing other art, not by existing as a physical residue of an artist’s ideas.”²⁴⁹ Kosuth locates his conceptualism by interpreting Marcel Duchamp’s readymade as the point where art moved from a question of morphology, or appearance, to a question of function. “This change –one from “appearance” to “conception”—was the beginning of “conceptual” art.”²⁵⁰

Kosuth makes use of the word “conception” as pertaining only to ideas, to thinking, and that there is no connection between one and the other. As previously mentioned, it is the ideas that influence other art, not the objects per se. Kosuth categorises works of art as “historical curiosities,” belonging to particular time, and to look at a Cubist ‘masterwork’ as art today is, for him nonsensical. The art object becomes static, without any potential to be reinterpreted, or able to conceive other definitions.

²⁴⁸ Anne Rorimer, ‘Siting the Page: Exhibiting Works in Publications-Some Examples of Conceptual Art in the USA’, *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, Michael Newman and Jon Bird (eds), (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999), p. 19

²⁴⁹ Joseph Kosuth, ‘Art After Philosophy’, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), p.165

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.164

Image

Gilbert Simondon differentiates *les Amis des Idées*, “the friend of ideas”, from “the sons of matter” *les Fils de la Matière*, where the former prioritise contemplation as a way of knowing the world, such as Pythagoras and Plato, while the later come to understand the world through its palpable and concrete transformations. He takes as an example working with clay, able to change from a wet substance becoming more liquid as it absorbs more water, or hardening as it dries out [*comme le changement progressif d'état qui s'accomplit sous la main du potier lorsque l'argile absorbe plus d'eau et devient vernis fluide ou au contraire durcit en se desséchant.*].²⁵¹ Knowledge comes through the working out of techniques. In this perspective, we could identify Kosuth as being a “friend of ideas”, separating conception from appearance, and excluding both technique and materiality from his work.

The work of Gilbert Simondon attempts to go beyond the dualism that Kosuth and his critics establish. Simondon’s critique of hylomorphism, as well as Holbraad’s notion of the thing as concept, insist on the inseparable aspects of the tangible and the intangible. In a 1965-1966 course on imagination and invention, Simondon proposes a theory of the mental image existing in various forms throughout its developmental process. For Simondon, a mental image is to be located within the biological, eventually apprehended through the invention.

²⁵¹ Gilbert Simondon, *Cours sur la Perception (1964-1965)*, (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2006)

For him imagination and invention can be considered as phases of the genesis of a single cyclical process: that of the image. At the beginning, the image is a network of motor tendencies, anticipating the experience of an object. Simondon locates these at the cellular level, with simple organisms, whose reactions to objects are preceded by spontaneous motor activities; these exist prior to the encountering of an object; motor functions precede perception [*la motricité précède la sensorialité*].²⁵² Through the interaction between organism and environment [*milieu*],²⁵³ the image becomes a receiving system of incidental signals, which allows the perceptual-motor activities to progressively act.

Eventually, the separation from the encountered object enriches the image by integrating the affective and emotional aspects of the experience, and can transform the image into a symbol. For Simondon, each phase reaches a point of saturation, leading to a new phase. From an interiorly organized universe of symbols aiming at saturation, Simondon writes that an invention can appear [*surgir*]: “Following the invention, the fourth phases of the becoming of images, the cycle resumes, through a new anticipation to an encounter with an object, that can be its production” [*Après l’invention, quatrième phase du devenir des images, le cycle recommence, par une nouvelle anticipation de la rencontre de l’objet, qui peut être sa production*].²⁵⁴ The mental image can eventually develop itself into an invention, following the perception of the world, from which information is taken. Simondon distinguishes

²⁵² Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2008), p. 29

²⁵³ Simondon makes use of the term *milieu*, the translation of the term *unwelt*, by Jakob von Uexküll.

²⁵⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention*, p. 3

the invention from the images that have preceded its making, by the fact that the order of size [*ordre de grandeur*] is modified by the invention; it moves from occupying one's body, and thoughts, towards becoming an object within the world, which it will organise: "the invention does not stay within the living being, as part of the mental apparatus, but climbs over the spatio-temporal limits of the living, to connect with the milieu it organises" [*(l'invention) ne reste pas dans l'être vivant, comme une part de l'équipement mental, mais enjambe les limites spatio-temporelles du vivant pour se raccorder au milieu qu'elle organise*].²⁵⁵

For Simondon the mental image, the imagination, and the invention are not separate realities, nor opposite terms, but part of a continuous cycle, therefore positioning the invented object as detachable, or an artwork as distinct from the subject and transmissible.

Just as Kosuth sees in art's ability to transmit its conceptual knowledge independently of the object, Simondon sees the creation of objects as allowing progress, as it is instituted by the invention [*institué par l'invention*]. The essence of an invention can exist without being manifested or expressed. But it is the actual coming to being of an object, where its essence or technicity becomes available for use. For example, photography as an invention is not to be found only in the camera, but also between the miniturised camera obscura within the camera body, and in the photosensitive chemicals. Both chemicals and camera obscura were

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 185

known for a long period; prior to photography the invention was to make light work on a surface treated with these chemicals. To invent is not only the ability to resolve a problem, but to produce effects that can go beyond the resolution of a problem: “In the real invention there is a jump, an amplifying force that goes beyond single finality and the search for a limited adaptation” [*Il y a dans la véritable invention un saut, un pouvoir amplifiant qui dépasse la simple finalité et la recherche limitée d'une adaptation*].²⁵⁶ These are not just theoretical ideas that are passed on to invent something new. For Simondon, there needs to be an acknowledgement of scientific properties, which are real, though “invisible”. To build an arch, one needs to take gravity into account, so each stone can support each other; it is not just an idea, it is an occurrence.

Simondon acknowledges the world, matter and its forces and properties, whereas Kosuth and the critics of Conceptual art bypass matter; the plurifunctional characteristics of matter and of elements are not taken into account. Simondon gives several examples of plurifunctionality, but I will make use of his description of arch constructing.

The construction process of a stone arch makes evident the plurifunctional aspects of the various elements that comprise it. These elements function as surface and as links to transfer the forces of compression. The semi-circular arch formed by the stones can be constructed due to the ability of each stone to transfer pressure from

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 172

one stone to another. This transference of forces fixes each stone to another one, without needing the help of cement, or pegs. Weight itself is difficult to work with, and problematic when it comes to balance. But these initial difficulties caused by weight, when applied towards an arch construction, become the principal source of stability and cohesion of the building, each stone allowing for its construction. The arch cannot exist as a section, as the stones would be unbalanced, and fall.

How is this applicable to Conceptual art? Simondon sees all inventions as part of an individual and as a mediator between the environment, comparing them to the operating modes [*modes opératoires*] of animals, such as the construction of a nest, burrowing, or the creation of a territory. An object is produced similarly as a specific animal activity comes to modify the natural world by showing the presence of living creatures, such as the visual or olfactive markings of a territory.²⁵⁷

The materiality that supports Kosuth's "ideas" is also part of an environment, a larger system of circulation, into which the work can be inserted. To explore the relationship between Kosuth's work and its relationship to various publications that are part of already existing systems, I will turn to actual artifacts, from the Art Metropole collection.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 188-189

Stuff

A first artifact from the Art Metropole collection: Joseph Kosuth's *Four Titled Abstracts* (fig.17), published in William Copley's periodical *S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop)*. This custom-made periodical, publishing six issues between February and December 1968, was meant to by-pass the gallery and museum system, and bring art directly to people. Each issue contained the work of several artists. The third issue, containing Kosuth's piece, also included the work of John Battan, Aftograf, Enrico Baj, William Bryant, Dick Higgins, Ronnie Landfield, Roland Penrose, Man Ray, H.C. Westerman, Hannah Wiener and Terry Riley.

S.M.S. does not make use of a single standard format. It comes in various sizes and formats, mostly as folders, as they can easily accommodate various types of small artwork. In the case of *Four Titled Abstracts*, the work comes as a large black envelope containing four folded black pieces of paper. These are reproductions of four Photostats. The photostatic process being a direct negative onto paper, usually produces a document of white letters surrounded by a black background. The blackness of the envelope is not the result of a technical process such as the Photostat, but is used to imitate Kosuth's favored medium.

Each sheet of paper contains a definition of the word *abstract*, taken from four different sources. Each sheet of paper is numbered 1 to 4. The four definitions accentuate the fact that the word *abstract* denotes the domain of ideas, and of

immateriality. The four definitions of the word are removed from their original placement in the dictionary, existing as specimens, white text surrounded by black, thus creating an artificial frame around the chosen words.

What interests me about this early piece is its printed nature, within a history that includes both typography and word. Kosuth separates form and content, treating form in fact as matter, and therefore as inconsequential, prioritising content, or the idea, which is expressed through written language. Kosuth treats each chosen material support as neutral and transparent. In earlier works, his use of materials such as glass, water and air, are chosen for having a “neutral, low information yield.”²⁵⁸ With these transparent materials, he felt he could escape the pressure of composition and colour; if colours were chosen for other works, it was black, white, and gray, as he “found that according to color psychology there was more of a transcultural response to achromatic color —black, white, and gray— than to the chromatic scale, which had a much more marked difference among specific individuals as well as between cultures.”²⁵⁹ His use of newspapers, magazines, billboards, are also seen by him as being neutral, which was important for him as a way to neutralize what he saw as an iconic quality of art. Simply put, Kosuth wanted to make art that would not be recognized as art, or, not recognized as formalist. Abstract painting for Kosuth is still lodged in the concrete, while he is striving for pure abstraction.

²⁵⁸ Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966- 1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 87

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 49

Compared to the informality and improvising qualities of the Xerox works of Toby Mussman (fig.15), from issue 6, or Paul Bertgold, from issue 4, *Four Titled Abstracts* (fig.17), looks precious, made meticulously, with its single definition per sheet. Besides the centrally placed definition, there is a rigid application of typographical techniques that is not considered so important for other Conceptual artists, such as Mussman, Bertgold, Mel Bochner and James Lee Byars. For these artists, the random use of various typefaces or types of handwriting also stems from the attitude of achieving neutrality, towards something impersonal. For them, neutrality is found in randomness, while Kosuth chooses specific supports, be they materials or typefaces, to elicit neutrality.

Randomness does not necessarily produce a neutral text, as the random choice can in fact give specific connotations. Kai Bernau, a Dutch graphic designer and author of the Neutral typeface, categorises the indifference towards a typeface as “defaultism”: “One must be aware that while tempting, using ‘default’ to achieve neutrality is a less than optimal approach: while the typographer (or whoever puts the text in its final form) can, by using a default typeface, minimize his own influence on the design by explicitly not choosing a typeface, the default typeface that is (randomly) used then (a typewriter typeface, handwriting or a default computer font such as Arial, Times New Roman or Courier) can give very specific connotations, and may often even be self referential, by looking default and

‘unchosen’.”²⁶⁰ The Neutral typeface was designed and “aims at minimising these associations and connotations, and aims at becoming a standard typeface for Conceptual artists.” To minimize the associative and the connotative is what Kosuth aimed at.

The letters of the alphabet play an important role in Conceptual art. Many pieces make use of handwriting, but a great deal rely on typography. Although most of Kosuth’s early texts employed sans-serif type, his dictionary definition series, taken straight from the printed page of dictionaries may have led to his increasing use of serif type in the 70s. The sans-serif type, which is often perceived as neutral, gives way to the serif, but a serif taken from a source that is also deemed to be neutral, transparent: the dictionary. All are treated as being transparent, as if unrelated to human use and making. In fact, each type has a history, and a designer. The use of a particular typeface conveys a particular effect.

Early pieces such as *Clear Square Glass Leaning* (1965) make use of a capitalized modern sans-serif typeface²⁶¹ such as GILL SANS or HELVETICA. John D. Berry writes of our perception of Helvetica as neutral stemming from its ubiquity, becoming the “default” sans serif typeface,²⁶² whereas Bernau mentions that it is not neutral at all, but “self-referential, or connoted to graphic design itself... the myth of

²⁶⁰ Kai Bernau, *Neutral*, 2005, p.15 (<http://www.letterlabor.de/book.php>), last accessed, May 28, 2010

²⁶¹ In typography, a sans-serif or sans serif typeface is one that does not have the small features called "serifs" at the end of strokes.

²⁶² John D. Berry, ‘dot-font: Neutral Sans?’, 2005, <http://www.creativepro.com/article/dot-font-neutral-sans->, last accessed, July 8, 2010

Helvetica's neutrality has turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophesy, and this is true whether the graphic designer that uses it is actually aware of the myth or seriously considers it neutral."²⁶³

Sans serif types got popularized in the 19th century, in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, and so they, along with some other newly popular type styles, came to embody the modern machine age. It made its first appearance as a specimen in 1816, but became a recognizable style of type in the 1830's in England. The sans serif came about following the "interaction of demands for new kinds of printing with new means of transmitting information."²⁶⁴ The modernist new typography was to communicate directly to the reader.

Kosuth's texts could be said to follow the first three statements of El Lissitzky 1923 *Topographie der Typographie*:

1. The words on the printed surface are taken in by seeing, not by hearing.
2. One communicates meaning through the convention of words; meaning attains form through letters.
3. Economy of expression: optics not phonetics.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Kai Bernau, p.14

²⁶⁴ Robin Kinross, *Modern Typography, an essay in critical history* (London: Hyphen Press, 2004), p. 37

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 105

The modernist use of sans serif was motivated by the belief that it was the appropriate form for the time. This was a different position from an earlier one taken by writer Stefan George, attracted to the simplicity of sans serif, which was part of his aesthetics research towards a total approach to literature and to life. The new typography aimed at industrializing and standardizing the form of letters. The neutrality of typeface that Kosuth perceived was the result of a demand for standards in manufacturing. Sans serif was also an attempt to do with the use of national connotation of particular types. In Germany the *blackletter* was to make place to a new typeface that would make international exchange easier.

The neutrality perceived in specific typeface has as much a history as a typeface that is said to be eccentric. Kosuth has since made use of several serif types such as Garamond,²⁶⁶ originating from Claude Garamond (1480-1561) a Parisian publisher, who also introduced the apostrophe, the accent and the cedilla to the French language. Garamond, and other older typefaces have been revived at the beginning of the 20th century. For many typesetters, “typographic quality was to be found by scouring the past.”²⁶⁷ Kosuth makes use of often-lengthy philosophical texts, from Wittgenstein or Freud, which he prints using serif typefaces (fig.18), conjuring up scholarly institutions, intellectual rigour and library stacks filed with books.

The *Four Titled Abstracts* in fact are four small notices that could become small posters. The poster, for Susan Sontag, is different from a public notice; though both

²⁶⁶ Susan Hapgood, 'Fonts of Wisdom', *Frieze* 29, 1996

²⁶⁷ Robin Kinross, p. 70

address the person “not as an individual, but as an unidentified member of the body politic,” the poster takes its public as being one of spectators or consumers, whereas the public notice aims at informing or commanding. “A poster aims to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal.”²⁶⁸ I can imagine these four folded pieces of paper, tacked on some wall, along with all the other works from the *S.M.S* portfolio. All of a sudden the definitions become ironic amidst all this stuff; *abstract* becomes concrete.

The by-products, the effluvia of Conceptual art, the things that were not meant to be art, but to refer to the absent art, the indicators and the accounts that reported on what had passed, all this material collected by General Idea, extended their own artistic production. All this collected stuff also addresses the history of the museum, invoking its beginning, the cabinet of curiosities, while resembling on a larger scale, the cohabitation of various art pieces as was found in publications such as *Aspen* and the *S.M.S.* portfolios.

As mentioned previously, Conceptual works took part and made use of different systems of circulation available, making them visible,²⁶⁹ perceptible, and known.

Duchamp’s famous demand for a non-retinal art is often taken to refer to ideas only,

²⁶⁸ Susan Sontag quoted in Rob Giampietro, ‘The Problem with Posters’, *Lined & Unlined*, 2004, <http://blog.linedandunlined.com/post/404938991/the-problem-with-posters>, last accessed July 8, 2010

²⁶⁹ Johanne Sloan in her analysis of Bill Vazan’s use of postcards writes: “Each mailed item makes visible a communication network, which also implies the existence of transportation and commercial networks.” Johanne Sloan, ‘Bill Vazan’s Urban Coordinates’, *Bill Vazan: Walking Into the Vanishing Point*, (Montreal: Vox, 2007), p. 88

forgetting that a movement away from vision does not only refer to the intellect, but also means to attend to the other senses, or to invisible phenomena, such as electricity and magnetism. Duchamp does not make the invisible visible, but perceptible. This is how we must encounter Conceptual art and its by-products.

I have found in the work of art historian Eve Meltzer, an approach towards Conceptual art that I share, by her attention to small details that refer to the hand. She asks viewers to carefully look at what is given by Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt, whose work proposes a “structural logic governing its form that cannot nor even need to be seen with our eyes.”²⁷⁰ The information that is proposed as a text, and to help imagine the work, is all that is needed. But, there is still something to look at, a hand written information on paper, allowing the reader to “accede to the tactile, temporal, and affective registers of meaning that inhere in [LeWitt’s] process and materials.”²⁷¹

The collection amassed by General Idea, resembles the type of artifacts that they were producing. Whereas historians have traditionally described Conceptual art as not interested in its material leftovers, Vincent Bonin suggest that we should pay attention to these items, as they are eventually absorbed by the market as by-products with a surplus value, and do succumb “to the logic of fetishism.”²⁷² But more precisely, these items for the most part were printed and published, as

²⁷⁰ Eve Meltzer, ‘The Dream of the Information World’, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2006, p. 119

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 133

²⁷² Vincent Bonin, *Documentary Protocols (1967-1975)*, (Montreal: Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, Concordia University, 2010), p.28

publishing became for many Canadian artists an extension of exhibiting, making possible the simultaneous presence of a work of art at various locations, and, as mentioned earlier, making use of, and perceptible using various communication networks. At the time, these networks were discussed by Marshall McLuhan, and his theories were of great influence to many artists. Curator Catherine Moseley points to a reliance on a documentary infrastructure as what distinguished conceptual work from the traditional art object, not its ephemerality.²⁷³ Artists also saw the possibility of the instauration of new networks, by not only piggy-backing on already existing modes of communication, but due to the multiplicity of existing data, creating information that gives individual artifacts new meaning by their relation to other artifacts.

AA Bronson made reference to the importance and influence of another theorist of the 1960s, Roland Barthes, particularly his article 'Death of the Author', which first appeared as an English translation in the 1967 multi media issue 5 & 6 of *Aspen* (fig.19 & 20), edited by Brian O'Doherty. The issue was dedicated to Stéphane Mallarmé's dream of an ideal book, one capable of "encapsulating the entire universe".²⁷⁴

Barthes' text questions the authority of the author as the originator of a text, emphasizing instead the multiplicity of voices that speak through a text, including

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 26. As mentioned by Vincent Bonin in footnote 28.

²⁷⁴ Alex Alberro, 'Inside the White Box- Brian O'Doherty's *Aspen 5+6*', *Artforum*, September 2001, p.1 (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mo268/is_1_40/ai_78637313/) accessed June 9, 2010

the reader's own voice. For Barthes, the text stands in between the words of the author and the reader's eyes, and is treated as an autonomous object, "where criticism is ambitious to constitute it as a scientific object so as to analyse with precision the formal, meaningful and functional system that constitute it" [*que la critique ambitionne de constituer en objet scientifique pour pouvoir analyser avec precision le système de formes, de significations et de fonctions qui le constituent*].²⁷⁵

This perception of a text opens up art to the future, to the ones who will encounter it. Marcel Duchamp also included the meeting with a spectator, as part of his artwork. Barthes wants the author-as-person to be disassociated from the text, so as to posit the text itself as the source of its own meaning. Barthes finds in Mallarmé the first writer to "see and foresee in its full extent the necessity of substituting language itself for the man who hitherto was supposed to own it; for Mallarme, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author;" ²⁷⁶ The notion of the author is to be replaced by the writer, the one who lets language proceed as a text, and is "born simultaneously with the text."²⁷⁷

What is of importance for this analysis is that Barthes does not eliminate the person, but only the idea of the author, making the writer a performer, a maker, or marker, whose *hand*, "detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin –or which, at least, has no other

²⁷⁵ Louis Hay, 'Le texte n'existe pas: réflexion sur la critique génétique' *Poétique*, 62, 1985, p. 149

²⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Aspen* 5+6, 1967, n.p.

²⁷⁷ Ibid

origin than language itself, that is, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin.”²⁷⁸ Barthes points to the possibility of multiple origins and readings. To decipher a text is then rendered useless, as the reader becomes the one who unites the text. For Barthes, the unity of a text is not in its origin, but in its destination. The text, including artworks, has no determinate meaning, but many; literature is *intertextual*.

Helen Molesworth discusses the importance of Barthes’ text for many artists of the late 1960s, who found the idea of “the author’s metaphoric death liberating, and ...deployed a variety of means to undermine or downplay their own authorship.”²⁷⁹ But do both Duchamp and Barthes actually favor the reader, or viewer, from the producer-author, as Molesworth suggests? Barthes has already mentioned the transformation of the author into a writer, “who lets language speak” and “who writes to reach”. The writer, and in the case of the conceptual artist, the maker sets herself/himself also, as a reader among others. The instituted work reveals in its deployment, the corporeal, as Meltzer sees in LeWitt’s notes for his grids: the corporeal, “which structuralism would rather have us forget.”²⁸⁰ As an example, let us examine *Aspen* magazine, in which ‘The Death of the Author’ was first published, translated by Richard Howard, and later in French, by the magazine *Manteia*, 5 (1968). The essay later appeared in an anthology of Barthes’ essays, *Image-Music-Text* (1977).

²⁷⁸ Ibid

²⁷⁹ Helen Molesworth, ‘Work Ethic’, p. 30

²⁸⁰ Eve Meltzer, p. 133

All issues of *Aspen* magazine are part of the Art Metropole Collection. The publication is seen as a predecessor to William Copley's *S.M.S.* project. *Aspen* was a multi media publication, started in 1965 by Roaring Fork Press publisher Phyllis Johnson, and former editor for *Women's Wear Daily* and *Advertising Age*. Ten issues of *Aspen* appeared, with various editors, including Andy Warhol (issue 3, 1966) and Dan Graham (issue 8, 1970-71). Johnson wanted it to be like a time capsule. The publication performed this by taking the form of boxes, varying in size with each new number. Inside, the various loose projects cohabited as a collection of various pamphlets, floppy records and 8mm film. Small advertisement cards floated in the box with the other artifacts. As with *S.M.S.*, *Aspen* was also a travelling, reproducible, cabinet of curiosity.

The contents of the Mallarmé issue, contained within a two-piece white box, 8-1/4 by 8-1/4 by 2-1/8 inches, were describe and presented in such manner by the editor:

aspen 5+6
 for Stephen Mellarmé
 guest editor-designer / Brian O'Doherty
 guest art directors / David Dalton / Lynn Letterman

B = LuFuRuBuD

28 = 1 + 4 + 5 + 8 + 10

1 box 1 book 4 films 5 records 8 boards 10 printed data

book book book record record record record record	essays fiction music	The Death of the Author / Roland Barthes / trans. Richard Howard Style and The Representation of Historical Time / George Kubler The Aesthetics of Silence / Susan Sontag Text for Nothing #8 / Samuel Beckett / read by Jack MacGowan Nova Express / excerpts / William Burroughs / read by the author "Now the shadow of the southwest column" from Jealousy / Alain Robbe-Grillet / read by the author Fontana Mix-Feed / John Cage / realized by Max Neuhaus The King of Denmark / Morton Feldman / Max Neuhaus (percussion)
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boards	sculpture	The Maze / Tony Smith
film	films	Rhythm 21 (1921) / Hans Richter
film		Lightplay: Black-White-Grey (1932) / Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (excerpt)
film		Site (1964) / Robert Morris / Stan VanDerBeek (excerpt)
film		Linoleum (1967) / Robert Rauschenberg (excerpt)
record	interview	Merce Cunningham
record	documents	The Creative Act (1957) / Marcel Duchamp / read by the author
record		Some texts from A L'infinif (1919-20) / Marcel Duchamp / read by the author
record		Four poems from Phantastische Gebete (1916) / Richard Huelsenbeck / read by the author
record		The Realistic Manifesto (1920) / Naum Gabo / Noton Pevsner / read by Gabo
print		The Russian Desert: A Note on Our State of Knowledge / Douglas MacAgy
record		Space, Time and Dance/Merce Cunningham / read by the author
print	poetry	Conditionnement / Michel Butor / trans. Michael Benedikt
print		Poem, March 1966 / Dan Graham
print	data	Serial Project #1 / Sol Lewitt
print		Seven Translucent Tiers / Mel Bochner
print		Structural Play #3 / Brian O'Doherty
print		Drawings for The Maze / Tony Smith
print		Score for Fontana Mix-Feed / John Cage / Max Neuhaus
print		Score for The King of Denmark / Morton Feldman
print		Translation of Jealousy (recorded excerpt) / Alain Robbe-Grillet / trans. Robert Howard

The various elements are to affect each other, and are to be compared. “The marvelous compilation revealed the mysterious, powerful creativity of a throw of the dice, which, governed solely by unpredictable rules of chance, improbably manages to link normally separate and unrelated objects.”²⁸¹ These were in a dialogue with each other. The “magazine” to be experienced properly today, would oblige us to get a hold of a 8mm projector, and a record player. It also solicited the reader to become a maker, through Tony Smith’s *Maze* project, which consisted of a plan and a miniature cardboard cutout. Time needs to be taken to experience each type of work, and then eventually, one can start assembling the excessive meanings that Barthes wished for.

Advertisements accompanied the various projects, loose in the box, amongst all the other stuff. Initially, I thought they were fake ads produced by artists, but it became

²⁸¹ Alex Alberro, ‘Inside the White Box- Brian O’Doherty’s *Aspen 5+6*’, p.1

apparent to me, after viewing several issues, that they were real advertisements. Perhaps at the time, I immediately would have recognised as such, but looking at it more than 40 years after, I took it for a parody of advertising. This encounter effectively indicated the proximity that can exist between advertisement and art. Dan Graham, writing in 1985 about his early magazine projects, says of art that it can be analyzed as belonging only to institutions, such as galleries and museums, but it can also be perceived as belonging “to the general cultural framework which the magazine is part of.”²⁸² By placing art beside advertisement in various publications, Dan Graham, along with other artists such as Stephen Kaltenbach, Joseph Kosuth and General Idea, with their own publication *File*, the reader can perform an informational gesture, through the relation between the ad and the art. The relation constitutes art.

While at the National Gallery in Ottawa, I was able to view and manipulate the by-products of Kosuth’s *One and Three Tables* (1965) (fig. 21). This work is part of a series of works titled *Protoinvestigations* that include *One and Three Hammers*, *One and Three Chairs* and *One and Five Clocks*, among others. All works share a common format: an object, a photograph of the object *in situ*, and a blown-up dictionary definition. In the case of *One and Three Tables*, the photograph depicts a table as it is actually installed in the exhibition room. With each new installation a new photograph is required, emphasising the fact that the photograph is not from

²⁸² Dan Graham, ‘My Works for Magazine Pages: “a history of conceptual art”’, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), p. 421

another original site. The tree elements are three types of definitions of table, or data.

Thus the “look” of the work can change each time it is installed in a new venue, as a new table can be chosen. The dictionary definition may vary, depending on the language of the source. Under the instructions, the installer is to choose a table, place it before a wall, and photograph it. This photo is to be enlarged to the size of the actual table and placed on the wall to the left of the object. The photograph depicts the table, the wall, and the floor as it is seen, including the cast shadows, which are regulated by precise lighting instructions from Kosuth.

Finally, a blow-up of the copy of the dictionary definition is to be hung to the right of the table, its upper edge aligned with that of the photograph.²⁸³ Though always the same piece, slight variations occur, each time it is remade. None should be regarded as the original, or the canonical version. It is the concept that matters. In an essay on Kosuth’s work, Eugene Tan offers us the possibility to view four versions of *One and Three Chairs*.²⁸⁴ Even though the different versions were made at different dates, they are all dated 1965, as the idea stems from that year, and the idea is the work of art. At the National gallery I was able to view the archived photographs from four previous installations of *One and Three Tables*. Though not considered art anymore, the images are kept. As for the table, ironically, it has taken on the aura of an art

²⁸³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs#cite_note-0, (accessed June11, 2010)

²⁸⁴ Eugene Tan, “Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs*, 1965”, *Understanding Art Objects, Thinking through the Eye*, Tony Godfrey (ed), (Farnham, UK and Burlington, Vermont: Lund Humphries, 2009)

object, as it is kept in storage, and lent to various institutions, while the initial instructions insisted on each gallery to choose an object fitting the required definition.

The maintenance of the idea is due to the instructions allowing for further pieces to be made. The act of making is programmed, but not evident while viewing a single version. The instructions though, can foster variations. It is through these rigid rules, like LeWitt's grids, that singularity can be identified. These artworks are made so as to eliminate the expressive, by making use of, or, resembling metrological data. Yet, the requirement to remake the work for each new exhibition, with its insistence on proper lighting and display, reveals the theatricality involved in its display. The theatrical text is presented, and represented in various ways, depending on the production. While retaining the original text, its varies in its staging.

One of the earliest data machines used to make art is the camera. Michael North identifies Barthes' dead author as resulting from the insecurity that many had felt, and were still feeling, about art produced by machines, and the question of ownership, as Barthes identifies the maker of photographs as merely mechanical and chemical. For Barthes a photograph is made of light emanating from the subject: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From the real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here."²⁸⁵ The

²⁸⁵ As quoted in Michael North, 'Authorship and Autography: theories and methodologies', *PMLA*, Vol.16, No.5, 2001, p.1379

author becomes an operator armed with an instrument, registering the world. To me this identifies and describes what many Conceptual artists were doing.

As Eve Meltzer argues, and as I want to argue, Sol LeWitt's work, and that of other conceptualists, allow for data to inform, and perhaps express not sentiments, but the corporal. Many Conceptual artists, like many previous modernists such as Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Klee, guard their sentiments, or feelings. Sensing is discussed as sensed data. For Klee, "the inner self of the artist should develop into a receptive apparatus that elevates the artistic product over subjective and moral meanings."²⁸⁶ Throughout the process of repetitive making, the slight variations that appear offer evidence of the uncontrollable, of the somatic and psychic. If Conceptual art by-products are the work of clerks, then they are clerks with an interest in registering the ineffable, the *infra-mince* of Duchamp, or clerks that would eventually become like Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, and prefer "not to" do what is asked, but instead prefer to do "otherwise."

For the Conceptual artist, once a set of rules has been established, the body produces the work, the results becoming graphic registrations of the work done. The body becomes an instrument of production, of measurement, but also to be measured, as the graphic registrations offer themselves as results or data to be analyzed. There is a transition from the psychological towards the physiological. The work of both the irrational and the rational conceptualists depict the productive

²⁸⁶ Bettina Gockel, 'Paul Klee's picture-making and persona: tools for making invisible realities visible', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 39, 2008, p. 423

modes of the body. The various marks, or transcriptions, serve as documentation of activity.

Pascal Rousseau in his essay on technological innovations and transcription procedures of the late nineteenth century, signals the setting up of “a conception of the thrifty, where graphic refinement, and abbreviative systems instruct a proceeding of abstraction.” [*une pensée de l'économie où l'épure graphique et les systèmes abrégatifs instruisent le procès de l'abstraction.*]²⁸⁷ The physicality of presence and its graphic memory are replaced by codification. In the nineteenth century, Jules-Etienne Marey was responsible for many studies on human, animal and insect movements, along with many inventions to measure and record movement. Marey wanted to refine his recording procedures so to be able to seize the most imperceptible movement, “that no language can express.” [*qu'aucun langage ne peut exprimer*].²⁸⁸ Marey wanted to produce an extra language, one that could express this inexpressible bodily language.²⁸⁹ Making use of these positivist tools, Conceptual artists attempted to approach the inexpressible, without attempting to make sense of it. Graphic notations, such as in the work of LeWitt or Darboven, occupy a space that is both notational and in need of interpretation; the body is the instrument in these cases.

²⁸⁷ Pascal Rousseau, 'Figures de déplacement. L'écriture du corps en mouvement', *Exposé 2*, 1995, p.86

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p.88

²⁸⁹ Ibid

Other artifacts from the Art Metropole Collection take on formats that are similar to information or instruction manuals. This is the case with the various exhibition catalogues, photocopied pages, either through the use of Xerox or mimeograph machines, or of typewritten texts; all have aspects of official publications. For example, Dan Graham's *End Moments* (1969) and Seth Siegelaub's catalogues for the exhibitions *January Show (January 5- 31, 1969)* and *March 1- 31, 1969*, have the look of either instructional books, or of some sort of data, scheduling, or ledger book.²⁹⁰ They are very plain, and their respective covers are very matter-of-fact. Perusing the books, I realized that though they were imitating a certain office look, what they contained was of a different nature. *End Moments* consists of several articles by Graham, who like other artists of the period, such as Donald Judd, Mel Bochner, Robert Morris and Robert Smithson, had come to art making via art criticism.²⁹¹

Of interest was an article by Graham discussing in part, the work of Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra in terms of the effects of gravity both on material and on the body of the artist. Considering Serra, Graham emphasises the various actions performed on his material, such as to fold, to tear, and to throw. By including a quote by James J. Gibson on kinaesthesia, Graham suggest that Serra's actions are not abstract verbs that have affected his material; Serra's body is also a material. Encountering the work, one should imagine not just the specific characteristics of the material, but how the body positioned itself for these actions. Accompanying the position of the

²⁹⁰ Ledger books come from the Commonplace books of the Renaissance. See Ann Blair, 'Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 1992, pp. 541-551

²⁹¹ Jeffrey Weiss, 'The Painted Word', *Artforum*, February 2009, p. 49

body is the sensation the skin perceives by various contacts. Following this passage on kinaesthesia, Graham includes a small text about Lee Lozano's *Grass Piece*, as being another artwork that manipulate the artist' own body.²⁹²

As for Siegelaub's catalogues, they offered the reader quirky propositions, that could be taken as either serious, or not. The *March 1- 31, 1969* catalogue is considered by both Lippard and Godfrey as the first exhibition to exist in catalogue form alone. The previous exhibition, *January Show* in fact had objects exhibited along with the catalogue, plus there was a receptionist, Adrian Piper, a then young unknown artist, who could answer questions for the visitors. It is important to remember that these projects by Siegelaub came about through his involvement with the exhibiting artists. As he states in a 1987 interview: "It grew out of my personal economic situation, which was—and still is—extremely modest, compared to other people in the art world, and out of the nature of the work that was being produced by artists with whom I was working. It was a symbiosis of these two elements."²⁹³

Austerity has been mentioned as an aspect both visually and theoretically of certain conceptual projects, while some try to be deliberately boring, acting as an alternative to "frenetic expressionist individualism and crowd-pleasing Pop," writes

²⁹² Dan Graham, *End Moments*, self published, 1969. Reprinted in *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965-1990*, Brian Wallis (ed) (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 41-45

²⁹³ Seth Siegelaub, 'Some Remarks On So-Called "Conceptual Art"', exhibition catalogue for *L'art conceptuel, une perspective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989, p. 91

Lippard.²⁹⁴ But these object to me seem somewhat quaint. They are old. I did not find the catalogue for *January Show (January 5- 31, 1969)*, having “an austere aspect [*un aspect austère*],²⁹⁵ as Claude Gintz wrote in the Paris retrospective catalogue. The *January Show* catalogue contains the works of Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Laurence Weiner, offering a series of photographs, and texts. The aim of the work was to stand against the then dominant form of art, painting, as championed by Greenberg; Kosuth writes in the catalogue: “This way the immateriality of the work is stressed and any possible connections to paintings are severed.” If art were deemed to be *a* painting or *a* sculpture, the catalogue would definitely not offer its reader/ handler a work of art.

Handling Conceptual art

The Xerox Book, another project of Siegelau’s, contains the work of Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Laurence Weiner. Each artist was asked by Siegelau to make a work of twenty-five pages, to be photocopied and printed for a book. The book is printed on cheap paper. Though it may seem like a plain publication, the content reveals itself to be quite playful. The quality of the Xeroxed pages can be compared to the earliest photographs, with its lack of details, as the first Xerox machines could not properly reproduce grays, or the mid-tones.

²⁹⁴ Lucy R. Lippard, *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972; a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries* (New York: Praeger, 1973) p. xvi

²⁹⁵ Claude Gintz, “‘L’art conceptuel, une perspective’: notes sur un projet d’exposition’, exhibition catalogue for *L’art conceptuel, une perspective*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989, p. 17

Many of the projects emphasise repetition, such as Andre's piece, which consists of the addition of a square shape one each page, and Barry's *One Million Dots*. Huebler's project offers the reader a series of dots or points and lines, accompanied with instruction on how to view and think of them. These instructions are meant to change the reader's perception: "For example, I can say that the point is situated in the exact center of a given surface, which can be the literal truth, or that it is the 'end of a line oriented to the plane of the surface at a 90 degree angle, and extending away from its percipient towards infinity at the speed of sound,' etc., etc."²⁹⁶ The image, reconceptualised by the text, is not altered for the eyes, but for the mind, which reinterprets the images seen. Huebler in fact opens up a dialogue between the book one is holding, "reading", and what one is thinking and visualizing. A similar effect is produced by Kosuth's piece *Title of the Project*. The piece consists of one sentence per page, describing the fabrication of the Xerox Book:

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE XEROX MACHINE USED

XEROX MACHINE'S SPECIFICATIONS

PHOTOGRAPH OF OFFSET MACHINE USED

OFFSET MACHINE'S SPECIFICATION

²⁹⁶ Robert C. Morgan, *Art Into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 48

Each sentence states a production fact, which we can imagine. These facts, not unlike Wittgenstein's own facts from the *Tractatus*, that are meant to determine the world:

I The world is everything that is the case.

I.I The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

I.II The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.

Wittgenstein's facts are immaterial. Kosuth applies the philosophers' thinking onto his own work, where the facts that are stated to describe the fabrication of the work, can be imagined. Their function is to inform, as a photograph or a description would. Kosuth includes other sentences that refer to photographs of the paper, ink, toner, glue, the workers at Xerox, the artists, and each of the artists' projects, and finally of the whole book. Kosuth's sentences emphasise the making of the book at hand. Though supplying the reader with plenty of information, the work points towards the imaginary, withholding the mentioned information, such as photographs and the various technical specifications.

While reading each of Kosuth's sentences, it made the book-thing into a process that one comes to know about, but generally does not take into account. The various indications are simple, and do not in any way fully divulge what it is to make a book. Yet, it makes evident the fact that the book is a thing made. The sentences read as a short story. The work being about itself is also about modes of representation. By writing about a photograph of the Xerox machine used, and the machine's

specifications, we become aware of the simultaneous existence of the machine as an image, and the machine as a series of processes. The information that Kosuth is giving forth, simple as it may be, alludes to making. *The Xerox Book* in my hands, that I have been flipping through, which AA Bronson writes that it was bought, with multiple other copies from a sale bin in Texas for \$5 each, reveals itself to have been deliberately pieces together. "Of all the assemblage-style books of the period, it is the most pure and most memorable," reminisces AA Bronson.²⁹⁷ Kosuth is not usually thought of as an artist interested in the making of objects, as his investigations on the nature of art are meant to preclude materiality. However, the works I've encountered reveal themselves at more than facts, but manipulated materials.

Conceptual projects took the form of catalogue, advertisement and articles in publications, but also took the form of lists, diagrams and measurements. These new vehicles for art made it easy to distribute. Art could be had by anyone who bothered to save these ephemera. Of course one had to recognize it as art, but the point was not that it be recognized as art, but that it entered the public space. Though aimed at the world, the work remained secretive. "Communication (but not community) and distribution (but not accessibility) were inherent in Conceptual art. Although the forms pointed towards democratic outreach, the content did not."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ AA Bronson, 'Bound to Please: The Archive from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion', *Art Metropole: The Top 100* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), p. 122

²⁹⁸ Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years*, p. xvi

This new aspect of art as concept, where a photograph or a document could instantiate, meant that it could be reproduced by different techniques and disseminated via various channels. This is very different from the idea of André Malraux's *musée imaginaire*, as the images from his book refer to actual artworks, while the photographs or texts of the Conceptualists refer to themselves, or to an activity that is no longer. Simple activities, in most cases following an a priori scheme, are documented as being results of experiments. At other times, activities are prescribed to participants, who can take part in the work; such was the case with many of General Idea's projects.

These documents, which traveled for the most part through the mail, could they be compared to what Bruno Latour calls "immutable mobiles"?²⁹⁹ In his 1986 essay 'Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands', Bruno Latour tries to show that there is no such thing as a passage towards a new way of thinking, such as the modern scientific culture; the "divide between prescientific and scientific culture is merely a border—like Tijuana and San Diego."³⁰⁰ The difference between the two modes is one of the scales of effects; if we compare for example the output of the National Institute of Health to folk knowledge of medicinal herbs, the Institute produces far more consequences than local knowledge. The enormous effect of science and technology does not result from new modes of thinking, but depends on

²⁹⁹ Bruno Latour, 'Visualization and Cognition: Thinking With Eyes and Hands', *Knowledge and Society*, 1986 Vol. 6, p. 1-40

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2

the use of “paper, signs, prints and diagrams.”³⁰¹ For example, we might consider the transformation of laboratory experiments into inscriptions, which can then be combined, superimposed, or integrated in texts. These inscriptions stand for various scientific theories that cannot always be verbally explained, but can be represented as data, to become meaningful. But why put so much trust in images and print? Can they really help explain theoretical projects?

The way inscriptions gather their force of persuasion depends on what use they are being put towards. Inscriptions have the ability of being “mobile... immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another.”³⁰² Plans, maps, diagrams all help to take an object of interest, such as a particular coastline, and transfer it onto paper, so as to be able to show it somewhere else. Also, it permits information to be added on. Geometry permits one to enlarge or reduce a particular structure, and move it from one site to another. But more importantly, as Simondon suggests, this allows for one’s thoughts to be externalized, for the realization of particular tasks, from the use of tools, to the domestication of animals, and further to the invention of signs and symbols that can be shared. “Order and organisation, given order and execution structure are formal aspects of the task, depending on the demands of information sharing, from the one who knows and wants, to the one who executes and obeys” [*Ordre et organization, ordre donné et structure de*

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 3

³⁰² Ibid, p. 7

*l'exécution se trouvent être des formalisations de la tâche selon les exigences de la transmission d'information de celui qui sait et veut à celui qui exécute et obéit].*³⁰³

Information gave rise to a rationalization, but as Latour writes: "The rationalization that took place during the so-called 'scientific revolution' is not of the mind, of the eye, of philosophy, but of the *sight*."³⁰⁴ What is then seen on paper becomes written in a homogeneous language, which allows for scale transformation, through linear perspective drawing. All other information about a site, or an object become dependant on its optical aspects; to convince someone of what was experienced somewhere else, all others senses are shifted towards vision; inscriptions represent absent things. "No one can smell or hear or touch Sakhalin Island, but you can look at a map and determine at which bearing you will see the land when you send the next fleet. The speakers are talking to one another, feeling, hearing and touching each other, *but* they are now talking *with* many absent things presented all at once."³⁰⁵

The absent island is made present with the help of various inscriptions that have traveled from the island and back. This can also be applied to fictitious or sacred subjects, represented through linear perspective, which can become as real as the map of Sakhalin Island. Having various types of information available together, and

³⁰³ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention*, p. 154

³⁰⁴ Bruno Latour, 'Visualization and Cognition: Thinking With Eyes and Hands', p. 7

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8

reproducible on paper, has, as a consequence, the ability to be perceived and compared with other inscriptions.

General Idea took on the collection of various artifacts as an extension of their own production. All this stuff was circulating, and making possible a variety of meanings. The work produced by General Idea was a way to invent, encourage, and to mythologise their work within all other cultural and commercial products. To attempt a sensualist reading of Conceptual art, in the shadow of the criticism of both Buchloh and Zepke, can only be done *à la lumière de General Idea*.

General Idea

General Idea is not often discussed in the literature on Conceptual art. Blake Stimson in his article 'The Promise of Conceptual Art', points out that Conceptual artists have established new ways to distribute art, produce collective statements, and new working relationships. General Idea is mentioned along with Art & Language, and the initial association of Daniel Burren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni.³⁰⁶ The book does include two illustrations of their work, *The Garb Age Collection* (1969) and *Orgasm Energy Chart* (1970) (fig.22).

Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* makes no mention either of General Idea. Her book consists of a list of events,

³⁰⁶ Blake Stimson, p. xi

exhibitions, books, artworks that depict the dematerialization of art, or the appearance of Conceptual art. The book came out in 1973, four or five years after the birth of General Idea, and not long before the opening of Art Metropole. *Six Years* could be thought of as a list from which the Art Metropole Collection was amassed. In its preface, Lippard urges to think of the collector of Conceptual art as a patron, one who helps artists, and participating in their artistic experiments.³⁰⁷ But unlike the book, which has a conventional presentation, the Collection gives evidence of the eclectic nature of works that have come to be known as Conceptual pieces.

General Idea produced made use of formulas to produce work, as Sol LeWitt did, but their form of conceptualism addressed the senses; ideas were treated as to enter, and affect fully the body, making use of optical illusions, as in their video *Cornucopia*³⁰⁸ (1982), mimicking Walter De Maria's film *Hard Core* (1968). While the later films a desert horizon that keeps revolving 360 degrees around a rifle-bearing cowboy, *Cornucopia* shows a shiny phallic-looking stick that changes colour, circling in front of a mouth, reflected by the polished surface: "The time had come to make people's mouth water and then to parch them before they had a chance to swallow", wrote General Idea.³⁰⁹ *Cornucopia* was made to fill *Hard Core* with the eroticism it was deemed to lack.

³⁰⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years*, p.8

³⁰⁸ <http://vimeo.com/39308174>

³⁰⁹ *General Idea, 1968-1984*, (Kunsthalle, Basel; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal, 1984-85), p. 13

Barthes' absent author becomes with General Idea, a trio, freeing each member from the tyranny of the individual genius: "It leaves us free to assimilate, synthesize, and contextualize influences from our immediate cultural environment."³¹⁰ One of General Idea's projects, *The Miss General Idea Pavillion* (1968-78) served as a framework to encompass other projects. The project proposed artifacts from the burnt out building that was to commemorate *The Miss General Idea Pageant*, a previous project. The building in fact had never existed; its fiction served to encompass various works together, as artifacts.

What is of interest are the various depictions of the planning of the pavilion, suggesting that General Idea does not regard ideas as immutable and transcendent, but as part of making. While Kosuth emphasizes ideas as something to contemplate, General Ideas makes use of ideas as techniques; for example, the use of numbers to measure, seen in various images depicting men in a state of planning, or reading architectural plans.

The two works taken from Alberro's book on Conceptual art, *The Garb Age Collection* and *Orgasm Energy Chart* (fig.22), are pieces that make use of instructions to produce work. The first one asking people to collect plastic garbage bags, and then to arrange and display them on the street. It also indicates that photos, and drawings can be made following the initial set up of the bags. The second piece consists of an empty grid, where one is asked to chart one's orgasms. The charts

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 25

were sent by mail to various people, had to be filled-in, and returned to General Idea for analysis.

Both these pieces address production; one perceived as waste, or garbage, the other as physiological, the orgasm. Both could also suggest either excesses, or necessities, or again collecting. I would suggest that what these two simple pieces reveal, and ultimately is to be found in the work and collection of General Idea: the pleasurable, the erotic. This is made evident with their publication *File*, with its racy photographs. While most conceptual artists were discreet about sexuality and eroticism, except perhaps Lee Lozano³¹¹, General Idea affirmed its importance both as subject matter, and as part of art making. List making does not need to be described as clerk work. To list can provide pleasure in the act of repeating similar acts, which become altered over time, creating variations, or differences.

✱

Listing, diagrams, charts, questionnaires, these devices in fact, were used by many artists and writers, who were exploring similar subjects through their own medium, and influencing each other, during the Conceptual art period. Writers were making use of inscriptions as a method to redefine and expand the notion of the poem and the novel. Diagrams, lists, maps, drawings have been part of literature for centuries, from the mid-16th century lengthy lists of François Rabelais's *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, enumerating the various foods ingested in one meal, to the blank pages of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759),

³¹¹ Lee Lozano, *Thesis (All Men Are Hardly Created Equal)*, as seen in *S.M.S. #1*, 1968.

are predecessors to concrete poetry and the experimental novels of Denis Roche, and Donald Bartheleme. Bartheleme has commented on the influence of Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson's 1966 experimental text, *The Domain of the Great Bear*, on his own writing.³¹² As much as the machines of the Industrial revolution had influenced artists and writers in the 19th and 20th century, an interest in office wares was becoming apparent in art.

Ed Ruscha's own interest in stamps and envelopes, along with General Idea's production of surveys and application forms for their pageants, can also be found in the work of novelists of the period, such as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), where patents of inventions, the stock market, stamps and the postal system, are all signs to be deciphered, while Donald Bartheleme (whose brother Frederick Bartheleme was part of the Conceptual art movement, before turning to writing), self-consciously wrote about the act of writing itself, and incorporated in several stories, lists, various typefaces, and the Question and Answer mode aimed at the reader:

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you like the story so far? Yes () No ()
2. Does Snow White resemble the Snow White
you remember? Yes () No ()
3. Have you understood, in reading to this point,

³¹² Mel Bochner, *Solar Systems & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965-2007*, p. 201

that Paul is the prince-figure? Yes () No()³¹³

William Gaddis, after twenty years of working for the government and big businesses, published in 1975 his gigantic novel *JR*, where newspapers, flyers, coupons, equipment information, all become part of the narrative. In France, Georges Perec's various writing experiments, between the 1960s and his death in 1982, were influenced by sociology and its methods of inquiry, and also by his own work as an archivist, with its daily handling of records and variety of data. This primary interest in writing and informational documentations, from post cards to pseudo-scientific charts to books, can also be found in the work of composers such as Iannis Xenakis, himself trained as an engineer before turning to composing, and Mauricio Kagel. In the case of Kagel, the composer did not only rely on musical notations, but gave written instructions to his musicians for the realization of his music-theater. In many cases, drawings are also used to illustrate the movements that the musicians need to perform. Kagel's partition becomes a composite of various modes of instructions.

Buchloh mentions Samuel Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet as being fetish-authors for artists of the mid to late 1960's. Artists are said to be attracted to both Beckett's radical atopism, and to the positivism of Robbe-Grillet, or as Buchloh puts it, "the affirmative petit-bourgeois positivism of Alain Robbe-Grillet."³¹⁴ As mentioned previously, Robbe-Grillet's work was also included in the issue 5 & 6 of *Aspen*, not as

³¹³ Donald Bartheleme, *Snow White* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965), p.82

³¹⁴ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique', p. 53

a text, but as a recording of himself reading from his novel, *La jalousie*. The writer's voice is heard, or should I say the author, cohabiting with Barthes' text about the author's death.

By stating that both Robbe-Grillet and Conceptual artists are in fact interested in positivism, and producing positivist work, I can only suggest that, perhaps Buchloh is reiterating André Breton's famous distaste for the novel, and its boring descriptions; descriptions remove, if not resist poetry, and poetry is art, for Breton. He equates the novel with realism, while being inspired by a positivist attitude: "The realist attitude... inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas to Anatole France, seems to hostile towards all intellectual and moral expansion. ... Each one goes on with his small 'observation.' " [*L'attitude réaliste... inspirée du positivisme, de Saint Thomas à Anatole France, m'a bien l'air hostile à tout essor intellectuel et moral. ... Chacun y va de sa petite 'observation'.*]³¹⁵ Breton uses as example an imaginary incipit to make his point: "The marquise left a five o'clock." [*La marquise sortit à cinq heures.*], a boring, poetry-less beginning of a novel. Pierre Brunel wonders what Breton would have thought of another first phrase of a novel, or incipit, one from Robbe-Grillet's *Instantanés*: "The coffee pot is on the table." [*La cafetière est sur la table.*]³¹⁶ Brunel proceeds to analyse the conservative forces that attacked Robbe-Grillet, and the *nouveau roman*. What is offending for the critics, are the lengthy

³¹⁵ Pierre Brunel, 'Récit poétique et récit mythique. La question des *incipit*', *Mythe et récit poétique*, Véronique Gély-Ghedira (ed) (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1998), p. 23

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23

descriptions, with no narrator, and a world that exist only as perceptions, without poetry.

Without going into the rest of the text, Brunel does in fact find poetry, suggesting that descriptions of objects, which is what was deemed the *nouveau roman* was doing, should perhaps be compared to still-lives, which again were themselves sources for poets, such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Francis Ponge. Can we compare the aesthetic of administration, with the poetry Rilke saw in his objects? For Kosuth, there is no interest in poetry:

“I gather you see little connection of your art to poetry?

Absolutely no relationship at all.”³¹⁷

Kosuth does not really discuss the subject, as much as dismiss it. Concrete poetry for him is “a kind of formalism of typography—it’s cute with words, but dumb with language.”³¹⁸ Kosuth separates the physicality of words from language’s abstraction.

“For Kosuth, art does not have a true object, an isolated form or work. A work of art is not a given object, but rather represents the result of mental choices that are intentionally pursued at the time of both its production and reception, an ‘object of thought’.”³¹⁹ The work is to engage the viewer/reader in an experience of

³¹⁷ Joseph Kosuth, p. 51

³¹⁸ Ibid.,p. 52

³¹⁹ Gabriele Guercio, ‘Introduction’, Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966- 1990*, p. xxxviii

actualizing art; one has to become involved in the “*process of the work*,”³²⁰ creating an event, where the viewer is part of the meaning-making process. There is willingness on the part of Kosuth, to ignore effects of words, and emphasize the idealism of language, as if ideas did not belong to the body, as if ideas, and objects were unrelated. The opticality that Greenberg prescribed, which in fact differed from what the artists thought of their own work, comes close to Kosuth’s own views of his work; the unacknowledgement of the effects of the media that presents his art.

The birth of the text and the textual, and the disappearance of the author, soon gave place to an increasing interest with the genesis of texts. What eventually became problematic was the definition of *text*, as it broadened. On top of the notion of textuality, was added those of transtextuality, intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, and architextuality, “in other words everything which establishes an obvious or discreet relation [of the text] with other texts.”³²¹ What came of these investigations is that it put an end to the notion of the text as an isolated thing, which eventually led to this interest in textual genetics, and authors’ manuscripts. “Textual genetics reasserts the value of the active, fluid process that is textual production of the writer ‘at work’, the evolution of the writing towards its final form.”³²² The manuscript reveals the author, the day-to-day aspects of working. The written marks give importance to the author’s hand gestures. This does not exclude

³²⁰ Joseph Kosuth, p. 225

³²¹ Gérard Genette quoted in Martine Reid, ‘Editor’s Preface: Legible/Visible’, *Yale French Studies*, 84, 1994, p. 2

³²² Martine Reid, p. 3

the “increasingly large share of textual creation which is performed by machine, starting with the computer.”³²³

As I mentioned earlier, I was able to look at several pieces by Kosuth, part of the Art Metropole Collection. I also looked at several pieces at both the National Gallery of Canada, and at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts. At the National Gallery I was able to view instructions provided by Kosuth, along with plans, on the making and installing of his piece *One and Three Table*. This work, initially thought of in 1965, and produced in 1967, has changed, with the evolution of technology and of art. A note found in the archives, from the National Gallery, and meant for the photographer who is to re-photograph the table, considers the fact that as the definition of art has become broader, to photograph a chair as un-artful, as Kosuth initially instructed, is now much harder. “But still one should presumably aim for a snapshot effect (neutral, deadpan, artless) in addition to the size factor which drives home the vraisemblance.”

The variations of the work are only evident in retrospect, available through the archival material. The actual work exists only as instructions; yet these instructions need to be carried out and become things, which will, in return, make evident their conceptual basis. Kosuth’s work is reliant on its thing-like materiality encountered in a gallery, allowing idea to become a consideration.

³²³ Serge Tisseron, ‘All Writing is Drawing: The Spatial Development of the Manuscript’, *Yale French Studies*, 84, 1994, p. 30

I would like to compare Simondon's notion of technicity to Kosuth's idea, as both are examples of survival. The technicity of a technical object is its essence. It is the origin of a technical condition, a technical schema that permits a technical object to function, residing within the object itself, such as the appearance of an electric field, resulting from the synthesis of various forces. For Simondon, technicity is recognised by its stability throughout various machines as they evolve.

Speaking at a conference about broken or obsolete machines, Simondon comments: "I think that the loss of function is a temporary loss, and that technical devices have a fundamental scheme that can be untimely at moments, yet keep their essence. And consequently might be able to come back into existence, regain activity by intergrading itself onto a new, and more complex device. There is something eternal in a technical schema. And it this, which is always in the present, and that can be preserved in a thing." *[Je pense que la perte de la fonction est une perte temporaire et que les dispositifs techniques ont un schéma fondamental qui peut être à certains moments inactuel, mais qui conserve son essence. Par conséquent qui peut revenir à l'existence, reprendre activité en s'intégrant à un nouveau dispositif plus complexe. Il y a quelque chose d'éternel dans un schéma technique. Et c'est cela même qui est toujours au présent et qui peut être conservé dans une chose].*³²⁴ The technical schema is always residing, and preserved in the machine, but is becomes evident through its functioning.

³²⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *Les Cahiers du Centre Culturel Canadien*, no.4, Paris, 1976, p. 87

I would like to suggest that Kosuth's *One and Three Tables*, though being an idea is only evident while the work is put into application, as it is re-made for each new installation. The work needs to be made, and asks to be made, over and over.

Finally, returning to Kosuth's technical choice of Photostat reveals a dependence on the display codes of painting. The photostat was primarily a clerical technique used in governmental offices, and libraries, previous to micro-fiche, while also belonging to, and understood as photography. Mechanical, and suggesting anonymity, the photostat is of a higher standard than a photocopied sheet of paper of the period, such as was being produced by both Toby Mussman and Paul Bertgold.

The use of xeroxed paper, as was also the case with *General Idea*, would ultimately have acted as blemishes on Kosuth ideas, due to its impoverished materiality. Looking at more recent works at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, the quality of paper used for a series of lithography indicates the importance material supports has for Kosuth. It is a choice that is perhaps dictated by the market itself. Alberro writes: "For despite pronouncements that [Kosuth's] art was not made for a gallery, and that the physical components that communicated the art were secondary and purely residual, the fact that his Photostats could easily be hung flat on the wall in a way that closely resembled traditional paintings made them a comfortable fit in any gallery or traditional exhibition space."³²⁵

³²⁵ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p. 39

Materiality in Conceptual art is for the most part ignored. It is we viewers who need to acknowledge their physicality. As Serge Tisseron writes: “Although the necessary beginnings of the text, as well as the intention of writing it, admittedly are initiated in the psychic system, the inscription process involves first and foremost the hand. The initial moment of writing, as of any marking, is when ‘something’ (for what does one call an original notion, an idea, an intuition, an inspiration?) which has neither extension nor duration is given both—a spatial existence (its marking) and a temporal existence (the time it takes for the eye to run across it). While this moment may entail numerous inscriptive instruments, ranging from a mere pencil to a computer, its actual realization is impossible without involving the hand. This manual process has been overlooked by linguistic studies particularly which are systematically interested in the end product of the manuscript.”³²⁶ Kosuth’s instructions are his manuscripts.

³²⁶ Ibid. p. 30

Chapter 4- Two types of materials: b) *celebrated*

It is [Franz] West's unswerving adherence to quasi-classical, of, if you will, paradigmatic forms of abstraction that pulls his work through the dark waters of conceptual theory.

Mark Zimmermann³²⁷

The two previous chapters have explored the seeming absence of touch as part of the making of Conceptual art, and its appearance via scratches in the work of Ed Ruscha. In fact, with Conceptual art, touch becomes accessible through writing, in part by looking at the instructions given by Joseph Kosuth to museums, for the display of his *One and Three Tables* (fig.21). The unacknowledgment of a new making for each new exhibition underplays the physicality of the work to the benefits of its ideality.

With this chapter, there might seem to be a return of past methods of art making, such as moulding and casting, including attentiveness towards the transformative abilities of matter. In fact, the artists I will be discussing merely continue this exploration, overshadowed by the partial definition given to Conceptual art. For Mark Zimmermann it is Franz West's craft, his understanding of both material and methodology that is refreshing, as the spectator is given matter to encounter, and not texts to read.

³²⁷ Mark Zimmermann, 'Craft and the Dream of Fine Art: Building with Franz West and Jerry Thomas,' *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2000, p.77

The work of Viennese artist Franz West, along with that of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, and Canadian Liz Magor, all respond in different ways to my fascination with matter. As much as the work encountered at the Art Metropole Collection is also stuff, these works offer, and celebrate materiality, by making thingness explicit and present. Also of importance is the interest both Magor and West take in traditional sculptural techniques, and issues of re-skilling, issues that are absent from Clark's work.

Re-skilling becomes not so much a recalling past methods of art making, as presenting a way to discover what it means to touch matter. Whereas artists of the past represented the sensual through images, these three artists attempt to experience it, with their work becoming evidence of the encounter. This is not so much a "transition from aesthetics to physiology, from romantic symbols to analog tracings... or from the 'wordless subjectivity' of picturesque travelers to the 'wordless objectivity' of fin de siècle life scientists"³²⁸ (such as have fascinated artists since the 1960s) as one where the ability of matter to be modified is enacted by the artists, to be both felt and imagined.

The work of artists Lygia Clark, Liz Magor and Franz West are prime examples of works that reveal their making, explicitly manifesting that they have been handmade. Viewing their work, one can understand the process that led to their

³²⁸ Philipp Felsch, 'Cultures of Speechlessness: Scrambles amongst the Alps, 1800-1900', *Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Preprint* 318, 2006, p. 182

final form. We recognize either the materials, or, understand the simplicity of the “putting” together, so to speak. In the case of West’s work, with his use of plaster and papier-mâché, they are materials most of us have previously encountered, either as children, making things with papier-mâché, or perhaps by doing home repairs, with plaster. Either way, the materials are so common, that one might wonder why an artist would choose to work with them. Clark makes use of plastic bags, elastic bands, small pebbles, which are all used to touch, rub, massage the bodies of her clients, while Magor works with paper pulp, fabrics, and more recently with divers synthetic casting materials.

These artists were chosen to help articulate the pleasure, possibilities, and limits found in direct contact with matter, as one is making, crafting a *thing of art*. The stuff that has ended in the Art Metropole collection, much as paper work, we could all make. In fact, desktop publishing, and the photocopier at the local post office, allow any of us to make something, and distribute it as the Conceptual artist were doing. Making something does not just mean learning a skill, or a craft, spending many hours working on a project. This being said, if one spends hours working on a Xerox machine, the various possibilities that the machine can do, or that we can make it do, will become a skill, a craft. The physical involvement with the machine is limited, unless one performs modifications on it, as a mechanic could do on a motor.

The use of documents in Conceptual art is a continuation of an interest with printed matter, which occupied many artists from the early avant-garde on. With Ed Ruscha,

there is an accrued emphasis given to the materiality of the printing process. The present chapter will extend this fascination with the notion of impression, by proposing that we think of it as moulding, and casting; Lygia Clark, Liz Magor, and Franz West all mould their work. As for casting, Liz Magor is the only one whose work depends directly on it, while the other two refer to it.

Liz Magor

Canadian artist Liz Magor (b.1948) accentuates the fact that both photography and cast objects are technically related, as both are an index of reality, meaning that both are produced from a direct contact; the casted object replicates the details of the mould, and the photographic image, the scene in front of the aperture. This dependence on indexicality becomes part of Magor's preoccupation with the notion of authenticity.

I first encountered Liz Magor's work in several exhibitions in the early 1980s. At the time it had a strong impact on my own artwork. Through art magazines I was familiar with works that made use, or resembled residues, but her work was an early and direct encounter with such work. The two encountered work *Four Boys and a Girl* (1979) (fig.23) and *Production* (1980) (fig.24) explicitly incorporate the residual with its making process as part of the piece. In both works, this is realised by exhibiting simultaneously the machine of production, a press, and the form produced by the press. The press for *Four Boys and a Girl* has two screw-like

handles, which when turned, push the press down onto the material within the mould. The results for this piece are five rectangular forms made of clothes, or fabrics, and grass clippings, all held together by white glue. Each finished form rests on a flat sheet of steel. The hand-operated press forced the clippings, fabric, and glue to become an object made of many items, resembling a process that in geology would produce a sedimentary rock.

By including the press as part of the work, Magor enables the spectator to understand how the five forms were made. One can also imagine that the turning of both handles might become increasingly more difficult, as the material becomes more compacted, adhering, or laminating a variety of articles to each other via the glue. Each produced form is about the dimension of an adult body. The material is transformed through applied pressure, and will with time continue to be transformed due to material decay. Magor feels she is implicating herself as a participant within a process of change, that continues whether or not she consents or involves herself: "Perhaps I am working to be part of the working of change."³²⁹

Production (fig.24) includes a different type of press, designed by Magor, and able to cast four brick-forms at once.³³⁰ These bricks are made of newsprint pulp, and are used to erect several walls. The press is located between two walls, momentarily hiding the machine that has produced them, as one approaches the work. There is

³²⁹ Liz Magor, *production/reproduction*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1980, n.p.

³³⁰ Avis Lang Rosenberg, 'Liz Magor: Working Sculpture', *Vanguard*, December 1980/ January 1981, p. 25

an element of theatricality in her display, to incorporate an element of surprise and discovery for the spectator. Encountering the press, we notice its surface covered with the dried pulp matter residue used to form the bricks. The residue has become patina to the machine, texturing it. The floor is pristine, suggesting that the actual production was realised somewhere else. We are encountering a finished work.

Production takes the initial act of making the five forms of *Four Boys and a Girl* (fig.23), and creates a semblance of a cottage-industry, by extending its production, and also by refining the end result. The fibers of the paper pulp make it possible to form, without the excessive need of glue. Scrutinizing the dried paper-brick walls, we can see slight variations in colouring, and bits of newsprints from the pulp are still legible, individualizing each brick. *Production* results from repetitive movements, a mode belonging to both machines and humans.

Again, the work of Gilbert Simondon is pertinent to help us understand Magor's fascination with the act of casting, and how machines and techniques can produce knowledge. In fact Magor's work espouses an important aspect of Simondon's research, which is to try to understand technicity (*technicité*), "by placing oneself, one could say, as a technical object" [*en se mettant, pour ainsi dire, à la place des objets techniques*].³³¹

³³¹ Vincent Bontems, 'Actualité d'une philosophie des machines: Gilbert Simondon, les hadrons et les nanotechnologies', *Revue de synthèse* : tome 130, 6e série, N° 1, 2009, p. 39

As mentioned in chapter 1, Simondon identifies the technical object with a specific mode of existence. Simondon's analysis is not only through the knowledge of its users, be they artisans, engineers, or technicians, but from internally established criteria out of which the technical object can evolve, which he terms technicity. By entering within a technical process, such as his example of brick casting, one would experience the technical operation that brings on technicity.

Giving importance to the technical object Simondon wants to retrieve it from the perception that it is a cause of dehumanisation in the twentieth century, professed by such thinker as Oswald Spengler, Kärl Junger, and Martin Heidegger.³³² For Simondon, the machine has not overtaken the world, as much as it has been enslaved to objectives of domination. Simondon wants culture to stop viewing and treating it as a stranger; the machine is to be welcomed without any xenophobia.³³³

Magor does not explicitly mention a wish to enter the technical, yet she does attempt to understand how her presses give form. She speaks of being "compelled to make things all the time" and these things need to be solid and still, unlike producing videos or performances, which she says, do not give her satisfaction.³³⁴ To work with actual matter gives her the sense that she is part of the process of transforming matter. Making a work of art that performs a function by actually producing objects as a machine would is different from a representation of a

³³² Ibid, pp. 47-48

³³³ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, p.9

³³⁴ Ibid, p. 24

functioning machine. Here we can compare Magor's work to Kosuth's project for the *Xerox Book*, with his description of the fabrication process of the book. Both works address fabrication, and both offer an object to encounter: a book and an installation.

However, while Kosuth's piece refers only to the object at hand, Magor's work is suggestive, if only by its use of titles. Meaning needs to be apparent, and not intended, for Magor "intentions are only intentions, they're not reality."³³⁵ The presses designed by Magor for both *Four Boys and a Girl*, and *Production* are attempts to understand the technicity of a machine. It is to learn from the procedures of the machine, while working with it. Gilbert Simondon has suggested that to really understand technicity, one might reproduce a machine, such as Pascal's machine, or a television. Magor's insistence on producing work is not just to have a tangible object, but to interact with the machine, in this case, a press. By working directly with the machine, the various acts of production will eventually lead Magor to be herself formed by the process, as it alters, and brings on new meaning, which modifies the initial aspect the work was to have.

In the case of *Four Boys and a Girl* (fig.23), Magor says: "I realized that the most these slabs could represent was bodies. To put more meaning onto them was really stretching it, and that occurred to me just by accident. I needed to get them out of the machine and put them on drying racks because I was going to make hundreds of

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 24

them. So I made these little bed-type bottoms. And the minute I pulled them the slab out of the machine and put it on one of those, that extra reference to a piece of furniture made it a union of two objects that was more meaningful than it would have been to go any further.”³³⁶

The weight felt by the act of pulling, lifting the wet slab of glued clothes and hay, to be deposited on a drying rack, became for Magor similar to the weight of a body. As spectators to this work, we may see a reference to bodies. But for Magor, it was the actual manipulation of the heavy clumps, along with their slow drying, that suggested moving a human body. The work became clearer for Magor through her initial form making and moving. She eventually decided to keep the number of forms to five, making the body reference more evident, as to produce more would possibly allow other references, such as productivity, to interfere with the notion of body.

While the initial plan for *Production* consisted of 400 paper bricks, Magor soon realized that the reproductive nature of the work needed to be addressed, that part of the “issue of the piece was that this item was reproduced and reproduced. So there had to be a substantial number,”³³⁷ to insist on the nature of reproduction. The lengthy process, resembling factory work, a sort of parody of art work, as she says, allowed Magor to be involved “with that very large process of change that

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 24

³³⁷ Ibid, p. 25

occasionally just freezes me with how inexorable it is.”³³⁸ The making of the bricks reaffirms for her, the importance of art making, without answering the question of why make art. While Ed Ruscha was thrilled to have a large quantity of manufactured books in front of him, Magor needs more than the quantity; she needs to make them herself.

Magor writes about her work of the late 1970s and early 1980s as trying to “objectify some history of a life, or at least the life of a body and the process of change that affects that body.”³³⁹ The transformation allowed by the material, stands for all changes and transformation that occurs through time. The passing of time, the disappearance of the present into the past, the appearance of the new, along with various new forms of commodification and industrialization, has created moments of longing for the past, for the natural and its reference to comfort, or coziness. The machines that participate with Magor in her making are the industrial objects that Simondon identifies as not being immediately clear and needing to be understood as one would a “foreign language” [*comme une langue étrangère*].³⁴⁰

Both *Four Boys and a Girl* and *Production* are not so much interested in achieving a well-made “brick”, as in evoking change. In her latest work, Magor continues to make use of casting as a technique. One can identify a refinement to the crafting of her work. Like a “working sculpture,” her work can be examined as phases, where

³³⁸ Ibid, p. 27

³³⁹ Liz Magor, *production/reproduction*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1980, n.p.

³⁴⁰ Gilbert Simondon, “Psycho-sociologie de la technicité” *Bulletin de l'École Pratique de Psychologie et de Pédagogie*, 15e année, no 2, nov. -déc. 1960, p.234

one moment is subsumed and extends the knowledge previously gained. Technique itself has become, not only a subject informing her work, but the procedures *forming* the work, creating a subject. It is important to point out that Magor's production is not meant to create a more precise machine; her machine makes an object that cannot further a technological development. Her work stays within the artisanal, as Simondon would say.

I have previously mentioned Simondon's description of brick-casting, an example he uses to undo the traditional notion of hylomorphism, which has matter being formed by an external force, and is often used as an analogy between divine creation and the hands of the potter, both forming clay towards being. Simondon relies on concrete phenomena as a way to proceed towards the analysis and criticism of philosophical paradigms, such as the dualism of hylomorphism.

For Simondon the hylomorphic schema confuses individual implicit forms of natural matter with generic qualities, separating from the true singularising haecceity, which defines a constraint, leaving a trace.³⁴¹ A tree trunk in the forest is indeed matter, but as an abstract notion. It becomes more concrete, as Simondon writes, if we become aware of its type, indicating how the wooden matter has taken form, thus differentiating for example, the pine from the fir. The haecceity of a tree is encountered in its curves, straightness or flatness, individuating³⁴² each tree, thus

³⁴¹ Jean Hugues Barthélémy, *Simondon ou l'encyclopédisme génétique* (Paris: PUF, 2008), p. 60

³⁴² Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information*, p. 52

making each one designed for a specific function, as a support beam or to build boats.

What is problematic with the hylomorphic theory, and often other philosophical theories that make use of the concrete as examples, is that in many cases the concrete entities are treated as abstractions. The form and the matter of the hylomorphic scheme are in fact an abstract form and an abstract matter, there are no specificities about materials, or as Holbraad puts it, there is no attention to “the contingent material characteristics that make things most obviously thing-like.”³⁴³

The bricks of both Magor and Simondon are made of specific materials; to take fine sand, wet it, and place it inside a mould, will not make a brick once the mould is removed, but only sand. A technical *operation* is what is needed, for Simondon, between clay and mould, and this successful operation can only occur if both clay and mould are properly prepared.

For Magor’s materials to take their form, they also require specific preparation. Interestingly, each piece I’ve been discussing is prepared differently. With *Four Boys and a Girl*, Magor employs various types of textiles, and organic material such as grass clippings, to make her forms. Though many textiles are organic, derived from various plants, once they have been transformed into textiles, and sewn together as clothes, they can no longer be made to adhere to grass as a homogenous form. Such

³⁴³ Martin Holbraad, ‘Can the Thing Speak?’, p. 3

mixture would require time, allowing for various processes, including decay, to bond clothes and grass together. Magor, as she states, wants to imitate and be part of natural processes. Pressing all this stuff together might allow for form-taking, but with the introduction of glue, these various materials can take on the appearance of congealed sediments. Glue holds the work together, though it is not necessarily perceptible to the eye.

In the case of *Production* (fig.24) Magor makes use of papier-mâché, a technique where paper is shredded, then wetted to produce a paste-like substance. To this paste is often added salt to prevent putrefaction, and flour, to strengthen and bind the paper fibers together. Basically, papier-mâché paste is glue. What differentiates this paste from the material of *Four Boys and a Girl* is the fact that Magor has moved from using things as material, such as grass and clothes, towards making her own material to produce things: papier-mâché to make bricks. I will now turn to her recent work and her use of industrial material, such as resin, to cast.

✱

Anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen mentions nineteenth-century Christian missionaries in rural Africa, being enamored with its life, because it reminded them of their own background being transformed by urbanization, industrialization and secularization. "By the same token, anthropologists have often sought to project onto distant societies they have studied, a non-commodified orientation which may

reflect the actual orientation of these societies under study, but which may also be suspected to be, in part, a utopian projection to compensate for the intimacy, meaning and order these North Atlantic intellectuals are missing in their own home societies today.”³⁴⁴ The utopian comfort of home, of nature, the return to a mythical past, towards a perceived authenticity, these are all themes that Magor has been working with since the 1990s.

Authenticity is questioned through Magor’s use of her two favorite sculpting techniques, casting and her photographic work, which all display “actual impressions of the real even when a sculpture or the subject of a photograph is in disguise.”³⁴⁵

While her early forms overtly referred to their own materials, as well as to the presses that had produced them, the material used in the recent work imitates other material by taking the form of trees, rocks and towels. These forms are constructed with polymerized gypsum, an industrially produced substance that can register subtle details, and create life-like semblance. But upon close inspection, a detail will reveal or undo the trick, such as discovering a layer of foam carpeting inside a tree-like sculpture titled *Hollow* (1998-99) (fig.25), or with *Double Cabinet (blue)* (2001),

³⁴⁴ Wim van Binsbergen, ‘Commodification: Things, agency, and identities: Introduction’, *Commodification: Things, Agency, and Identities (The Social Life of Things Revisited)*, Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere, eds. (Münster: LIT VERLAG, 2005), p.48

³⁴⁵ Nancy Tousley, ‘Into the Woods’, *Liz Magor* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University; Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2000), p. 22

what looks like a pile of folded towels, reveals itself as a shell-like structure under which cans of beer are hidden. A detail “undoes the illusion.”³⁴⁶

Viewed from afar, both these works appear as real wood and real towels. While the early pieces I’ve discussed incorporated both the machine of production to its production, these recent sculptures are exhibited alone. They have been cast, but the mould from which they were made is absent. Yet, critic Philip Monk has depicted these sculptures in terms of moulds: “we can read the cast sculpture itself as a mould too, to which an unrelated interior matter (foam carpet, beer cans), a vulnerable body, seek to conform as if to a protective shell... it is almost as if the mould and cast have become one.”³⁴⁷

Magor has in fact scrutinised where mould and cast meet, that area where Simondon says the small hands of the mould form the clay. The separation of casting machine and casted forms found in her early work, becomes at this point, conflated. The physical pressure that Magor used to form *Four Boys and a Girl*, and *Production*, is replaced by another type of pressure, one that relies on adhering, to conform to an already made surface.

The actual exertion of pressure onto material that was encountered in the early work, has given place to exploration of adhering, and of conforming to an already

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 21

³⁴⁷ Philip Monk, ‘Playing Dead: Between Photography and Sculpture’, *Liz Magor*, Grant Arnold and Philip Monk (Toronto: The Power Plant; Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002), p. 66

existing from, as Monk suggests. In the case of *Hollow*, shaped as a large tree trunk lying on its side, the interior wall is covered with carpet foam, following the textured resin interior surface. Plus, Magor has placed a sleeping bag inside the trunk, which replicates her early use of fabric as a metaphor for body, but also acts as an invitation to enter this piece of fabric-sleeping bag. The sleeping bag, like our clothing, offers both comfort and protection. It gives us a sense of security, while we mold ourselves to its fabric.

While the early work was experienced by Magor through her fabrication, and encouraged the spectator to imagine the technical operation that brought on the casted forms, these newer pieces refer less to the corporal act of making, and more as invitations to enter a structure for protection. What I find fascinating is this wish to explore matter through various types of touching, especially to enter matter, to feel, be near, and perhaps understand matter through contact.



Philip Monk has written that Magor has used her art as a “means of interrogating change in the world.”³⁴⁸ In her book, *Four Notable Bakers*, made with found photographs, and without any text, Magor is questioning one’s identity within the societal, the genetical, and the technological. Monk writes: “The process of baking and the look of bread are used as a grid to interpret another order of identity, that of

³⁴⁸ Philip Monk, Liz Magor (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986), p.5

the human species.”³⁴⁹ The book portrays “a relation of hand to things, but rather than a relation of hand to predetermined object, it is a sculptural process of making, the unformed brought to formation, that is indicated.”³⁵⁰ The book, as her other projects, confronts the process of making art to the ever changing process of life, biological and societal.

This interaction between the artist and matter, evident in Magor’s early work, has become less evident in recent work. The overt processural aspects of making have become secondary aspects of Magor’s current work. Gone are the presses that indicated process, and the residues. Kept is the notion that human beings mould themselves to existing societal, and cultural demands. Magor’s interest with the notion of impression is still evident, but has become theoretical. Her early wish to participate in natural and social changes, as moved to a position that her book on bakers illustrates: from one of making towards one of attending to machines. As the machines do the work, the worker attends by cleaning, oiling, and sharpening the machine; the attendant does all the auxiliary tasks.

For Simondon, the attendant has a role that is below the technical individuality, while the role above the technical individuality, is one of organising and supervising the various machines, and their relations within an ensemble. Both positions are not at the same level as the technical object. Either one is helping the machine, or managing it. For Simondon, culture needs to acknowledge the machine as an equal.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 27

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 27

That is why he sees a problem with both roles of attendant and supervisor. What he offers as a solution, is to become part of the technical, the way an artisan is.

Simondon takes as model the relationship that exists between artisan, tool, and world, as a basis to understand technology. For Simondon, the artisan is at the same level as a technical object, because she, or he applies an action upon nature through a tool, which makes this tool both a vehicle of action, and of information, within the relation human-tool-world. The tool becomes a relay. In the case of the worker watching the bread machine, Simondon would say that he or she is under the technical individual, as it is only a work that is peripheral to the machine; the machine can function on its own. It only needs to be “fed”. An appropriate relation for Simondon is one that the worker is involved with the machine, which he also terms a technical individual. Magor’s images are not specific enough to reveal the type of relation that the workers have with machines.

The changes that have led workers to be replaced by machines have created a malaise, as the machine is perceived as having taken the role of the worker. The worker is not anymore besides the machine, but either above as organiser, or below as server. Simondon believes that for humans to have a function that makes sense around machines, it is necessary for each employee involved with a technical task, to understand the machine from the top as well as from the bottom. For Simondon, by understanding the technical object, the relationship between human and machine

will become stable and valid [*Il est nécessaire que l'objet technique soit connu en lui-même pour que la relation de l'homme à la machine devienne stable et valide*].³⁵¹

Liz Magor's early work with presses can be said to be an answer to Simondon's call for a better understanding of the technical object. Her wish to feel part of a process is performed by her own casting of forms. This is why it is important for Magor to include the presses along with the produced forms. This search for comfort was initially felt through physical work. The initial act of pressing material is revisited in the latest work, but here Magor's inquiry examines the adherence itself of matter onto matter, such as foam laminated onto a resin surface, but also of bodies that could snuggle within these tree trunks and sleeping bags. Magor encourages the viewer to consider entering her work, not as process in this case, but as one does with everyday objects, such as furniture and clothes, by adhering to them. Let us take a closer look at Magor's interest in interiority through the sculptural prescriptions of Minimalism.

Minimalism

Magor's interests with interiority may partly be a delayed historical response to work, issues, and debates of the 1960s, concerning Minimalism and Michael Fried. Two points come to mind. First, Donald Judd in his 1965 text *Specific Objects* criticises sculptures that are "made part by part, by addition, composed", which

³⁵¹ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, p. 81-82

would make “specific elements... separate from the whole, thus setting up relationships within the work.” It is the relational aspect between elements that Judd, and also Robert Morris reject, in favor of work that values wholeness, singleness, indivisibility, emphasising its being as one thing, “open and extended, more or less environmental.” Secondly, Michael Fried’s critical text, *Art and Objecthood*, where Minimalists, or literalists as he initially wrote, make pieces that are *hollow*³⁵² (Fried’s emphasis), which Robert Morris would later refer to as being an unimportant aspect of minimalist sculpture.³⁵³

Magor seems to simultaneously acknowledge and go beyond both the minimalists and Fried. Her work is not made, per se, part by part, as most work is a single object; yet it contradicts Judd’s prescription that it “isn’t necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting.”³⁵⁴ In fact, Magor encourages close inspection of her work. The use of various materials, textures it, and become details to inspect, such as the bricks from *Production*, which allows bits of newsprint texts to be seen, and read.

The work makes use of, and extends Minimalism’s prescriptions, by actively celebrating the material used. Magor’s surface treatment can be interpreted as a

³⁵² Michael Fried, ‘Art and Objecthood’, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 151

³⁵³ Robert Morris, ‘Notes on Sculpture, Part 2’, *Continuous Projects Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 1993), p. 15

³⁵⁴ Donald Judd, ‘Specific Objects’, p. 4, Originally published in *Arts Yearbook 8*, 1965, homepage.newschool.edu/~quigleyt/vcs/judd-so.pdf

repudiation of some of Robert Morris' early observations and prescriptions on minimalist sculptures, mainly the immediate perception of a work as a gestalt; the absence of space when encountering small, intimate objects; and the opposition he creates between works "formed by clear decision," which he opposes to work that he feels are like "groping craft,"³⁵⁵ suggesting a disdain for handling matter.

Judd, in his *Specific Objects* article, acknowledges the various new materials used in the art of the time, mostly industrial. He resists celebrating them, stating that "There is an objectivity to obdurate identity of a material," acknowledging the individuality of each material, and their qualities such as "hard mass, soft mass, thickness of 1/32, 1/16, 1/8 inch, pliability, slickness, translucency, dullness." These are said to have "unobjective uses"³⁵⁶ meaning that the use of these qualities obscures the obdurate quality of a material with illusionism, or relationship between parts.

This being said, to encounter a work by Donald Judd today, reveals an artist who had a deep affection for materials and their sensuousness. His interdiction to touch his work is aimed at preserving an achieved aspect that gives it its specificity. In fact Judd is aware, and makes us aware that to touch is to alter, as the oil from our fingers would spoil the perfectly polished material, and its various colourings, whose reflectivity plays such an important part in our visual pleasure. Briony Fer

³⁵⁵ Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 3', *Continuous Projects Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, p. 33

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5

has interpreted this simultaneous invitation and frustration as an embodiment of an anxiety lying deep at the heart of Judd's sensual works.³⁵⁷

As with Ed Ruscha's work, and the vinyl record, Judd's work underlines the fact that mass produced and industrial material are prone to modifications, obsolescence, and disappearance. His *Untitled* (1976) (fig.26), consisting of fifteen different box-like sculptures, all made of ¾" Douglas fir plywood, is an example of the high degree of craftsmanship that Judd demanded for his work. What caught my attention when I encountered the work at the Dia Beacon was the plywood; it just didn't look like regular plywood. Most of Judd's plywood work from the 1970s was in fact made with a special grade of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) plywood, called Marine Plywood.³⁵⁸ Though available as a commercially grade plywood at the time, and used as flooring, and not meant to be seen, this type of plywood, used in *Untitled* (1976), allows the work today to function as a time marker. Plywood production has changed since the work was produced, due to new forest management, and the reduced size of available trees to produce the veneer needed for the construction of plywood.³⁵⁹ Lingering around Judd's plywood boxes eventually led to consider another aspect of today's wood production: its slow eradication as a material from our everyday, replaced by various wood ersatz.

³⁵⁷ Briony Fer, 'Judd's Specific Objects', in *On Abstract Art*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 130-151.

³⁵⁸ Francesca Esmay and Roger Griffith, 'An Investigation of Cleaning Methods for Untreated Wood', WAG, 2004, n.p., cool.conservation-us.org/coolaic/sg/wag/.../esmay_griffith_04.pdf

³⁵⁹ I would like to thank Francesca Esmay, conservator for the Panza Collection for precisions.

Both Judd and Magor demand and propose various ways to perceive art: close, far, stationary, in movement, intimately, or not. Judd attempts to give materials a voice by restraining the metaphor, the illusions, while Magor emphasizes the emotional aspects that materials can infer, and their ability to transform the one transforming the material itself. The same is true of Judd, as he is interested in exploring the new materials available, and the possibility of stretching the notion of art: "Most of the new materials are not as accessible as oil on canvas and are hard to relate to one another. They aren't obviously art."³⁶⁰ Judd pays close attention to the possibilities of these new materials, as much as Magor insists on close inspection of her work; both are obsessed with surfaces.

Close contact between body, clothes and objects is the central preoccupation of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark. Her work examines the layering that occurs between skin, materials and various types of touching occur, as if temporarily laminating surfaces. While Magor's work is ultimately meant for a viewer, Clark's work could only exist as an encounter with someone else.

³⁶⁰ Donald Judd, 'Specific Object', p. 5

Lygia Clark

Going beyond sculpture's surface, and indeed celebrating the sensuous pleasures of the body, as well as art making, Lygia Clark, (1920-88) had a conception of art as a vital activity, one that focuses on the modification of the spectator, to be achieved through the moulding of their emotions. Never formally associated with Conceptual art, her work has been discussed as being systematic and conceptual.

The description of Conceptual art as being theoretical and objective, are in fact adjectives that Clark's work stands in opposition, starting from her early involvement with the Brazilian Neoconcrete movement, that flourished briefly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In its manifesto, *Manifesto Neoconcreto* (1959), written by poet Ferreira Gullar, the Neoconcrete movement took up a position against the Concrete movement, which was seen as being dangerously rationalist. The Concrete movement, whose members were artists and poets, arose at a time when Brazil was going through "an intense period of industrialization and urbanization that highlighted the nation's momentary yet seemingly unlimited faith in modernity."³⁶¹

For the Neoconcrete movement, the artwork has to prevail against theories; it has to encourage intuition against mathematical and scientific objectivity,³⁶² as championed by the Concrete movement. The use of mathematics as an a priori

³⁶¹ Michael Ashbury, 'Neoconcretism and Minimalism :On Ferreira Gullar's Theory of the Non-Object', *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Kobena Mercer (ed) (Cambridge,Massachussets, London, England:MIT Press, 2005)

³⁶² *Lygia Clark, de l'oeuvre à l'événement* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005), p.7

formula for poetry was theorised and articulated by Concrete poets Haroldo and Augusto Campos in their *Da Psicologia da Composicao a Matematica da Composicao* (From Psychology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition). The Concrete movement was based in São Paulo, Brazil's industrial centre, whereas the Neoconcrete movement originated in Rio de Janeiro, seen as the cultural center of Brazil.

The work of Lygia Clark does not only belong to the realm of art, it is also therapeutic, displacing her work from public space that defined her work as art, to a private setting that functioned primarily as one of healing, with Clark working as a therapist. Initially her work encompassed several participants/spectators, eventually becoming an exchange between a client and herself, through the use of objects, which she termed *objetos relacionai*, or relational objects (fig.27). These objects, all hand made by Clark, were used to stimulate the patient during the therapeutic process. The artwork could be said to explore the limit of the prehensible and nameable.

Looking at these relational objects outside of their use, and on their own reveals their sculptural aspects. The use of various materials seems at first to indicate more of an interest in heterogenous materials, assembled as a small sculpture. But the mode of assembly suggests a practical use, a function of some sort, over and above formal aspect. These sculpture are in deed instruments, whose role is to perceive various tensions from the body, and eventually, throughout the therapeutic process,

release them. The relational objects play an important and active role in Clark's clinic.

Is it possible as a viewer to recover the experiential in the case of Clark's work? At rest, once the experience is over, these objects are mute. Curator Guy Brett mentions that it would be a purist attitude to believe that the initial context of the work has value, while the rest, the documentation, the films, the photographs, and the objects themselves are travesties. These are in fact already part of the process of memorization. What Brett asks is how can all these mediating activities and objects renew the creative cycle that was active in the initial work?³⁶³ This is a similar question to the one I asked myself upon encountering the objects from the Art Metropole collection. Whereas those objects were meant to circulate, Clark's objects belong to her practice, a practice located at the institutional margins of art and clinic. For Clark's clients, much depended on becoming sensitive to perceptions.

The relational objects were put to use in a practice that she called *Estruturação do Self* (Structuration of Self). This work was conceived in 1976, and used for the rest of her life. In her apartment, Clark would receive her clients for sessions that would last one hour, three times a week, for months, if not years in some cases. Her client would lie down on a couch, wearing only underwear, as the skin of the patient needs to make full contact with Clark's relational objects. For her, the initial positioning of

³⁶³ Guy Brett, *Carnival of Perception. Selected Writings on Art* (London: inIVA, 2004), p. 14

the lying body, its weight on the couch, would already create openings, grooves, where the body would accommodate itself.³⁶⁴

This type of form taking differs from Magor's, as for her one material adheres to an already existing surface, conforming to it, whereas in Clark's case, both surfaces conform to each other, accommodating each other. In fact the work of Clark became more and more dedicated to accommodating the body, to search for what the body needed, and choosing the appropriate object, which meant, to take into consideration the weight, or lack of weight of the object. Each invented relational object had different possibilities, so as to stimulate the client's overall sensorium.

The emphasis on the objects touching the body, and the reaction to them, potentially varying from client to client, almost seems to go beyond words. Metaphors might be the closest one could get to relay these feelings. To understand, one would need to be handed one of Clark's objects, and be allowed to play with it. Many are easy to construct: take a plastic bag, such as a grocery bag, a rubber band, and a pebble. Inflate the bag, seal it with the rubber band, and place the pebble into one of the corners of the bag. Then, squeeze the bag, gently and slowly. This is an enjoyable and playful activity; from this type of action between body and object, Clark sought to cure its user, her client. One can appreciate the sensual aspects of the act, and its ephemerality. The description might at first seem to indicate that it is a massage-like therapy, meant for the body only, but the process was one that addressed the

³⁶⁴ Suely Rolik, 'D'une cure pour temps dénués de poésie', *Lygia Clark, de l'oeuvre à l'événement* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005), p. 13

emotional and the traumatic. For Clark, the body memorised the traumatic, which the relational object would “flush” out (*affleurer*, as psychotherapist, and art critic Suely Rolik says) and treat. Clark used the relational object as an instrument to pin point these memories. Her relational objects were used from the 1970s till her death in 1988.

Psychologist Lula Wanderley has identified the relational object as not only an object to be perceived, but to be imagined, “lived in an imaginary inwardness of the body.”³⁶⁵ The objects are indeed felt, but they must be perceived not only as sensations, but as stimulating the imagination and emotions. The use of the word “lived” emphasises that Clark’s objects are meant for the body as a whole, both for the sensual and the conceptual. Contact between skin and the objects is to initiate the process of the “lived.”

The work proposes transformations in opposites that are thought to be mutually exclusive: body and mind, inside and outside, the real and the imaginary, masculine and feminine, art and life. Clark’s “cultural artifacts” are to bring about “a psychic transformation in the here and now.” She described her work not as art, but as “preparation for life”.³⁶⁶ Her insistence that it was not art, expanded its definition, as she ventured into another territory, the therapeutic, to expand its practice. Clark felt that her interests were outside of art’s interests therefore she had to create her own

³⁶⁵ Guy Brett, p.29

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 30

territory³⁶⁷, between art and the clinic. This new territory, Suelly Rolnik calls it poetry; poetry is to wash one's hands with a soap bar, knowing that it is a sculpture.³⁶⁸

A description of some relational objects might help to engage the possibilities of working with them. Certain objects would be given specific names, such as *Grande Colchào* [Big Mattress], a thick plastic cushion, filled with polystyrene marbles, and covered with a loose sheet where the client would lie down during the session. Clark would make use of other relational objects to press the body of her client into the mattress, as a way to give form [*enformer*], as a milliner would.

Several of her objects were made of plastic grocery bags, filled either with air, water, sand, seashells, or seeds. These would be placed at various places on the body, sometimes covered by the client's shirt. Others were made using deep-sea diving tubes, placed either between the legs, near the bellybutton, or by the ear. Clark would also use the tube as a way to blow, and warm certain areas of the body, or to emit various sounds.

Clark carefully chooses her objects, and how they were to be put to use. Rolnik distinguishes various modes of touching that were initiated by Clark: massaging, rubbing, scrubbing, caressing, brushing, squeezing, pressing, grazing,

³⁶⁷ Surely Rolnik, 'La savonette est une sculpture', *Lygia Clark, de l'oeuvre à l'événement* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005), p. 89

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 89

blowing/insufflating, panting, warming up, covering, wrapping, making sounds, or just resting on the client's body.³⁶⁹ The objects were used to answer the demands of the body, throughout the process. These needs would orient Clark's choices, both sequentially and in use. How did Clark know what her client's body needed?

Clark refers to what psychologist Donald Winnicott calls "the good-enough mother", the adult that tends to recognize the variable bodily signs of the child, the vibratile body of the child, and lets herself be affected by them, and gives signs in response. The work of Clark consists in mobilizing her client's "memory's micro-sensoriality" residing in the body [*mémoire de la micro-sensorialité*].

Clark differentiates between macro and micro-sensoriality: Macro-sensoriality is the relationship the body has between itself and the environment, the forms that we are familiar with, perceived as separated from the body. Micro-sensoriality is to perceive the rapport between things as a constant rhythm, which extend from "Mozart to the movements of soccer on the beach" [*qui s'étend de Mozart aux gestes du football sur la plage*].³⁷⁰ The body is a vibratile body via its micro-sensoriality. In her therapeutic work, the client's body imagines its parts changing through being touched by the relational object: the becoming-sand of the belly, or the becoming-cloud of the whole body. The relational object, as it meets the body, also becomes vibrational, such as through its polystyrene marbles. There is an exchange between body and world. The client must let her or his imagination play with the perceived

³⁶⁹ Suely Rolik, 'D'une cure pour temps dénués de poésie', p.13

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 14

sensations. A client that would identify the sensations as being matter-of-fact evidences such as “leaves touching me” or “ the sound of paper”, would be asked to leave, as no work is being done. The client must phantasise. The cure demands it.

For those who feel threatened by the world, the body becomes limited in its movement. Pains are felt. Clark sees the body as absorbing the various forces that affect it, texturing it, creating sensations that will be part of memory. Clark’s work is to address these memories by locating and unlocking them through her various uses of the relational objects. The memories are summoned by stimulating the body, by touching the body, as it needs to be.

Since she died, Lygia Clark’s work has re-entered the art world. Various modes of display have been used to explain her work and objects. For the public of museums and biennales, the re-enactment becomes entertainment, as they remain outside of the experience, while an actual participant would take part in an experience, becoming aware of the force of the micro-sensorial: the silence, the temporal continuity, and the various aspects of sensing.³⁷¹

The work of Clark does not reside only in the objects. All her life she attempted to elaborate the object’s roll as a catalyst for transformation. The objects or simple material, such as large sheets of plastic, become props to accentuate the body’s

³⁷¹ Ibid, note 65, p. 25

sensations. The work celebrates its own making. The unused relational objects become mute, as much as any ceremonial object is mute if unused.

I am looking at these relational objects as photographs. I look at them as sculptures. I look at them as sculptures in action. I remember similar experiences, looking at these photographs. I have made simple objects that either produce strange sounds, provoke agreeable sensations on the skin of my hands, or at times feelings of anxiety depending on my posture. Many might also recognize from their own life occurrences that would be similar to the feeling some of Clark's objects produce.

What I find fascinating and important in Clark's work is her insistence on the meeting of the body and material. The various possibilities of touching and being touched, as listed by Rolnik, are not without relationship to François Laplantine's own interest in modalities. The relational objects are not meant to become static objects. They are not instruments with specific functions; these relational objects can be altered depending on the demands of the patient's body. The relational object is open to information from the body, resembling Simondon's technical object, functioning only when integrated within the world.

Guy Brett quotes artist Susan Hiller, who believes that art is "a first-order practice, as important as sociology, psychology, physics, politics, or whatever." Art in many ways insists on modalities and variations, either by overtly placing itself in our way, or by being inserted subtly, if not secretly in various mass medias. Or, again, it is an

encounter with an everyday thing, or occurrence that one might privately defined as art, resembling either the mystics' own fascination with the "anodin", the trivial, as revelatory: "What is of fundamental importance is inseparable from the insignificant. This is what makes the anodyne stand out in bold relief. Something stirs within the everyday. The mystic discourse transforms the detail into myth; it catches hold of it, blows it out of proportion, multiplies it, divinises it. It makes it into its own kind of historicity,"³⁷² or belonging to Robert Smithson's wishes: "A great artist can make art by simply casting a glance. A set of glances can be as solid as anything or place..."³⁷³ Something provokes the mystic as much as something, perceived by Smithson instills in him the urge to glance at it as art.

A slight variation, a barely perceptible relief, the micro-sensorial as Clark would say, is also what François Laplantine urges us to pay attention to, with his prescription for an *anthropologie modale*: "While walking, we'll orient ourselves towards an horizon of knowledge which is no more an anthropology of sign or structure, but of rhythm." [*Nous orienteront chemin faisant vers un horizon de connaissance qui n'est plus celui d'une anthropologie du signe ou de la structure, mais du rythme*]"³⁷⁴

Laplantine understands the body as perpetually becoming, while insisting that it still can be described. This demands an attentive form of writing; "it is to have recourse to a writing of time and of the multiple, or to invent it" [*C'est avoir recours à*

³⁷² Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Michael B. Smith (tr.), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.10

³⁷³ As quoted by Guy Brett, p. 14

³⁷⁴ François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible*, p. 11

une écriture du temps et du multiple, ou plutôt l'inventer].³⁷⁵ Inventing this type of writing is similar to Clark's invention of her own space between art and clinic. I believe that this is exactly what many Conceptual artists attempted through their "linguistic turn"; ways of describing, so as to keep the "artifact", the "thing", in movement. Animated.

For Laplantine, taking cues from Gilles Deleuze, a writing of the *multiple* means a writing that is not made of juxtapositions, or of accumulation, which he calls *pluriel*, or plural, but one that proceeds from an activity that is one of modulation, and sometimes of moulding. It is a constant working of the material, calling for a mode of knowledge that is not structural, but modal.³⁷⁶ To analyse, and to write, is to think as "an elaboration of thinking through movement" [*une pensée qui s'élabore dans le mouvement*], a thinking that come to be through active doing, making, dancing and walking. Nietzsche recounts in his *Ecce Homo* that the idea of his Zarathustra came to be while wandering through the woods alongside of the lake of Silvaplana, while advising that moving will secure one against indigestion: "Sit as little as possible; do not believe any idea that was not born in the open air and of free movement—in which the muscles do not also revel. All prejudices emanate from the bowels. — Sitting still (I said it once already)—the real sin against the holy ghost."³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 35

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 37

³⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Duncan Large (tr.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 21

Both Clark and Laplantine want to critique and dismantle the opposition-couple that is often made between thinking and abstraction, placed in opposition to sensation. For them, thinking and feeling [*l'intelligible et le sensible*] need not be separated. The emotive is within the body, as is the thinking process.

* *
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As mentioned earlier, Clark's relational objects are for the most part made of everyday, cheap stuff. The fragility of the objects demands that they be rebuilt, or replaced. This fragility, such as the blown plastic bag, attached with rubber band, and the pebble it surrounded, needs to be experienced, yet will probably not achieve similar results as it would in therapy.

Clark's objects may not look like therapeutic objects, or objects to monitor the body, such as we encounter with every visit to our medical doctor, or with the inventions of Étienne-Jules Marey, such as the dynamograph, the chronograph, the densigraph, the hypsograph, and the calorigraph.³⁷⁸ Yet, through use, they achieve similar goals as medical machines, becoming known to the user, in this case Clark. The difference is that Clark's objects are malleable, reacting to both the therapist and the client. Their use is not direct as a thermometer, an acupuncture needle, or even massage oil are. The relational objects rely on a degree of improvisation, of guessing, and hesitation. Clark is seeking and using subtle gradients so as to simultaneously be able to modify her use of the relational objects, while taking into account the client's reactions.

³⁷⁸ Edwin Carels, 'Biometry and Antibodies: Modernizing Animation/ Animating Modernity', *Animism*, Anselm Franke (ed) (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), p. 69

The relational object does not give specific treatments, nor have specific properties. They are not special, if only that one rediscovers, or finds the unusual within their material familiarity, and through new reconfigurations of body gestures, such as Paul Valery writes in *L'âme et la danse*: “Our steps are so easy and familiar that they never have the honor of being considered on their own, as strange acts” [*Nos pas nous sont si faciles et si familiers qu'ils n'ont jamais l'honneur d'être considérés en eux-mêmes comme des actes étranges*].³⁷⁹

The banal, everyday movement, or gesture becoming the basis for art, was already evident in the work of early twentieth-century choreographer Rudolf Laban (1879-1958), and eventually brought to a radical simplicity by dancer Anna Halprin and her student Yvonne Rainer in the 1960s, who removed the modalities, the accents of the everyday movement, as to explore the factual. Like these dancers, Clark is exploring a non-commoditised movement, a modest movement, a zone of “doing/making nothing” [*rien faire*].³⁸⁰ This making nothing corresponds to the work of Conceptual artists, working at the same time as both Rainer and Clark. The removal of gestural modalities produced the strangeness of these everyday movements, what dancers of the 1960s referred to as found gesture, gestural ready-mades.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Laurence Louppe, ‘Lygia Clark n’en finit pas de traverser nos corps’, *Lygia Clark: de l’oeuvre à l’événement*, p. 38

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 38

³⁸¹ Ibid, p.38



Probably the most evocative piece of Clark, emphasizing subjectivity, is *Caminhando* (Trailing, or Walking Alone) (fig.28), from 1964. The piece consists of a paper Moëbius band, which is to be cut length-wise, using a pair of scissors. The work does not consist only of the cut paper. It is the action led by the paper band. While cutting, one must avoid the severing of the band, so as to continue, as long as possible, the continuous trailing of paper cutting. One can always choose, as approaching a previously cut section, to continue either to the right, or left of the opening. Clark writes: "This is a decisive notion of choice. The unique sense of the experience resides with the act of doing. The work, it is your act." [*Cette notion de choix est décisive. L'unique sens de cette expérience réside dans l'acte de le faire. L'oeuvre, c'est votre acte*].³⁸² *Caminhando* can be made/experienced by anyone, and is individual to each person. What is emphasised is the act itself; the experience is to exist beyond the sayable. This suggests the famous ending of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."³⁸³ The emphasis on silence points towards experiences and usage.

While the *Tractatus* considered sentences had meaning or sense because they were like pictures, Wittgenstein's later thinking approached the sentence as one acquiring meaning through its use, or application. He became interested in everyday language,

³⁸² *Lygia Clark: de l'oeuvre à l'événement*, p. 45. First published as Lygia Clark, 'Fusion Généralisée', *Robho*, no 4, 1968, pp. 12-19

³⁸³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C.K. Ogden (tr.) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1983), p. 189

moving away from his early interest for a metaphysics of language. Learning language became for him part of a communal activity, such as playing games, where the various rules need to be learned, not prior to playing, but through playing: "It is through sharing in the playing of language-games that language is connected with our life."³⁸⁴ Language becomes rooted in the experiencing of the everyday.

Lygia Clark emphasises the experience of making over the use of language. Her therapy avoids the usual reliance on the verbal. Her client might want to tell her a story, to which she would answer, "If you knew your story, you wouldn't be here. Undress, lie down, and we will start working."³⁸⁵

This reinstating of the subjective experience as part of the Neoconcretism movement suggests a different reading of two philosophers who were important for Minimalists and Conceptualists: Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. For the Americans, and some European artists of the time, the subjective seems to only address the body as maker of movements, providing data, without emotions. Art historian Anna Dezeuze suggests that existing similarities between the Brazilian movement and the Euro-American one differ greatly on one aspect: intimacy.

Dezeuze makes reference to the work and writing of both Donald Judd and Robert Morris, with their own interest in phenomenology, to articulate her point that these

³⁸⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, from *Philosophische Grammatik*, quoted in Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p.163

³⁸⁵ *Lygia Clark: de l'oeuvre à l'événement*, p. 60

two artists in fact could be aligned with their critic, Michael Fried, when compared to the Neoconcrete movement. The reason for this overall grouping is their overall resistance towards closeness and intimacy towards the objects they are encountering, whereas the Neoconcrete artists encourage such interaction through direct handling and touching: “Donald] Judd’s works clearly differ, however, from ... [Lygia] Clark’s *Bichos* in one crucial sense: the sensory pleasures which they invite are not, in fact, tactile.” Judd’s words “You look and think, and look and think, until it makes sense, becomes interesting” are used by Dezeuze to contrast with the South American artists: “for them, you need to look, *touch* and think.”³⁸⁶

Furhter, Anna Dezeuze, quoting David Raskin, proposes that Judd was in fact more influenced by behaviorism than phenomenology, and that “the behaviourist holds that the real world exists in a meaningful manner outside of our engagement with it,” having Judd privileging the condition of the object, while the Neoconcrete acknowledge the object as being part of the world. Plus, a Brazilian interpretation of Merleau-Ponty encourages the thinking of body and soul, as being in-dissociable, or what Laplantine, having himself lived in Brazil for many years, calls attention to: the separation that has traditionally been held, between sensation and reason: “The question of binarity does not only concern the opposition between sensations and reason (with this perspective, the former coming to perturb the later), but the distinction, which all of European philosophy agrees upon, and consists of separating sensations from emotions, and even more, sensations from sentiments.”

³⁸⁶ Anna Dezeuze, ‘Minimalism and Neoconcretism’, <http://us.macmillan.com/author/annadezeuze> (accessed Oct. 2, 2010)

[*La binarité en question ne concerne pas seulement l'opposition entre les sensations et la raison (les premières venant dans cette perspective perturber la seconde), mais la distinction, qui fait l'unanimité de la philosophie européenne, et qui consiste à séparer les sensations et les émotions, et plus encore les sensations et les sentiments*].³⁸⁷ The separation of sensation from emotion Anna Dezeuze locates it again in the work of Judd, Morris and Fried. Notice how Laplantine's modality distinguishes emotion from sentiment, with the former as something *que vous ressentez*, and the later is something *que vous éprouvez*.



As I discussed earlier, Judd insists on the obdurate qualities of materials, their matter-of-factness. This does not imply that his various choices of material are to only be approached, as Dezeuze suggests, as things to see. Judd experiences these various materials, by working with them, and by finding appropriate modes of display, including awareness to both light and space. Perhaps less noticeable would be also the smells of the various materials, mainly if we consider the heat of the Texas desert, where several of his works are installed. Recently, sound artist Stephen Vitiello³⁸⁸ has recorded a variety of sound from these sculptures in Marfa, Texas. Judd makes use of material that is part of our everyday, triggering our own memory of materials, of our experiences of wood, steel, Plexiglas or concrete.

More specifically, Bryoni Fer identifies Judd's choice of material as a negotiation with touch. By choosing industrial materials like Plexiglas over more conventional

³⁸⁷ François Laplantine, *Le social et le sensible*, p. 151

³⁸⁸ Stephen Vitiello, *Listening to Donald Judd*, Sub Rosa, Brussels, 2007

sculptural material such as bronze, Judd needs to prohibit touch as a way to preserve the material's fragility and pristine aspect, whereas with bronze, to touch only adds to its patina. Each material reacts differently to fingerprints.

Clark's objects belong to the tradition of Brazilian Baroque carnivals, as her art is not to be found in her static objects "but in rituals."³⁸⁹ Rituals often include touching other bodies, exactly what created anxiety in Judd, Morris and Fried. But we should not forget that anxiety is felt, *éprouvée*, in this case, by the artist, Judd. The sensations that occur during the making of a work of art are not always evident for the viewer. While Clark's work insists on touching her client/spectator, Judd touches his material towards a specific end, denying any further contact. His work does invoke touch by insisting on preserving a uniform surface, and this denial is "exacerbated by the impersonal quality, the fact that [the materials] are brought in, rather moulded and fabricated by the artist's hand."³⁹⁰

Judd's work was never intended to be used as Clark's relational objects were. In fact he was less concerned with the spectator than his objects. Yet, by insisting on the physical presence of his objects, Judd not only presents the spectator with a meticulously crafted object, but positions his work in such ways as to incite an encounter that needs to be experienced temporally. One needs to linger, look, move around, and like Laplantine's prescription for anthropology: to be attentive. In his early writing, Judd paid close attention to works, such as Dan Flavin's fluorescent

³⁸⁹ Angelo Farias, 'Apollo in the Tropics: Constructivist Art in Brazil', , *Brazil: Body and Soul*. p. 402

³⁹⁰ Briony Fer, 'Judd's Specific Objects', p. 151

light sculptures, that many would only glance at. By lingering long enough, Judd noticed that his eyes, adjusted to the dark room and to the green fluorescent lights, perceived that the natural light coming through a window took on a strange aspect: "After a while natural light seen through the window seemed rose and the green seemed normal."³⁹¹ Judd had taken note of the transformation that occurs with one's sensorium in controlled space.

Experiencing subtle changes is a characteristic of both Judd and Clark's work, as well as Magor's, with her interest in process. While Clark's objects were ephemeral, Magor and Judd were very much concerned with the physical presence of their work. The same can be said of the work of Franz West, whose own interest with touch is concerned with libidinal pleasure.

Franz West

The work of Franz West (b.1947) serves here the purpose, my purpose, of re-introducing the object as a primary concern in art, as it was for Judd. A concern for those who want to make something, not only observe and take notice, as Robert Smithson suggested with his set of glances –as this aspects ignores the joys of making something, of working with matter. Fetishisation? Perhaps, but still an instance of art that seems to be denigrated as an older model, as if new work was

³⁹¹ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 66

only one of managing information, and transferring it to someone, somewhere else, for fabrication.

The striving towards the immaterial, or the dematerialisation of the object, was pursued not only by conceptualists, but also by performance artists. Peggy Phelan has argued that the ephemeral quality of performance art is unique, as it “enacts in disappearance.”³⁹² In her book *Unmarked*, Phelan writes that by being “marked,” is a means by which identity becomes fixed, whereas being “unmarked” can become “a powerful tool against fixed and therefore hegemonic representations.”³⁹³

Performance art is often mentioned as an early influence on Franz West, mainly those of the *Wiener Aktionismus*, the Viennese Actionism. The provocative performances of Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, acted as protest against the conservative Vienna of the early 1960s, perhaps a sort of exorcism of Austria’s National Socialist past. Having witnessed Hermann Nitsch’s *Fest des psycho-physischen Naturalismus* (Festival of Psycho-Physical Naturalism) in Nitsch’s Perintegasse studio in Vienna in 1963, West, then sixteen, decided that one could either become a participant to these performances, or a follower, imitating their work. West wanted to go beyond their destructiveness, and offer something constructive. In becoming an artist, he chose neither. A series of

³⁹² Linda M. Montano, *Letters from Linda M. Montano*, Jennie Klein (ed), (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.xii

³⁹³ Ibid

drawings, *Zeichnungen in Aktionismusgeschmack*, 1974-79 (Drawings in Actionist Taste) mocks his elders' obsession with bodily fluids.

West does make use of the notion of the performative, and the potential for interaction between spectator and sculpture, eschewing Phelan's dichotomy between *marked* and *unmarked*, as he feels his sculptural objects to be incomplete without their users. His early pieces, though influenced by performance, were not concerned as Happenings were, with collaboration between artist and spectators. West eventually saw the Actionists and their way of life as a sort of 'Disneyland',³⁹⁴ not unlike the way Ed Ruscha saw the work of the Abstract Expressionist becoming recipe-like. If the Actionist movement had any influence on West, it is to lead him into the opposite direction.

Minimalism for West served as a trampoline, a way to distance himself from the Actionists. He found in Minimalism a positive influence on his work, "something really extraordinary."³⁹⁵ West is not interested in slick industrial products, nor is he interested in clarity, and precise geometrical forms, important aspects of the movement. In fact, it is a Minimalism seen through the work of painter Cy Twombly (fig.29), which modified West's understanding of Minimalism. Twombly's paintings led West to "associate Minimal Art less with standardized, industrially manufactured components (which at the time was like a positivist hypertrophy), but rather with what was happening when you let a drop fall, the resulting mark –it

³⁹⁴ Franz West, *Pensées Features Interview Anthology* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2003), p. 16

³⁹⁵ Ibid

helped me understand that as minimalist.”³⁹⁶ A simple, accidental drop of paint became synonymous with Minimalism.

Gestalt theory served to articulate artistic concerns, both for the Minimalists (mainly Robert Morris), and Franz West, opening new avenues for their art production. Both artists made use of the theory of form, but in different ways, with results that are not unlike the various results Neoconcretism and Minimalism arrived at; aspects of intimacy and sexuality are again central to this difference. Morris, as mentioned previously, privileges shape, scale and mass, as he is trying to articulate “the distinctive concerns of sculpture.”³⁹⁷ For him, colours and the physical properties of surfaces and materials are distracting, and need to be regulated.

Of importance for Morris is the inclusion of the exhibiting field as relevant to the sculpture’s perception, mainly its illumination. Lighting the work is an important consideration for him, as well as for Judd, emphasising the importance of proper placement for an optimal encounter with the work. Morris’ initial use of Gestalt theory emphasizes the form’s invariant underlying shape. Contrary to Morris, Gestalt theory for West places “the ambiguity of perception at the centre of his sculptural works,”³⁹⁸ by offering ambiguous objects for the spectator’s own psychic

³⁹⁶ Franz West, ‘On Cy Twombly’s Semantic Loop’, *Cy Twombly, States of Mind: Paintings, Sculpture, Photography, Drawing*, Achim Hochdörfer (ed) (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst, 2009), p. 170

³⁹⁷ Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, p. 237

³⁹⁸ Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra, *Franz West* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p.44

and physical use, acknowledging the physicality of sculpture, and that “the objects enter into us.”³⁹⁹



Gilbert Simondon in his *Cours sur la perception*⁴⁰⁰ enumerates the most important aspects of the psychology of form:

-perceived isolated elements have a tendency to be perceived as a group, structured, organized, as constellations, or columns or rows of letters on a page. Within the field there is a spontaneous perceptive organization of forms.

-forms have a tendency to separate themselves as specific ensembles; it is the Figure removing itself from the non-structured background.

-perception implies the perception of significance. Structures are perceived, not objects in their substantiality.

-forms have pregnance (from the German *pragnanz*, in the sense of pregnant with meaning), a force of impression, making it easy to differentiate from a background. Symmetrical and complete forms have more pregnance. Natural forms, such as animals, have a particular pregnance, even if they are asymmetrical.

³⁹⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰⁰ Gilbert Simondon, *Cours sur la perception* (1964-1965) (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2006), pp.94-96

-The good forms (forms with pregnancy) tend to keep their own characteristics, even if the presentation is modified. They are constant.

In his course, Simondon criticises the importance given to geometrical forms in Gestalt theory, to the detriment of biological forms, which following studies of animal perception has since altered theories of perception, and accentuated the importance of colouring, positioning, and movement. These are not absolute, detachable forms recognizable in various contexts, the way geometrical forms are. For animals, in many cases, the form needs to be activated. Simondon writes: “As well, significant forms of the animal world are generally *postures* (my emphasis) instead of abstract and isolated forms.” [*De même, les formes significatives du monde animal sont généralement des postures* (my emphasis) *plutôt que des formes abstraites et isolées*].⁴⁰¹

It is this emphasis on posturing that eventually becomes central to West’s work. West did not read Simondon, but was nonetheless attentive to various psychological states one can experience while making something, encountering something, manipulating something. In an interview with curator Bice Curiger, West compares the encounter with a sculpture to an encounter with another body, rephrasing an important Minimalist concern: “As a body, you stand or walk around the sculpture. It’s almost equivalent to your own corporeality, ... There is something standing here

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, p. 206

that you walk around, and perhaps the impression you have of what is being presented also determines whether the movement is quick or especially slow, depending on whether you are really concentrating.”⁴⁰² He also mentions altered perception due to the sense of falling asleep, stupor, influenced by alcohol, or from exhaustion,⁴⁰³ while his early 1970s pieces called *Passstück* (fig.30), are attempts to give form to neuroses, as I will explain later.

Before proceeding to an analysis of his work, I'll situate historically these early pieces. The early *Passstück*, or *Adaptives* have been compared to Arte Povera, such as Michelangelo Pistoletto's early 1960s *Minus Objects*, or to what Lucy Lippard in 1966 called 'eccentric abstraction,' post-minimalist work, that accentuated process, such as Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, and the "anti-form" of Robert Morris. West mentions the work of Piero Manzoni and Dieter Roth, with their use of non-traditional materials, as early influences. Interestingly, not much has been said about West's relationship with such figures as *die Wiener Gruppe* (the Vienna Group), Walter Pichler and Bruno Gironcoli, the later briefly teaching West at the Vienna Art Academy.

The Vienna Group consisted of poets Friedrich Achleitner, H.C. Artmann, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm, and Oswald Wiener. Their public performances, and interest in language precedes both Happenings and Conceptual art. The group made great use of the writing of Wittgenstein, as a way to go beyond conventional poetry.

⁴⁰² Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra, *Franz West*, p. 8

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 44

Members of the group were involved in the infamous June 7, 1968 evening of *Kunst und Revolution* (Art and Revolution, also the title of a Richard Wagner text), along with Actionists Günter Brus and Otto Muehl, with young West sitting in the audience. The work of the Vienna Group, like the Actionists, was aimed at the conservative politics, and religious Austrian culture following WWII. The group's work is particularly important for West, as they introduced the work of Wittgenstein on language concepts, as a basis to produce art, preceding by several years Conceptual art's own interest with the Austrian philosopher and his philosophy of language. The Vienna Group "constructed fictional art-games, and art personalities in real life. Art became a language-game of fictional elements. This based on Wittgenstein's theory of 'language-games' developed in 1930, published in 1953 in the 'philosophical investigation' (1958, 2nd edition), where meaning of sentences is defined by their use in specific social situations."⁴⁰⁴

Artist and curator Peter Wiebel has recently argued that the work of Oswald Wiener preceded and was more radical than both the British and American Conceptual artists interested in language, as they trusted language, whereas Wiener mistrusted the medium he was criticising: "[A]s the happenings and fluxus-events at the beginning of the sixties took place and were experienced as a sensational innovation by the bourgeois art business, these had already been theoretical positions which the wiener group had already left behind."⁴⁰⁵ Anglo-American Conceptual artists

⁴⁰⁴ Peter Weibel, *the vienna group: a moment of modernity, 1954-1960. the visual works and the actions, Venice Biennale 1997* (Vienna and New York: Springer, 1997), p.778

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid

were working their way through the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* (4.01 The sentence is the image of reality), while the Viennese artists had followed Wittgenstein, going beyond the *Tractatus*, and were experiencing the later texts, where words, as mentioned earlier, behave differently depending on the situation. Language is therefore not a precise picture of the world; one needs to learn its usage.

For Franz West, the relationship between the early precise Wittgenstein, and the later, flexible one, informs his titles, and his use of quotes accompanying his work. Words are there to help. They are both insightful and inadequate. This fuzziness of language is not un-like the fuzziness of Gestalt that intrigues West.

Besides perhaps being the first Austrian to publicly hold a lecture on Wittgenstein in 1960,⁴⁰⁶ Oswald Wiener is important for our understanding of West's work, through his notion and description of the "bio-adapter." Wiener, who was also a member of the architectural and design group *Englische Floote* (English Fleet), with Ernst Graf, Heinz Geretsegger, Hans Hollein, Walter Pichler, and Ingrid Wiener, wrote about a "bio-adapter" in a section of his 1969 novel *die verbesserung von mitteleuropa, roman* (the improvement of central europe). The section, first written in 1965-66, and titled *appendix A: the bio-adapter (for w. pichler)*, first appeared as a catalogue essay for Walter Pichler's first *Prototypen* exhibition in 1967 at the Taxis-Palais in Innsbruck. Wiener's text goes beyond Pichler's own ideas, by proposing that the bio-

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, p.780

adapter “constitutes the first sketch of a complete solution of all world-problems,” by modifying the user’s perception on herself, or himself and the environment. In fact, a human being, described with humour by Wiener, “outside his adapter... is a vulnerable, nervously activated and with respect to language, logic, thinking power, sensory organs and tools miserably equipped lump of slime, trembling with a fear of life and petrified by a fear of death. after the addition of his bio-complement he becomes a sovereign unity which no longer needs the cosmos, nor mastery of it, because this unity ranks strikingly higher than him in the hierarchy of imaginable values.”⁴⁰⁷ It was not the “virtual” or utopian possibilities of the bio-adapter that intrigued West, but “the wearable, touchable dualities of the bio-adapter as physical conduit to be deeply relevant. The matter of modifying, exaggerating, or revealing one’s experience through the adoption of user-controlled objects became a fundamental question of West’s art.”⁴⁰⁸

Though autonomous sculptures,⁴⁰⁹ Pichler’s *Prototypes*, as described by Wiener, become objects to and for use, expanding their initial function. Christine Mehring underlines the connection between both Pichler’s *Prototypes*/bio-adapters and their description by Wiener, to West’s on-going series *Passstück*, started in 1974. These are “extensions for the body that originate in part from the utopian vision of their creator for their user, who may wear and handle them to gain a better sense of his

⁴⁰⁷ Oswald Wiener, *appendixA: the bio adapter (for w.pichler), 1965-66* (<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~hkurz/wiener/ow-1-uk.htm>)

⁴⁰⁸ Franz West, *To Build a House You Start With The Roof* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press; The Baltimore Museum of Art, 2008), p. 61

⁴⁰⁹ Georg Schöllhammer, ‘The Bolted Gesture’, *Pichler, Prototypen/Prototypes 1966-68*, Sabine Breitwieser (ed) (Vienna:Generali Fundatio, 1998), p. 56

or her body and mind –and, specifically, the relationship between them.”⁴¹⁰ The *Passstück* are probably West’s most well-known and discussed pieces, gaining popularity from their handling, which the public is encouraged to do. Here art is not only to be touched, but handled and moved as one would a vacuum cleaner, or a feather boa. It was only in 1980 that these pieces were named by West’s poet-friend Reinhard Priessnitz, who saw them as only fragments, *Stücke*, that needed to go through a process of fitting onto something, *passen*, in order to become whole. The size of the *Passstück (Adaptives)* is appropriate for easy handling; sometimes small enough to fit into one pocket, but never too big to hinder the user. Like Lygia Clark’s objects, the *Adaptives* take into account the human scale. Still, West does not prescribe their use, but suggests that one *can* use them, allowing “more room for individual agency” as Mehring suggests.

Everyday gestures fascinate West, from the waiter carrying his plates through a crowd, to the back and forth movement of vacuuming, or the hands gesturing while one tells a story. We all know these movements, and we have made them, or mimicked them. Yet, they can all differ from one person to another. And what if one started exchanging these gestures, or giving oneself gestural rules, scenarios, such as to vacuum as if drunk, to walk like Chaplin, or dance while reading? One is in fact acting, pretending, creating awareness that is different from the awareness of one’s “natural”, or banal movements that informed the work of Yvonne Rainer and Lygia Clark. Worth mentioning is the importance humour plays in West’s work, absent for

⁴¹⁰ Christine Mehring, ‘Tools of Engagement’, *Artforum*, October, 2008, p. 325

the most part in many of the work I have been writing about. Humor produces various reactions, from a sense of happiness, a smile, to laughter.

Looking at photographs of West's various *Passtücker* in use, one can notice the smiles on many of the users or onlookers of the scene. Some of these photographs do have a more serious aspect, reminiscent of the series of photographs taken between 1965 and 1966 by Actionist Rudolf Schwarzkogler. The black and white photographs⁴¹¹ depict various tableaux, or private performances. Often depicting a single male body, cropped due to the proximity of the camera, or covered by various objects, such as knives, razor blades, wires, along with various forms made of gauze and plaster bandages. The various mises-en-scène between body and objects, or props, suggest and create emotional situations. At times, the hands and torso of a second body becomes part of the situation, often simply touching the principal subject, or administering some sort of treatment. What is of importance considering the work of West, are Schwarzkogler's use of props, and the specific type of material he used. These eccentric shapes made of gauze and plaster bandage are incorporated in West's early work, along with papier-mâché. These medical-related materials were also part of West's home life, as his mother was a dentist. West made use of these in his early work. While Schwarzkogler did manipulate and pose with his objects, West proposes them for an audience, who will be able to manipulate them as they wish.

⁴¹¹ Schwarzkogler, initially a painter, documented his first action in 1965 using colour film. All other actions were photographed on black and white film.

The *Passtücks* have a coarse surface texture, which has since become a trademark of most of West's work. It was an early *Passtücks* that was influenced by Twombly's (fig.30) spirals. It was constructed partly as a way to understand Twombly, to "plasticize"⁴¹² Twombly, transferring a two-dimensional painted gesture into a three-dimensional one. West is trying to understand movement and manipulation. By manipulating, and thinking about the process of manipulation, West suggests that thoughts in fact become manipulated, changing as he is working with his material; body and matter acting on upon the other. In fact, West is adapting himself to Twombly's work, as Magor's soft foam conform to the already existing surface. The interplay, an adaptation between body and stuff, eventually arrives at a form. The "arrival" of the form can depend on several factors, one being, the "impulse to biomorphise his ideas."⁴¹³ Exhibiting his *Adaptives*, West advises the visitors with this text: "The objects are to be used. They represent the potential to give form to neurotic symptoms. Their function as objects for the human body... opposes Leonardo da Vinci's observation that the facial muscles represent an individual's muscular system and psychological state..."⁴¹⁴ The viewer needs to experience, not only rely on scrutinising.

The use of *Adaptives* by participants demands that body and object adapt to each other. Participants must decide what can be done with the object. They have to imagine a purpose and a potential. Thinking, imagining, posturing, moving become

⁴¹² Christine Mehring, 'Tools of Engagement', p. 62

⁴¹³ Ibid, p.64

⁴¹⁴ Ibid

intertwined. The participant playing with the *Adaptives*, is in fact proceeding analogously to West when he makes his work; the manipulated thing is both an agent of impression and of expression.⁴¹⁵

Impression. Expression. Form. Terms that have somewhat disappeared from the language of art, are brought back by West, just like his own interest in plinths, which sculpture had turned its back on. For many sculptors the use of a pedestal, or plinth to display a sculpture belongs to the category of the monument. Rosalind Krauss has described the close relationship that existed between sculpture and monument, and the important role the pedestal played. The monument addresses a specific site, symbolically recalling an historical fact or event associated with the space. The role of the pedestal, she writes, is to “mediate between actual site and representational sign,”⁴¹⁶ the sculpture resting on it. The relationship between monument and sculpture was to become separated, with sculptures placed directly in sites, without the mediation of an external device. Several sculptors have since re-integrated the pedestal within the language of contemporary art, along with the monument. For Franz West, the use of the plinth, while recalling classical art, expands, again, the definition of a sculpture, by including its mode of display as part of the sculpture. This is evident when encountering his work, as the plinths are often given a similar texture to the object resting on it.

⁴¹⁵ Franz West, *To Build A House*, p. 61

⁴¹⁶ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster (ed) (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 35

Before analyzing the settling to/of a form, I would like to emphasize that West's invitation to use his work, does have an affinity with Clark's relational objects, as both artists have an interest with the encounter between object and user. If Clark tries to cure certain malaises, or neuroses, West is more interested in the possibility of showing neuroses. More importantly, Clark "administers" if you will, the object, while the client is passive. In the case of West's work, the "client" is able to use the objects as she or he wishes. An important difference between the two artists is their relationship to the object; West never attempts to negate his work as art. There is a close involvement with each aspect of making the work. West does not use terms such as Judd's *specific object*, Morris' *structures*, or Clark's *relational objects* to describe his work; with the word *sculpture* he anchors these objects in the world of art, bringing along with them everyday objects within its realm, and not the other way around. And if no one uses the objects, would this mean that they have failed? Which begets another question: does it matter?

His first untouchable art, and legitimate sculptures were made in 1986 for his *Legitime Skultur* exhibition at the Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, in Graz, Austria. This move for West was to give his objects their autonomy: "Not allowing contact with the work had the effect of diminishing its reliance on external animation, thrusting forward its intellectual demands, and liberating the artist to produce more fragile forms without worrying about durability."⁴¹⁷ The intellectual demands are the demands that the spectator is willing to perform, by taking into

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, p. 73

account the title and texts that are part of the objects encountered. Many include references to Viennese intellectual and cultural history, such as Klimt, Freud and Wittgenstein, such as this sentence: “*Idiosyngramm*: This condensation in the sense of Ferdinand Schmatz’s texts assumes Richard Gerstl’s view of Gustav Klimt.”

The “untouchable” pieces are made mainly of papier-mâché (fig.31). Like plaster, papier-mâché is not a legitimate art material, but they both belong to the world of sculpting; plaster is an important material for mold making, and producing maquettes. Georges Didi-Huberman has discussed the importance of casting in art, as well as its rejection, being a technical material.⁴¹⁸ Papier-mâché, an even poorer material, also belongs to the world of art, but is mainly associated with the decorative arts and theatre. One encounters it as jewelry, carnival masks, multi panel folding-screens, and Japanese lacquered papier-mâché bowls. It is also greatly used by children. West’s papier-mâché pulp is made from recycled newspapers and telephone books. Newspapers have been part of modern art making at least since the first Cubist and Dada collages, but also as ad hoc wallpaper.

The crushed newsprint, with its printed words, becomes sloppy. What appeals to West is the slow drying into hard matter that can resemble dry skin, bark, mud, or mushrooms. Plus, papier-mâché has the ability to adhere to itself easily, as a dry section can easily be recovered by a newer wet one. The papier-mâché also acts as

⁴¹⁸ Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance par contact* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2008)

glue, holding together diverse material, such as bottles, cardboard, plastic containers, or other types of detritus.

Contrary to Liz Magor's working methods, West does not cast his work, but models it. The hands exert pressure on the paper, but cannot completely limit and control its shape as a prepared mould would. Whereas Magor addresses exterior forces affecting matter, first through her use and display of presses, later by investigating notions of the natural and comfort through imitation of natural surfaces, West could be said to elaborate his forms as if they were also casted, but by a psychic and libidinal mould. The exerted pressure stems from internal, psychological states.

The papier-mâché works address traditional sculpture. In most cases, the small works are displayed on pedestals, while larger are either placed on a plinth, or directly on the floor. The use of papier-mâché has been described as a way to "keep the sculpture outside the world of the consumer society and the postmodern simulations of industrial perfection."⁴¹⁹ West's work may not be as popular and commercially available as Takashi Murakami's work is, but West is no less involved with the international art market. The difference is that his work looks as if it had been put together in no time. Here, there seems to be no attention to details, to workmanship, to any lengthy sculptural process. It exhibits itself as being about the fundamental act of making, of making by hand; they are for some the result of an inquiry into the subconscious, aiming "to unearth primal images", as suggested by a

⁴¹⁹ Robert Fleck, as quoted in 'On Papier-Mâché', *Franz West: Pensées Features Interviews Anthology*, p.172

gallery press release.⁴²⁰ Industrial production aims at producing efficiently by procuring a standard method to produce a standard object or product. West for his part produces his own standard object; one always knows that it is a Franz West sculpture, but his work results from a refined un-refinement. It is as if West makes use of what industrial production rejects, and correlates it with states of mind and psychological assessments: “Improvised, imperfect, imprecise, impudent, indeterminate, incongruous, inchoate, inept, inadvertent, indefinite, indistinct, incomplete, insouciant, insecure, irresolute, irregular, unidentifiable, unprepossessing, ungainly, unseemly, unstable, unspecific, ungoverned, untoward.”⁴²¹

There is indeed a rejection of the slick, uniformed finish, towards a textured surface. “In my own work, there is something homogeneous, something you can almost lie on like a pillow, a graphic element, that is, texture.”⁴²² West here directly relates the act of graphic markings to texture, as he initially explored by re-making Twombly’s scribble into a three-dimensional object. West was not interested in the hard, slick, “anorganic minimalism,” but by the result of paint droppings.

West is known for his laconic comments, which can confuse when encountering his work. But his comments on Twombly’s work might be helpful for thinking through West’s interests, and enable an articulation of his interest in touch. Twombly is

⁴²⁰ From David Zwirner Gallery in *Franz West: Pensées Features Interviews Anthology*, p. 182

⁴²¹ Lynn Cooke in *Franz West: Pensées Features Interviews Anthology*, p. 208

⁴²² Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra, *Franz West*, p. 123

mainly known as a painter, while having produced several sculptures and photographs.



Finding art in the residue left by a drop of paint, meant for West that a small event can become important, a shaping principle. He sees in Twombly's use of accidents something that is both nihilistic and poetic. He writes: "Letting color flow, because it's something uncontrolled, not made deliberately. It is never hand made."⁴²³ Never hand made! A deliberate choice for West equates the hand made, as "everything handmade is form."

West offers a new way to think of Minimalism's forms. Perceived by many critics as lacking the artist's hand, West's comment suggests that these forms due to their deliberate choice by the artist, are to be thought as handmade, while an uncontrolled accident, such as a paint drip, is considered not hand made, and a minimalist gesture.

The nihilism of Twombly is the answer West found to generate art. Twombly's purposelessness made more sense to West than the purposelessness of the Actionists' violent work. It showed "that a differentiated form of provocation can work."⁴²⁴ Twombly's pen and brush gestures resemble scribbles. They have no precise form. For West, the relationship between the physical gesture and the

⁴²³ Franz West, 'On Cy Twombly's Semantic Loop', p. 170

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p. 172

picture is hard to understand, and an understanding of the gestural emerges only “with the help of an object.” West has produced two works that have a relationship to Twombly: an *Adaptive*, known as *The first Passstück*, 1978/ 1994, and a sculpture, *Twombly*, 1988, for which he says that having Twombly in mind brought about an “internal logic” that developed and influenced the end result.

The first Passstück, based on the loops of Twombly’s picture, was made as a tool to help West understand Twombly’s marks, a sort of tool to understand purposelessness. West also mentions the scribble illustrating “meaninglessness” from Wittgenstein’s *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*. He conflates the factual with meaninglessness, associating Wittgenstein’s marks with Twombly’s.

The scribble from *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics* is part of Wittgenstein’s analysis of the modes of recognition of similarities and differences: “If I draw a meaningless curve and then draw another later, pretty much like it, you would not know the difference. But if I draw this peculiar thing I call a face, and then draw one slightly different, you will know at once there is a difference.”⁴²⁵ The meaninglessness of Wittgenstein’s scribble, in fact becomes for West a new connection, opening new possibilities for making sculptures. West’s making of a three-dimensional scribble, or loop, not only attempts to show meaninglessness, which for Wittgenstein, cannot be said or demonstrated, but individualises each scribble.

⁴²⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett (ed) (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), p. 31

West primarily discusses the meeting between sculpture and spectator. He doesn't mention his own interaction with the work, if only as a finished object. The gestural he identifies in Twombly, he doesn't address for his own work. He does mention, without expanding, that he is interested in "the skin on our hands."⁴²⁶ Not *of* our hands, but *on* our hands. West differentiates skin and hand, yet it is the skin that is on the hands, not on another body part. This suggests contact, touching, while perhaps not including activities such as grasping, writing, and drawing. The contact between hand/skin and material, without any ordered aims, might be different to activities like writing, drawing and moulding. To simply touch, without an aim, suggests a randomness perceived in Twombly's work: "The hand throws in randomness, but brings forth the most beautiful order."⁴²⁷ In another early work, *Freunde* (Joy, 1985), West enacts a transformation, plasticising a drawing by Sigmund Freud.

In recent years, many artists have taken the slap-dash method of putting things together, to serve as an equivalent to the hand-made; an exhibition such as *Un-monumental*, or with the work of the Austrian group Gelitin, insist on this aspect of making work. This tendency echoes the words of Meyer Shapiro, praising the Abstract Expressionists as works done by hand. As I have mentioned previously with the work of the Fetish Finish artists, the presence or absence of traces of the

⁴²⁶ Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra, *Franz West*, p. 17

⁴²⁷ Franz West, 'On Cy Twombly's Semantic Loop', p.170

hand-made while considering a polished surface is beside the point, as they have been “polished away”.

To locate and speak of touch, as an important aspect of making, is to acknowledge its role as a conductor for making. By this I mean, that touch may not lead to an answer, to knowledge, but is responsible as a mode of inquiry, and of pleasure. With West, the encounter between matter, postures, language, and his encouragement to slow down one’s moves –zones of deceleration⁴²⁸— to rest on his many pieces of sculpture-furniture to ponder art, indicates his attentiveness to an inability to concentrate at all time, while we make, encounter, and study art. West encourages one to make use of these moments of tiredness, of fuzziness.

West started making sculptures when there was a call to forget objects, to strive towards dematerialisation, and explore the temporal. For four decades, he has been following his desire to make things with his hands, and allowing others to come in contact with them, while acknowledging the temporality of making and touching.

⁴²⁸ Robert Fleck, Bice Curiger, Neal Benezra, *Franz West*, p. 40

Chapter 5- Working Drawings

All that is visible clings to the invisible. That which can be heard to that which cannot –that which can be felt to that which cannot. Perhaps the thinkable to the unthinkable. Novalis, On Goethe⁴²⁹

The Romantic use of the pen

In 1952 Öyvind Fahlström wrote about his use of the felt-tip pen, which he said, allowed him to work with precision, as with India ink, plus many gradations of gray were available to him, though not as fuzzy as pencil drawings can be. The felt-tip pen also produced random textures, a pleasurable “spontaneity” he writes, that eventually started to feel “monotonous”.⁴³⁰ Fahlström chose to modify his work, eventually producing his large drawing *Opera (after having presented a pretty unintelligent indictment against the rule of the rat)*, between 1952-53 (fig.32).

This account of Fahlström, from his text *An experimental field*, is interesting for me as it addresses several considerations I have encountered during my drawing process. These are: spontaneity, monotony, manipulation, and surprise. Spontaneity for Fahlström is momentarily exciting, soon giving way to the monotonous. I would compare this reaction to Ed Ruscha’s own feeling towards the abstract expressionistic method of painting, as mentioned in the first chapter, for which he

⁴²⁹ Novalis, ‘On Goethe’, *Philosophical Writings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 118

⁴³⁰ Öyvind Fahlström, ‘An Experimental Field’, *A Theater without Theater*, Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Patricia Falguieres, Bernard Blistene (eds) (Museu D’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008), pp. 160-161

felt that to paint in such a way was akin to following a recipe; it becomes habitual. Another way to describe Fahlström's change of attitude, might be through the words of Benjamin Buchloh in consideration to what he saw as two modes of working by Eva Hesse: between a "seemingly ludic naiveté and a discerning criticality."⁴³¹

This chapter is both a study of the making of my own drawings, and an exploration of the notion of drawing through certain aspects of the early German Romantics, and English Romanticism that have endured and adhered to various notions of art making, such as the notions of empathy, animism, process and spontaneity, the later suggesting an ideal of the genius creating poetry naturally, "without long labour or study."⁴³²

The terms have been put to use recently by theorists of material culture, such as Tim Ingold and Martin Holbraad, as ways to allow things to speak for themselves. Attending to things and to matter becomes an encounter with resistance, including physical resistance. It is this contact that initiates my own art making. To try to write about this contact, this touching and manipulation of various stuff, will be attempted by proposing to view and to *listen* to my drawings. It is principally through the notion of temporality that my interest with the visual and the aural intersect.

⁴³¹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Hesse's Endgame: facing the Diagram', Catherine de Zegher (ed), *Eva Hesse Drawing* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2006), p. 128

⁴³² Angela Esterhammer, 'Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation', *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, Charles Mahoney (ed) (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 321

Ed Ruscha explores this intersection, as well as the passage of time. His interest with the patina of things, representing use and the past could be compared to the works of the German Romantic painters, (1800-1840), and their use of ruins, as well as their association of the visual to the musical through landscape paintings, as both for them are encountered temporally, as a series of successions. Stephen Bann writes of the Romantic movement of having precipitated the “enhancement of the consciousness of history,”⁴³³ with its historical novels and paintings. An important difference between Ruscha and the Romantic movement is the latter’s interest and theorising of the allegorical, mainly through the writings of the early Romantics, or Jena Romantics (1798-1904) Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. Yet, the importance given by Ruscha to fragments, such as the bits of sentences he collects for his paintings, and the fragmentary nature of his small books, point towards an interest with the allegorical.

While no Romantic theory of landscape was ever fully articulated, Alice Kuzniar has enumerated several authors of the period who discuss the relationship, enough to offer a comprehensive theory of landscape.⁴³⁴ For the Romantics, both landscape and music share a concern with “formal arrangement instead of with conceptual thought; in addition, they are both suggestive and emotive rather than discursive media. In other words, they are both distinct from the verbal arts.”⁴³⁵ By modulating colours and considering proportion in landscape paintings, it allows for harmonious

⁴³³ Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 4

⁴³⁴ Alice Kuzniar, ‘The Vanishing Canvas: Notes on German Romantic Landscape Aesthetics’, *German Studies Review*, Vol.11, No.3, 1988, pp.359-376

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 360

and dissonant alternations that the viewer would similarly encounter successively in time. Experiencing a landscape is a reaction in succession rather than instantaneous one.

There is another aspect to this intersection between sound and image that interests me, linked to memory and perception. By proposing an image that indicates, or refers to sound, this might trigger in one's imagination a sound, such as discussed in the chapter on Ruscha. In some cases, to display an object that is similar to a audio-speaker might momentarily confuse the viewer, who would disengage the process of visual scrutiny, and *tendre l'oreille*, tend an ear, or tend to the ear, or prick up one's ear to hear if there is something, anything to listen to. A momentary confusion of the senses is one of my interests, a *trompe l'oreille*.

The drawings I have produced for this thesis were made for two main reasons. One, to act as a research field to articulate the sense of touch; two, to suggest sound as one is looking at them, and insist on the physical aspects of sound.

Romantic Process and Spontaneity

Process and spontaneity are aspects of romantic theory. The spontaneous for the Romantics did not only mean the instantaneous, unpremeditated, such as improvising on the spot, but is also related to notions of vitalism, of growth, of an on-going biological evolution. The Jena Romantics advanced the view of romantic

poetry as “perpetually in the process of self-achieving, but never achieved in the sense of being finished, fixed, finite...”⁴³⁶ Similarly for the English romantics poets, true poetic language had to be organic and living: “Like works of nature, aesthetic products conceived as living form could not be mechanically constructed through rule and line. Nor could they be reproduced.”⁴³⁷ Romantic art was perceived as vital, modeled on a biologically unfolding process, where form develops by itself, to be distinguished from mechanical ones, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817): “The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form on the other hand, is innate. It shapes, as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one & the same with the perfection of its outward Form.”⁴³⁸ There is an aspect of passiveness that is encouraged, allowing things to unfold.

It suggests that spontaneity be set in motion, with the result recognized as such, eliminating any process of meditation, reflection, or testing as the work unfolds. But in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1801), William Wordsworth says: “For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” and results from a poet that had “thought long and deeply,” to which he adds that poetry “takes its origin

⁴³⁶ Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle*, p.25

⁴³⁷ Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.4

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4

from emotion recollected in tranquility.”⁴³⁹ The passivity of the spontaneous, standing for the natural and against the mechanical, is an adopted method, a choice that allows for a procedure to be carried on, a preparation of sort, not unlike Simondon’s brick casting. Wordsworth in fact combines the opposed organic and mechanical, mentioned by Coleridge, and includes the premeditation. The spontaneous can thus be defined as “voluntary”, as defined in eighteenth-century dictionaries, and occurring first in Hobbes: “That all voluntary actions... are called spontaneous, and said to be done by man’s own accord.” For Wordsworth poetry demanded meditation and discipline, so as to modify “life’s emotions into essentially different moods, ones that overflow spontaneously into poetry.”⁴⁴⁰

Spontaneity of Drawing

In art, spontaneity often suggests that the work has been produced naturally, with various connotations, such as: authenticity, freedom, necessity, desire, idealism and metaphysics. Drawing seems to be spontaneity’s preferred representative form for philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. In his *Le plaisir au dessin* (2009), he introduces drawing as the opening of form [*Le dessin est l’ouverture de la forme*].⁴⁴¹ He insists on the dynamism of drawing, considering the gestural over the figurative, and insisting on the unfinished nature of the drawn form, with the drawn figure

⁴³⁹ Angela Esterhammer, ‘Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation’, *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, p. 326

⁴⁴⁰ Paul Magnuson, ‘Wordsworth and Spontaneity’, *The Evidence of the Imagination*, Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennett (eds) (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. 115

⁴⁴¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le plaisir au dessin* (Paris: Galilée, 2009), p.9

indicating “essential incompleteness, a non-closure or a non-totalisation of the form” [*un inachèvement essentiel, une non-clôture ou une non-totalisation de la forme*].⁴⁴²

For him the word “drawing” retains a dynamic, energetic, and inchoate value, as if animated, keeping a connection with the sense of an initial movement, while also suggesting a striving towards something, as if it had tropisms, like a plant aiming towards an environmental stimulus. For Nancy, an animating force belonging to the infinite inhabits the artist, and finds a way to express itself through the hand. To draw with one’s hand thus becomes a metaphysical evocation, as Claire Martin writes: “From the clumsy and hesitant gesture of the artisan as he attempts to write, to the gracious arabesques sketched by the artist’s arm, there is a similar force of expression that exceeds me and is expressed in me, independent of my own will.” [*Dans le geste maladroit et hésitant de l’artisan lorsqu’il tente d’écrire, comme dans les arabesques gracieuses esquissées par le bras de l’artiste, il y a la même expression d’une puissance qui me dépasse et qui s’exprime en moi, indépendamment de ma propre volonté*].⁴⁴³ Both Nancy and Martin describe drawing as unmediated and spontaneously recording, with the artist becoming a medium, a relay, amplifying imperceptible forces towards various perceptual modes. The deployment of drawing that Nancy discusses temporalises it, evoking again the Romantics.

⁴⁴² Ibid. p. 9

⁴⁴³ Claire Martin, ‘L’oeil et la main: la “métaphysique du toucher” dans la philosophie française, de Ravaisson à Derrida’, *Les Études Philosophiques*, No. 1, 2003, p. 110

These invisible forces have been categorised in various ways; for Denis Diderot (1713-84), it is the soul expressing itself in the spontaneous quality of the effortless sketch, as he comments in his Salon of 1765: "A sketch is generally more spirited than a picture. It is the artist's work when he is full of inspiration and ardour, when reflection has toned down nothing, it is the artist's soul expressing itself freely."⁴⁴⁴

For Henry van de Velde (1863-1957), in his unpublished *Manuscript on Ornament*, started in 1915, ornaments can be divided in two categories, the *Linear* and the *Geometric*.⁴⁴⁵ A reader of Nietzsche, van de Velde translates Nietzsche's term "power" (*Macht*) into "force" (*Kraft*), to create his notion of line-force, an expression of the same phenomenon that Nietzsche refers to as the will to power. This line-force informs van de Velde's categorizing of ornaments; it is present in the *Linear*, but absent from the *Geometric*, as the later appears at the moment when the *Linear*, produced through play, or spontaneously, becomes replaced by tools, transferring the notion of 'beauty' away from the organic, to the symbolic. He writes: "Let us not forget that the origin of ornament corresponds to the need to "animate" surfaces, to practice on the object the accomplishment of the rites of life. Yet the trace and the lines which accomplish this mystery must be penetrated themselves of the germ of life and the force which will allow them to take possession of what they want to bring to life."⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Alison Byerly, 'Effortless Art: The Sketch in Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature' *Criticism* Vol. 41, No 3, 1999, p.349

⁴⁴⁵ Elie G. Haddad, 'On Henry van de Velde's *Manuscript on Ornament*', *Journal of Design History*, Vol 16, No 2, 2003. Van de Velde worked on his manuscript between 1915-1935.

⁴⁴⁶ Elie G. Haddad, 'In Nietzsche's Shadow: Henry van de Velde and the New Style in Architecture' *Architectural Theory Review*, Vol 10, No 2, 2005, p. 94

In the case of Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, these forces belong to the unmediated, and the ability to make art without the burden of analysis or logic, which they explore under the bataillean term of *l'informe*, an operative term to reach a sense of non-knowledge, to escape analytical knowledge, and retain a sense of otherness.⁴⁴⁷

L'informe: mode d'emploi (The Formless: Instructions For Use), the title of an exhibition organized in 1996 by Krauss and Bois at the Centre Georges-Pompidou, in Paris, It celebrated materiality through Bataille's own definition of the term *informe*, which he defines, in his *Dictionnaire*, through suggestive descriptions, like crushed spider, or spit, associating the incomprehensible to a sentiment such as disgust. Drawings are not discussed by Krauss and Bois, suggesting that it might not be able to be considered as matter, keeping drawing tightly linked to the notion of thinking, which *l'informe* is to avoid. *L'informe* categorised by Krauss and Bois as a notion resisting assimilation and logical conceptualisation, unfortunately becomes itself a conceptual category that is applied onto matter and things, ignoring specificities of matter.

Drawing as a logical tool is often defined through its geometrical or notational use, with scientific drawing being the prime example of the non-expressive, and objective, from which phenomena can be revealed, or to let nature speak. Here, the

⁴⁴⁷ Rosalind Krauss and Yve Allain Bois, *Formless: a user' guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997)

suspect mediation of the human hand, with its tendency for the expressive, is to be replaced by instruments.⁴⁴⁸ The resulting images, even images from microscopes, are in fact as much a result of the authors' choices, explain Sarah de Rijcke and Anne Beaulieu. Both authors identify a tension that is played out between producing images that are to be factual, while resisting any tendencies to individualise the images. Yet for many makers of scientific images, not only are examples of both successful and disappointing images given in how-to books of scientific photography, but also, as in Felice Frankel's *Envisioning Science: The Design and Craft of the Science Image*, one is encouraged to individualise the production of images: "If your scanning electron microscope comes with coloring software, don't always use the default color palette. Your images should not look like those of your colleagues; you should control the appearance of your image, not the computer scientist who created the algorithms."⁴⁴⁹

Scientific images often make use of figures, graphs, diagrams, and tables, along with photography. We recognise these as some of the favorite techniques used in Conceptual art. The scientific image is meant to depict a specific subject factually, in a bare, authentic, neutral and objective way. Often these images result from various sketches, before being published. Such were the cases for nebulae or comets in the mid nineteenth-century. These images should be understood as the result of a series of activities, or process that involves looking through instruments, sketching, note

⁴⁴⁸ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity" *Representation* 40, 1992, p. 81

⁴⁴⁹ Sarah de Rijcke and Anne Beaulieu, "Taking a Good Look at Why Scientific Images Don't Speak for Themselves" *Theory and Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 5, 2007, p. 735

taking, and their transcriptions. The finalised image is the result of a working drawing, such with the cases of the drawings of the Great Nebulae by William Parsons, the third Lord of Rosse, and the various scientific drawings realised by Robert Hooke. Each final drawing, which is then engraved, published, and distributed, is as much informed by the reworking of preliminary sketches, as by the use of the telescope, and microscope, respectively.

In the case of the drawings made to correctly depict the spiral nature of the M51 nebula, Omar Nasim states: “The development of the scientific image within the Rosse project was a complex interplay between what was seen through the telescope and what one’s hand drew on paper, where one had to continually account for variations in what one saw in the same object on different nights. This amounted to finding a procedure that would narrow down, suggest, select and thereby visually and conceptually stabilize the object, or at least the image of it.”⁴⁵⁰ A fluctuating phenomenon such as a nebula was eventually made into a static image. The published image allowed for other astronomers to not only see with their eyes the nebula, but with their mind’s eye, understanding the form seen through the telescope. The working drawing allowed for an idea to be perceived, or a “conception of something, and to communicate and preserve that idea in the image.”⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ Omar W. Nasim, ‘Observation, working images and procedure: the ‘Great Spiral’ in Lord Rosse’s astronomical record books and beyond’ *British Society for the History of Science*, 2010, p. 15; also see Matthew C. Hunter, ‘The Theory of Impression According to Robert Hooke’ *Printed Matter in Early Modern Britain*, Michael Hunter (ed) (Burlington, Vermont; Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), and *Wicked Intelligence*, unpublished.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.3

Here the spontaneous nature of sketching becomes part of a logical process, where a working drawing will eventually produce a stable representation. By ignoring this genesis, the stabilised image is able to proceed as a fact, and not the result of a procedure involving specific drawing techniques, methods, and materials.

Drawing has moved between two categories, one expressing the soul and the other as a tool for thinking things through. Between soul and cognition, expression and utility, the spontaneous is retained in the form of the processual, as both scientific and un-scientific methods of drawing involve the procedures of a working drawing. To try to understand a phenomenon such as the spiral nature of the M51 nebula, telescopic observation alone did not help, the working images allowed the observer to attend to details, and to make out what he saw, without which the spiral-like properties would have been overlooked.

The act of drawing, and re-drawing involved hesitations, lulls, and confusions. Often notes accompanied Rosse's various sketches, signaling an interplay between text and image: "The accompanying sketches tend to depict what requires further observation and confirmation, what is over a period of time 'suspected', 'thought', 'made out', 'believed' and 'confirmed' to be the case, and various possibilities with regard to the object's nature and properties."⁴⁵² The working drawing, explored by Nasim, is temporalised, and reasserts what I've mentioned in chapter 3 in regards to

⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 22

textual genetics analysis of the author's in manuscripts as an active and fluid process.



The term working drawing used by Omar Nasim to describe the process that led to a stabilised image of the Great Spiral Nebula, has another art historical source. In 1966 Mel Bochner exhibited four identical loose-leaf notebooks, containing works from various artists, collected by Bochner, and xeroxed. The exhibition was titled: *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*. The exhibited material consisted of various drawings, diagrams, or other material used as preparation for art works. These documents were not shown as information about the various processes leading to finished work. The documentation was the work of art.

The notebooks related to each other, existing as independent objects, not as information documenting moments towards the a finished work. Bochner insists on the specificity of the moment, taken apart from its continuity, prioritising the cut and the interference over process.

What is of interest for me is Bochner's collection of various material that enter in relation, becoming a part of 'The Serial Attitude', an article he wrote in December 1967 for *Artforum*, exploring artworks that made use of the serial. While an individual drawing might exist in relation to a finished work, insisting on each

moment as a continuous phase, Bochner evokes discontinuity. Nasim's working drawing is therefore of a different nature than Bochner's *Working Drawings*.



In her book *The Infinite Line: re-making art after modernism* (2004), Briony Fer's analysis of seriality in art production, addresses some of the assumptions that installation work brings about the aesthetic experience: first, that it is a direct and spontaneous experience, and secondly, "the idea that an excess of materiality leads to a more direct, even visceral experience." Her aim is to counter a so-called empathic model of aesthetic experience, and "consider instead the cuts and dislocations that are a *condition* of viewing."⁴⁵³

Her approach at first might seem like an attempt to avoid matter, and keep to the theoretical. She mentions that for an artist such as Joseph Beuys, or members of the Arte Povera movement, direct encounter with real material was understood as a way to recover "something from the corrupting and alienating conditions of modernity."⁴⁵⁴ Fer reminds us that while this direct sensory encounter with matter may seem "all-embracing, it is, of course, as mediated as any other kind of experience, if by redefined expectations, conventions and models of viewing."⁴⁵⁵ Fer adds that one may walk into an installation, yet the work may still function as a picture. The spectator is both within an installation and viewing an installation, "but

⁴⁵³ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: re-making art after modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.4

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 87

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 87

the place of the subject remains the same” towards the installation-as-picture. A similar point was made earlier, while considering new-media work.

The consideration introduced by Fer is important, as she suggests that tactility in art is often meant for the eyes, as an image, or a scratch. Like empathy, touch is addressed via the look of texture.



While I have explored artists who have celebrated matter, and artists who were described as ignoring matter, I would like to stress another aspect of matter that will reveal other facets of touching: overlooked matter, matter that becomes sensed through the repetitive.

Briony Fer celebrates the overlooked: “it is almost as if the understated, the apparently inattentive and indifferent, becomes the necessary ground for heightened intensity.”⁴⁵⁶ The habitual, such as the repetitive daily gestures attached to working with a single tool, or carrying out a specific task on an assembly line, identified either as numbing, dumbing, or alienating, or again, depicted in pathological terms when it appears in art production (e.g. Krauss’ essay *LeWitt in Progress*). For art historian Patricia Falguières, to repeat is to proceed, as the syllogism does, to the point of boredom, which both critiques of art and historians of philosophy try to evade, through a recourse to pathology: “The fruits of the

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 4

procedural are constantly threatened by disinterest. From this a common posture of art critics and historians of philosophy: to re-affect with pathos, that is to say, with history and genesis, these ungrateful objects” [*Le désintéret toujours menace les fruits du procedural. De là une commune posture des critiques d’art et des historiens de la philosophie: réaffecter de pathos, c’est-à-dire d’histoire et de genèse, des objets ingrats*].⁴⁵⁷ For Falguières, these objects celebrate their making as resulting from a passive operativity, which to pathologise as Krauss does, would obscure. To produce operatively does not have to be consistently identified negatively. This disinterest in fact can function as a source to instill this heightened intensity of Fer.

■ ■ ■

Öyvind Fahlström found a solution for the monotony he felt towards the small patterns that his felt tip pen produced spontaneously. In fact, it is by manipulating and modifying the placement of the drawings, by positioning his drawings beside each other, that Fahlström encountered another type of spontaneity, which he called the *unexpected*. His large drawing *Opera* came about through these two operations, or moments: the *spontaneous*, with the textures of the felt-tip pen onto paper, followed by the *unexpected*, through the organization of the drawings. The passage from one moment to the other, through monotony, indicates an emotional response: the artist in this case wants the unexpected, therefore manipulates, shifts, and arranges his work to allow its appearance, through a montage of the drawings. The

⁴⁵⁷ Patricia Falguières, ‘Le théâtre des opérations’, *Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, 48, 1994, p. 71

manipulation is lost to us, and probably to Fahlström. Forgotten. Yet, moving and positioning his drawings into various sequences was an important part of his making procedures.

* *to draw* * *

My drawings (fig. 33) are made with a technical pen, or rapidograph, and at times with various grades of pencils for preliminary schematic lines, before I proceed with the ink. A few drawings are simply made with pencil. The pleasure of the spontaneous that Fahlström feels could also indicate the comfort of handling the pen, an ease occurring between hand and pen while drawing. My own choice of the technical pen was primarily dictated by the line quality it produced. The small tips available for technical pens makes it possible to fill in a small paper area with a large number of very fine lines. These fine lines can at times appear as engraving, while at other times they recall technical draughting.

The pen can produce a clean, uninterrupted line, if the movement of the arm and hand is not too fast. At times a smaller tip can get obstructed, or doesn't allow the ink to flow uniformly, interrupting the continuous gesture of line making. For a line to continuously follow the arm or hand movement, one needs to learn how to manoeuvre with the pen, establishing a unity between the pen and the movements of the hand and arm, along with the rest of the body, so to draw a line as if an effortless activity; the ink needs to flow out of the pen as if it flowed naturally from

the fingers; the pen needs to become a part of the body, or to paraphrase anthropologist Jean-Pierre Warnier, the pen needs to be incorporated into the body schema, through sensori-affectivo- motor experiences.

Warnier's interest in the relationship between body and material culture can be seen as an extension of a 1936 text by Marcel Mauss, *Les techniques du corps*, (The Techniques of the Body), where he later discusses how various activities, such as walking and swimming vary from generation to generation, and across cultures.

Mauss identifies actions that seem spontaneous and natural, as in fact learned through culture as a technique. For example, he mentions how during World War I, the British troops were incapable of using French army spades, consequently requiring that the troops be given English tools. For Mauss this demonstrated that a *tour de main* (a know-how) could be learned, but slowly. Another example, which confounds Mauss, is his observation of a Kabyle man running down hill, without having his sandals flying off his feet. Mauss says that it is a vertiginous sight, and asks himself: "How can he keep his feet without the slippers coming off? I have tried to see, to do it, but I can't understand. Nor can I understand how women can walk in high heels. Thus there is a lot even to be observed, let alone compared."⁴⁵⁸

Mauss cannot understand how one can possibly run with slippers, or walk in high heels, even if he looks, or attempts to replicate the action. Warnier suggests that

⁴⁵⁸ Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', Ben Brewster (tr), *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1973, p.83

Mauss' own definition of the body is a limited anatomical body, one that does not take into consideration the body's movement modification as it makes use and sense of the various objects it engages with, in this case slippers and high-heels. Warnier suggests that if Mauss had read Paul Schilder's *Das Köperschema (The Corporeal Schema)* (1923), he would have understood that the Kabyle man does not lose his slippers, because they "are incorporated into his motor habits by apprenticeship. They belong to his *Köperschema*. He is a man-with-slippers."⁴⁵⁹

Jean-Pierre Warnier, in his essay 'A Praxeological Approach to Subjectivation in a Material World' analyses how body movement and material culture interact with each other, emphasising how material culture becomes incorporated deep into the "psyche of the subject because its reach is not through abstract knowledge, but through sensori-motor experience."⁴⁶⁰ The effectiveness of sensori-motor experience, Warnier reminds us, depends as well on emotional involvement, to reach the subject.

This is realized through various means, such as apprenticeship, which builds up the bodily habits, the *tour de main*. Proper use of a given materiality, which trains the neuro-physiological and psychological body, is reinforced also by the emotional encounter, such as with instructors in the case of apprentices: "psychic life

⁴⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Warnier, "A praxeological approach to subjectivation in a material world" *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol 5, No. 5, 2001, p. 7

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 10

elaborates itself by internalizing sensory-affectivo-motor experiences with other subjects in a material world.”⁴⁶¹

What Warnier fails to discuss are the shoes themselves - the physical thing. One may learn to walk with high-heels, or run down hill with slippers, but for such activities to happen, the shoes need to be conceived and built to allow such activities; a poorly designed, or made pair of slippers might have caused the Kabyle man great injury. For the slippers to withstand the various forces applied by both the body and the surfaces walked on, several conditions must be considered, such as material and construction; it is a concern for efficient footwear, and, returning to the subject of drawing, one needs to consider the efficiency of the pen. Indeed one needs to learn the use of a tool, to apprentice, but the role of the tool, the instrument, or the technical object should not be neglected.

Gilbert Simondon observes that when an older tool is exchanged for a newer one, similarly manipulable, there is an impression of one’s own gestures being more precise, more skillful, and able to work faster, reducing the limits of the corporeal schema, while expanding it; it seems that we can do more, being more efficient, dexterous. The tool allows the body to be extended so as to accomplish a gesture, whereas the instrument is the technical object that allows the body to be extended and to adapt itself, for an improved perception.⁴⁶² In a short paper on the techno-aesthetic, Simondon describes two type of pliers, *Peugeot-France* and *Facom*, finding

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 13

⁴⁶² Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, p. 114

that the later possesses something richer than just a more efficient functionality: “It gleams, and gives one a feeling of ease, that is not far from a sensori-motor pleasure” [*Elle resplendit, et donne, quand on l'utilise, une impression d'aisance qui n'est pas éloignée du plaisir sensori-moteur*].⁴⁶³

The user feels the difference throughout the body, and Simondon is aware of this. In his techno-aesthetic, it is through usage and action, not contemplation that techno-aesthetic pleasure occurs: “It is through use, in action, that [the tool] becomes somewhat orgasmic, a tactile means and force of stimulation” [*C'est dans l'usage, dans l'action, qu'il (l'outil) devient en quelque sorte orgasmique, moyen tactile et moteur de stimulation*].⁴⁶⁴ Simondon writes of joy and pleasure that is felt when using a good, and efficient tool. He extends his comments towards all types of tools, towards musical instruments, the paintbrush and the application of either paint or watercolours on various surfaces. For Simondon, *l'esthétique* is originally, *le faisceau sensoriel*, the sensorial fascicle, or network between the artist workable matter, through contact.



Roland Barthes writes of his love of writing, the act of writing by hand, not with a typewriter. He understands how others can proceed differently, but it is because “each one should write with the body they have” [*que chacun écrive avec le corps*]

⁴⁶³ Gilbert Simondon, ‘Sur la techno- esthétique’, *Les Papiers du Collège International de Philosophie*, no. 12, 1992, p. 5

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 6

qu'il a], to which he adds, *comme il l'entend* ⁴⁶⁵ meaning as the body wants, or as the body understands, or again, as the body *hears* it. For Barthes, writing was a sensual act, exemplified by his love and consideration of the various writing instruments he used, and to the place where he worked in, with its organization for writing to happen.⁴⁶⁶ Barthes does mention his dislike of the *Bic* pen, which does not provide him with what he feels that writing needs to be, a soft writing, making work almost effortless: "The essential thing is that they (fountain pens) can produce that soft, smooth writing I absolutely require" [*L'essentiel, c'est qu'ils (stylos) puissent me procurer cette écriture douce à laquelle je tiens absolument*].⁴⁶⁷ This sensual aesthetic has correlations with efficiency. For Simondon's analysis of the technical object is a movement, from an abstract phase towards an ever more concrete phase, to perform better, as if a natural object, due to its internal logic, to its auto-correlation (*auto-corrélation*), which ensures its existence.⁴⁶⁸

In a passage from *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Simondon writes that the failure of a direct technical action reveals that the world does not let itself be incorporated entirely through techniques; there is a limit to the effectiveness of human gesture upon it. Simondon takes as an example the fact that water cannot rise over a certain height within a pump, and therefore technical notions become inadequate. At this point, the practical needs to be instructed by the theoretical, as it

⁴⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, 'Une sorte de travail manuel', *Oeuvres complètes, t.III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p.768

⁴⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Un rapport presque maniaque avec les instruments graphiques', *Oeuvres complètes, t. II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), pp. 1710-1713

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1711

⁴⁶⁸ Gilbert Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques: Cours et conférences* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 91

will provide new ways to think the conditions of the operation, in this case, through hydrostatic. Once theorised, it can be applied, and water can therefore be pumped beyond its natural limits. Technical failure forces a reconceptualisation of the initial direct operation to find an effective solution. It needs to find a compatibility system between technical gestures, and the limits the world imposes on these gestures; the compatibility system is the concept.

Simondon indicates that technical failure is responsible for the notion of the practical [*la pensée pratique*], which eventually acts as a basis for morality. It does by giving value to effort if it is efficient, and to action, if it is non-absurd: “We cannot say why it is of value that an action is simple, easy to accomplish, while it is another to be efficient; because there is no analytical link between easy and efficient; nevertheless, it is valued that an action be both simple and efficient. Only a prior technical encounter, truly applied and inserted in the *hic et nunc*, can provide a foundation for this pluralist value chart of practical morality” [*On ne peut dire pourquoi c’est une valeur, pour une action d’être simple, aisée à accomplir, et pourquoi c’en est une autre d’être efficace; car il n’y a pas de lien analytique entre facilité et l’efficacité; pourtant, c’est une valeur pour une action d’être à la fois simple et efficace. Seule l’épreuve technique antérieure, réellement appliquée et insérée dans le hic et nunc, peut fournir le fondement de cette table de valeur pluraliste de la morale pratique*].⁴⁶⁹ To experience the effective, or the ineffective, Simondon insists on the reliance of direct contact in the here and now.

⁴⁶⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, p. 207

To write or to draw (or to run in slippers), particularly if it is a daily and engaged activity, depends on the conditions of the tool used. My studio partner, like Barthes, insists on specific pens, and leads for her pencils, claiming that while writing and drawing the movement, or gesture needs to be un-hindered; some pens, such as, again, the *Bic* pens, or certain lead of pencils, make her movement sluggish; it doesn't glide on the paper. Comparing it to walking, she says that it would be like walking in thick mud, where the foot needs to be pulled out each time, so as to take a new step. A good pen allows for ease and comfort.

With my drawings, the issues of comfort and efficiency are renegotiated, as some drawings are drawn either by using a defective pen, or manipulating it incorrectly. A defective one does not let ink flow freely, while my sometimes abrupt and fast gestures move the pen at a rate faster than the ink can flow out, producing a series of broken and superficial lines. In other cases I have my hand linger, letting the ink flow, to accumulate and cause small puddles on the paper. In both cases I make use of the abilities, or inabilities of the writing tool. In fact my own drawing efforts do not depend so much on an efficient tool. Choosing the technical pen allows for a very precise line to be drawn, with ink that dries quickly, but not instantly; it has time to enter the fibers of the paper, if the paper is a type that allows such absorbency. The technical pen is like a small machine, as it is made of several parts, needing to be regularly cleaned, as dry ink might obstruct the passageway, obstructing the flow. The tool demands care.

Unlike a pencil mark, ink cannot be easily erased. It can be camouflaged by adding more ink, by modifying the area, or it can be scratched out using a sharp blade, if the paper allows it. I have made use of a sharp blade to remove unwanted lines, or small blemishes from the surface of the paper. This can be done easily, as my paper is quite thick (300lb). The decision to remove, or allow an accidental line, or an error from a drawing, is a decision based on what I think the drawing needs. Within the 12" circular form, the rules I have set-up allow for the unexpected, surprises. The space is there to register all marks, whereas the outside of the circular form has to be kept free of extraneous lines. If an unexpected line is too long, caused by an error of movement, it is removed. My drawings basically consist of working within the periphery of a 12" circular form, or as with my recent typographical ornaments, within the designed forms.

Each drawing follows a variety of simple pre-established rules, which will make the drawing process proceed systematically. For example, one drawing has the circular form divided in eight pie-shape sections, with each section to be filled-in with lines drawn as close to each other without touching. These lines are to be drawn, starting from the center of the section, moving towards its exterior edge. The movement of the hand is to alternate from section to section, by having the hand move from left to right in one section, and, right to left with the next one. Depending on the relationship between my arm-hand-body-placement to the paper, each line can be drawn with more or less ease, as neither the paper, nor my body is repositioned

while drawing. Plus, as each drawn line moves laterally from the centre towards the outside edge, the length of each line increases, from the shortest at the centre to longest one at the peripheral edge of the pie-shape section. Longer lines are harder to control and sustain as an even gesture, not only because they are longer, but because of the inadequate reach of the arm and the hand. An efficient method would be to modify the paper's angle, for a better reach, or to get up and modify my body's position. The inadequate posture and movements produce a variety of shaky lines that influence the positioning of the following one to be drawn. Each line tries to conform to the previous one.

✱

Work produced with sets of rules, or conditions, came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, and can be identified either as Conceptual art, or process art, where an operational logic is proposed and followed. With process art, there is an insistence "on minimizing artistic intervention into the unrestricted properties of materials."⁴⁷⁰ Materials are submitted to various conditions, with each one responding in its own way depending on the imposed circumstances, such as the hung latex of Eva Hesse, the thrown lead of Richard Serra, the folded felt of Robert Morris, or the knotted wire of Alan Saret.⁴⁷¹ Each material is acted upon at various degrees, either by artist, natural laws, or both. Each material responds to manipulations and natural laws as it can, due to its own properties, and characteristics, what Simondon refers to as haecceity.

⁴⁷⁰ Cornelia H. Butler, 'Ends and Means', *Afterimage: Drawing, Through Process*, Cornelia H. Butler (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: MIT Press, 1999), p.85

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 84

Serra used hot lead, not cold lead, to be thrown. The physical properties of lead are very different from the one's of say of mercury, glass, or wool. Many of these materials have become associated with individual artists, such as Hesse and latex, or Serra and his use of various heavy metals. These artists seem to be verifying the use and place of these materials, by manipulating them directly, as if to resist a complete disappearance of the traditional act of making. Materials also are invested with various social and political connotations: Serra's metal, belonging both to the traditions of sculpting and engineering, is formed in Germany, while American steel mills slowly disappear, creating what is known as the rust belt; Hesse's latex, industrially made and used, is a new sculpting material. Both malleable materials, though with Serra's large pieces, the work needs to be done industrially, while Hesse's material is manipulated by herself, or an assistant, with latex deteriorating faster than steel.

Each material responds "spontaneously" to a procedure. The felt-pen, an invention of Sidney Rosenthal, appeared on the market around 1952 as the *Magic Marker*, offering its users the ability to mark on almost any surfaces. The ease with which Fahlström made use of his felt pen, with its free flowing alcohol based pigmented colour dispensed through the felt tip, could be thought through Warnier's sensory-affective-motor experience; Fahlström does mention what the pen can do, which I assume, comes from his learning through practice, by controlling the thickness, or thinness of lines. As for the random textures mentioned by Fahlström, these can be

explained by the ability of the paper used, to absorb liquid, in this case, pigmented alcohol, whose specific qualities make it easier to penetrate into the paper, referred to as bleeding, which can be prevented through the use of specific papers.

With my drawings, I've decided to include these simple rules, as a way to produce unenvisaged results, spontaneously. Here it is not only the material that is manipulated as with process art, but it is the body's small movements, which are directed through the various prescribed movements that my arm-hand-body attempt to make. The results - my various drawings - suggest an analogy with the matter of process art, where possibilities and limits are explored, but without becoming the main thrust of my work.

By choosing to draw in such a way, the notion of the model-to-be-drawn is displaced. I am drawing an image without scrutinising a model, as I am not looking at an actual vinyl record while drawing, but remembering and imagining a record. With the record as my subject, I have chosen the 12" LP in black vinyl. Records basically resemble each other, with slight variations, such as the label, various types of grooves, scratches, or finger marks. Though I have chosen to emphasise variations with my drawings, I have not initiated a correspondence between individual drawings to a specific recording, nor have I proposed that the drawings are to represent various copies of a single recording, accumulated in second-hand record stores. The drawings are records.



While drawing, there is a wish on my part to enter into the drawing process. I imagine being able to behave as ink does, to be able to enter into the materiality of the drawing. This phantasy attempts to imagine the possible sensation of the ink and the paper as they encounter. It is also one of imagining the record and its corridor of sound that the stylus of my pen draws, imitating the stylus of the record player traveling and following the record's grooves, making them audible. Drawing my own records is not only mimicking record grooves, it is making grooves, as the tip of my pen does not only leave an ink trace, but scores the surface of the paper, actually breaking its surface at occasions, scratching.

The sound made by pens have been explored, and recorded by several artists, such as Christof Migone and CM von Hausswolff. The sounds of my drawings do exist, but have not yet been played; they are awaiting a stylus, as were the marks on a skull as Rainer Maria Rilke reminisces in *Primal Sound* (1919). Studying the coronal sutures of a skull, Rilke is reminded of the grooves in wax-cylinders, produced by a sound-tracing stylus. He wonders what would happen if one were to reverse the recording process, and have the stylus re-play the sounds from the cranial grooves: "A sound would necessarily result, a series of sounds, music ... Feelings -which? Incredulity, timidity, fear, awe- which of all the feelings here possible prevents me from suggesting a name for the primal sound which would then make its appearance in the world ... Leaving that side for the moment: what variety of lines then, occurring

anywhere, could one not put under the needle and try out? Is there any contour that one could not, in a sense, complete in this way and then experience it, as it makes itself felt, thus transformed, in another field of sense?" Contact with these imaginary sounds produce in Rilke emotions; they are felt as contact.

The phantasy of entering my record-drawing ends once the work is done. It is while the work is being done, while the process is engaged, in motion, that I am drawn into this phantasy of sensing the formation of an inked line on paper. It is an urge for a voyage into substance⁴⁷² and a wish to understand a technical process. Simondon describes several technical processes, such as the aforementioned brick casting; wood carving, where he describes various ways to cut wood, either with or against its grain; the making of a good carving tool; and the functioning of various diodes. These all read like voyages into processes, reminiscent of lengthy descriptions found in novels such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), or Herman Broch's *The Death of Virgil* (1945).

Simondon's descriptions reveal his immense interest, knowledge and respect for materials and their properties, not unlike early texts by Theophrastus, Jakob Böhme, and Novalis. These writers all viewed matter as animated. The surface of my drawings can at times appear animated, as is vibrating. This is due to the treatment I give to the drawing. By scratching the paper surface results in a light texture on some areas, not unlike flocking, or velour, while other areas of the paper can

⁴⁷² Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage Into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984)

become shiny due to the quantity of ink applied to the paper. The texture is the result of the tip of my pen and the ink, loosening small fibers from the surface of the sheet of paper, which adhere to the surface. The fuzzy surface results from an accumulation of small movements, that both draw and sculpt. The accumulated small lines of the drawing are not doodles, nor scribbles, but do belong to this family of small markings; except that they do not accentuate the movement that made them, as much as stimulate optically their viewer. Concerning one drawing by Eva Hesse, Bryony Fer writes: "If doodle-drawing in modern art had tended towards a frenetic mobility (think of the most famous, Klee taking his line for a walk) then here tiny movements of the hand make something completely static..."⁴⁷³ It is made by hand, it is precise, but with a slight unevenness, making for a slight texture to emerge.

There is a tension between the words static and slight texture, as if the meaning of the word static-as-motionless, was replaced by the definition of static-as-interference, such as white noise, or the static between TV channels (with analog signals). Static in these cases is not uniform; it is in constant flux.

My drawings are suggestions of sound, indicating sound, addressing the audible, with considerations for eye-ear-hand-body control. These various sensory modes though existing simultaneously, can also be apprehended individually. By this, I mean that the drawing could be identified as an image only, ignoring both the

⁴⁷³ Bryony Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p.123-124

absent sound that occurred during its making, and the actual sound belonging to the environment of the viewer. The various sets of rules that I employed to produce the drawings can only be accessed through a minute observation of the lines' directions.

It is the use of the record motif that established the relationship between the drawing and sound. Eventually, while drawing my records, a kind of monotony appeared; not that the motif was slowly losing its appeal, but I wanted to modify the image. Also of issue is the passage of time as recorded by these drawings. The sound implied by the drawings demand that the viewer pay attention to sounds while looking and moving around the drawings. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the relationship between looking and listening was of interest to the early German romantics. Landscapes were to be experienced temporally like music, such as with the work of Caspar David Friedrich and Philipp Otto Runge.⁴⁷⁴ Landscapes are perceived sequentially, attending to one detail after another.

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To get rid of this monotony, I resolve to have the temporality of the record give way to the temporality of the typographical mark. The passage of time, of music, or the sudden breaking of silence, or the interruption of a text by footnotes, or glossing, all

⁴⁷⁴ German Romanticism has been divided into two phases, an early, progressive and liberal one, which Friedrich and Runge are part of, and a later one, more reactionary, with painters such as Friedrich Overbeck, Franz Pferr, and Peter Cornelius belonging to it, known as the Nazarene tradition. See Mitchell Benjamin Frank, *German Romantic Painting Redefined* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2001)

these situations are not only represented, but made present, felt through various typographical ornaments, such as the *fleuron* * and the asterisk *.

Typographical ornaments such as the printer's flowers, or *fleurons* were used extensively in Eighteenth century English literature to allow the reader to imagine the passage of time in novels, which made use of the epistolary technique as a way to describe the instantaneous recording of experience (fig.34). Though many problems plagued such novels, such as the time the author took to reflect upon an experience, before writing it down, or the discrepancies between the amount of events described, and the actual time it takes to write the words describing these events, the temporal structure of these novels were regulated by various ornaments. Epistolary novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) included *fleurons* to indicate duration or interruption. These marks were eventually removed from modern publications, dismissed as "accidental" as they were deemed to be mere decorations, without any function. It is these 'absent' marks, which I have reclaimed for my drawing series.

These various ornaments, including the asterisk, do not only demark an interruption in the text, but also interrupt the reader, as Janine Barachas insists in *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. Their presence animates the surface of the page, interrupting the process of reading by drawing attention to the

work of the master printer, as these typographical motifs all belong to the hand-press period.⁴⁷⁵

My removal of these marks from their textual contexts, which gives them their sonorous meaning, is compensated by their new context, beside the records. Plus, they have been enlarged to the size of the records. This enlargement is part of my interest of entering my drawings, a preoccupation that recalls the notion of *Einfühlung*, of empathy, and the recent theory of point of view, or perspectivism as proposed by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and expanded by Martin Holbraad, who asks: “might there nevertheless be a sense in which things could speak for themselves? And what might their voices sound like?”⁴⁷⁶, a question similar to Rilke’s concerning cranial suture.

Herbarium of gestures

My drawings of records and ornaments belong to my record collection. They also fit within a paper trail, one made of the various types of paper I’ve been encountering throughout this research, from the Xerox copies and multiples of Conceptual art, to the papier-mâché of Liz Magor and Franz West, to books read, and the various notes I’ve taken along the way. The drawings, though able to exist without any of these references, are bound to them; they are part of the text, this text. The

⁴⁷⁵ Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2003). Chapter 5, ‘The space of time’ is relevant here.

⁴⁷⁶ Martin Holbraad, ‘Can The Thing Speak?’ , p. 3

records/drawings are objects made, experienced, and contemplated; vinyl records are leftovers of an obsolete technology. They accumulated and littered back-stores and basements for years before ending in landfills, until recently, when they have reappeared as specialty objects, or as the latest example of crafts. Drawing by hand, like the vinyl record, has become topical, many wondering if it will disappear, such as design professor Pam Schenk's observation of students lacking drawing skills, preferring to draw using computer programs,⁴⁷⁷ while for W.J. Mitchell, the reliance on the pencil as an important tool in architecture is a thing of the past.⁴⁷⁸ In scientific images, drawing is still prioritised in a field such as lithic illustration (the drawing of flaked stone artifacts).⁴⁷⁹

There are many ways to draw, with many tools, as it is with writing. To draw my records is to wish to make a record. Not to copy a record. The vinyl object that is the record does differ from the inked paper record, except that some early records were actually made of paper covered with shellac. Both drawing and record are objects and images. The drawn image is based on years of record collecting, and thousands of listening hours. Often, records are not listened to, but only manipulated and examined, with specific gestures such as flip it from side to side, checking for scratches or reading the label. The record at times is less of an audible object than a manipulable one. Its circular form makes it easy to hold, the hands curving,

⁴⁷⁷ Pam Schenck, 'A letter from the front line', What is Drawing for? *Tracey*, October 2007, (<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sota/tracey/journal/widf2.html>)

⁴⁷⁸ W. J. Mitchell, 'The Death of Drawing', *UCLA Architecture Journal* 2, 1989, pp. 64-69

⁴⁷⁹ Dominic McIver Lopes, 'Drawing in a Social Science: Lithic Illustration', *Perspectives on Science*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2009, pp. 5-25

following its edge. When seeing someone touch the recorded surface, I always cringe, as it leaves marks that become audible over the recorded sound. These are the marks Ed Ruscha explored. When holding a record for inspection, or to play, a series of small gestures are repeated, to avoid scratching. These gestures I've acquired from years of collecting, and from watching other collectors handle records.

Adorno compared the early twentieth-century record album to photographic album, and to an herbarium.⁴⁸⁰ Each drawing is the result of a collection of gestures, dictated by the chosen form, and by simple rules. In several drawings, the rule was to start and follow the periphery of the circle, and to slowly fill in the space towards the centre. By looking at the series, one can try to imagine these movements. None refer directly to the act of handling the record. Such a reference would become possible as a memory, as Warnier theorised sensori-motor experience.

While Warnier's experience is acquired through time, Simondon postulates in *Imagination et invention*, motricity is a source for the imagination, starting at the biological level. The mental image has a life independent of the subject: "The mental image is like a sub-ensemble, relatively independent inside the subject who is a living being; at birth, the image is a fascicle of motor tendencies, a long term anticipation of experiencing an object" [*L'image mentale est comme un sous-ensemble relativement indépendant à l'intérieur de l'être vivant sujet; à sa naissance, l'image est*

⁴⁸⁰ Theodore W. Adorno, 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', p.58

un faisceau de tendance motrice, anticipation à long terme de l'expérience de l'objet];⁴⁸¹ movement at the biological level eventually to the production of an object.

Simondon depicts a relation to material culture that is more intimate than Warnier's as he proposes objects resulting from a biological source. The relationship between object and human is to be considered as prior to its encounter, its perception. These biologically-based spontaneous movements exist before any encounter; motricity precedes perception. For Simondon, to invent a technical object, is to actually link humans to the world. "A created object is not a materialised image that is placed arbitrarily in the world as an object amongst objects, to overcharge nature supplementary artifice; it is, through its origin, and still, by its function, a system of coupling between the living and the milieu, a meeting point where the subjective world and the objective world communicate" [*Un objet créé n'est pas une image matérialisée et posée arbitrairement dans le monde comme un objet parmi des objets, pour surcharger la nature d'un supplément d'artifice; il est, par son origine, et reste, par sa fonction, un système de couplage entre le vivant et son milieu, un point double en lequel le monde subjectif et le monde objectif communiquent*].⁴⁸²

The various small marks on paper, which produce the records and the typographical marks, are drawn to suggest an animated surface, as if these shapes were pulsating.

⁴⁸¹ Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)* (Chatou: Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2008), p. 3

⁴⁸² Ibid, p. 186

For Simondon these drawings would be on a certain level animated, a result of an innate motricity, a mental image that becomes object in the world, where it will affect, and produce more mental images, which for Simondon means that an image as a life cycle.

To draw these records is an encounter with a cultural artifact and with a geometrical form, the circle. Both the act of drawing, and its subject are used to apprehend touch, while the sense of touch is one of the ways to encounter matter. Touch is not the subject of my drawings yet it is evoked.

Direct encounter with various types of matter elicits touch, yet it is touch that acknowledges these various materials, including tools. Touching needs to be done in various ways, as required by the work done. By attempting to follow simple rules to make my records, I need to control my movements, my grip, and my pen. To hold my pen too tight will eventually stress my fingers, making them numb, and unable to properly guide my pen. This was at points registered on paper, yet I couldn't tell you where. Resistance produces touch. Though touch is always present, as a continuous aspect of living, once an encounter with the world is registered, is felt, it may become a need, as contact between body and matter opens the way for emotions.

For anthropologist Tim Ingold certain types of lines are alive, emotional, while others are static. He uses as an example the continuous movement of writing with a pen as alive, while a page of printed text is said to have no relationship between the

trace it leaves and the movement that made it; the original connection between the manual gesture and its graphic trace is broken by the punctual movement of the digit of the keys.⁴⁸³ Ingold suggests that the gesture is erased because the “form of the printed letter or characters have their origin in the engraving of stone, wood, and metal rather than in handwriting,” with the engraved gesture being cancelled out, as the chisel works and reworks the material to make each letter, whereas the written gesture is fully recorded, as it is uninterrupted.⁴⁸⁴ No trace of the energetic movement remains for Ingold in the carved letters, and the typewriter cannot transfer the various pressure of the hand, the way a pencil does. To type with a keyboard, as we mostly do today, is to write without expression for Ingold, whereas one previously wrote with the whole body.⁴⁸⁵ Ingold searches for those marks, and scratches that are meant to indicate touch, and human sensibility. A line drawn with tools, or a text typed with a computer, though the result of manual operations, but they are without expression. As the Romantics would say, they are mechanical, not organic, while for Simondon, this opposition does not come into play, as all production is human.

Indeed we are surrounded with various words, from the Internet to the vast amount of texts encountered daily, in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and advertisement. The linear, the straight line has become known as something made, rather than grown. Yet, for someone like Stéphane Mallarmé, the typographic text does indeed

⁴⁸³ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A brief history*, p. 93

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 137

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 144

have an effect on the reader, as it draws them to the actual stuff of a text, which usually disappears as one is reading. To emphasise the artifice of typography forces the reader to look at the text, not only to read it. Characters are drawings.⁴⁸⁶ For a typographer such as Gerrit Noordzij there is an evident link between the manual written letter, and its transformation into a typeface: “there is no essential difference between typography and handwriting, if we apply a similar method of description, based on ratio of thickness of horizontal to vertical stroke.”⁴⁸⁷ Noordzij scrutinises the forms of letters, and the space around them. A letter does not exist on its own, but on a surrounding surface. Each typeface become effective or not, that is, easy to read, or not, if it is well balanced. Letters are not just written in a continuous movement, as Ingold suggest, but are formed. It is writing with built-up shapes. Noordzij calls this lettering: “In lettering the shapes are more patient than in handwriting, as they accept retouching strokes that may gradually improve (or impair) the quality of shapes.”⁴⁸⁸

To draw geometrically, as I’ve done with the typographical ornaments such as the asterisks and the *fleurons*, is to proceed differently from my usual method. For example, with the triple asterisks drawing I wanted to place these within a similar area of my previous drawings, a circular area with a diameter of 12”, the size of an LP. I wanted two asterisks above a singular one. To situate each asterisk equidistant

⁴⁸⁶ Jean-Gérard Lapacherie, ‘Typographic Characters: Tension between Text and Drawing’ *Yale French Studies* 84, 1994, pp 63-77

⁴⁸⁷ Gerrit Noordzij, *Letterletter* (Point Robert, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia: Hartley & Marks Publishers Inc., 2000), p. 6

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*

to each other within this circular area, I needed not only to calculate, but also to figure the size that the asterisks would be. The measuring was done with a compass, a ruler, a triangle, and a protractor, along with my pencil and eraser; it did not take long. A few modifications were done to ensure that the asterisks were large enough to touch the outer edge of the circle, while keeping the forms as close as possible to each other (fig.35).

What became apparent as I was drawing the various tips of my asterisk was that each one did not need to be measured. The geometrical design controlled the overall shape, allowing for duplicate lines and shapes to be made easily, once the center had been located, and that directional lines were drawn. This was another type of repetition, not based on free hand gestures, but dictated by the established geometry. After establishing the size and placement of my lines, all points were joined, slowly revealing the form I wanted. As I do not make use of geometry often, its use and results intrigued me. After several drawings were made, I realized how I could play with my motif, modifying its size, or number of points. The precision that geometry can bestow on a drawing, appealed to me. The pleasure to draw geometrically varies from other types of drawing, such as drawing from nature, from memory, or as process.

My use of geometry was to think about Ingold's expressive free-hand line, and the inexpressive ruler-made line. The handmade line is spontaneously drawn, organically belonging to the surface that it adheres to, as it is drawn *along* the

surface, while the line made with a ruler is said to not connect to anything; it is drawn *across* a surface.

Drawing freehand or with a ruler. Tim Ingold in his book *Lines*, writes of lines today as static, whereas previous lines were part of movement and growth, resulting in a contemporary perception of the term line or linearity as being narrow-minded, sterile, “as well as the single-track logic, of modern analytic thought.”⁴⁸⁹ Ingold tracks the disappearance of dynamism of the line, and its replacement with a containment of this vitalism. A line used to be a path one moves along, writes Ingold, but has been modified into boundaries, or points. This sets an opposition, between going along a path, and joining up bounded region; from a line of movement and growth to a dotted line, a succession “of instants in which nothing moves or grows.”⁴⁹⁰ Ingold draws a series of lines to reproduce a squiggly line, which he then joins, producing a semblance of the original drawing. “I have in fact drawn each dot by hand. To do this I had to bring the tip of my pencil into contact with the paper at a pre-determined point, and then to jiggle it about on that point so as to form the dot. All the energy, and all the movement, was focused there –almost as if I was drilling a hole. In the spaces between the dots, however, there remains no trace of movement.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History*, p. 2

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 73-74

The drawn line here is said to exist only if the dots are joined up, with the movement broken, as each dot could have been made a various times. To reconstruct the line by connecting each dot is no longer the trace of the gesture. Gesture is there, but not its trace. The process becomes less one of exploring, or walking as Ingold writes, but of construction or assembly. To connect each dot, is to follow a pre-determined route, as if one is looking at a map. The finished composition is static, without a possibility of growth. For Ingold, trace is “any enduring mark left in or on solid surface by a continuous movement.”⁴⁹² To make dots, though a continuous movement, it is only parts of the gesture that is registered as trace. The line has become fragmented, “under the sway of modernity”, writes Ingold, into a “succession of points and dots.”⁴⁹³

The line, like walking, is a way to connect continuously with the surrounding, whereas the fragmented line, as a series of points, becomes mapping, which transforms our sense of the environment, from one that we inhabit, to the perception that we merely occupy it. To move from one spot to another, is to move across a surface, whereas to move along, as one makes a line, is to inhabit the environment. This produces two types of lines, two modalities of travel, being wayfaring for the growing line, and transport, for the line that connects points, which moves onto surfaces. They are two ways of knowing, with wayfaring producing knowledge as one goes, while with the notion of transportation, moving

⁴⁹² Ibid, p. 43

⁴⁹³ Ibid, p. 75

and knowing is separated, with knowledge being built up latter, with the information gathered from point to point.

As I've mentioned previously, the two types of lines as described by Ingold replay what some other would call the mechanical and the organic; the hand drawn and the tool assisted; or the hand-written and the typewritten. It could also be termed spontaneous and planned. Another example to accentuate this difference is the distance an author might feel, comparing one's manuscript, to its printed, book version. Gustave Flaubert commented on seeing his *Madame Bovary* as a book was distressed: "The sight of my work in print deadened my mind completely... It seemed flat. Everything looks black."⁴⁹⁴ Flaubert, contrary to Mallarmé, does not imagine how his novel is to reach the reader. He does not take into account the transformation from the final manuscript, through a copyist, and then through the typographer and the printing press, before ending on the shelves of a bookstore.

Would Ingold find expression in Mallarmé's typography? Perhaps not, and this might be due to the Ingold's definition of continuity, which he uses to make his point. Ingold rejects interruptions, such as he sees in the movements of the stone carver, whose carved line cannot unfold continuously: "For quite unlike the calligraphic brush stroke, which registers the fleeting moment of its production and can on no account be repaired or retouched, [the carver] in cutting back and forth

⁴⁹⁴ Martine Reid, 'Editor's Preface: Legible/Visible' *Yale French Studies* 84, 1994, p. 9

with the chisel each successive cut eliminates the trace of the preceding gesture.”⁴⁹⁵ The continuous has to be registered. Ingold, might be mourning what Briony Fer insists are the conditions of viewing art today, made up of “cuts and dislocations,” but he is also resisting the richness that a work can suggest. By insisting on the visible, he ignores the invisible, including the other senses and memory. The typographic text demands to be approached as an animated surface.

Philosopher Etienne Souriau encourages a multi-modal encounter with things, to gather the richness that they can diffuse, beyond what artists can say. This he finds exemplified in a peculiar book: *Les dessins trans-conscients de Stéphane Mallarmé*, by Ernest Fraenkel (1960), where the author becomes enthralled not with Mallarmé’s words or sentences, but with the typographical positioning on the page. Fraenkel wants to reveal the hidden “texte plastique” that each page contains, by reducing each word, or sentence to a shape, and by connecting these shapes to each other with lines, thus making the space between words into shapes. Fraenkel reveals each word as occupying a surface, and modulating it (fig.36).

Souriau in his introduction to this peculiar book writes: “It is an experiment to attempt. A legitimate experience. A pathetic experience. As this abstract message is an authentic part of the *Coup de dés*. It exists in it. It is in affect” [*C’est une expérience*

⁴⁹⁵ Tim Ingold, p. 136-137

*à tenter. Expérience légitime. Expérience pathétique. Car ce message abstrait fait authentiquement partie du Coup de dés. Il y existe. Il y agit].*⁴⁹⁶

Playing with typography comes from the world of advertisement, which influenced the Futurists, the Surrealists and the Constructivists. In 1889, the typographer Motteroz invented the device of “jeté de texte” or “jeté de groupe”, which consisted of throwing the various letters to be printed, to create a sort of haphazard arrangement, used for advertisements. This throwing is in fact what Mallarmé came to use for his own 1897 publication of *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*.⁴⁹⁷ As mentioned earlier, typography also includes various ornaments, elements of punctuation, numbers, and blanks, which all animates the surface of the page.

Animating paper

An accumulation of lines on paper can also animate its surface, stimulating the viewer’s vision by producing an intense sensation of movement or vibration. Interestingly many 20th century artist have made use of ruler-made lines either as a way to address the ineffable and the spiritual, or as a mean of achieving higher cognitive levels, from the Malevitch, to the works of Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Agnes Martin, documented in the exhibition catalogue *3 x Abstraction*.⁴⁹⁸ All these

⁴⁹⁶ Ernest Fraenkel, *Les dessins trans-conscients de Stéphane Mallarmé: A propos de la typographie de un coup de dés*, avant-propos par Etienne Souriau (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1960), p. 8

⁴⁹⁷ Jean-Gérard Lapacherie, p. 77

⁴⁹⁸ Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher, *3 x Abstraction* (New York: The Drawing Center; New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 2005)

artists made extensive use of geometry. Their lines are for the most part made with the help of a ruler. This is evident if we look attentively at most of Agnes Martin's work. In many works, she repeats lines; horizontally and vertically to eventually make a grid with the surface of the paper, or canvas. Each line repeats the previous line, and so will the next one. Having myself made my own grids, I know that one knows what is to be expected: each line needs to repeat the same trace as the previous line. What is often forgotten with such work is the making of the first line. The first one does not repeat a previous one. It is just a line, from which all other will proceed. Martin's work, such as her 1965 drawing *Leaf*, with its pencil lines on a white canvas, makes one think of graph paper.

Briony Fer writes of this work as one that invites a contemplative gaze, "bolting the viewer to it, as if the *work* of the work were to open on to an immaterial and meditative space,"⁴⁹⁹ to the infinity. The term infinity, a favorite of the Romantics, becomes in the 1960s, a term that relates not to the sublime, but is to be taken literally, as something that could go on forever. Martin was not interested in seriality, but indeed with the transcendental. Yet, for Fer, there is a strong link between the contradiction of Martin's repetitions and the infinite with the procedures of seriality, which the minimalists appreciated in her work. Fer makes a case for Martin's interest with infinity, through her initial interest, while living in New York City at the end of the 1950s, with ephemeral and everyday materials, "an

⁴⁹⁹ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line*, p. 47

aesthetic of the thrown away.”⁵⁰⁰ Martin produced small assemblages, which she later abandoned as she found them “too indebted to material reality.”⁵⁰¹ Yet, it is exactly materiality that interests Martin, Fer claims, that led her to modify her work. A trade-off: one kind of material for another, grids made of found material, such as wires, is now drawn. The materials used for her drawings, graphite, inks, and watercolours, become residual lines, left on papers, or prepared canvas. The lines are not uniform, and produce subtle tonal shifts or small leaks produce various thicknesses of lines. Many of Martin’s grids reveal small leakage at the edge, where the movement that made the ink line had to end, giving two of the edges a denser appearance from the rest of the grid.

These variations, or modalities, are what interest Martin. The subtle shifts that occur with repetition result from the choice of material, which allows for various shifts with the quality of each line. The irregularities produced by ink, create textures and nuances, animating the surface, revealing simultaneously its materiality, while also suggesting the possibility of entering within the surface. Whereas Öyvind Fahlström writes of the leakage produced by his felt-tip marker as eventually becoming monotonous to him, Agnes Martin insists on taking note of all these minuscule differences, and repeating them over an entire career (fig.37).

Minuscule differences are felt depending on the type of material one used. A slight change that can occur while drawing a line, due to a change of material; a new type

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 48

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p. 51

of paper, or a thinner or thicker one, or a new type of ink, or pen. This is realised by shifting. In the case of sculpting, to vary from one material to another is felt as a shift. These changes do not necessarily occur through a continuous flow of time. Changes can be felt sometimes after a long period of time has passed. One in fact remembers, with all its possible failures, a difference, once a forgotten contact is reestablished, is reconnected. This happens sometimes when wearing a sweater one hasn't worn in years, or eating a carrot, fresh from one's garden after years of eating them from the supermarket.

The pleasure I have in the act of drawing, with the temporal and tactile aspect of repeating a series of small lines to fill-in my records, cannot be evoked, or conveyed properly by the finished drawing. Considering my ruler-made lines, Ingold might see them as way to proceed fast, but to draw them as perfectly as one can is an effort. In fact, it cannot be done fast. Looking at a scribbled line as it is drawn is indeed different from the attention one has on the pencil making a straight line with a ruler, if only because a slight change in a single straight line becomes noticeably pronounced as the line is drawn. A slight shift alters the regularity of the ruler-made lines, it makes a small dent perhaps, that possibly could become, as Briony Fer writes, "the necessary ground for heightened intensity,"⁵⁰² the small detail that we are sensitive to, it resonates, and that pulls us in.

⁵⁰² Ibid, p. 4

I would like to end on a Romantics note, from Novalis, who was greatly attentive to the physicality of books, and the importance of typography. While Ingold describes the printed page as self-contained, ready-made, severed from the manual,⁵⁰³ Novalis finds it stimulating; the black letters on a page stimulate memory. Books are not filled with dematerialised, abstract knowledge, serving a transcendental function, “in which ideas flow freely, unencumbered by material exigencies”, writes Chad Wellmon in his article ‘Touching Books: Diderot, Novalis, and the Encyclopedia of the Future’. They are things made, that affect our senses.

Like Simondon, Novalis sees in the object, in this case the book, a unique point of contact between the inner and outer worlds. To read a book is a contact between not only between body and book, but also between the world and our memory. But it is specifically the letter that is an aid in the excitement of a particular train of thought. Reading is a physical encounter, an important aspect of Novalis’ argument “against what he considered the increasing abstraction or sundering of cognition from sensibility;”⁵⁰⁴ to think is to feel, with ideas becoming objects of sensual perception, accessed through contact with the book in hand. I would like to recall Ed Ruscha’s small books, their size, weight, all part of the pleasure of touching the pages.



⁵⁰³ Tim Ingold, *Lines*, p. 93

⁵⁰⁴ Chad Wellmon, ‘Touching Books: Diderot, Novalis, and the Encyclopedia of the Future’, *Representations*, Vol. 114, No. 1, 2011, p.91

Conclusion

The role of touch in the making of a work of art is persistent. What has changed is an ability in some cases to recognise its mark. While we can say that touch is a permanent state, or “the sense of life” as Jenny Slatman states,⁵⁰⁵ the evidences are not always identifiable as such, where a scratch or a * is needed, acting as seal of the indexical understanding.

In an art context, to address the sense of touch, the notion of contact, of tangibility, of proximity, of the haptic, of materiality, of skin, is a negotiation with the hand, either by recognising its role, standing for the artist who works and forms matter, or by minimising its reference to the artist, referring to the body as a whole, a body that registers as matter. This division replicates the hylomorphic schema, a division that I’ve tried to overcome by rethinking the relation one undertakes with matter through manual work.

The evidence of the hands may be unapparent from an encounter with a geometrical resin form, yet the presence of geometry alone, that most abstract of forms, is such an indication: it is present not to our mind, but to our body, made and positioned to be encountered. The object is a made one, through a specific technique and skills.

⁵⁰⁵ Jenny Slatman, ‘The Sense of Life’, p.305

The next question upon encountering such an object would be its use. In other words, is it art or not, which brings up the question of labour in art and in non-art. While the gestures, movement, skills and technique may be similar in both cases, the art object is imbued with extra meaning from the artist and art theory. While many artists throughout the twentieth century and the twenty-first century have blurred the line between art and productive labour, at times infiltrating the work force itself, this is done with specific intention by the artist. The object retains the “autonomous effect of art” writes John Roberts: “Art that opposes this or weakens its claims, loses its identity as art.”⁵⁰⁶

Roberts establishes a displacement of the role of the hand, from direct manipulation, such as Magor’s early work, to one of authorship-at-a distance and surrogacy, as with Magor’s later work. With the early work, Magor leaves her traces by producing her own forms, while with the latest work, the work is not about production itself, therefore Magor can have the work fabricated. The role and place of touch remains throughout her work, while displaced, from one of producing and feeling pressure, to one of conforming to surfaces. The various techniques are intimately tied to emotional states.

By contrasting her various technical methods, the place and role of touch can be monitored. For both artist and spectator, a close attention to these details informs the work. For the artist, the close relationship between concept and the techniques

⁵⁰⁶ John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 227

that will allow the work to exist is one of constant movement, a negotiation between what is wanted, needed, possible, and in some cases, surprising.

My own method of working is to allow the work to surprise me. By collecting and intergrading, or assembling various material, object, things and ideas together, that the work evolves. Often a small detail will call on my attention. It can be my inability to fully control my line drawing if I extend my arm too far, or keep it too close to my body. Other times, the proximity of several objects, or the use of two different material, or colours will retain my attention.

The physical acts of putting these elements together, or in the case of my drawings, of tending to filling a surface with an accretion of marks, is an important aspect of art making. While the pleasures of the hand made are present in my everyday life, I want them in my studio work.

To transfer and use manual work found at home or throughout the labour force to the studio, is a strategy that was used by the Russian avant-garde and the American minimalists, both portraying themselves as workers. In more recent activities, artists imitate small artisanal and commercial ventures such as repairing obsolete technology (Tim Dallett and Adam Kelly with their Artifact Institute), or communal eating and drinking (Michael Riedel, Andrée Anne Vien, Dean Baldwin). Repairing machines and cooking are activities done by hand, activities that become part of art, replacing the traditional activities of art making, one type of manual labour

displacing another one. I have chosen to locate manual labour, to experience working with materials, with matter, in art, making my studio part of a neighbourhood, along with the small-time repair shop, the restaurant, the tavern, the photocopy store and the video game production company.

All these various types of touching, and of making become registered in my record drawings. To draw is to listen, to smell, to move and be still as I'm scratching the surface, accumulating inky lines over each other, reminiscing of past sounds and imagining aural possibilities, as Novalis did, when considering the relation between sound and matter, pondering the formations of things as arrested sound movements, sensing in the static the sonic possibilities:

376. PHYSICS. Couldn't every sculptural formation, from crystals up until man, be explained in an acoustic manner by means of arrested motion?

382. (THEORY OF ART). (Painting) Sculpture is nothing else but the figuristics of music. Remarkable expression: in the highest vibration.

(Painting) Sculpture –objective music. Music –subjective music, or painting. One should be able to acoustically impress everything (necessary), to render it into silhouettes, and to encipher it. Lines are fixed motions. A circle arises through the central oscillation of a plane.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁷ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia/Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, David W. Wood (tr) (Albany: SUNY, 2007)

The importance given to the artisan by Simondon as a basis to build a relationship with contemporary technological ensembles, indicates that direct contact, or handling, needs to be retained as a basis for many new media work, not only as suggestions of the tangible and interactive, but of being able to follow closely the transformations that these tools can perform. For my part, it is a continuation of simple manual work that attracts me, a spontaneous somatic need answered by my hand's prehension.



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