

More Than Words:  
Text Art Since Conceptualism

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## Abstract

Since 2009, there has been an increased presence of group exhibitions in public institutions in the UK and the US which address the ways contemporary artists in the past two decades have used text as a material, a subject, and a conceptual device. Significant amongst these exhibitions are *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 2009, and *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2012. Within their curatorial strategies, and independently from one another, both exhibitions draw a binary of the genealogy of text in art practice as emerging either from the international movement of concrete poetry of the mid-1950s to 1971 (including the work of Décio Pignatari, or Haraldo de Campos), or from conceptual art of the mid-1960s-early 1970s (including the work of Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language, Robert Smithson, or Mel Bochner). Such group exhibitions have overlooked how feminist, second generation conceptual artists embraced language as material. Artists of this second generation of conceptual art were critiquing conceptualism by introducing subject matter which looked outward from art and which demanded the audience to engage with language as a material through their use of the printed word, typography, written language, and methods of printing. For these artists, such as Mary Kelly, language was not presumed natural, and the materiality of text was necessary in order to engage an art audience in questions of power, representation, gender, and socialisation.

With the rise of the digital age, the materiality of the linguistic signifier offers artists today something different than it did in the 1960s. Since the late 1990s, there has been a proliferation of works by contemporary artists in the UK and US that I refer to as text art, made by artists such as Fiona Banner, Janice Kerbel, Shannon Ebner, Pavel Büchler, or Paul

Elliman. Part of my original contribution to knowledge is to explore the ways contemporary artists use text, to interrogate how this is different from work seen before, and to question the demands it places on the audience who reads it, as well as the challenges it places on the act of reading an artwork made of words. The literature emphasises a turn away from looking or the visual to a turn towards reading which occurred in conceptualism (Kotz, 2007; Blacksell, 2013). I explore the binary of this turn in the conceptual art period of 1966-1973 and I suggest that artists are engaging with text today not only to challenge how an audience encounters written language as art, but the very act of reading text in a digital world.

The first three chapters explore the materiality of text in a historical genealogy of conceptual art, conceptual art in relationship to concrete poetry, and the feminist critique in second generation of conceptual art. The latter three chapters explore the materiality of text in contemporary art practices. This is the focus of the thesis, which builds on the foundation for materiality of text argued in chapters one, two, and three. I argue not for a cohesive movement of contemporary text artists, but rather, that diverse, contemporary artists' practices are making similar investigations across text in art, and that this warrants attention to explore how we consider text as a medium today.

## Dedication

For Molly, Bobby, and Sunny. Many words were written while you were tucked up in bed.

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## Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 20 January 2017

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## Introduction: More than Words

In 2009, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London staged *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* It was an exhibition of historic works of concrete poetry, artworks from the 1960s using text, and contemporary text artworks. Mark Sladen, in his curation, suggested the latter two groups of works demonstrated a direct relationship with concrete poetry (Sladen, 2009, p.4). Artworks in the exhibition were mostly wall-based and were installed over the two floors of the ICA. *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* took its name from the influential poetry periodical run by Ian Hamilton Finlay between 1962 and 1968. Sladen, then Director of Exhibitions at the ICA, had been inspired to make the exhibition after he happened across the ‘typestract’ poems of Dom Sylvester Houédard in the Poetry Library at the South Bank Centre six months earlier (Sladen, 2016). These works stimulated within Sladen the kernel of an exhibition – where historic works of concrete poetry would be shown alongside contemporary artworks to demonstrate the emergence of an approach to the materiality of language in use of text in contemporary art that Sladen felt was influenced by, or suggestive of, concrete poetry (Sladen 2016).

When *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* opened, it had been over forty years since the ICA had mounted an exhibition of concrete poetry, the international movement which sought to move beyond the linguistic interpretation of poetry to a trans-national, trans-linguistic, new visual language. The first exhibition of concrete poetry at the ICA was *Between Poetry and Painting* in 1965, when the movement was at the tail-end of its period of international significance. Until *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, there had not been another. Concrete poetry was then, and remains now, a marginal field of both literary and visual arts. Jasia Reichardt was

Assistant Director at the ICA at the time she curated *Between Poetry and Painting*. Coming from a background in art criticism, Reichardt's exhibitions expressed a shift within the ICA's curatorial focus towards theoretically-driven exhibitions featuring more 'conceptually based art' (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). Conceptualism, by contrast, between 1966-1973 was an international movement which saw visual artists challenge the object-status and image-based understanding of art, and attempt to dematerialize the art object, in order to work with transportable, democratic materials, language being one such medium. With *Between Poetry and Painting*, Reichardt put recent language-based artworks such as Barry Flanagan's *Finger Poem* (1965) in a discourse with concrete poetry (much as Sladen did in 2009). *Between Poetry and Painting* was a popular exhibition, with the November AGM reporting the exhibition 'was attracting new members' to the institution (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). It was the first exhibition in London to showcase concrete poetry, which Reichardt positioned against work from the Lettrist group and 'complemented by older work by [Guillaume] Apollinaire and [Stephan] Marinetti' (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). It followed an exhibition of concrete poetry in Cambridge in 1964 and Oxford in 1965 (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). Though *Between Poetry and Painting* had a broad reach in terms of audience attendance and critical reception, and was accompanied by performances and events such as readings, it has been given less art historical attention than other landmark exhibits staged at the ICA in the same period, such as Reichardt's *Cybernetic Serendipity* (1968), or *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), curated by Harald Szeeman and organised by Konrad Fischer at the ICA from its tour after its initial staging in Bern (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). Both of these exhibitions have been referred to as 'legendary' in art criticism, and have each triggered retrospective exhibitions which reimagine the exhibitions themselves: *When*

*Attitudes Become Form* being restaged in Venice in 2013, and *Cybernetic Serendipity* warranting an archival exhibition in the ICA in 2015 (Rappolt, 2013).

*Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* placed works by poets Dom Sylvester Houédard, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Henri Chopin, and Ferdinand Kriwet in dialogue with artists working in Britain and Europe today, such as Janice Kerbel, Karl Holmqvist, and Frances Stark. A number of artists and poets included in the exhibition, such as Liliane Lijn, bridged the two periods, for they actively practiced in the first period of conceptualism in the mid- to late-1960s, and continued to make artwork using text through to today. With *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, Sladen attempted a 'corrective' to the oversight of concrete poetry by art scholarship which had consistently suggested the dominant trajectory of the development of what I will describe and define below as 'language as art' since the 1960s as stemming from conceptualism (Sladen, 2016). Sladen felt an 'intuition' that there was a 'zeitgeist' of artists using language post-2000 that signaled a relationship with concrete poetry, which he saw in their engagement with the materiality of text (2016). Sladen's intuition echoes an argument made by Jamie Hilder, an artist, curator, and literary scholar from Vancouver, around the same time, which were published first in his doctoral dissertation at the University of British Columbia, and later in a book published by McGill-Queen's University Press (Hilder, 2010; 2016). Hilder observes that concrete poetry and conceptual art have had an antagonistic relationship, wherein concrete poetry has been dismissed by the art world, and conceptual art's protagonists (Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, and Carl Andre in particular) borrowed from concrete poetry's use of language whilst simultaneously placing their practices at a distance from concrete poetry by articulating their rejection or dismissal of the movement (Hilder, 2016, p.153).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a proliferation of works by contemporary artists in the UK and US that I refer to as text art (which I define shortly). These artworks demand the audience to engage with language as a material through the artists' use of the printed word, typography, written language, and methods of printing. In response to this artistic activity, curators have, since 2009, developed group exhibitions (and some critical surveys in book form) that attempt to contextualise and position these individual, contemporary text art practices against a historical genealogy of text in art. As demonstrated by Liz Kotz's 2007 book, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art*, a prominent genealogy of text art has been to position contemporary work in a line of art history from the language experiments made in conceptual art practices of the mid-1960s to early 1970s, such as those of Lawrence Weiner, Art & Language, or Robert Smithson, artists who were typically based in the US metropolitan centres of New York and Los Angeles, and Art & Language, based in the UK (Kotz, 2007). More recently, as seen in the *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* for example, curators have re-examined the international concrete poetry movement of the mid-1950s to 1971 as an influence on and predecessor to text in contemporary art practice. While both of these movements present significant lines of influence for the development of text in contemporary art practice, such curatorial selection and positioning of *only* these two movements to the range of contemporary text art resultingly overlooks the importance of the second generation of conceptualism, namely that made by American and British artists exercising a critique of conceptualism and operating in practices informed by feminism, who engaged the materiality of text to make this critique. Such overlooking perpetuated the lack of inclusion of feminist artists engaging language at the time of the mid- to late-1970s, a period when significant exhibitions surveying conceptual art and the use of language within it, were staged. Specifically, I refer to Mary Kelly who was not included in landmark group



exhibitions of conceptual art in the UK at the time of the initial movement, such as *The New Art* at the Hayward in 1972 (which though was not exclusively an exhibition of language-based art, included significant text artworks such as Art & Language's *Index 02* (1972), or *Languages* selected and toured by the Arts Council in 1976 (which included work by Stephen Willats and Victor Burgin). Liliane Lijn provides a single exception to this assessment, for Lijn was included in *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* with her conical sculptures on which she inscribed words from poems and placed the work on rotating turntables. At the ICA in 2009, Lijn's work was included in a trajectory of concrete poetry and kinetic sculpture. In the 1970s, Lijn, like Kelly, was overlooked in the language-works included in group exhibitions on conceptual art in public galleries named above. This thesis explores the use of text as a material in contemporary practice through an engagement with genealogies for text art, and for curatorial positions on text art in exhibitions in the last four decades. Specifically, I argue for the influence on contemporary text art of the use of text as material in critiques of conceptualism of the late 1970s and early 1980s informed by feminist art practice on text art today.

Concrete poetry, as an international movement which related to conceptual art, emerged from the information aesthetic theories of German concrete poet and theorist Max Bense from the late 1950s, and from the Noigrandes group in Brazil in the mid-1950s, informed by information theory and computational studies. In contrast, much language-based conceptual art emerges as a development from the philosophy of language of Ludwig Wittgenstein, or the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and Roman Jakobson (Hilder, 2016, p.153). The theory informing the movements differs greatly, as do the attitudes of poets and artists of each movement to the materiality of text. Consider the Symbolist Stéphane

Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés (Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard)* (1897) or Guillaume Apollinaire's typographic calligrammes such as *Il Pleut* (1918). Both are works attributed as foundational to concrete poetry. For example Décio Pignatari, Augusto de Campos, and Hardoldo de Campos wrote in the 1958 manifesto, *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry*, reprinted in Bob Cobbing's and Peter Mayer's *Concerning Concrete Poetry: 'forerunners: mallarmé (un coup de dés, 1897)...apollinaire (calligrammes): the vision, rather than the praxis'* (sic) ((de Campos, de Campos and Pignatari, 2014). Apollinaire's *Il Pleut* for example, presents the text typed in cascading varticle lines set at irregular, gentle diagonals creating the sensation of raindrops running gently downwards. This sensation echoes the melancholy of the poem. Mallarmé's project was far more ambitious than any pictorial illustration with words and it was indeed Mallarmé who 'first identified the potential of language to function on its own, beyond the spectral figure of the author' (Hilder, 2016, p.154). But these well-known works are not included within Emmett Williams' 1967 *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, which was reprinted in 2013, for Williams, like Pignatari and the de Campos brothers, sees the Apollinaire and Mallarmé as 'forerunners' to the concrete poetry movement (de Campos, de Campos and Pignatari, 2014). Hilder argues that the concrete poetry movement as it emerged in the 1950s was defined not just by an attention to the aesthetics of language – how the words looked on a page – but to a desire to create an international, supralinguistic, movement, attempted through the image of language (Hilder, 2016, p.8). Though concrete poetry thus has a broad reach, for the purposes here, I am referring to the period from the mid-1950s to 1971. When I refer to the conceptual art movement, I refer to the period of the mid-1960s to mid-1970s (1966-1973) in the US (primarily New York and Los Angeles) and Europe (in both the UK, Germany, and Eastern Europe, though I do not focus on Eastern Europe here). The artists recognised by the canon of art history as conceptual artists of this

period, such as Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner, are predominantly male, with the exception of a few figures such as Yoko Ono (who became prominent in Fluxus), Lijn, and Hanne Darboven. The contemporary period attended to in this thesis is 2000 to today, with a particular focus on the last decade, and on exhibitions presenting group surveys of text art since 2009.

Sladen's intuition indeed reflected a curatorial pattern which drew attention to contemporary artists using text with a new attention to materiality. Following *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, several survey exhibitions at UK and US public galleries and museums began to present concrete poetry in juxtaposition or dialogue with contemporary text art, and argued a formative relationship of the former on the latter. These were: *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, at the MoMA, New York from 6 May – 27 August 2012, which presented the relationship of both concrete poetry, from 'concrete language experiments from the Neo-Dada and Futurist movements' (Hoptman, 2012, p.181), to contemporary text art through the work of twelve contemporary artists or artist groups, against historical works by artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Carl Andre, Lijn, and Bruce Nauman. *Marking Language* at The Drawing Room, London, from the 10 October – 14 December 2013, which was shown in parallel with *Drawing Time, Reading Time* at the Drawing Centre, New York, presented an international selection of works by seven artists, and again made a reference to concrete poetry, communication, and methods of writing, such as the typewriter and the hand. *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century* (Hayward Publishing, 2015) presented a survey in the form of the book. Its editors Victoria Bean and Chris McCabe anthologised the contemporary practice of visual poetry, yet extended their survey to include well-known artists (not poets) including Jenny Holzer and Fiona Banner, as well as Lijn, along with Sue

Tompkins (who was also in the ICA show) and those practicing and identifying solely as poets such as Nick Thurston. *Postscript*, at the MCA Denver from 10 October 2012 – 3 February 2013, which later toured to The Power Plant, Toronto from 22 June to 2 September 2013, explored writing in visual practice and literary fields after conceptual art, suggesting a relationship between conceptual art and conceptual writing, a field of literature which transforms conventional literary expression through experimental, ideas-based practices (Ives, 2013). In London, Chelsea Space presented two exhibitions of concrete poets within six months: Bob Cobbing from 19 November to 19 December 2014, and Kenelm Cox from 29 April to 5 June 2015.

In the preceding three decades, little attention had been paid to concrete poetry in institutions and public art galleries in the UK and US. The interest in concrete poetry that has emerged since 2000 is telling of a new curatorial response and attention to the place text was occupying in art practice, to its materiality, and its display in exhibitions. Specifically, curators sought to explore the attention to the new materiality of language emerging in contemporary art practice. Curators turned to concrete poetry as a precedent, overlooked in art scholarship, specifically exhibitions, at the time and which was ready to be reasserted as a dominant influence. While concrete poetry has influence on some developments of materiality and the use of text in art since the 1960s, such group exhibitions have had the unintentional result of presenting a binary of *either* conceptual art *or* concrete poetry bearing an influence on contemporary practice, whilst also glossing over other movements or periods in recent art history which have exerted an influence on the development of the materiality of text in art, such as Dada, Surrealism, Pop, or of concern to this thesis, feminist art in the second generation of conceptualism.

With the dominance of dematerialisation in the scholarship at the time, any material investigations of language in conceptual art then become a counter-point, a crude generalisation thus by default that the materiality of language in conceptual art itself takes one of two directions. Artists such as Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner and Dan Graham engaged with, embraced, and challenged the materiality of language, a notion which I will develop further below, within conceptual art practices of the late 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, other conceptual artists denied or attempted to escape the materiality of language in favour of a pursuit of formlessness. Such artists included Joseph Kosuth, both independently and with the Art & Language group, and Carl Andre. They were similarly disparaging and distancing of concrete poetry. Liz Kotz writes of Kosuth that: 'When Joseph Kosuth describes the work of artists like Graham or Acconci as resembling concrete poetry, there is no question that he means it as a term of derision' (Kotz, 2007, p.293). Kosuth is quoted in Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, as saying that concrete poets 'realize the sort of decadence that follows from that sort of materialism [treating words as material]. They are trying to say things about the world that are illogical in terms of language' (Lippard, 1973, p.132). Yet, the movements of concrete poetry and conceptual art share many similarities, not least in their manifestations of the word art. Both conceptual art and concrete poetry were international in their scope. In the case of concrete poetry, what later became identified as the international movement began in South America and in Switzerland, but it reached much of the world, including Eastern Europe, Canada, and Japan. Conceptual art too had a wide geography. Both of the movement's most intense moments of activity occurred in the 1960s, though concrete poetry began earlier than conceptual art and had a longer span. The two movements also overlap closely in time, with

concrete poetry waning by the mid-1960s and ceasing to have international relevance by the Stedelijk exhibition, *Klankteksten / Konkrete Poesie / Visuele Teksten* (*Sound texts / Concrete Poetry / Visual Texts*), in 1971, and conceptual art hitting its peak international period of activity in the near-same window of 1966-1973. Lynda Morris argues conceptual art between 1967 and 1973 'was a true avant-garde', drawing her definition from Donald Drew Egbert's *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe* (1970) (Morris, 2014, p.171). Morris argues that the defining characteristic is 'not stylistic' but that the movements 'emerge[d] in the aftermath of wars', in the case of conceptual art, being after the Second World War, and during the Cold War (Morris, 2014, p.171). Morris suggests the radicalism lies in its internationalism, something she attributes to the 'influential' and 'innovative primary art dealers' as much as the artists (Morris, 2014, p.171). Conceptual art as a movement reached a peak of activity at the height of the Vietnam War Tet Offensive in 1968. Concrete poetry, though a literary movement, emerged slightly earlier, yet fits Morris' definition of an avant-garde: international and in scope, and emerging in the same period of time. Hilder however, sees avant-gardes as associated with 'nihilism, activism, antagonism, [and] agonism' and strongly argues that concrete poetry was rather an '*arriere-garde*', a term he draws from William Marx to describe a movement that 'take[s] up [forebearers'] concerns while acknowledging them as influences' (Hilder, 2016, p.17). Marjorie Perloff established concrete poetry as an '*arriere-garde*' when she wrote in 2001: 'We need, in other words, to ground Concretism in its history, to understand, for example, its relation to the two World Wars as well as to the varying cultures that produced it. And further: from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can begin to discriminate *between* the various manifestations of what once seemed to be a unified movement. Not all concretisms, after all, are equal'

(Perloff, 2007). Both concrete poetry and conceptual art explored the possibility of language as a medium within an international movement.

Conceptual art and concrete poetry also had fundamental differences. Conceptual artists such as Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, and the Art & Language group turned to language in attempting to turn away from the image and away from the art object, and to embrace an ideas-based understanding of art. In part, this can be seen as a response to Clement Greenberg's arguments of modernism and abstract expressionism. Concrete poetry, particularly as the movement emerged in South America, turned to the visual potential of language (Hilder, 2016, p.8). For the Noigrandes poets in Brazil, namely the de Campos brothers, and Décio Pignatari, the rematerialising of the word to create a universal language came from a desire to comment on American imperialism rising in Brazil and the visual imagery of advertising culture through a visual language that used those very tropes. One can see such commentary in Pignatari's *Beba Coca Cola* (1957-64), for example (fig. 0.1), where the language slips between meanings, such as that for drink – that which global Coca Cola advertising tells us to do – to drool, and coca from cola to cocaine, thus presenting coca cola as a term synonymous with global dependence and slavish addiction. In contrast, the conceptual art movement, as its treatment of language was historicised by its chroniclers such as Lucy Lippard, sought to dematerialise the status of the art object through the use of language, and in so doing asserted the importance of the artist, for the artist was one imbuing the otherwise innocuous text with importance. Hilder summarises that: 'The pairing of conceptual art and concrete poetry does not automatically make sense beyond their common practice of *displaying language*', for one could easily turn to the Surrealist word-image, or the Dada use of text as a comparison for the presence of text in art, however, 'in

conceptual art [the display of language] was meant as the dematerialization of the art object, while in concrete poetry it was the rematerialization of the word' (Hilder, 2016, p.129).

Despite similarities in the time and the appearance of their respective developments of language, visual and verbal, however, concrete poetry and conceptual art have been, until 2009, largely separated and unequal in academic scholarship within literary and visual art. Conceptual art has been dominant in art scholarship as the emergence of language as an autonomous medium; concrete poetry has been relatively marginal, as I will shortly outline. Through the study of exhibitions which surveyed language in recent artworks, and were mounted at the time of each movement, I draw out the cross-overs and fluidity of ideas between them in their approaches of language. This builds a foundation from which, later in the thesis, I explore contemporary artworks and their relationships. The study of exhibitions also reveals the spaces within which other contemporary artworks emerge from other movements and their use of language.

The waning of concrete poetry coincided with the moment when conceptual art was beginning to take hold in the US and Europe as an international presence. While poet Stephen Scobie locates the movement's demise 'ironically' to what was also its peak moment, of 1967-8 (Scobie, 1997, p.146), other critics and chroniclers of the movement point to the beginning of the new decade of the 1970s as the moment that marked the end of concrete poetry as an international movement (Solt, 1996, p.351). The exhibition *Klankteksten / Konkrete Poesie / Visuele Teksten (Sound texts / Concrete Poetry / Visual Texts)* at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum which opened in November 1970 had a 'retrospective quality' to it (Hilder, 2016, p.12), signifying the end of a period. By the 1970s, Ian Hamilton



Finlay began to disassociate himself from the movement, which he saw had begun to diffuse in both 'quality' and 'criteria' (Bann, n.d.). 'The exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* was shown at the Kunsthalle in Bern, and then at the ICA in London in 1969. Conceptualism has, for many reasons, developed a renewed appeal to artists, curators and art historians, since its initial moment four decades ago. Sophie Richard suggests the current interest in conceptualism of the 1960s is due to two main reasons: one, the redefining of art in conceptualism radically shifted what was understood to be art, and so this radicalism has resulted in an enduring appeal (Richard, 2009, p.33). And two: the need to research and interview the key protagonists of the movement before they die, as many who survive are now in their eighties (Richard, 2009, p.33). Unlike the international focus of the art world on conceptual art, concrete poetry has only attracted marginal interest since its initial moment. It has been almost entirely ignored within art from the late 1960s until its re-emergence in the 2000s. Even within literary studies, there are only four book-length critical studies of concrete poetry published in English to date. These are: Liselotte Gumpel's *"Concrete" Poetry from East and West Germany: The Language of Exemplarism and Experimentalism* (1976), David Seaman's *Concrete Poetry in France* (1981), and Caroline Bayard's *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (1989), and Hilder's 2016 *Designed Words for a Designed World*. Many of the acknowledged proponents of the genre, such as *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968), edited and introduced by Mary Ellen Solt, are out of print. Yet since 2009, concrete poetry has appealed to curators making sense of language in art. Group exhibitions of language in art began to suggest concrete poetry as an alternative trajectory for how artists engage text in contemporary art. Conceptual art has been the dominant narrative in contemporary art and its criticism for the use of language in art since the 1960s. The two movements have a fluid relationship; no movement occurs in isolation.

Why have curators explored these two movements in exhibitions – concrete poetry and conceptual art – other than an obvious shared use of language?<sup>1</sup> Many other movements used language – Dada, or Pop, for example – so why have recent group exhibitions surveying text art in contemporary practice drawn a binary between concrete and conceptual art? Hilder sees the relationship thus: ‘While conceptual art utilized language to critique a system of referentiality within the institution of art, concrete poetry drew the reader’s attention to the materiality of language, to its physicality, and its changing role within global communication’ (Hilder, 2010, p.9). Hilder offers valuable insight to the relationship of concrete poetry and conceptual art as a convergence rather than a binary, but I do not take as strict a stance as Hilder does, for he argues that one movement (conceptual art) overtly borrowed from the other (concrete poetry) (Hilder, 2011). Instead, I focus on the importance of materiality emerging in both movements’ treatment of text, and the subsequent development and response to this materiality in the feminist art that soon followed. Practices in conceptual art and concrete poetry in the 1960s saw a divergence or split in approaches to language, which resulted nonetheless in works which visually resembled one another, as chapter one explores. Demonstrating a new engagement with materiality of language, exploring the textuality of the signifier, and drawing audiences into new modes of reading text arts – even challenging what reading is today – contemporary text art works again resemble, on the surface, text works from the 1960s and 1970s, from both concrete poetry and conceptual art, as well as from 1970s and 1980s feminist, second generation conceptual artists, as I will explore in chapters two and three. Yet, the contemporary artists and artworks

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<sup>1</sup> Hilder asks a similar question in his study of concrete poetry.

also stand independent from prior movements, offering a new engagement with the materiality of text.

In the years surrounding the millennium, text was very much present in contemporary art practice in the UK and internationally. From artists such as Bob and Roberta Smith's painted signage which evoke a nostalgia for mid-century British high streets in their appearance and deliver messages with political undertones; to Nathan Coley's neon lettering atop buildings which quote pop song lyrics; or Mark Titchner's heavy metal block typefaces on painted canvases declaring philosophical texts and propaganda in brief statements: text was visible throughout contemporary practice. Yet text's materiality was remarkably under-explored through the 1990s in contemporary criticism and exhibitions, for as with other aesthetic qualities, these were often regarded as secondary to the conceptual premise and context of the work. This can be seen in criticism of artists such as Liam Gillick or Barbara Kruger, which is cited later within the thesis in chapter three, for example. As Johanna Drucker proposed throughout *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*, art practice in the 1990s fully engaged with the material but art criticism maintained an oppositional legacy of criticism from the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century (Drucker, 2005).

By materiality, I specifically refer to the visual and aesthetic qualities which one sees when one encounters a written text, including the form with which it is written (printed, neon, etc.), the surface on which it is written (paper, wall, etc.), and the contexts which are both connoted by the textual form or typeface, and the methods of production called up in its making. The term materiality has been the focus of much attention, particularly in a post-digital age, that is after the era in which digital technologies became ubiquitous. My use of

the term, however, is not informed by Marxism, such as in the writing of Joshua Simon in *Neomaterialism* (2013) in which symbols behave like materials in an economy after dematerialisation (Simon, 2013, p.52). Simon here follows Noam Yuran, to understand how brands behave like objects, for example the 'criteria of "real" and "fake" in brands' (Simon, 2013, p.52). Rather, I follow the definition of materiality as put forward by art historian Petra Lange-Berndt, in the book *Materiality* (Lange-Berndt, 2015). Lange-Berndt attends to both the formal properties of materials in art – of which I will argue, text is one such material – and the political potential within the use of materials, or the engagement of materiality, within art. As Lange-Berndt writes that it is 'A political decision to focus on the materials of art: it means to consider the processes of making and their associated power relations, to consider the workers – whether they are in factories, studios, or public spaces, whether they are known or anonymous' (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.12), an argument which is fundamental to this thesis' exploration of materiality. Material is the substance of a form, and, Lange-Berndt writes, "material' describes not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change' (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.12). Derrida, writing in the catalogue for the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, at the Pompidou Centre, curated by Jean-Francois Lyotard in 1985 (and reprinted in *Materiality*), proposes that: 'Matter is no longer a support, substance, subject, term, at the borders of an opposition. Nor is it a receptacle or an intelligible kind of matter' (Derrida, 2015, p.207). Derrida suggests not that matter is *not* a substance, but that it is *no longer* substance. This shift in which 'we proceed from the opposition between matter and form' being compressed 'through the *matériel* of a word processor' arrives at a result of 'immaterials' (Derrida, 2015, p.207). *Les Immatériaux* was significant for its early positioning of the importance of the digital in effecting how an audience experiences materials, and

communication.<sup>2</sup> Derrida's assertion that material is not a receptacle provides a stark contrast to the typography specialist and enthusiast Beatrice Warde, who famously proposed in her 1930 speech and subsequent essay 'Printing Should Be Invisible' that typography (i.e. text by material, typographic production) should act precisely as an invisible receptacle, as she calls it, a 'crystal goblet' (Warde, 1930) which contains but does not colour the text. But materials are subject to change. The onset of digital and postmodern graphic design resulted in a new materiality for text, one where its formal properties were increasingly desirable, not to recede from view, but further the material contexts of the text. Lange-Berndt highlights the shift in the understanding of materiality post-digital. She writes: 'Materiality points to the whirling complexity and entanglement of diverse factors in the digital age, in which 'material', which like sound or language can now also be something that is not physical, is an effect of an ongoing performance' (Lange-Berndt, 2015l, p.14).

Lange-Berndt is concerned with materiality across mediums (and not specifically text). She writes: 'Materiality is often one of the most contested concepts in contemporary art and is often sidelined in critical academic writing' (2015, p.12), arguing that art history lags behind other fields, namely sciences, in its slow take up to address materiality today (2015, p.18). To Karen Barad, feminist and physicist: 'Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter' (Barad, 2003, p.802). Lange-Berndt suggest that Barad argues that 'to engage with material also means to formulate a critique of logocentrism' (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.13). In

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in the 'Tous les auteurs' site of the exhibition, its concluding area, visitors could participate in real time digital writing experiments, and the exhibition also featured a room of computer consoles.

Barad's 'rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them' (Barad, 2015, p.213), she asks: 'How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?' (Barad, 2015, p.213). The recent artworks explored in this thesis are, by definition, logocentric. They are not a phenomenological escape into sensation, as light art or sound art may claim to be. To Barad, matter is performative and 'an active participant in the world's becoming' (Barad, 2003, p.803). I am not separating out language and material, but treating language as material. If the material is an alternative expression to language to communicate meaning, what is it to engage with language as material, in text art? Lange-Berndt suggests a 'methodology of material complicity: What does it mean', she asks, 'to give agency to the material, to follow the material, and to *act with* the material?' (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.13). By attending to the material, formal properties of the text, we can begin to attend to the political potentials invoked within the text: its processes, and its power relations. It is from here, that in chapters two and three, I extend the discussion of the material to argue how it enables political subjectivities to be engaged by the audience through the text. Lange-Berndt argues that formalist art historian Clement Greenberg was 'not greatly interested in materials' and concerned instead with the possibility of arriv[ing] at pure form' (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.13). In my understanding, materiality is not a way of looking at text and its formal properties such as colour, typeface, point size and so on, but rather, to explore the tension created between a text and its material form in order to explore its performative agency, particularly its political performativity to engage its audience.

With the exception of Dave Beech's and Paul O'Neil's *We Are Grammar* (2011) at the Pratt Manhattan Gallery in New York, few, if any exhibitions, sought to broadly explore the depth

and breadth of text as a new material in contemporary practice, which ‘no longer look[s] like text art’ but rather has ‘become a field of operations and a network of practices that we just call art’ and survey this vast area of production of contemporary art practice (Pratt Manhattan Galleries, 2011). Text art operates in a no-man’s land, between graphic design and art, between literary and visual arts. There are no curators of text art – the work usually is placed within collections through acquisition in prints and drawings, owing to its initial emergence as works on paper, and being collected as such.<sup>3</sup> Though, as Beech proposes, text is like ‘grammar’, present but diffused throughout art practice to a point where it becomes unremarkable, much like grammar in language (Pratt Manhattan Galleries, 2011). It is present but recedes into the background. Yet text also possesses its own art historical lineages and unique traits by which we have arrived at this present moment. Text art, at times, falls into the fields of typography, letterpress, graphic design, sculpture, painting, animation, or any combination thereof. Text appeared esoteric and difficult to visitors when it was first presented in galleries in the UK, both regional and metropolitan (Amiel, 2016; Johnstone, 2016). Text is by today fully accepted by artists and curators into the seemingly limitless tool box available to artists. Yet the research of text in contemporary art practice is not rooted in the history of exhibitions of the practice. The recent curatorial focus of concrete poetry as a historical precedent for contemporary practice has gone some way to correcting the imbalance of conceptual art, concrete poetry, and contemporary art in their relationship with language. But, such exhibitions have overlooked another precedent for

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<sup>3</sup> Many proto-conceptual text artworks on paper entered major collections such as that of the MoMA through the collections of prints and drawings. Wynn Kramersky, one of the foremost collectors of works on paper in the US, has an extensive collection of language-based works within his larger collection.

contemporary text art; namely, the practices of the second generation of conceptualism of the late 1970s and 1980s that was formed by feminist artists and those questioning identity, representation, and the power inherent in language. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist, conceptual artworks by Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, began to engage the materiality of text as they used language to interrogate issues and ideas beyond art such as identity, representation, and power.

This leads me to a primary research questions addressed in this thesis: how and where can we see a new materiality in text art practice since the late 1990s? What does such materiality reveal about artists' changing relationships to text? How has text art in the last decade expressed a new and different engagement with materiality, responding to cultural shifts of the moment, namely the rise of the digital and its impact on everyday engagements with text? And, how have curators addressed the materiality of text in contemporary art since the 1960s, and what do their curatorial strategies reveal of the audience's engagement with text? To address these questions, I turn to individual artworks, and also, to group exhibitions in which curators make an assessment of text art as a field and put forward arguments within the context of the exhibition. Part of my original contribution to knowledge is to explore the ways contemporary artists use text, to interrogate how this is different from work seen before, and to question the demands it places on the audience who reads it, as well as the challenges it places on the act of reading an artwork made of words.

Mary Ellen Solt wrote that concrete 'poets themselves are often reluctant to make the unqualified statement "I am a concrete poet"' (Solt and Barnstone, 1968, n.p.). She adds that most would answer: 'It depends on what you mean by "concrete"' (Solt and Barnstone, 1968,



n.p.). The same could be said for most artists today using text as a medium, subject, or tool in their practice. It is deeply unfashionable, indeed undesirable, to say one is a 'text-based artist'. In part, this is due to artists' desire to work across disciplines, but in part, I argue, this is also due to confusion in terminology. A minor aim of this thesis is to assert the validity of 'text' as a descriptive label for artistic practice, and to explore the implications of text art on broader art practice to open up new paths for discovery. I address here the core terms at issue: text art, which is distinct from text in art practice more generally. I understand the latter as the appearance of written language in visual art without the artwork marking an investigation of language. Works of text art make the subject of the analysis. The logocentric works of visual art explored in this thesis differ also from the relatively recent emergence of 'art writing' such as that pioneered by Maria Fusco, wherein the position of writing as a practice within contemporary art is explored with a greater emphasis on fiction, critical practice, and embodying objects through writing.

First: text art. Whilst countless artworks, contain words, either on their own or in combination with other media, text artworks are made exclusively of text, or feature text in relationship to other media (such as photography), which activates the reading in the work. At their core, text artworks interrogate the use of, understanding of, interpretation of, or relationship to written language. Text artworks are artworks about text or textuality. Text is not just used in the artwork to convey an idea, but is implicated in the artwork. The text artworks analysed in this thesis, I argue, are more than words. The contemporary works which I analyse in this thesis interrogate written language – and our relationship with it – through a considered, critical use of the materiality of the work, through the text. This includes the support, the page it may sit on, the method of production that produced it,

such as a typewriter or by hand, and the contexts and connotations contained within that. Thus, while many artworks contain words, I explore the examples in this thesis to ask: is text used as an interrogation of language, of communication, and the materiality of words, and does the work challenge the audience in their encounter of such work by questioning the very process of reading? The artworks in this thesis are not based in text, but extend from it.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, I refer to the contemporary artworks throughout as *text art*, a term used by Beech (Beech, 2009). Thus, while Shannon Ebner's cinder block alphabet which she photographs letter by letter to construct palindromes and textual videos (*Between Words Pause*, (2009)) is discussed in the thesis, Robert Indiana's iconic Pop Art sculpture, *Love* (1970), is not, for Indiana is not concerned with the interrogation of language, communication, or the materiality of words. Rather, Indiana's concern was the word as an 'appropriated element for art' but also with the sculptural structure divided into equal quadrants and exploring the circular form with the tilted 'O' (Indiana, 1969). The audience's encounter with the text art is affected by the context surrounding them, but also contained within the textual form, that is, within the site of the page and the text itself. In the chapters of the thesis, the word 'language', unless specified in an artwork as verbal language or otherwise, refers to written language. I use written language interchangeably with text to encompass all of the materials and methods with which artists present text in their artworks: neon, painting, handwritten, printed, etc. The material specificities contained within any single method, such as neon, are explored as part of the unique qualities that

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<sup>4</sup> Recently the term *art writing* has become popular, particularly through the work of Maria Fusco in her journal *The Happy Hypocrite* and MFA programmes at UK art colleges such as Goldsmiths, University of London. Prioritising inscription as a method in such practice follows a Derridian trajectory for understanding language and prioritising writing. It also emerges from practitioners who identify themselves as writers, not artists.

make up the text. Throughout the thesis, when I refer to conceptualism, I am abbreviating the period of conceptual art of 1966-1973, which I define in detail in chapter one, and which is distinct for its self-reflexivity, and negation of artistic content.

The use of text in conceptualism followed philosophy's linguistic turn in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, which challenged philosophy's relationship to language and the extent to which language shaped consciousness. The linguistic turn was a development in Western thought which was largely influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The phrase itself was popularised by Richard Rorty's *The Linguistic Turn* (1967). The linguistic turn sought to understand language in order to answer philosophical questions. In conceptual art, the turn to language made a similar endeavour. The turn to language in art in the 1960s expressed an inherent 'concern to undo accepted modes of perception within modernist painting' in combination with a theorised, analytical approach to art, shifting away from ontology and towards text (Wilson, 2016, p.35). In the UK, the linguistic turn in art was led by the work of Art & Language, specifically members of the group Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin in Coventry in 1966-67.<sup>5</sup> The group's practice, like that of conceptual artists emerging in New York at the same time, was informed by the writings of Wittgenstein. Curator Bernice Rose reflected that: 'The origins of [conceptual art]...are complex since the verbal and the visual are bound together very closely' (Rose, 1978, p.35). According to Rose, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of Wittgenstein, the ideas of French structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, and those of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty sought 'to determine if visualization is prior to, anterior to, or simultaneous with verbalization, and if the verbal and the visual are

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<sup>5</sup> Art & Language included member Atkinson, Baldwin, Charles Harrison, Harold Hurrell, David Bainbridge.

independently structured and conceived or rather, interdependently. Do our verbal structures supply us with a “picture” of the world and do they, as postulated, form the very basis of all our social structures, even to the extent of determining our kinship systems?’ (Rose, 1978, p.35). Wittgenstein’s writings were widely read by artists and critics engaged in debates on the relationship of language and philosophy, as were those of Ferdinand de Saussure. As Rose observes, Wittgenstein in particular, informed debates amongst artists on the relationship of the ‘structure of culture’ to the ‘grammatical structure of language’ in the 1960s (1978, p.35). De Saussure, in his founding arguments of structuralism, argued the necessity for a linguistic system of difference in order for concepts to be understood. Tree is not tree because it is labeled tree, but because everything else is not tree, and so on. In questioning the arbitrariness of the written sign, questioning the transparency of language became a focus for many conceptual artists, including Mel Bochner (explored in his series of works in the late 1960s-early 1970s, presenting the words: *Language is not Transparent*). In many interrogations of language by conceptual artists, systems of order were questioned, but systems of subjectivity and power in language were presumed by the artists as natural. Artists who engaged in the interrogation of language, did so from a privileged subjectivity. For example, Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* (1965) seems almost illustrative of Derrida’s arguments about the ‘metaphysical’ core of Western thought, wherein words function as labels attached to ideas (Derrida, 1988, p.236). In the work, Kosuth presents three representations of chair: a folding chair, installed on the gallery floor; a black and white photograph of the same wooden chair, to its left and mounted slightly off the ground; and a mounted photographic enlargement of a dictionary definition of the word ‘chair’ (fig. 0.2). ‘Which is the true definition?’ one is left to ponder, as the audience questions the perception of representation. Does the concept of chair differ between the three

representations of a chair? Within Kosuth's work, language is used to challenge representation, whilst the authority of language itself remains unchallenged. Yet Kosuth assumes an audience all knows and refers to the same idea of 'chair'. Artists who critiqued conceptualism in the second generation that followed in the late 1970s took up this challenge of representation and language. I will explore how in feminist art that critiqued conceptualism, language is interrogated from the position of subjectivities, and that this occurs in the textual form as well as the textual content.

Hilder makes a proposition, which I paraphrase here, in the application of the question to text art: perhaps it is not the work of art that needs reading, but the act of reading itself. Through a study of text art as individual works and in group exhibitions, I explore another core research question. What do our conventions of gallery-based viewing enable and inhibit us from seeing in these works? That is, what is reading in a gallery? What is it to see a text? Exploring feminist art engaging language post-conceptualism, I question how artists introduced modes beyond reading or seeing a text artwork, namely, experiences of gesture, encounter, and pleasure. First then, it is necessary to clarify how I define reading in art in comparison to seeing, and specifically, reading text artwork in the context of an exhibition. Such an encounter with a text differs in basic ways from reading literary prose or poetry. In a gallery, one is in public and not in private, the setting where one might typically read a work of fiction or non-fiction. One encounters the text in a space to be navigated spatially by walking around, standing at, or perhaps viewing a moving image or animation composed of words. Texts may vary in size, to be larger than human form. Works on paper and paintings made of words are still typically mounted on walls and thus encountered in the vertical. Reading, whether in a gallery or in a book, is arguably affected by the larger shifts in our

encounter with text post-digitally as our reading practices changed after the advent of the portable digital screen. In *Corrected Slogans: Reading and Writing Conceptualism* (2013), a volume of essays, talks, and debates published on the occasion of *Postscript* at the MCA Denver, Monica de la Torre states of the change in reading post-digitally, that: 'New forms of writing will elicit unprecedented forms of reading' (Ives, 2013, p.199).

Conceptual artists turned to the linguistic in their critique of the image. Though many experiments artistically and curatorially in the late 1960s tested the possibility of dematerialisation of the artwork, often through text, the negation of all aesthetics is impossible, though the attempt to do so revealed a new, textual aesthetic which was restrained in its presentation and often stripped down to black typed text on paper, mounted on walls of the gallery. For example, Victor Burgin's earliest text works, such as *This Position* (1969) create a new aesthetic in the work's text typewritten as a list on a white page, and mounted directly on the wall (fig. 0.3). Yet artist Lawrence Weiner, in an interview in 1971, insisted at the time that the physicality of a text is irrelevant: 'It doesn't matter if [an idea is] physically conveyed or whether it's verbally or orally [conveyed]', going so far as to call it 'fascist' to prioritise the verbal over any other form (Weiner, 1972, p.66). 'Fascist' is in this case, extreme and over-the-top, and, I would contend, to be taken as a provocation, but Weiner's position is that materiality does not matter, and materialisation of an idea into a form, textual or otherwise, does not matter. The underlying presumption is that if a work prioritises the reading encounter, it negates the visual. (This is a presumption that still persists, as in the recent work of Ruth Blacksell, which I come to shortly). Literary theorist Elaine Scarry, however, suggests reading and seeing as inter-connected and writes of the intimate encounter of the text and the reader as resulting in a visual experience, in the

private act of reading a literary text. Scarry suggests the images one sees in one's mind's eye are more vivid and real if they are cued by written language (she calls this 'dreaming-by-the-book') than those that a reader may imagine without being guided by written words ('daydreaming') (Scarry, 1999, p.40). Recent studies support the idea of mental images put forward by Scarry. Neuroimaging research studies support Scarry's thesis, and have revealed how other areas of the brain, beyond the language-processing centres, are activated by the exact words one reads (Lacey, Stilla, and Sathian, 2012). For example, words that symbolise objects with a strong smell or have an association with smell, such as 'soap', activate parts of the brain devoted to smell (Paul, 2002). Metaphors like 'He had leathery hands' stimulate activity in the sensory cortex (Paul, 2002). Writing on the effect of fiction on the brain, Annie Murphy Paul contends that the stimulation of language on the sensory cortex is why 'the experience of reading can feel so alive' (Paul, 2002). Another literary theorist, and scholar of both Scarry and Paul de Man, Rei Terada extends Scarry's challenge to the binary of reading and seeing by suggesting a text cannot be separated from its material forms of production to its material conditions of perception. Interpreting Scarry's arguments, she writes: 'texts make readers feel as though they are having particular perceptions and not just material visions of letters' (Terada, 2007). When we read prose, Scarry contends we do not just see letters or words; we see ideas, we see things. Such an argument predicates on the use of prose – an isolated conjunction or preposition would not hold the same experience. Text art is not prose, but it presents the same possibility, perhaps even an enhanced possibility, for the engagement with the audience. That is, reading and seeing exist on a continuum.

Kenneth Goldsmith uses the term 'textuality', which I accept in my analysis, to distinguish the qualities of the written text, specifically the poem, concrete or otherwise, from the 'visuality'

of a work of visual art (Goldsmith, 2008, p.196). If textuality refers to the material, contextual, and literary influences, meanings, and contingencies within written words, visuality refers to the material, contextual, and fine art influences, meanings, and contingencies within a work of art. The tension between textuality and visuality, Goldsmith argues, is what makes concrete poetry 'successful' and 'give[s] it its punch' (Goldsmith, 2008, p.196). The tension between textuality and visuality also, Goldsmith argues, means that a painting of words and a poem cannot be read through the same critical lens despite resembling one another in their presentation of text. This, to Goldsmith, 'would be an inviting confusion of genres, discourses, and intentions' (Goldsmith, 2008, p.196). A position between textuality and visuality needs to borrow both from the discourses of literary theory and visual art. According to Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, if an audience encounters a work of text art, that audience oscillates between reading and seeing due to a 'continuous conflict in the viewer/reader' (Buchloh, 1990, p.113). This oscillation occurs in varying degrees, depending on where the text may fall on the spectrum of reading and seeing, and the level of conflict or mistrust in the information being presented that the audience encounters. Like Goldsmith's textuality and visuality, verbalisation, to Buchloh, is ideas which are constructed with words, and visualisation is those ideas which are constructed with images. By contrast, W.J.T. Mitchell contests the opposition of seeing and other cognitive acts. This can be seen in his neologism, the 'imagetext', which he first uses in *Iconology: Images, Text, Ideology* (1986), before refining it in *Picture Theory* (1994). Imagetexts are mixed forms that combine word and image, suggesting not an oscillation but a simultaneous act. Mitchell asserts there is little difference between 'verbal and visual notations of the image' and builds his argument equally for 'graphic, pictorial symbols' and language (Mitchell, 2005, p.55). To Mitchell, there are 'inescapable zones of transaction' between the written word and the image (Mitchell,



2005, p.55). For this reason, I tend to refer to the ‘audience’ of the work throughout the thesis, as opposed to spectator, reader, or viewer, so as to enable space for the textual and the visual—or the verbal and the visual—elements of the work to play out. Similarly, when discussing the textuality of works, the contexts of a method of production or material warrant being addressed: contexts such as the cinder blocks with which Shannon Ebner constructs a sculptural alphabet to be photographed, or the digital process of designing and laying out a text, as in the work of Janice Kerbel. In the thesis, I will test in analysis of contemporary artworks whether an audience oscillates between reading and seeing, as Buchloh contends, or whether a text presents a kind of transaction with an audience.

To paraphrase Eve Meltzer, rather than rely on monolithic, ahistorical presumptions about language, and how it functions as representation, and given the breadth and limitless depth of writing and theory on activities so broad as reading, or seeing, I turn to theoretical apparatuses that are guided by the artworks, which I outline below (Meltzer, 2013, p.58). In Wolfgang Iser’s study, *The Act of Reading* (1978), he proposes the idea of ‘narrative gaps’ between the reader and the text, an idea explored in my analysis of artist Janice Kerbel’s work in the final chapter, and the importance of the participation of the reader, specifically an ‘implied reader’ to whom the author writes (Iser, 1978, p.10). Iser builds on the posthumously published lectures of J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, which put forward speech-act theory.<sup>6</sup> Austin distinguishes between two types of utterances (and his concern with the linguistic stems from uttered and spoken communication, not written communication): the ‘constative’ and the ‘performative’ (Austin, 1962, pp.2-8). The

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<sup>6</sup> The text was further developed by John Searle after Austin’s death.

difference between the two, for Austin, is that the 'performative' *does* while the 'constative' *reports* on something having been done. Iser is also concerned with how a text produces its reader, and it is for this reason that I use both of their positions of theory. Iser's writes: 'As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process' (Iser, 1978, p.ix). A text artwork produces a response when encountered by an audience, whether it is read in full or only in part in passing (as may be the encounter in the lengthier works such as Fiona Banner's wordscapes). How are we otherwise to encounter Cy Twombly's *Virgil* (1973) (fig. 0.4) in which the artist has crossed out the word so that it can only be read *sous rature*? Or Paul Elliman's found typographic alphabet, *Found Fount*, which amasses letters but not texts? For Iser, the reading experience is a one-to-one relationship between reader and text, wherein text dictates a singular effect or idea, but in the 'semantic fulfillment' which 'takes place not in the text, but in the reader' (Iser, 1978, p.110). To Iser, 'sentences set in motion a process' of cognition and reception, and the aesthetic object that arises – the idea – occurs not in the text but in the reader (Iser, 1978, p.110). To Iser, the reader does not passively receive the text, but engages actively in structuring the text. To Iser, as the author anticipates the reader, the reader anticipates the plot, narrative, characters etc. 'Narrative gaps' emerge when the flow is interrupted, when the expectation of the reader is confronted by an unexpected change in plot or character, for example. These gaps emerge as the unwritten portions of the text, which require the reader's active participation in order for the text to be read.

Iser is concerned the literary arts, and specifically attends to prose, and so the texts on which he has developed his understanding do not share foundational traits with a text artwork.

Namely, plot and character do not often feature within a text artwork, though they do on

occasion, such as in Fiona Banner's *Arsewoman in Wonderland* (2001) or Barbara Kruger's *Picture/Readings* (1978). While the length of text in a novel will be likely over a hundred thousand words, read over a span of days or weeks at several sittings in a one-to-one (book-to-reader) setting, a text artwork may have only a few words that compose it, and be read in seconds in the semi-public setting of a gallery. A comparable one-to-one experience can be encountered with the artwork as presented in documentation or catalogue (indeed, all of the historical examples in this thesis such as *Catalogue for an Exhibition* (1969) are attended to in this way), but the artworks differ from literary texts in that they have a spatial form, which is encountered as it is installed and exhibited within a gallery space or public space. In this encounter, we need to attend to the space in which the work is installed and how it is displayed, we share a space with others also viewing the same work.

Meltzer writes on how text standing in place for an absent material art object or performance creates a new material object. Of Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery; The Gallery Will Be Closed* (1969), Meltzer writes of the negation of the visual. She argues that:

'Barry...represents a widespread belief in the aesthetic and political capacities of invisibility, withholding, and withdrawal as artistic strategies. Yet for all the economizing, negating, and conceptualizing that [Barry] and their contemporaries performed over the years...those strategies are, paradoxical though it may seem, the very means by which the artwork permits us to see what we otherwise could not' (Meltzer, 2013, p.37). An artistic strategy such as this enables an oscillation between that which is to be read (to follow Meltzer's example, Robert Barry's announcement for *Closed Gallery; The Gallery Will Be Closed* (1969) (fig. 0.5)), which states only in a text on paper on the gallery door that the show is closed – there is nothing to see beyond the text – and that which emerges to be seen by the audience in the 'broader

cultural imaginary' in the potential idea contained within the text (Meltzer, 2013, p.37). What I may understand or experience through an artwork will be something different from another's encounter with the same work, impacted by contexts, times, settings, personal experience and so on. Extending the idea of 'narrative gaps' to the analysis of a text artwork, enables one to consider, for example, the expectation of the audience, and the space between what is written or included in the artwork, and where the reader activates the text. I attempt to employ this strategy in this thesis, particularly in the artworks presented in the latter chapters.

There has been only one book-length study on the effects and purposes of written language in conceptual art published to date, which is Kotz's *Words to be Looked At*. Kotz's book takes its cue for its title from Robert Smithson's press release for gallerist Virginia Dwan's first *Language* show in 1967. Smithson's work *A Heap of Language* (1966) is significant to Kotz's analysis, where she suggests that language in conceptual art of the 1960s operates as displaced in both time and space, both 'literal' and 'metaphoric' (Kotz, 2007, p.3). Kotz explores the relationship of the Fluxus performances to language in conceptual art, the 'event score' and written language as material in conceptual art, though she makes clear that her book is in no way a survey of the phenomenon (Kotz, 2007, pp.5-7). The concept of the event score ('short, instruction-like texts proposing one or more actions') draws most of Kotz's attention (Kotz, 2001, p.55). However, the work remains the most significant book-length study on the subject of language in conceptual art which is published by an academic publisher. For, while Kotz argues that in art of the 1960s 'words took on a new materiality and urgency in the face of magnetic sound' she draws a picture of the conceptual art scene exclusive to New York. Kotz is particularly concerned with the effect of recording

technologies and the influence of the post-Cage event score in the development of a materiality of language in conceptual art (Kotz, 2007). One of the greatest strengths of the book is Kotz's attention to the 'doubleness' of the linguistic sign specific to materiality of words and visual art, by which she suggests that 'although a word is partly defined by its contexts—a word also constantly exceeds these contexts and goes elsewhere. A term, phrase, or text taken out of its normal context of use and resituated onto a blank page, for instance, or the wall of a gallery can do something else entirely' (Kotz, 2007, pp.3-4). To Kotz, the page is a site, but it is also a starting point. Kotz thus presents a narrow geographic locus, and a lack of address of related fields, or women artists (only Ono and Darboven appear, and not in great detail). Hilder criticizes Kotz for transplanting the poem-works of Carl Andre, Dan Graham, and Vito Acconci into a discourse of analysis where they are treated as isolated from the 'artistic discourse of New York in the sixties', with nothing to do with concrete poetry whatsoever (Hilder, 2016, p.151). Kotz's book thus does not present a foundation for a broader historical span for the material of language in other movements coinciding with the sixties conceptualism, or after. The analysis in this thesis attempts to broaden this view to explore the relationship of language art in the sixties to the contemporary work since the 2000s, but also explore other movements and works within the movements to present a wider picture of the emergence of text as material after the 1960s.

There are other significant academic investigations in the field of language in conceptual art and contemporary art, and the implications of the material in conceptual art; namely, Johanna Drucker's books *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art* (1994) and *Figuring the Word* (1998). Drucker is prolific in her writing on the materiality of language. In *The Visible Word*, the focus of her study is on the avant-garde movements of Dadaism,

Surrealism, and Constructivism. *The Visible Word* stemmed from Drucker's PhD research at Berkeley, and applies semiotic and post-structural theory in her analysis of the works. In it Drucker argues that Futurist, Dadaist, and Cubist artists emphasised materiality in their experimental approach to both visual and poetic forms of representation. But, she contends, art criticism that followed has distorted our understanding of such typographic works, polarising the use of experimental typography in advertising from similar appearing uses of typography in visual and literary arts (Drucker, 1994).

Ruth Blacksell's writings and presentations from her PhD research completed in 2012 at the University of Reading, including the article 'From Looking to Reading: Text-Based Conceptual Art and Typographic Discourse' (2013), and 'Visual to Textual', given as a lecture at the ICA in February 2012 explore the shift towards reading and away from the visual in conceptual art. Blacksell's focus is typography in conceptual art and the relationship of such art to the publishing of text and typographical artworks within the pages of art magazines and publications, and she locates her research within the minute typographical shifts of single artworks such as Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1967), as it appeared in several art magazines. Blacksell, like Kotz, attends to Fluxus and argues that Fluxus artists established practices in which written language influenced artists' use of text in conceptual art in the 1960s—particularly the output of Lawrence Weiner, whose statements responded to the tone and grammar of Fluxus instructions. Blacksell focuses on how the stuff of printed matter (typography, text, layout and publishing) produced by conceptual artists marks an important shift in text art by prioritising the textual over the visual (Blacksell, 2013). Blacksell, also like Kotz, focuses on material forms of production in relation to the use of text in conceptual art, and both disregard any impact of concrete poetry (Blacksell, 2013; Kotz, 2007). Blacksell too

limits her study to the UK and US, focusing on artists such as Graham, Acconci, and Art & Language, but also limits her scope to works appearing in the pages of magazines rather than gallery-based works, which automatically presupposes an engagement with reading from by the audience, given that the works are presented horizontally in a linear, book-like format, and not vertically mounted on walls in gallery spaces where they can be encountered by several audience members at once, thereby changing the interaction of the audience. Such articulations of a dichotomy of from reading to seeing do not hold up to such scrutiny when we consider works viewed publicly and encountered in the visual space of a gallery. My research attempts to build on these significant works, by expanding the analysis beyond the 1960s period to the contemporary use of text art, and to consider the physical, material qualities of the encounter with text as artwork specifically within a gallery.

Dave Beech's curating and writing, including the exhibition already noted, *We Are Grammar* (2011), and his introductory essay to the volume, *Art and Text* (2009), also demands consideration. Though the volume itself presents a broad survey of contemporary art practice engaging text under thematic chapters (such as Text, Semiotext(e)), Beech's essay attends to works of text art as being contingent on their context of production and circulation, arguing that 'art's contingency on language...does not stop at the art object; it penetrates every aspect of art' (Selby, Beech, Harrison and Hill, 2009, p.26). The large-scale exhibition of 39 artists or artist groups in *We Are Grammar* focused primarily on what Beech and his co-curator, Paul O'Neill identified as a 'third generation of text art', rather than bridging historical with contemporary practice, which I attempt to do. Beech and O'Neill argue the text artworks of the generation of artists in the 1990s, including Karl Holmqvist, Matt Higgs, Matt Keegan, and Elizabeth Price and 36 others, are demonstrative of a use of

language that ‘interrogate[s] the social and cultural landscape, the grammar of lived experience’ (Pratt Manhattan Galleries, 2011). The artists in *We Are Grammar* engaged text as material to intersect art, philosophy, and language, and text receded to the background of works rather than being works ‘about language’ (Pratt Manhattan Galleries, 2011). Though Beech and O’Neill do not make a claim specifically about feminist art, one can extend this use of material when coming to address feminist critiques of conceptualism, as I will do. More recently, in 2015, Beech has argued that text art can be ordered into four waves: conceptualism of the 1960s (which he describes as analytic); 80s postmodernism (semiotic); 90s deconstruction; and the 2000s, which he argues as performative, and in the line of J.L. Austin’s argument about performative language being words that *do* rather than *say* (Beech et al., 2016).

Many of the recent studies on text and its materiality in contemporary art are not published as books but as papers, or presented as lectures, or exhibitions, perhaps indicative of the newness of the field. In the 2012 annual Hilla Rebay Memorial Lecture presented at the Guggenheim Museum New York, in a lecture titled ‘The Artist as Typographer’, Tom McDonough proposed that contemporary artists are turning to written language in practices that engaged the material of text and typography, different to those we have seen in previous generations and art movements (McDonough, 2012). McDonough argued that in the practices of Shannon Ebner, Adam Pendleton, and Dexter Sinister, we can see evidence of contemporary artists engaging in ‘language’s materialization’ (McDonough, 2012). Artists such as Ebner, McDonough argues, engage in a practice of ‘wild semiosis’, which focuses on the mode of inscription and flips the arbitrariness of the sign and the relational nature of language and meaning, to argue that the material form and mode of inscription of the sign is



intrinsic in contemporary text artworks to its signified message (McDonough, 2012).

McDonough refers to a 2006 work by Ron Terada, *See Other Side of Sign* (fig. 0.6), in which a roadside construction sign lends the work its title as it sits in an unused building site.

McDonough's observation is similar to one made by poet Rosmarie Waldrop on the subject of concrete poetry. Writing in 1976, Waldrop states 'both conventions and sentence are replaced by spatial arrangement', in concrete poetry. She continues: 'We do not usually *see* words, we *read* them, which is to say we look through them at their significance, their contents. Concrete Poetry is first of all a revolt against this transparency of the word' (Waldrop, 1976, p.141). McDonough argues that contemporary artists Ebner, Pendleton, Dexter Sinister, as well as Matt Keegan, and Janice Kerbel, are engaging with typography, printed matter, methods of printing production not as a coherent movement, but as a diverse but shared investigation in the 'material realisation' of language, modes of inscription, and language as art in physical space. The 'typographic turn', that McDonough argues we can see in these contemporary art practices has occurred for three reasons (McDonough, 2012). One: it builds upon a critical design history that was established in the 1980s (a history largely associated with Cranbrook School of Design); two: it responds to digital technology's transformation of our reading practices and print production; and three, it reassesses the legacies of conceptual and neo-conceptual art, with particular attention to Lawrence Weiner, which was opened up to a younger generation of artists by Liam Gillick. Attending to the typographic argues against the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. McDonough concludes that the 'fungibility of language' – by which he means the mutual possibility to replace one form of written language with another form of written language – is particularly challenged in our time, where 'language as material fact' becomes suspect (McDonough, 2012). The 'fluidity of a sign' is now taken as a given (McDonough, 2012).

Within this public lecture, McDonough does not delve into the genealogy of these contemporary practitioners, and stays in an analysis rooted in the present, though he hints at the influence of concrete poetry early in the talk. While I agree with McDonough in part, I explore the importance of feminist second generation conceptualists who developed ambitious projects with text since the mid-1970s.

My original contribution to knowledge is to explore the ways contemporary artists use text, to interrogate how this is different from work we have seen before, and to question the demands it places on the audience who reads it, and the challenges it places on the act of reading an artwork made of words. I address the importance of feminist artists making text art in the late 1970s and 1980s in the second generation of conceptualism, and the influence they bore on how text has become used as material in contemporary practice. I make this exploration by looking to artists who questioned hegemony with their political subjectivities and challenged the neutral assumption of language (artists who were black, gay, feminist, or lesbian) in their text artworks. This makes up a core foundation for my exploration of the materiality of text in art today.

My research methodology focused my analysis on primary sources in order to fully explore the artworks in question, and the context of their making. These sources include the artworks; the exhibitions in which they were presented; the dissemination and response to the artworks and exhibitions in critical publications; and interviews with artists and curators involved in making and exhibiting these works. The exhibitions were viewed first-hand where possible, and if not possible, either due to geographic location and lack of funds or flexibility to travel, or due to the exhibitions having being mounted before my research commenced,

then they were viewed as installation shots, archival material, catalogues, reviews, and curatorial interviews. I interviewed five curators or exhibitions organisers of survey exhibitions of text art in since the 1970s. These are: Karen Amiel, and Isobel Johnstone, who consecutively worked as exhibitions officers for the Arts Council Collection in the 1970s and were responsible for organising and/or touring the exhibition *Languages*, curated by Rudi Fuchs in 1979; Fiona Bradley, curator of *Words*, which the Arts Council Collection toured through the UK in 2002; Kate Macfarlane, curator of *Marking Language* (2013) at the Drawing Room, London; and Mark Sladen, curator of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* at the ICA in 2009. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, and appear in the appendix. They provided me the opportunity to gather new research around the curation of text art, and to subsequently take a position on their assessments of the field of text art. The interviews also revealed information on the cultural, economic, and historical contexts surrounding the developments of the exhibitions, information which is often left out of narratives that focus on the artworks and artists and not the contexts in which they were framed.

The exhibitions considered as primary sources present group exhibitions are those in which curators have staked a claim on the current practice of text in/as art and made an assessment and interpretation of it, which has implications within broader discourses in art, such as conceptual art, or feminism. My research makes its focus in the US and UK. In so doing, this is not an assertion that experimentations in text and conceptual art practice were not underway elsewhere. Indeed, they were important to many artists from Eastern Europe and the then Soviet Union of this period, such as Douglas Davis (who was in New York), and Russians Komar & Melamid's *Questions New York-Moscow-New York* (1977) or Valery Cherkasov's *I Want to Eat* (1964) which made found typography out of cutlery, photographed

on a table, to spell the work's title (fig. 0.7). However, as my research rests as much with the dissemination of the works in the context of exhibitions, the focus of the research remains in the UK and US. I emphasise the period of research in the title as 'since conceptualism' for although language in art is present in the Dada, Neo-Dada, Constructivist, and early periods and movements of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, it was in the conceptual art movement of 1966-1973 that language as an autonomous art object. It is also against conceptual art that the other key movements examined as historical precursors to text in contemporary art are positioned in relation to, that being concrete poetry and feminist critiques conceptual art. While the number of exhibitions surveyed may seem relatively small, in comparison to group exhibitions on drawing within the same time period, for example, this is likely reflective of the relatively marginal position text art occupies in contemporary art criticism and theory.

I have, since 2009, met and interviewed most of the artists discussed in detail within the thesis. Usually these meetings were carried out within their studios, whilst discussing the artworks in question. Their recollections and views on the exhibition of their works make up another primary source. This layer of oral history includes studio visits and meetings with: Janice Kerbel, Shannon Ebner, Paul Elliman, and Fiona Banner who feature in the analysis, as well as Daniel Eatock, Sam Winston, and Sue Thompkins whose work ultimately does not feature as significantly in the final thesis, but nonetheless informed the research and writing process. I have had follow-up conversations on email with Pavel Büchler, Tauba Auerbach, Pae White, and Barbara Kruger after attending lectures and discussions on their practices and works, as well as Ebner, Kerbel, Elliman, and Banner. Regrettably, my interviews with artists which occurred during the earliest part of my research in 2009-10, were not recorded, and subsequently not transcribed, a decision made at the time as the artists felt it disruptive to

the nature of the discussion. Though this is unfortunate, I viewed these visits as fact-finding missions and opportunities to explore their works first hand, rather than to extract quotes from the artists on specific aspects of their work. Discussing interviews with artists as a methodology, O'Neill writes that

While interviews with artists have a long-established history—becoming [a] principal communicative form in the 1960s, in particular in connection with pop art, conceptual art, and minimalism...much of this material must be treated with attention to what W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley call “the intentional fallacy,” with each interviewee having the potential to describe his or her own narrative with a degree of “contextual evidence” (O'Neill, 2012, p.3).

As I refined my research of key artists for the study of this thesis, it became clear that the study's focus should include several key exhibitions wherein the selection, interpretation, and dissemination of those artists' works and engagement with text is presented in such a way as to stake a position by a curator for text art in contemporary practice and its historical precedents. I thus identified several exhibitions, historical and contemporary, wherein the curators make an assessment and put forward an argument on text in contemporary practice, and make crucial selections of works to include and leave out, and how to position them. I attend to several in depth, and others as references. The historical exhibitions are attended to in chapter one. *Between Poetry and Painting* (ICA, London, 22 October – 27 November 1965, curator: Jasia Reichardt) is explored in chapter one, for it makes a unique offering as a survey exhibition of concrete poetry within London's most adventurous public exhibition space at the time. It provides a book end to the exhibition *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* which followed over four decades later. Also in chapter one, I attend to the series of exhibitions (all group shows) held at the Dwan Gallery in New York in the late 1960s-early 1970s, and organised by the gallery director Virginia Dwan (*Language to be Looked At and/or Things to Be Read*, Dwan Gallery, New York, 3 June - 1967, curator: Virginia Dwan; *Language II*, Dwan Gallery, 25 May -

1968, New York, curator: Virginia Dwan; *Language III*, Dwan Gallery, 24 May 1969, New York, curator: Virginia Dwan; *Language IV*, Dwan Gallery, 2 June 1970, New York, curator: Virginia Dwan). One of the landmark exhibitions for heralding conceptual art in the UK is discussed in chapter one (*When Attitudes Become Form (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)*), Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March – 27 April 1969, Curator: Harald Szeeman, installed by Konrad Fischer, ICA, London, September 1969, London Exhibition Organiser: Charles Harrison) for many of the artists practicing a linguistic conceptualism in this exhibition went on to have significant impact on the use of language in art for the decade that followed, though it was not specifically an exhibition of language-based works. To contrast the analysis of survey exhibitions of text in conceptual art as a possible precedent for contemporary practice, I attend to a significant survey of concrete poetry which occurred in North America at the same time as *When Attitudes Become Form*. This is *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts* (Fine Arts Gallery (now Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery), University of British Columbia, Vancouver, March 1969, curators: Alvin Balkind and Michael Morris). Also in Vancouver that same year was *Catalogue for an Exhibition* (Centre for Communication and Arts, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 19 May – 19 June 1969, curator: Seth Sieglaub), which presented a communication-based approach to conceptual art and language. This is contrasted with a discussion of *Information* (MoMA, New York, 2 July – 20 September 1970, curator: Kynaston McShine). Surveys of concrete poetry in the 1960s are brought to a close with *Klanketeksten, Konkrete poezie, Visual Teksten (Sound Texts/Concrete Poetry/Visual Texts)*, (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, November 1970. Curated by Liebeth Crommelin (director), exhibition curated by Hansjorg Mayer, Reinhard Dohl, Bob Cobbing, and Paul de Vree, and toured to Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 15 October – 27 November 1971 as *International Exhibition of Visual and Sound Poetry*; and to Oxford, Stuttgart, and Nuremberg).

Finally, in chapter one, in the historical analysis of exhibitions which cumulatively present a critical survey of the exhibition of text art in relation to conceptual art, and concrete poetry, I turn to two exhibitions of the artists' books. First, I explore *Book as Artwork* (Nigel Greenwood Inc., London, 1972, curator: Lynda Morris), and then I compare it to the less significant, but still noteworthy *Artist's Bookworks* (British Council Touring Exhibition, 1975, curator: Martin Attwood). As I move on from the use of text in conceptual art, I attend in detail to the *Post-Partum Document*, by Mary Kelly, as it was exhibited as *Post-Partum Document* (Mary Kelly, ICA, London, 1976, curator: Barry Barker). Kelly's *Document* is the only solo exhibition studied in the thesis, and is included not least because it makes an important offering to the use of text in conceptual art practice and the presentation of such text in an installation, as well as the relationship between the audience and the works through Kelly's introduction of Lacanian psychoanalysis to conceptual art. Also, the *Post-Partum Document* is a serial of works in six parts which presents a survey in its own right. Kelly's analytic use of language and Lacanian theory, and her installation of the work as texts which presented a discursive, immersive, and narrative experience for the audience is explored and then contrasted with *Languages: an exhibition of artists using word and image* (Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, Arts Council of Great Britain Touring Exhibition, 12 – 29 April 1979, curator: Rudi Fuchs, organised by Isobel Johnstone and Karen Amiel).

There follows a notably large span of time before another text art survey exhibition in the UK is staged, the first being Bradley's *Words* (Arts Council England Touring Exhibition, City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth, 4 May – 20 July 2002, toured to Arts Centre, Aberystwyth; City Art Gallery, York; Gallery Oldham; The City Gallery, Leicester, curators: Isobel Johnstone and Fiona Bradley). Following *Words*, however, there then emerges a new

interest in text art, with curators responding to a widespread interest in the materiality of language being demonstrated across contemporary art practice. These are: *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* (ICA, London, 17 June – 23 August 2009, curator: Mark Sladen); *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* (MoMA, New York, 6 May – 27 August 2012, curator: Laura Hoptman); and *Marking Language* (The Drawing Room, London, 10 October – 14 December 2013, curator: Kate MacFarlane), which all presented, to varying degrees, an argument for the relationship of, and influence of, concrete poetry on contemporary art practice using language. Not all survey exhibitions of text in contemporary practice share this argument, however, including *Postscript* (MCA Denver, Denver, CO. 12 October 2012 – 3 February 2013, toured to PowerPlant, Toronto. Curators: Nora Burnett Abrams and Andrea Andersson), which explored the relationship of conceptual writing and contemporary art; and *We Are Grammar*, (Pratt Institute, The New School, New York, 25 February 2011 – 7 May 2011, curators: Dave Beech and Paul O’Neill), which presented a survey of text in contemporary practice of over forty artists making work across two-dimensional mediums, sculpture, installation, and video since 2000. I note two significant surveys which take form as books and not exhibitions, which are: *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Victoria Bean and Chris McCabe, introduced by Kenneth Goldsmith, (Hayward Publishing, London: 2015)), and *Art and Text* (Dave Beech, Charles Harrison, Will Hill, Kevin McCaighy, Louis Pattison, edited by Aimee Selby, (Blackdog Publishing, London: 2009)). Both of these works, though they exist as books and not exhibitions, present surveys of text in contemporary practice, whether concrete poetry or conceptual art, and present challenges to the encounter, expectation, and groupings of such works. Like the exhibitions, these books present a conscious selection after surveying a field. After the peak productivity of conceptual art in the mid-1960s to early-1970s language became accepted. The simultaneous heterogeneity with



which text appeared across art practice did not present a unified movement or position for the materiality of text.

These primary sources, catalogues, installation shots and correspondence between curators and artists were researched in the archives and libraries including: The National Art Library, the British Library, St Bride's Printing Library, The ICA archives held at Tate Britain, the Courtauld Institute of Art Library, Chelsea College of Art archives, Camberwell College of Art archives and library, and the archives of the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery at the University of British Columbia. As indicated, where possible, interviews with curators were followed up to corroborate research findings. The secondary sources which provided further information, commentary and opinion include the reviews of the key artworks and exhibitions at the time of their first showing (in magazines including *Studio International*, *Avalanche*, *Art in America*, and *Artforum*), artists' monographs, and texts surveying conceptual art or concrete poetry, such as Alberro and Stimson's *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (1999) and Bird and Newman's *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (1999). However, as the scholarship around text art and its dissemination are a focus to the thesis, these are also primary sources in that respect. My methodology thus combines art history and curatorial studies, exploring the historical contexts of the artworks' production, the artist's position within movements and geographic centres, as well as the resulting dissemination of such artworks, particularly how they are contextualised in exhibitions and displayed in gallery spaces, how this furthers or restricts the audience's engagement with new forms of reading invoked by the text artworks, and how they are subsequently received.

In this thesis, I make a contextual analysis of the artworks studied which comes from engaging with curation. As Jens Hoffman summarises, curating is based in exhibition making, that is the 'formulating of a certain theory or argument, based upon which one makes a selection of artworks or other objects with the aim of creating an exhibition in which those objects or artworks are displayed to the public' (Hoffman and Lind, 2011). With the exception of the 2015 book *The New Concrete* (Victoria Bean and Chris McCabe, eds.), the examples of surveys to which I refer within the thesis are all exhibitions. I have selected these exhibitions so as to explore how the curators have made claim to contextualising the use of text in contemporary practice, specifically attending to group exhibitions, the aforementioned 'dominant mode of curating contemporary art' (O'Neill, 2012, p.1). O'Neill expands on the term 'exhibition' as that which 'impl[ies] a temporary space for public presentation within which an overarching curatorial framework [and which] is provided as a means of bringing together a number of artists, with the curator as the agent responsible for the selection of these artists and/or their works' (O'Neill, 2012, p.123). Hoffman's position on curating (which is in opposition to the diffused, diverse, and varied practices that develop from relational aesthetics and operate outside of gallery-based encounters with objects, such as the work of Maria Lind), stems from an 'interest in objects as elements that carry and speak about history, and how we experience them when we see them in a museum' (Hoffman and Lind, 2011). I propose text art, like any artwork, is one such object. O'Neill 'explicate[s]' the term 'curatorial discourse...by drawing on Foucault's understanding of discourse as a meaningful but malleable assemblage of statements, brought together and classified as belonging to the same discursive formation' (O'Neill, 2011, p.6). Thus, in the thesis I explore not only how text is presented within the artwork and how it is engaged with by the audience specific to that single artwork, but consider the artworks and their encounter with the audience as part of a

spatial, durational, temporal, public experience in which the text is most often encountered in the vertical, and the curator has presented a specific argument or 'curatorial discourse' on the emergence of text as material in contemporary artwork. How then do the artworks differ from one another in their treatment of, or engagement with, text? How does the presentation specific to the exhibition concept and context further or inhibit the text within the artwork?

Divided into six chapters, the thesis examines how text is treated as material, method, and subject matter in contemporary practice by exploring the historical precedents for text in art history since the late 1960s in the US and UK, and questioning how text art has been selected, grouped, exhibited, displayed, communicated, and subsequently interpreted by curators, primarily within group exhibitions usually held in public institutions. The primary research focus in this thesis is on text in contemporary art practice. At the outset of the research in 2009, I noticed a shift in how artists were engaging text in contemporary art: what text demanded of the audience, and how artists negotiated between the text artwork and the exhibition space demonstrated a new attention to the textual form. As I began my research, there was also a growing curatorial interest in text in contemporary art, as seen in the survey exhibitions already noted. These exhibitions, such as *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* at the ICA, and *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* at the MoMA, are explored in detail later in the chapters of the thesis. The curatorial position of these exhibitions unintentionally developed a binary of the precedents or genealogies for text in contemporary art. That binary suggests that contemporary practice using text developed either from concrete poetry or from language-based conceptual art. There has been little or no curatorial attention in such group exhibitions that attended to the importance of feminist art using language in the

second generation of conceptualism as a precedent for how text is treated as a material by artists in contemporary art. The first three chapters of the thesis explore powerful precedents that go beyond the conceptual art paradigm in order to understand text in contemporary practice. Conceptual art is explored in the first chapter, for it cannot be overlooked as an influence and important precedent, and it is explored in parallel with concrete poetry which overlapped in the period of the mid- to late-1960s. Feminist artists who mark the second generation of conceptual artists from the mid- to late-1970s are the focus of chapters two and three. My attention to feminist conceptualists enables me to develop an alternate foundation to the binary of conceptualism and concrete poetry in establishing an argument for why and how text has developed in contemporary art practice today. Chapters four, five, and six focus on text in contemporary artwork, particularly in the last decade, and this is the crux of the thesis and a core of my contribution to knowledge. From the foundation of art historical precedents established in chapters one to three, I explore how contemporary artists are engaging with text, and whether this engagement is informed by concrete poetry, conceptual art, or feminist second generation conceptual art, or a combination thereof. Part of this examination necessitates the questioning of how text in contemporary art practice has been handled curatorially within the group exhibition, a format of displaying art, which as Paul O'Neill writes: 'has become the dominant mode of curating contemporary art (O'Neill, 2012, p.1).

The first three chapters of the thesis explore three specific historical precedents in the last forty years to better understand how we have come to the current state of text art today. In chapter one, I explore conceptual art, which has been the overriding argued influence on language in art – which is distinct from text art – since the 1960s, and concrete poetry, which

until 2009, was largely marginal, with little argued impact on contemporary art, but which has recently received a great deal of curatorial attention as a strategy of correcting the history of text art. I explore the fluidity of the two movements, though the flow of ideas is largely one-way until the 1970s when concrete poetry's international movement ends and conceptual art has its most significant period of international impact. Through an interrogation of key works, explored against a backdrop of survey exhibitions which staked an argument for language in art, I explore the use of text within these works, the various approaches used by artists to explore the materiality of language in the sixties and seventies, and the encounters an audience had with text as material artwork in the gallery-based exhibitions studied.

In chapter two, I begin to establish an alternative foundation for contemporary text art in the second generation of conceptual art, which was influenced by the subjective, theoretical, and psychoanalysis-informed feminist work of artists such as Mary Kelly. The focus of this chapter is Kelly's seminal work, *Post-Partum Document* (1973-9) in which the artist tracks her son's acquisition of language from non-verbal markings to single-word utterances, patterned speech, and finally, handwriting. Language is still very much the subject of the work, particularly the child's acquisition of language in the social order. Analysis of the *Post-Partum Document* is made against the context of Kelly's earlier work, namely *Women and Work* (1973-5), made in collaboration with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, as well as in comparison with works by Adrian Piper, Steven Willats, and Hans Haacke. This chapter argues that Kelly introduced a new approach to the use of language in conceptual art, informed by her critique of conceptualism, and presented a level of materiality and subjectivity in the work. Chapters two and three marks a shift from artists in the first period of conceptualism,

who used language as the subject and medium to make questions about art itself, but presumed an inherent naturalness to language, to a new generation who use text as the medium of the artwork but expand the questions in their work to issues beyond art, and question with it, the presumed natural authority of language.

With chapter three, I begin to explore the use of text by artists – Kruger, Holzer, and Glenn Ligon, specifically – who question the neutrality and inherent power of language, and through their texts, engage their audiences in that questioning. This is aided by the artists’ use of the materiality of language. These artists’ practices were informed by feminism and queer theory, and turned to language to question difference. For these artists, language became a material with which to question the politics of subjectivity, namely: who had the right to speak? And what could they say? Through exploring the use of the textual form, with the use of pronouns, and with the graphic treatment of text which recalled the advertising style of tabloids (in the case of Kruger) or fly posted leaflets or posters (in the case of Holzer), these artists began to suggest new forms of reading, inside and outside of the gallery, for audiences who were confronted with their works.

Chapters four to six move the analysis to contemporary works made in the past ten years, to explore new engagements by artists in their use of the materiality of language, how these affect the audience’s experience of reading text art works, and question whether contemporary art engaging text as material develops or diverges from precedents established in conceptual art, concrete poetry, or feminist art of the second generation of conceptualism. In chapter four, I look at the work of artists Fiona Banner, Shannon Ebner, and Pae White to question the effect of language on the subjectivity of the audience. These

works – such as Banner’s ‘wordscapes’ (1994-) (large, wall mounted sheets of paper, or text directly on the gallery wall, which the artist writes by hand as she transcribes her experience of watching a subject, often a movie, but sometimes a nude model, which she terms ‘performance ‘nudes’ (2006-)), or Shannon Ebner’s *Dead Democracy Letters* (2002-6), a series of temporary signs made of cardboard and spray paint, erected in the landscape and photographed, which results in the artwork – explore how language and the body interact in the reading encounter with a text art (Stonard, 2016). As the artist writes the texts, the texts choreograph the reader. Within these works, as well as Pae White’s *Too Much Night Again* (2013), a gallery-based installation of tightly-strung yarn which creates a sculptural tunnel of letters only readable from specific vantages as it fades in and out of view, explore a reintroduction of pleasure and gesture through a material embodiment of text, both on the part of the artist and the audience.

Chapter five explores artworks by contemporary artists Paul Elliman, Tauba Auerbach, and Banner again, and draws the strongest correlation between concrete poetry and contemporary art. The artworks within this chapter’s analysis require a gloss and are impenetrable, certainly unreadable, without it. In Elliman’s *Found Fount* (1988-present), an on-going collection of found detritus through which Elliman sees letterly shapes and creates an assembled typographic alphabet of sorts, presents text not as words but as fragments, as letters. The works explored by Banner in this chapter are sculptures of punctuation marks. The chapter questions what language presents as a form, subject, or tool when an artist is not constructing words to be read. The works in this chapter demonstrate most strongly the legacy of concrete poetry on contemporary text art.

Chapter six explores contemporary text art works by Janice Kerbel, Pavel Büchler, and Tauba Auerbach, that treat the page as site of performance. With lineages from concrete poetry, Fluxus, and proto-conceptualism (such as John Cage's scores), I explore Janice Kerbel's recent works including *DOUG* (2015) and *Remarkable* (2007) and question the engagement demanded of a viewer when the text artwork invokes a performative reading. The latter three chapters explore the materiality of language in contemporary art practices, arguing not for a cohesive movement, but for diverse practices making broadly similar investments and investigations.



## 1: Between Dematerialisation and Materiality: Text in Concrete Poetry (1955 – 1970) and Conceptual Art (1966 – 1973)

### Introduction: Historical Background

One dominant narrative foregrounding the use of language in contemporary art is that of conceptual art, specifically in the Anglo-American and European context, introduced language to art practice in a way that challenged the structures and understanding of art (King, 2004). This resulted in language becoming an accepted tool, subject, material and (anti)-form in the canon as seen in the works of artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language, Carl Andre, Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, as well as Robert Smithson, and Mel Bochner, amongst others. The second narrative suggests concrete poetry from the European and South American contexts of the 1950s and 60s as an influence on contemporary artists' address of the materiality of text in art since the 2000s (Bean et al, 2015; Sladen, 2016). Thus, in order to examine text in contemporary art practice, and any movement or period of art subsequent to these two bearing an influence on text in contemporary art practice, both concrete poetry and conceptual art need to be addressed as art historical periods. In this chapter, I explore the materiality of text by addressing key artworks against how they were presented in survey exhibitions of conceptual art and concrete poetry since the mid-1960s. I question how this materiality was overlooked or refuted by both artists and critics at the time, thus opening a space for critique and embracing of materiality of text within the periods that followed, and how subsequent artists reacted to, or against, conceptual art. Rather than distinct or polarised movements as they have been positioned in art history (Kotz, 2007; Blacksell, 2013), concrete poetry and conceptual art are two related historical precedents for text in contemporary art that have a fluidity and overlap between them.

## Concrete Poetry: From the Page

Concrete poetry was an international movement which began in 1955 with the meeting of Décio Pignatari and Eugen Gomringer; waned by the mid-1960s; and ended at time of the Stedelijk Museum's touring exhibition: *Klankteksten/ Konkrete Poesie/ Visuele Teksten* in 1970-71.<sup>7</sup> Pignatari travelled to the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, to meet Gomringer, who was in 1955 working as artist Max Bill's secretary. In their meeting, Pignatari and Gomringer realised and agreed that what they were each working on independently, internationally, was concrete poetry, and they further theorised the movement out of that meeting (Hilder, 2016; Houédard, 1965). The term concrete poetry was also, independently, used by Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström in 1955 (Fahlström, 1955). Concrete poetry was truly international, with no single hub or manifesto, but diverse nexuses in global locations, one of which was Pignatari's native Brazil. The strand of concrete poetry that emerged from the Brazilian Noigrandes movement sought to present a universal language that emphasised the visual qualities of the word in order to challenge and question imperialism and visual culture seen in the American cultural influence on South America (Hilder, 2011). If language could be a recognisable material object, then it could be supranational, so thought the concrete poets (Hilder, 2011). Such challenge to corporate imperialism responded to a cultural shift of the encounter with text from the horizontal to the vertical, as text in advertising culture shifted from the language of newspapers to the language of the billboard. Reflecting on this shift, Walter Benjamin observes Mallarmé who 'was the first to incorporate the graphic tensions of the advertisement into the printed page' (Benjamin, 1979, p.61), writes in *One Way Street*:

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<sup>7</sup> Concrete poetry practice continues from 1970, but the movement, as I position it, loses its defining internationalism and enters into the field of visual poetry from then on.

Printing, having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence, is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. This is the hard schooling of its new form. If, centuries ago, [text] began gradually to lie down, passing from the upright inscription to the manuscript resting on sloping desks, before finally taking to bed in the printed book, it now begins just as slowly to rise again from the ground. The newspaper is read more in the vertical than in the horizontal plane; while film and advertisement force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular (Benjamin, 1979, p.62).

To frame, to push into the vertical, was to address the script, *the text*, as dictatorial. Benjamin writes of advertising, but one can consider the application of his text to the rise from the horizontal plane of the book, to the vertical wall of the gallery as text became an object to be seen as well as read. Concrete poets wanted their work to be recognised like signs.

Positioned against the national traditions typically associated with literary arts, concrete poetry crossed boundaries as an international movement. Poetry anthologies are almost always printed in one language, resulting in a national categorisation of the literary field; something concrete poetry sought to challenge (Hilder, 2011). For example, Pignatari's *Beba Coca Cola* (1957) epitomises these qualities: words as signs, trans-nationalism, and a critique of visual culture through the poem form. Here, white letters in a sans serif Helvetica typeface, evoking the smooth business of American corporations of the mid-century, sit on a red square. The text slips between Portuguese, Spanish, and, as Hilder calls it, 'the globalized language of Coca-Cola' (Hilder, 2011). 'Drink coca cola', the first line reads. *Beba* alternates with *baba*, and the work slips between languages and meaning. *Coca*, glue, cocaine, are alternately presented in the right-hand column, with meaning slipping between language and between drinking and destruction.

Brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, together with Pignatari, founded the Noigrandes group in Sao Paulo in 1952. Their poems were meant to delight the eye, but also to dissolve the linguistic *beyond language* to a universally recognisable sign. Many concrete poets were also graphic designers and works of the early period are characterised by clean lines of pure modernism.<sup>8</sup> A second wave of concrete poetry, known as ‘dirty concrete’ can be seen in the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Houédard in the UK, and by poets in Canada such as Stephen Scobie (Bean et al., 2015). These poets moved towards a style fueled by the use of the typewriter. The visual noise produced by the typewriter’s keys – such as ‘misprints, ghost prints, overprints, doubling’ – was purposely drawn into the poem to place the machine in direct relation to the text (Bean et al., 2015, p.12). Scobie’s *Computer Poem – Night and Day* (1969) presents a single sheet of paper that serves as both instructions and raw material. On it are two columns of words (List A- night, and List B- day), which present words evocative to Scobie of night and day (and not synonyms for night and day as Smithson’s *Heap of Language* presents synonyms for language). This includes ‘owls, prowl, and shadow’ for night and ‘golden, wonder, and green’ for day (Scobie, 1969). The sheet then presents instructions for how the computer will write poems based on a set of rules and the raw material of text. The runs, in a dot matrix printer, are to be superimposed and overprinting is allowed. The

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<sup>8</sup> As many concrete poets were engaged in employment as graphic designers, so too were many of the conceptual artists using language engaged in professional design practice. Early in his career, Sol LeWitt was graphic designer in I.M. Pei’s architecture firm in the mid-1950s. Robert Smithson worked on *Arts* magazine, which enabled Dan Graham to publish *Homes for America* in the magazine. Ed Ruscha’s background in graphic design is evident in the typography and layout of *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1963). In the second generation of conceptualism, in the 1970s, Barbara Kruger worked for ten years on the photo desk at Conde Nast publications, working on magazines including *Aperture* and *Mademoiselle*.

installation then shows reams of paper, hung on the wall and descending in folds on to the floor (fig. 1.1).

Hilder identifies two strains of historic concrete poetry in the fifteen years of the movement, which he terms 'procedural' and 'performative' (Morris et al., 2015, pp.115-116). This is distinct from the 'constative' and the 'performative' distinctions of language in the speech-act theory developed by John Searle after J.L. Austin, for Hilder's categories attend to the materiality of language, and its production as related to its function. The procedural work is defined by 'a mechanical, almost industrial quality' wherein the work's meaning 'springs from the relationships between words or letters that will often closely resemble each other' (Morris et al., 2015, pp.115-116). The work of the Noigrandes group falls under this definition, and Pignatari's *Beba Coca Cola* is 'exemplary' as it constructs an 'anti-corporate poster poem' in the red and white of the soft drink's iconic branding as it encroaches on public space (Morris et al., 2015, pp.115-116). Hilder's second strain of concrete poetry is the 'performative', invoking the speech-act theory of J.L. Austin, and to Hilder this strain, 'rejects the mechanical and ordered for the manual and excessive; it asks questions of language's ability to represent, and of its role in subject formation' (Morris et al., 2015, p.116). This does not imply that the procedural uses machines, whilst performative is handwritten – both procedural and performative works *can* be made using the typewriter, for example.

Performative concrete poetry draws attention 'towards the various forms of language (visual, written, spoken, body)' and places a demanding experience on the reader that they pay attention to each of these forms of language within any given work (Morris et al., 2015, p.116). These works expanded in size beyond the printed page into folio size works that were exhibited on gallery walls, such as at the *Concrete Poetry* exhibition at the Fine Arts Gallery at

the University of British Columbia in 1969, and into the format of books, which presented another type of network and distribution.

### **Conceptual Art: Into Words**

In order to begin to explore the differences, overlap, and gaps between the two movements, I turn now to conceptual art. In its most defining works, conceptual art interrogated and tore apart systems of international borders, nationalistic art, the commodification of art, and the status of the art object. Lynda Morris argues for conceptual art as a 'true avant-garde between 1967 and 1973' (Morris, 2014, p.171). (Morris draws a period slightly later than that which I adhere to in this thesis, from 1966 with Robert Smithson's *A Heap of Language*).

Morris, following Donald Drew Egbert's *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968* (1970), defines avant-garde movements as adhered to by their radicalism, and as 'movements [that] are not stylistic. The connection between them is that they form in the aftermath of wars' (Morris, 2014, p.171). Morris points to conceptual art's most intense moments as being in East and West Germany, particularly at Konrad Fischer's Dusseldorf gallery space where he showed Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers, and David Lamelas, in the curated art fair exhibition, *Prospect 68* (1968). Language presented a possibility. It was portable, cheap, and could be shown readily in exhibitions at short notice in Kassel and Bern, as well as in New York. However, it also posed the potential to challenge the art market with what dealers and the market could feasibly commodify as an art object. (This soon proved futile as it quickly became clear that anything could be bought and sold, whether in more traditional mediums or in text, and many conceptual artists developed some of their most challenging work with the support of dealer gallerists such as Konrad Fischer).

The first definition of conceptual art appeared in the 1963 essay by Fluxus artist Henry (Harry) Flynt. (Flynt claims he first wrote (and copyrighted) the term in 1961) (Buchloh, 1990, p.107n1). Here, Flynt first defined 'concept art' as 'an art in which the material is "concepts," as the material of for example music is sound' (Flynt, 1963). He continued: 'Since "concepts" are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language' (Flynt, 1963). Ursula Meyer contended that 'conceptual art completed the break with traditional esthetics that the Dadaists, and notably Marcel Duchamp, initiated' (sic) (1972). To Craig Owens, writing retrospectively, the use of language was a defining rupture with modernism and opened the door to movements to react against it. He writes: 'the eruption of language into the aesthetic field — an eruption signaled by, but by no means limited to, the writings of Smithson, Morris, Andre, Judd, Dan Flavin, Rainer, and LeWitt — is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism' (Owens, 1979). More recently, art historians Kotz and Blacksell each counter Meyer's argument of a 'rupture', and instead argue for a fluid development of the use of language in Fluxus into the use of language in conceptual art (Kotz, 2007; Blacksell, 2013). Whether a rupture or a flow, the text in conceptual art came from Fluxus, from Duchampian ready-mades, but had an awareness of and borrowed from the use of language present in concrete poetry in the period immediately preceding, and overlapping with, conceptual art's first experiments with works using language as they were presented internationally in the mid- to late-1960s.

Art produced in the conceptual art movement of 1966-1973 in New York and later in the UK, by artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth (who was at times affiliated with Art & Language, and at times not), Carl Andre, Dan Graham, and Vito Acconci,

can be defined by four main traits. These are: self-reflexivity in understanding its function as art and not claiming to be anything else; an impulse towards reduction for an audience's experience; the negation of aesthetic content, which resulted instead in a shift from a traditional art object to a new aesthetic object, often in language or photography, rather than an outright negation; and, and the question of placement and where art belongs (Hilder, 2011). These traits can be seen emerging from Duchamp's ready-mades. Of interest to this thesis is the third trait: the resulting new aesthetic object of text (and not photography, unless it is in a direct juxtaposition with language), and the shift in aesthetic brought on by a new materiality of language. Although it is convenient to position the dematerialisation of the art object through the use of language in conceptual art, against the materialisation of language in concrete poetry, such positioning does not uphold under scrutiny. The unstable foundation of an either/or trajectory of concrete poetry and conceptual art begins to topple when interrogated further, unless one allows for a greater fluidity between the two movements. Conceptual art, in its turn to language, suggested simply a different materialisation of the art object through the use of language.

Crucial to the development of the conceptual art movement was a turn away from modernism and a rejection of abstract expressionism and the critical scholarship fueled by Clement Greenberg. Andrew Wilson articulates the 'parameters for conceptual art' as developing from a reaction to the 'central tenets of Clement Greenberg's formalist modernism' (Wilson, 2016). These tenets include countering the importance of 'sight' in Greenberg's modernism, and thus 'defini[ing] itself through language, linguistics and philosophy' which, in such opposition, could not be seen in the same way (Wilson, 2016, p.9). Wilson draws the comparison thus: 'Modernist art was autonomous, self-referential, defined



by its own conditions. Conceptual art drew its material, content and criticality from the world which it existed and acted within' (Wilson, 2016, p.10). Joseph Kosuth's turn to language was also a rejection of the modernist critic. Kosuth argues in his essay 'Art After Philosophy' that art was the site where philosophical investigations should take place. Referring to A.J. Ayer, Kosuth writes: 'In other words, the propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in character – that is, they do not describe the behavior of physical, or even mental objects; they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art' (Kosuth, 1969). Within his propositions in 'Art After Philosophy', Kosuth follows Wittgenstein, arguing that 'the meaning is the use', and proposed the replacement of philosophy with art, linguistic in its practice and seeking a potential formlessness (Kosuth, 1969). Kosuth is not only hostile to the audience, but he also resists to engage with language on any material level (Alberro and Stimson 1999, p.852-861). This refusal is tied up in his presumption that language is objective. For in Kosuth's famous Photostats of dictionary page definitions, such as *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) The Word Definition* (1966-68), he completely fails to address the very materiality of the Photostat which produces the work. The Photostat was a predecessor to the photocopier, making a 'cheap and reproducible [work] in order that they might be thrown away after each exhibition'. It was, as Hilder notes, a 'new printing technique' which advanced 'the expansion of advertising into the everyday' (Hilder, 2010, p.129). Kosuth's arguments and positions would be contradictory enough if they remained within his own practice, but taken verbatim by critics then and now, it is surprising that art historians such as Kotz note that 'When Joseph Kosuth describes the work of artists like [Dan] Graham or [Vito] Acconci as resembling concrete poetry, there is no question that he means it as a term of derision' and then goes on to reiterate his position in her own lack of questioning of his use of the materiality of text (Kotz, 2007, p.293).

Lippard first developed her arguments for dematerialisation in relation to conceptual art practice in an article for *Art International*, which she co-authored with John Chandler in 1968 (Lippard and Chandler, 1968). Placing an emphasis on the language-based works of art she saw emerging at the time, Lippard and Chandler observed that such practice ‘upsets detractors because ‘there is not enough to look at’” (Lippard and Chandler, 1968, p.31). They go on to argue that such art is ‘post-esthetic’ (sic) (Lippard and Chandler, 1968, p.31). They write: ‘when works of art, like words, are signs that convey ideas, they are not things in themselves, but symbols or representatives of things’ (Lippard and Chandler, 1968, p.32). Lippard and Chandler go on to list examples of artworks that they believe are ‘ultra-conceptual’ or dematerialised art objects (Lippard and Chandler, 1968).<sup>9</sup> In his response to Lippard’s and Chandler’s published article, Terry Atkinson wrote a letter to Lippard, reprinted in Alberro and Stimson’s *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, which Lippard included, in part, in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973). In ‘Concerning the Article: The Dematerialization of Art’ (1968), Atkinson finds Lippard’s use of the term ‘dematerialization’ so imprecise and far removed from his understanding of art practices — particularly those engaging with language, including his own — that he presumes Lippard to be ‘speaking metaphorically’ (Atkinson, 1968). Atkinson challenges Lippard’s use of dematerialisation by referring to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines dematerialisation as ‘depriv[ing] of all material qualities’ (Atkinson, 1968). Arguing that an art object, or any matter, does not simply become dematerialised by undergoing a change in state, even if that change renders it invisible, Atkinson instead suggests that such artworks

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<sup>9</sup> Lippard and Chandler’s article is reprinted in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (2000), but this section of text is omitted.

undergo a rematerialisation or 'conversion' (a term he uses cautiously). Mel Bochner also attacks the *Six Years* as 'severely defective as a useful work of scholarship' (1973). Bochner objects to Lippard's 'audacity' as a critic in shaping a singular narrative that documents and theorises 'six years of extremely active and possibly radical art' without a 'systematic, clear, informed, and consistent' methodology (1973). Rather, Bochner argues that Lippard develops a falsely perceived 'idiosyncratic' reading of art history built on chaotic networks of movements and subjective historical research' (1973). Lynda Morris defends Lippard's contribution in *Six Years*, wherein she sees Lippard as attempting to let dematerialisation 'define itself', through the book as an anthology of texts on the period of conceptual art, of which Lippard is "'editor" rather than "author"' (Morris, 2014). Morris writes: 'If a new art form emerged between 1966-72, it was the exploration of the communication-network: galleries, magazines, exhibitions, publications, mailers, public spaces, newspapers, television and video...the movement was united by the form (anti-form) used to present their ideas, the content of the ideas' Morris continues, 'became totally personalised' (Morris, 2014). Yet Lippard herself reflected in the revised preface to *Six Years* that since '1967, it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term, that a piece of paper or a photograph is as much as object, or as 'material', as a ton of lead. Granted. But for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a de-emphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)' (Lippard, 1973, p.5).

### **Between Materiality and Dematerialisation**

I turn now to the relationship of the two movements. If concrete poetry has enjoyed a marginal relationship within literary studies, it has been largely ignored and refuted entirely by visual art for four decades. As Peter Mayer writes: 'Concrete poetry was distributed via

small press magazines and exhibitions because the established literary presses of most democratic countries rarely paid it any attention except to occasionally vilify it' (Mayer, 1996). In Hilder's 2011 lecture at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, he argues that the movements either 'do not recognize one another, or do not like one another' (Hilder, 2011). Hilder makes the argument that the critical neglect of the movement is largely due to two things: 'the disciplinary gap that concrete poetry staked out for itself in the middle of the twentieth-century, combined with its consciously international character' (Hilder, 2011).

To argue this neglect or antagonism, Hilder summarises a number of slights made by conceptual art and its chroniclers on concrete poetry (Hilder, 2016, pp.145-147). Lippard distinguished concrete poetry from conceptual art in *Six Years*, stating in an interview with Carl Andre that: 'certainly there are at least twenty people using either words or written things as vehicles for their art, but there is a distinction between concrete poetry, where the words are made to look like something, an image, and so-called conceptual art, where the words are used only to *avoid* looking like something, where it doesn't make any difference how the words look on the page (Lippard, 1973, p.157). She suggests that Lawrence Weiner, 'maybe...bridges some of that' to which Andre replies: 'Larry is a good poet' (Lippard, 1973, p.5). Also in *Six Years*, Joseph Kosuth is quoted in the transcript of a symposium, 'Art Without Space', held on November 2, 1969 at the radio station, WBAI-FM in New York. Kosuth states: 'Most of the concrete poets are now starting to do theater and getting out of concrete poetry [Acconci, Perreault, Hannah Weiner, etc.] They realize the sort of decadence that follows from that sort of materialism' (Kosuth, 1973, p.132). Even as recently as 2007, Liz Kotz referred to concrete poetry as 'quaint' and 'pictorial' (Kotz, 2007, p.138). In the volume edited by Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss, *Art Since 1900*, concrete poetry is mentioned only

once, in the index (Foster and Krauss, 2004). (It is not mentioned at all in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, though conceptual art appears in eighteen different entries and over at least 50 pages (Harrison and Wood, 2003)). We might reasonably expect this difference in attention warranted, given that conceptual art is an art movement and concrete poetry a literary one. Indeed, the resurgence of interest in concrete poetry with group exhibitions such as those already mentioned has been stated by some of the curators, such as Sladen, as an attempt to 'correct' art history (Sladen, 2016). In 1971, writing in his magazine *Lotta Poetica*, the poet Paul de Sarenco went so far as to accuse Kosuth of 'copying from Timm Ulrichs, Ben Vautier, Jean Claude Moineau [sic]' and Carl Andre 'copying from all the northern concrete poets' (1971, p.12). Copying is too strong a word. Movements occurring in the marginal practice of language, in overlapping time periods, and exhibiting in the centres of New York and London will have cross over and fluidity. Rather, at issue here, is that in the historicisation of the movements, and in the acceptance verbatim of the artist's stated opinion of one movement's influence over another, the fluidity of the works' initial development is lost, and one movement is emphasised to prioritise materiality, and the other to refute it, and yet other movements still such as feminist conceptual art are not even mentioned.

Hilder argues not only the fluidity of concrete poetry and conceptual art, but more strongly, concrete poetry's unacknowledged influence on conceptual artists using language (namely, Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, and Carl Andre, three artists who are also the focus of Blacksell's PhD thesis at the University of Reading). He argues that these artists 'borrow directly from concrete poetry' while 'denying any line of influence' (Hilder, 2011). Hilder observes that the two disciplines have little in common: conceptual art was concerned with the

dematerialisation of the art object, and concrete poetry with the materialisation of the word (Hilder, 2011). Beyond a visual similarity of works of each movement, there is, as Hilder suggests, little reason to place the two movements together. Indeed, if one places works from either movement alongside each other, there can be such great overlap and coincidence between them and their treatment of language, that the categorisation of materiality versus dematerialisation does not hold up. Curators seem to not agree on where artists fit in the genealogy. Some artists appear in landmark exhibitions of concrete poetry whilst at the same time being proponents of conceptual art (such as Kosuth), and further, distancing themselves from concrete poetry as a line of influence.

I turn now to Carl Andre, for he is an artist with an over fifty-year international career, as a sculptor and as a poet. Andre is clear, and long has been, to signal these works are poems, not drawings, or preparatory works on paper, etc, yet they demonstrate a clear relationship to the artist's minimalist sculptural works (Andre, 1975). In Andre's metal floor pieces and his typed poems; the same form is used - a grid - but the material changes. In *I...Flower* (1963) — one of a series of sonnets written by repeating a single word to form a grid-like structure — Andre types a single word with a typewriter on a sheet of white paper, such as 'breath' or 'flower' in five columns of 14 rows, with no spaces between the words (fig. 1.2). Andre states that he 'used the typewriter as a machine or lathe or saw, to apply letters on the page' (Andre, 1975). The typewriter, however, automatically prints the text in a grid due to its spacing. Andre continues that writing on the typewriter was like 'applying physical impressions on to a page, almost as if I had a chisel and was making a cut or a dye and making a mark on metal' (Andre, 1975). While a romantic notion, Andre fails to acknowledge the relative uniformity with which a typewriter makes an impression of a letter on a page, in

comparison with the irregular impression of a hand cutting with a chisel. I highlight these points because though the artists failed at the time to address all the materiality engaged with by their respective choices of method of production (as in Kosuth with the Photostat), these material considerations to the text nonetheless exist. By the mid-1960s, Andre's sculptures explored grids and flatness, and were installed on the gallery floor, encouraging audiences to walk over them. *144 Lead Square* (1969) is one such work, in which Andre creates a 12 x 12 grid of squares on the gallery's floor (fig. 1.3). In his floor-based grid sculptures, Andre worked in steel, zinc, copper, tin, and magnesium. In 1969, his *144 Magnesium Square* presented a visually similar object to the audience, but resulted in different oxidation (the metal was in its raw state), different sounds when walked across, and different weights. In *Now Now* (1967), two black lines create a 2 x 2 square grid (fig. 1.4). The word 'now' is written four times, once in each grid. By locating the word in a slightly different orientation within a square of the grid, Andre plays with the viewer's perception of the word. The audience sees all four words at once, yet our eyes travel from one to the next. The work on paper precedes the sculpture, and in them, Andre began to explore ideas of seriality, repetition, and form within the medium of language before he did metal.

Andre received a significant exhibition of his poems at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford and the Lisson Gallery, London in 1975, which Lynda Morris reviewed in detail for *Studio International* in the September/October 1975 issue, and reprinted in *Genuine Conceptualism* (2014). Morris, unlike Andre (and Kosuth) attends to the materiality of the works, and their installation. She writes: 'The ground floor of the museum in Oxford contained the work *Passport* from September 1960. A colour Xerox of each page of the book was pasted in a horizontal line around the walls' (Morris, 2014, p.111). 'Colour Xerox', Morris goes on to say,

'is a new process, which resembles a laboriously produced colour etching. The surface is slightly embossed and the subtleties of colour belong to the medium, not to the image' (Morris, 2014, p.111). Morris draws comparison with to Andre's sculpture, as three works – *144 Magnesium Square* (1969), *Lost Ladder* (1959), and *Equivalent VIII* (1966), had very recently been acquired by the Tate for their permanent collection at the time of his exhibition of poems in Oxford in 1975. Morris observes a disappointment amongst the audience that his sculptural works were absent in Oxford, but draws the comparison in his longer narrative poems which address subjects from Ralph Waldo Emerson to the life and death of Eadweard Muybridge, that '[Andre] uses found text in the poems as he uses found materials in the sculpture' (Morris, 2014, p.112). Morris observes that as a reader, 'it is tiring' if reading the longer, narrative poems as he has installed them 'pasted flat on gallery walls' (Morris, 2014, p.112). She writes: 'we read a letter at 45° and we are not used to reading small type at 90°', and concludes with the reflection that as a child, before he could read, Andre preferred to look at pages of poems in family volumes, rather than prose, for the 'patterns the poems form' (Morris, 2014, p.112). This childhood preference for exploring words as images translates thus to his poetry.

Yet, like Kosuth, Andre was keen to distance himself from concrete poetry. For example, Andre asserts his untitled poem about a rose took its cue from Ezra Pound, writing in 'On Painting and Consecutive Matters' that 'My plastic poem about the rose will not be printed in a blooming, petalled pattern' (sic) (Andre and Frampton, 1980). Indeed, in its block of text which printed the word rose five times on each of eight lines without spacing, Andre recalls Gertrude Stein's 'a rose is a rose is a rose' (who is not a only a poet but best known as a Modernist novelist, yes, but also not a theorist informing the work of other conceptual



artists) (Stein, 1968). Andre's assertion misses the point that the concrete poetry movement of the mid-1960s had evolved from the Noigrandes movement, and not the pre-war calligrams of the French poet. Ruth Blacksell, however, furthers Andre's protest, and supports his claim as she contests that Andre borrowed from concrete poetry, writing in 2013 that 'although as first glance text-works like Andre's might appear to connect to concrete poetry (where text would be arranged semi-pictorially to evoke the poem's subject), what differentiates them is precisely the way in which they echo the shifting theoretical paradigms of visual art at the time by moving the object into a solely language-based context' (Blacksell, 2013, p.69). Yet Blacksell's claim that concrete poetry bore no influence on Andre's poems (which he himself calls *poems*) fails to acknowledge concrete poetry's theoretical underpinnings as a movement, and instead falls back on the pictorial quality of words to make the distinction as the underlying foundation and primary aim of the movement, when it was not. Blacksell only echoes, unchallenged, the long-held view of 'art history [being] an antithetical position to concrete poetry' (Hilder, 2010, p.129).

Concrete poetry was not about printing words in a visual form that reflected the subject of those words. It was about a visual recognition of language beyond boundaries and nationalities. Yet Andre's poems were not about an internationalism, a translatability that his sculptures addressed in their materiality. Rather, when Andre tries to distinguish his poems from other language explorations in conceptual art, and from concrete poetry, stating in *A Theory of Poetry: 1960-1965*, that though 'they are not the first poems [he] ever wrote...they are the first poems in which [he] took the English language for subject matter' he isolates himself to works within the English language (Kotz, 2007, p.141). He furthers this, highlighting his importance within the insularity of the New York art world, when he states, 'What I want

to illuminate in my poetry are not those things which only I can see, but those things which any man can see. I am interested in those poems which you can go back to Manhattan and duplicate' (Kotz, 2007, p.151). It is in English, in Manhattan, with his words imbued with meaning, that they acquire value. Hilder highlights Andre's almost 'unconscious emphasis' on 'English' and 'Manhattan' being the norms by which his work operates, and thus differentiates Andre's project from the concrete poets on economic terms (Hilder, 2016, p.161), not on formal terms. The question then is not why is Andre using language in the way he does, but why is it receiving so much attention and importance as a precursor to the challenging addresses of materiality in text evident today, when he has so little awareness of the materiality himself, or the potential for critique within language by artists who are not writing in English, for Manhattan audiences, who presume language as natural, objective, and transparent.

A word is material, but it is of course not the same type of material as metal or brick or stone. Andre's statements about his poems and writing methods make a straight line to his sculptural works. For example, Andre's *One Hundred Sonnets* is a group of one word poems. Kotz discusses Andre's work, stating that the words move from 'pronouns...to body parts or fluids' (from I/you to head/hair to colours and numbers, and elements of landscape sun/moon) (Kotz, 2007, p.146). Within the work, Andre explicitly makes words single units. Like his sculptural floor pieces in which the material bears evidence of subtle shifts between parts, the words transition in order to suggest a progression. Yet Hilder criticises 'One Hundred Sonnets' as an 'unreflexive projection of sculptural techniques onto poetic material' (Hilder, 2016 p.161). By not attending to the materiality of the words, Andre attempts to treat words with the same sculptural method as his other materials. This is peculiar, given

that as Hilder highlights, Andre never addresses the page as a space, in the way sculpture occupies a space with an audience (Hilder, 2010, p.141). By comparison with the supranational, supralinguistic investigation of concrete poetry, Andre is isolating himself within a privileged subjectivity unaware of its own privilege. Without attending to the image of language, he assumes that the English will be universal, that he is illuminating things 'which any *man* can see' (emphasis added), when it is anything but (Kotz, 2007, p.151). In Andre's sculptures, he selects materials such as lead, and gives them meaning based on the context and order in which he shows them. Only one in such a position of power and privilege could assume language to be objective without questioning the power within it.

### ***Between Poetry and Painting, 1965***

I turn now to several exhibitions of text – either in group exhibitions of concrete poetry, or group exhibitions of conceptual art which included significant works of text art – from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s to begin to map how text has been exhibited as art in the past four decades, and how curators have addressed text in the space of the group exhibition. Cambridge and Oxford each hosted exhibitions of concrete poetry in 1964 and 1966 respectively. The exhibition at Cambridge, held at St Catherine's College, was titled *The First International Exhibition of Concrete and Kinetic Poetry*. Organised by Stephen Bann, Reg Gadney, Phil Steadman, and English critic Mike Weaver, the exhibition included new writing by Ian Hamilton Finlay and Frank Popper. Weaver et al distinguished concrete poetry into three categories in their curation of the work: visual, phonetic, or moving (kinetic), categories that Reichardt did not adhere to. But these classifications were too limited, and failed to acknowledge the slippage between such categories within the works. As Mary Ellen Solt wrote, 'when we are confronted with the particular text...we often find that it is both visual

and phonetic, or that it is expressionistic as well as constructivist' (Solt and Barnstone, 1968, n.p.). In 2015, Bronac Ferran brought together much of the archival material in the concrete poetry exhibition at Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, *Graphic Constellations: Visual Properties and the Properties of Space*.

In London in the mid-1960s, there were only a handful of galleries, public and private, showing contemporary art work. Of the public institutions and bodies, the only two collecting contemporary art were the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Tate. The ICA offered an alternative, bold space for exhibition and ideas. The dealer galleries were few, relative to now. Those that existed bore impact: Lisson Gallery, run by Nicholas Logsdail; and Nigel Greenwood Inc., run by Nigel Greenwood and assisted by Lynda Morris. In 1965, Jasia Reichardt was the newly appointed Assistant Director of the ICA. Taking over from Lawrence Alloway, Reichardt began orienting the programme towards a more 'conceptually based art and a more explicitly articulated theoretical base' in her exhibitions (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). The 'theoretical base' was evident in one of her earliest group exhibitions which she organised in her new role, *Between Poetry and Painting*, in 1965. As part of her theoretical re-orientation at the ICA, Reichardt also 'revamped' the *ICA Bulletin*, the gallery's monthly newsletter (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). In the bulletin, Reichardt began publishing poetry. Larger images were accommodated in the expanded re-design, where previously it served as a news source for events. Poetry readings however, had long been a part of the ICA's programming, since its inception in 1948, when Dylan Thomas, W.H. Auden, and T.S. Eliot read works. Reichardt's group exhibition and expansion of poetry in the bulletin responded to the merging of literary and visual culture of the time, as she brought the two fields more prominently together within the spaces and outputs of the ICA.

*Between Poetry and Painting* was the first exhibition in London to showcase concrete poetry in the context of a permanent visual arts gallery space. Held between November and December in the Dover Street site (the exhibition was staged a couple of years before the ICA moved to its current site in Nash House on The Mall in March 1968), *Between Poetry and Painting* included 49 artists, though this number is larger if artists who gave performances or readings beyond the installed exhibition are counted. (The catalogue refers to the contributors all as being artists despite the interdisciplinarity of their practices). *Between Poetry and Painting* was 'popular' and succeeded in 'attracting new members', suggesting that Reichardt's selection of language within the exhibition space, and presentation of it, was not too esoteric for audiences of the time (Massey and Muir, 2014, p.140). There was no involvement of any dealer galleries. Reichardt's selected artists included important figures in British concrete poetry: Bob Cobbing, Kenelm Cox, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Dom Sylvestre Houédard, and less-known artists such as Barry Flannagan. Houédard contributed an artist's book to accompany the catalogue. Modest in appearance, the staple-bound, brown paper booklet consisted of an essay by Houédard which charted the development of text in art, titled: *Between Poetry and Painting: Chronology* (Houédard, 1965). In it, Houédard argues the periods of text in art as: Painting Becomes Script; Logos and Ikon on Equal Terms; Painting Incorporates Writing; and Painting Incorporates Actual Words or Near-Words (Houédard, 1965). It also included an international selection of artists such as Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, and Dieter Rot. *Between Poetry and Painting* is significant for its placement of concrete poetry within the contemporary art institution. Presenting concrete poetry in the exhibition space of the ICA argued for the importance of concrete poetry as a visual field. Houédard saw the hybridity of language and image as essential to the concrete poetry

project. He writes: 'the written word freezes the spoken word and makes it concrete and material' extending that this thus gives evidence to a 'prehistory in magic' and a substitution of worshipping logos if ikons are 'forbidden' (Houédard, 1965). Reichardt's curatorial strategy was to position the new concrete poetry in a genealogy of language in art rather than language in literature. She writes in the catalogue:

Since Dada and Futurism there have been two main trends in the use of type as an art medium. The first involves the transformation of type materials into an abstract composition, the actual literal meaning (if any) is subsidiary to the pure impact of shape and colour. In the second category are examples where the visual arrangement or transformation exist to stress and emphasize the message of the text, or at least where there is a suggestion that the text is the central issue' (Reichardt, 1965).

Her distinctions foreshadow those made retrospectively by curators, of concrete poetry or conceptual art, where one type of practice emphasizes the image of language and the other, the message of language.

*Between Poetry and Painting* is less attended to in comparison to Reichardt's other landmark exhibition of the same period, *Cybernetic Serendipity*, held at the ICA in Carleton House Terrace on the Mall in the late summer of 1968.<sup>10</sup> The concrete poet Max Bense, who pioneered information aesthetics, met Reichardt on the occasion of *Between Poetry and Painting*, a meeting that was purportedly influential to a meeting that in turn purportedly seeded *Cybernetic Serendipity* (Klutsche, 2012, p.83). Though *Between Poetry and Painting* is referenced in studies of concrete poetry, it attracts much less attention within histories of

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<sup>10</sup> *Cybernetic Serendipity* was exhibited from 2 August – 20 October 1968 and is regarded as a landmark exhibition of the ICA which tested its conceptually-based approach to art by exhibiting computer generated music, graphics, poetry, and film, robots, and painting machines.

exhibitions. It was a wide-reaching, impactful exhibition though, and it was instrumental in extending the strategy of exhibiting international concrete poetry within public art galleries to Canada.

### ***Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts, 1969***

Michael Morris was a young Canadian artist who had completed a painting degree at the Vancouver School of Art in 1964.<sup>11</sup> At the encouragement of his tutor, William Townsend, Morris carried on with postgraduate studies in London on scholarship to the Slade School of Fine Art in 1965. Whilst there, Morris visited *Between Poetry and Painting*, which 'would become the basis of the 1969 concrete poetry exhibition at UBC' (Morris et al., 2015, p.149). It was through Reichardt that Morris then became acquainted with her network of artists (beyond those exhibiting in *Between Poetry and Painting*) who were working in and visiting London at the time, a network that included conceptual artists Gustav Metzger and John Latham (Morris et al., 2015, p.149). Morris also attended the *Destruction in Art Symposium* in 1966 at the ICA. When he returned to Vancouver later in 1966, Morris was hired by Doris Shadbolt to be acting curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Here, he began to work in multiple roles: artist, gallery curator, organiser, and became instrumental in the Vancouver art scene of the 1960s, heavily influenced by what he had seen in London. In 1967, after travelling in the US, Morris resigned from the Vancouver Art Gallery and took up post as Programming Curator at the new Simon Fraser University, where Iain Baxter was also involved.<sup>12</sup> While there he collaborated with the Douglas Gallery (a small frame shop and

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<sup>11</sup> Now Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Fraser University Gallery was itself a site of activity in the late 1960s. SFU Gallery was established as a public art gallery in 1970. In the preceding years, visual arts

gallery in Vancouver's West End) to organize a symposium on *Art and Destruction*, directly influenced by the symposium he attended at the ICA in 1966.

In March 1969, after leaving SFU, Morris, together with Alvin Balkind, the gallery director at the University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, co-curated *Concrete Poetry: An exhibition in four parts*.<sup>13</sup> Though it was directly influenced by Morris' experience of Reichardt's *Between Poetry and Painting*, the two were very different exhibitions. In correspondence between Balkind and Reichardt in January and February of 1969, as Balkind and Morris quickly prepared the show for March 1969, Balkind politely declined Reichardt's offer for the ICA to sell the Fine Arts Gallery 'blow ups' of concrete poetry, for Balkind did not want 'simply to repeat [her] show', an act he acknowledged 'which would be hardly creative' (Balkind, 1969). In his correspondences, Balkind explains the show as curated in four parts: a one man show of works by New York artist Ray Johnson, which had never been exhibited in Vancouver; 25 concrete poems by Morris, who was primarily known as a painter; a survey of works of contemporary concrete poets and artists, and 'an intermedial presentation' exhibiting the range of impact of concrete poetry, from musical notation to computer and mathematical related matter (Balkind, 1969). Joseph Kosuth was included in the exhibition, contributing *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)* (one of four parts) (1969) (fig. 1.5), one of his typographic white on black found definitions from dictionaries. It was in November of the same year that Kosuth stated how he and his contemporaries were 'getting out of concrete poetry' (Kotz, 1973, p.132).

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programming was coordinated by artist Iain Baxter, who was a Resident in the Centre for Communications and the Arts until the early 1970s.

<sup>13</sup> Now Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery.



Balkind had sensed a relationship between concrete poetry and computer generated art and intended to include this in the exhibition. Balkind also had seen Reichardt's *Cybernetic Serendipity* on a flight stop-over on his way back from Europe to Vancouver in 1968. Their correspondence however reveals that Reichardt failed to see the relationship between the two exhibitions. She wrote to him, 'I don't understand exactly [computer generated art's] relevance, and therefore am slightly at a loss as to what to suggest [sic]', when Balkind requested information on works of Jean Tinguely for *Concrete Poetry*, whom Reichardt had exhibited in *Cybernetic Serendipity* (Balkind, 1969, n.p.). Balkind replied to her:

Certain members of our committee for the concrete poetry exhibition have felt that computer poetry and computer permutations might be related to concrete poetry. One of them is working on the problem here with the University of B.C. computing centre. I think you need not concern yourself any more with that or with Tinguely whose metamatic produced strange drawn objects which only in the wildest fantasy bear any relationship whatsoever to concrete poetry (Balkind, 1969, n.p.).

Despite stepping away from his conversation with Reichardt, Balkind's intuition was correct. He and Morris included within the exhibition works such as Stephen Scobie's *Instructions for Computer Poem 3 – Night and Day* (1969), which aesthetically combined early code with an installation of reams of paper hung on walls in a model that precedes the Dot Matrix. Decades later, many proponents of concrete poetry such as Kenneth Goldsmith, Victoria Bean, and Peter Mayer, would themselves seek to argue that concrete poetry foreshadowed the internet by the 1990s and 2000s (Bean et al, 2015; Mayer, 1996). What Balkind did not realise at the time was that it was the international connectivity, the networks of working, the realisation of a visual language beyond borders that would echo in the interconnectivity of

communication in the digital age, decades later. Both *Between Poetry and Painting* and *Concrete Poetry: an exhibition in four parts* demonstrate the literary arts mounted in the vertical, the exhibition of concrete poetry within the visual arts gallery.

Balkind was employed by UBC as the curator of the Fine Arts Gallery from 1962-1973, and was influential in establishing Vancouver as an international art centre in the 1960s. The significance of Morris' role was not to exhibit the concrete poetry of Vancouver and Canada – for this concrete poetry came later and belongs to visual poetry, not the international movement so far described – but to bring the international art scene to Vancouver for the impactful sharing of ideas across concrete poetry and conceptual art. In 2012, the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery at UBC mounted a large exhibition, *Letters: Michael Morris and Concrete Poetry*, which re-examined the relationship of Morris' painting, and his *Letters* series, to the concrete poetry exhibition, and the relationship of painting to communication as a field.

***Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art, 1966; Language I - IV, 1967-71; and Catalogue for an Exhibition (Simon Fraser Exhibition), 1969***

In the mid-1960s, New York-based conceptual artists and their gallerists began to position language in exhibitions in contemporary dealer galleries and art school galleries in ways that explored the relationship of reading to seeing in the new linguistic work. In 1966, Mel Bochner organised *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Here, Bochner utilised the relatively new technology of the photocopier which enabled multiple facsimiles to be printed quicker and more efficiently than before, and collated his peers' working drawings

(including works by Dan Flavin, Dan Graham, Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Smithson).<sup>14</sup>

*Working Drawings* presented a curatorial exploration of Bochner's concern – as an artist, and a curator, and as a writer – with reading text and seeing art, and the slippages and interchanges between the two engagements with the work. Presenting the works in four black binders, Bochner suggested they be read, flipped through and consulted as books (fig. 1.6). That is, as objects to be handled in a one-to-one relationship between the text and the audience. However, Bochner placed these black binders on plinths within the otherwise empty gallery space, suggesting a clear relationship of sculpture to language. *Working Drawings* thus presented a new model of exhibition responding to, and extending, the conceptual art proposition for language: an exhibition defining itself through language, linguistics, and philosophy, rather than by sight through the visual.

Exhibitions in the dealer galleries of the 1960s were the first to show language works that engaged with the conceptual art proposition for language as art. Gallery director Virginia Dwan opened her Los Angeles gallery space in 1959. Her New York gallery followed, opening in 1965. Both were crucial in the promotion and support of artists such as Robert Smithson through the late 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Operating with a great deal of financial freedom, Dwan supported her artists with large stipends, generous time, and freedom to exhibit works that were still unconventional and challenging to the art market, particularly language works and earthworks (Dwan, 1982). Public institutions did not begin to exhibit text artworks until the

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<sup>14</sup> The Xerox machine was first introduced in 1959 and slowly replaced office Photostat and mimeograph machines.

<sup>15</sup> Dwan was the heiress to the conglomerate 3M. She started her West Coast gallery with her personal wealth, enabling her to operate free from the pressure to sell artworks.

landmark conceptual art exhibitions of Harald Szeeman in 1969, and so Dwan's pioneering support for language as artwork in the US in this period is significant, as was Konrad Fischer's in Dusseldorf, Nigel Greenwood's, and Nicholas Logsdail's, both in London.

For four years starting in May 1967 and culminating in June 1970, Dwan's summer, end-of-art season exhibitions were surveys of language in conceptual art, referred to collectively as the 'Language Shows' (Dwan, 1982). The first was *Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read*, held in the New York gallery in summer of 1967. The exhibition's title came from a text written by Robert Smithson in the penname (which he only used once, for this text), Eton Corrasable. (Eaton's Corrasable Bond is an erasable typing paper used in typewriters, and one can presume Smithson's nom de plume was a play on words referring to the paper support). The text served as an esoteric press release for the show and presented a proposition for reconsidering language in, and as, art. Smithson attempted to reconfigure language as an object oscillating between two cognitive functions (reading and seeing). In it, he writes that language is 'built not written', emphasising the sculptural quality of words (Smithson, 1967). A review in *Artforum* acknowledged the show in September 1967, and stated that while 'a didactic exhibition' about words in art is welcome, 'It is a bit reprehensible to suggest that the way-out kids (including oldsters) who make (and are) the new art scene have really come up with anything new or advanced over the international avant-garde practice of 1930' (Artforum, 1967), implying the difference in the use of language as art was not at the time felt to be drastically different from that of the inter-war avant-gardes of Futurism, or Dadaism.

The following three exhibitions at Dwan's New York gallery were titled sequentially: *Language II*, *Language III*, and *Language IV*. Collectively, the exhibitions present turning points in the intersection of text, visual practice, and modes of art viewing. By showing written language in a visual art gallery, Dwan positioned artworks that challenged the audience to encounter text art through reading, such as Dan Graham's *Schema* (1966) (fig. 1.7), produced in art magazines and publications including *Aspen* and *Art-Language*, alongside artworks that could be regarded more in the viewing relationship between the audience and art object, such as paintings from On Kawara's *Today Series* (1966), in which Kawara would paint the date in white against a solid coloured or black background. The installation of the 'Language Shows' adhered very much to gallery conventions: works were installed on walls, or on plinths, and regarded as sculptural objects or images to be looked at, not handled (fig. 1.8), to be encountered collectively in public, not read individually in private.

Bochner's notecard *No Thought Exists...* (1969) suggests a preparatory note for a later work, but is an artwork in its own right. On it, Bochner used black ink to write statements on the role of language in art. With words scribbled out to the point of illegibility, he writes that: 'No thought exists without a sustaining support', suggesting written words are the support to an idea, like a canvas to a painting. Attempting to work out the distinction of *conceptual* and *perceptual* in his notes on the card, Bochner arrives at a concluding line in this 1969 work that he will explore at least four physical manifestations over the next year. He writes: 'Language is not transparent', and underlines it for emphasis (Meyer, 1972, pp.50-57).

Through 1969 and 1970, Bochner rubber-stamped the same words on plain paper hung in a grid of four (fig. 1.9), as well as on graph paper (fig. 1.10). At times, he stamped the words just once so that the words are legible. Other times, Bochner experimented with stamping

repeatedly to the point that the words could not be read if isolated from the other, more legible, versions. In 1970, Bochner painted black paint directly on Dwan's New York gallery wall for *Language IV*, and left it to drip down to the floor revealing its presence on the surface of the wall. He wrote in uppercase letters in white chalk the same statement: 'Language is not transparent' (fig. 1.11). Removing the paper support and placing the text on the gallery wall, Bochner suggests that the sustaining support for the idea is the materiality of words themselves, and the exhibition space. Here, for the first time, Bochner numbers his statement, perhaps in reference to LeWitt's 35 numbered sentences presented in the previous year, which itself references Wittgenstein's numbered statements of the *Tractatus* (1921). Bochner's *Portrait of Robert Smithson* (1966) is a handwritten work in black, uppercase letters written on graph paper in which Bochner writes synonyms for repetition, providing textual reference to Smithson's own *Heap of Language*. Perloff summarises Wittgenstein thus: 'The limits of language is [sic] shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is a translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence' (Perloff, 1996). Bochner's *Portrait* can be seen to be testing Wittgenstein's limits.

Smithson's *A Heap of Language* (1966) creates on the page a mound of text that is ascending and descending, a mound of building blocks suggesting a built pyramid and a pile of rubble of an object deconstructed (fig. 1.12). The work was shown in Dwan's first *Language* show. A pencil on paper drawing, the order of words shifts in the middle line of text, moving from synonyms for language that are associated with speech (e.g. 'vernacular' and 'colloquial') to those that imply inscription (e.g. 'character' and 'hieroglyphic'). Listing as many synonyms for language as Smithson can presumably think of, the gaps within words become evident. These are not physical gaps, but gaps in the potential of the signifier and the signified. Smithson

articulates the gaps within words as fissures, in 'A Sedimentation of the Mind' (Smithson, 1968). He writes: 'At the bottom of both the material and the print is the beginning of an abysmal number of fissures. Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any *word* long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void'.<sup>16</sup> Smithson distinguishes print/text from minerals/earth—the two art mediums he uses—contending both contain fissures of conceptual potential.

Smithson approached writing in his theoretical articles in the same way he did sculpture, stating that it was '*information* which has a kind of physical presence for me. I would construct my articles the way I would construct a work' (Smithson and Flam, 1996, p.xvi). In 'A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art', Smithson surveys his artist peers who also write, many of whom, such as LeWitt, also appeared in Dwan's exhibitions, stating: 'the language of the artists and critics referred to in this article becomes paradigmatic reflections in a looking-glass babel' (Smithson, 1968). Smithson sees a failure in both literature and art to truly understand or unleash the potential of the written word. The terrain of ruptures previously alluded to open a potential void — a new system of meaning — to the reader. A related metaphysical conceptualisation of language is addressed by David Abram, who sees in the 'ostensibly inert bits of ink on a page' the opportunity to 'hear conversations that are unfolding on the other side of the planet, to see scenarios that happened, not just elsewhere, but two thousand years ago', through the seemingly innocuous act of focusing of a written

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<sup>16</sup> 'When the fissures between mind and matter multiply into an infinity of gaps, the studio begins to crumble and fall like the House of Usher, so that mind and matter get endlessly confounded' (Smithson, 1968; Smithson and Flam, 1996).

word (Childrenofthecode.org, 2004). Both Smithson and Abram point to the potential contained within language, which rests ultimately with the reader. A word, or series of words, can never convey an idea fully, but the word has limitless potential to ignite further ideas despite that failing.

In 1969, in the press release for *Language III* (1969), Dwan observed: 'It is interesting to note that since the last exhibition [in the *Language* series], works by concrete poets have become more three-dimensional, exhibiting a more sculptural frame of reference,' suggesting concrete poets treated language as physical object, and also evidencing fluidity and awareness between the movements (*Language III*: Dwan Gallery, 1969). In a press release, Dwan compares the project of the 'Language Shows' to exhibitions held at Robert Newman and Billy Apple's alternative New York gallery, Gain Ground, which featured concrete poetry and marked a meeting of literature and visual arts (though Dwan is not specific about which works she is comparing). Dwan uses wording closer to the terminology used by her artists in describing works as 'non-object' but still concerned with a form of communication in verbal language (*Language III*: Dwan Gallery, 1969).<sup>17</sup> Though the first 'Language Show' was described in *Artforum* at the time as an unimpressive thematic, end of season group show, the 'Language Shows' resulted in far reaching impact far past their installation. The exhibition Dwan presented shows echoes of Bochner's earlier experiments in *Working Drawings*, but on the whole, adheres to the typical modes of gallery viewing behavior and norms of installation: largely it was an exhibition of flat works on walls.

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<sup>17</sup> Gain Ground was founded by Robert Newman in 1969 and closed in 1970. Newman was involved in the concrete poetry scene, but the space showed artists and poets, including Vito Acconci and Eleanor Antin.



Dwan's most significant offering to the incorporation of text into conceptual art practice was the extension of the text as artwork to the printed matter surrounding the exhibition: the announcements and press releases. LeWitt prepared a written announcement for his 1967 show at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, which coincided with the first *Language* show in the New York space. The announcement shows a drawing of modular grid for *One Set of Nine Pieces (from Serial Project No. 1 (ABCD))* (1967). LeWitt's first serial project, the sculptural work in *Serial Project No. 1*, saw the artist arrange 'open and closed modular units on a four-part grid base to present every possible variation or permutation' (Museum of Modern Art, 1978). In a poster detailing plans for the work *One Set of Nine Pieces* at the Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles in 1967 (fig. 1.13), held concurrently with the first Dwan Gallery *Language* show in the New York space, LeWitt presents a textual working out for his sculptural series. Within an 11 x 11 square grid, nine smaller grids of 3 squares x 3 squares are demarcated. Each one was numbered sequentially 1–9 from the bottom left, counting up and to the right. Over the top of the grid and in the margins of the grid, LeWitt uses pen to handwrite further measurements and comments regarding installation. The work is signed and numbered. Kotz notes LeWitt's own observation of his practice: that the 'preparatory' work of 'scribbles, sketches, drawings' are of interest, and may in fact be more interesting than the work itself, an idea already tested in Bochner's *Working Drawings* the previous year (Kotz, 2007, p.48). The announcement displays a correlation to his gridded sculptures using physical matter, such as *Incomplete Open Cubes*.

The critique of the printed matter surrounding an exhibition was extended in the 1969 exhibition by Seth Sieglaub, with his *Catalogue for an Exhibition*. From 19 May – 19 June

1969, *Catalogue for an Exhibition* was held on the new Burnaby (a municipality in Greater Vancouver) university campus with the involvement of key conceptual artists: Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin (both Art & Language members), Robert Barry, N.E. Thing Company, Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, Kosuth (then working as the US editor of *Art-Language* from New York), LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner. Siegelaub preceded it with *January 5-31, 1969*, also exhibited as a catalogue-as-exhibition, held at 44 East 52<sup>nd</sup> street in Manhattan. The publication, *Catalogue for the Exhibition*, which the project produced is testament not only to the importance of Vancouver in the international conceptual art scene at that moment, drawing such key artists to a relatively remote, West coast, small city, but the weight language as communication and information in conceptual art played in the exhibition and the relationship of an exhibition to the documents that give evidence to its having taken place. The exhibition took place over a month at various sites around the mountaintop campus. That it was placed within the University's Centre for Communications and Arts was telling: the works were distributed via the school's communication facilities and not in a singular gallery presentation. They were diffused and spread throughout locations across the campus, as indicated on the catalogue's cover which shows a map of the works' sites, and used communication formats such as the university mail and student newspaper. The project's related symposium featured a 'telephone hook-up' between participants and speakers in Burnaby, Ottawa, and New York (Siegelaub, 1969).

We can see within the SFU exhibition, like with the concrete poetry exhibition at UBC, a turn to language in both movements for a desire to address changes in communication. There is a great deal of crossover in the exhibitions, not least in the inclusion of Joseph Kosuth within both. Vancouver was a vital art scene in the 1960s, but it was, and still is, also a relatively

small, remote city with a localised art scene.<sup>18</sup> For Kosuth to be present in both exhibitions is in conflict with his later articulation of his position of distancing himself from concrete poetry.

### ***Information (1970)***

The Greek root of idea is 'idein', meaning 'to see'. To the art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, a work of art made of text inherently presents a proposition to its audience: they can either read it or see it (Buchloh, 1990, p.113). Buchloh argues that the question of reading or seeing text in conceptual art was posed when artists presented a disorienting aesthetic proposition that left the audience with the tools to do either, but were forced by the work to choose one strategy over the other (Buchloh, 1990, p.113). Buchloh turns to LeWitt's *Structures* (1961–62) (fig. 1.14) as an example of an artwork that attempts the integration of 'language and visual sign in a structural model' (Buchloh, 1990, p.113). *Structures* contains inscriptions that describe the support, the inscription itself, or an inversion of the two (e.g. 'RED SQUARE', 'WHITE LETTERS'), and Buchloh argues that the inscriptions 'created a continuous conflict in the viewer/reader... not just over which of the two roles [reading and seeing] should be performed in relation to the painting', but also over 'the reliability of the given information and the sequence of that information: was the inscription to be given primacy over the visual qualities identified by the linguistic entity, or

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<sup>18</sup> In 1970, Lucy Lippard curated *955,000* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, which was open from 13 January to 8 February. As there was not enough funding in the budget to fly many artists in to make any site-specific works, each artist sent in an index card with their instructions for the construction or installation of their work. Included was the instruction for Robert Rauschenberg's *Glue Pour* (1969) in which Rauschenberg instructs: '50 truckloads of mud, cement [or] asphalt' and to 'use one of the above materials [sic]'.

was the perceptual experience of the visual, formal, and chromatic element anterior to its mere denomination by language?’ (Buchloh, 1990). He goes on to argue that ‘the permutational character of the work suggested that the viewer/reader systematically perform all the visual and textual options the painting’s parameters allowed for’, which ‘thereby suspend the reading of the painting between architectural structure and linguistic definition’ (Buchloh, 1990). To Buchloh, one cannot read and see at the same time, and instead must oscillate between the two: much like any viewing of the duck–rabbit image, which both Wittgenstein and Mitchell have written about (Mitchell, 1994).

As Smithson’s and Andre’s use of language relates to their use of sculpture, LeWitt’s differs in his preference to the term ‘structures’ over ‘sculpture’ (Sellers and Baum, 2001). Even Meltzer observes that by 1967, ‘the rules of structural order were widely and readily applied to nearly every field of cultural inquiry’ (Meltzer, 2013, p.31). LeWitt’s structures, Meltzer contends, ‘accord with [Jian] Piaget’s’ definitions of structures, in that they are a system of transformations’ (Meltzer, 2013, p.32). Within LeWitt’s grid of squares within squares he ‘renounces the visual’ by creating a text drawing that challenges the image in line with conceptualism, and ‘in its place, proposes that there is a deeper, structural logic governing its form that cannot, nor even need, be seen with our eyes’ (Meltzer, 2013, p.33). Meltzer makes the examination to push through LeWitt’s (along with Douglas Huebler’s, Joseph Kosuth’s et al disavowing of the visual) and ask: ‘*what does the print look like?*’ (Meltzer, 2013, p.34). She resolves that it looks like a structure and therefore must be considered as such (Meltzer, 2013, p.34). She writes: ‘Above all it is the *look* of LeWitt’s print that nearly causes us to *overlook* the obscurities of his language and swallow whole his stated

disassociation of the visual' (Meltzer, 2013, p.33), thus emphasising the importance in addressing the often-unaddressed materiality of the words.

Writing in LeWitt's catalogue essay for his 1978 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, curator Bernice Rose articulates the dominance of Wittgenstein over the conceptual artists in their preoccupation with language: questioning whether an idea can exist without the linguistic form. For LeWitt, the rule-dominated system offered one way in which to explore such an idea. Rose reflects on the importance of the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé to LeWitt (LeWitt et al., 1978). For LeWitt, what Mallarmé offered was a proposition for a new 'rule-dominated anti-aesthetic system that generates its own style' (LeWitt et al., 1978). The visual grids of graphic design appealed to LeWitt's method for art making. Rose argues that the article is perhaps one of LeWitt's most important influences, taking him toward the development of the artwork as a rule-dominated structure that then takes shape as a painting or sculpture by consequence of those rules.

In 1970, Kynaston McShine, then Associate Curator in the Museum of Modern Art's department of Painting and Sculpture, organised a large survey exhibition of 150 artworks at the New York museum, titled *Information*. McShine described the exhibition as 'concerned with the strongest international art movement or 'style' of the moment' (McShine, 1970). The 'non-object quality of this work', McShine argued, 'transcend[ed] the traditional categories of painting, sculpture, photography, film, drawing, prints, etc.' (McShine, 1970). McShine and Lippard were peers and friends. In 1964–65, they worked together on an exhibition McShine curated at The Jewish Museum, *Primary Structures* (1966). One can see the correlation of Lippard's terminology in the press release for *Information*, wherein McShine emphasises the

communicative function of the artworks as crucial to the 'non-object quality' (Museum of Modern Art, 1970). To Meltzer: 'this exhibition reconceived what it meant to be a viewer' (Meltzer, 2013, p.40), for some works were not even present in the exhibition, but included only in the catalogue.

### ***Book as Artwork 1960-1970, 1972***

Where *Information* explored language as flattened communication structure, the Italian curator Germano Celant was in the 1960s concerned with the new media of books as artwork. Celant's publication *Book as Artwork 1960-1970* attempted, for the first time, to interrogate the phenomenon of artists' books, or more specifically, publications and printed matter as artworks as the title indicates.<sup>19</sup> Celant's original list of 75 titles was first published as an article in the Italian art magazine *Data* in 1971. Nigel Greenwood Inc., published the book in English in an edition of 800 copies in 1972. The project found a third context as an exhibition that same year when Lynda Morris, who was then working at the London gallery, reframed Celant's textual project as an exhibition in collaboration with him, and staged it between August and September of 1972. Morris added to the titles, broadening its internationalism and bringing the list to 259. As Andrew Wilson observes, by 1972 publications already were an important part of the Nigel Greenwood Inc.'s activities as a gallery. In 1970, Greenwood produced the exhibition *Publication*, as well as exhibited Ed

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<sup>19</sup> Originally published *Book as Artwork 1960-1970* in Italian for the first issue of *Data*, edited by Tommaso Trini, 1971. Later published in an edition of 800 as *Book as Artwork 1960/1972* (Nigel Greenwood Inc., London: 1972). The book was re-issued as *Book as Artwork 1960/1972* as an edition of 1000 in 2010 by 6 Decades Books, New York.

Ruscha's artist's books.<sup>20</sup> Curating Celant's list, Morris installed the physical objects of the books on a ledge slightly above an adult's standing waist height, around the walls of the gallery. Only two images of the installation remain (fig. 1.15). In 'Curating *Book as Artwork 1960/1972*' Morris reveals that Celant 'wanted everything behind Perspex' but that she 'wanted people to be able to handle the book as much as possible' (Morris, 2014). Celant writes to Morris at Nigel Greenwood in the preparation of the exhibition, stating that the 'nylon' which Greenwood proposed for the installation was 'too vulgar and poor' and that 'a person will be able to cut and take everything' (Celant, 1972). Morris, however saw value in the audience handling the artist's books and not viewing them only as objects. The solution they arrived at was a bespoke Perspex unit designed by Adrian Grey which provided a compromise for Celant's and Morris' desire for the treatment of the books in the gallery space, and their relationship to a viewer. The Perspex shelf Grey designed had a slanted cover and a horizontal opening at the bottom. This enabled the rare and valuable books to be displayed vertically, and out of reach of the gallery visitor, and the books for sale to be displayed horizontally, where they could be handled. Morris' display thus distinguished between books as artworks, and books for sale, and between objects to be looked at, and objects to be handled and explored. One can see in her curation of the artist's book as exhibition type developing thus from Bochner's *Working Drawings* and not from the concrete

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<sup>20</sup> *Publication* was a significant exhibition in the curatorial history of language as art in its own right. It was organised by artist David Lamelas, who presented three statements to artists to which they were to respond with a new work. The statements were: 'Use of oral and written language as an Art Form; Language can be considered as an Art Form; Language cannot be considered as an Art Form'. The exhibition included: Keith Arnatt, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Michael Claura, Gilbert & George, John Latham, Lucy Lippard, Martina Maloney, Barbara Reise, Lawrence Weiner, and Ian Wilson.

poetry exhibitions, which placed the literary arts in the visual arts gallery vernacular. The exhibition at Nigel Greenwood closed in September of 1972. This coincided with the end of *Documenta 5* in Kassel, in which Konrad Fischer, together with Klaus Honnef, curated the 'Idee/Idea' section in the Fridericianum, which was given only a small part in Szeeman's catalogue but had a 'profound impact' on the reception of *Documenta 5* (Morris, 2014).

Morris's curation suggests another type of exhibition of text art: the artist's book exhibition, particularly as informed by conceptual art. Morris worked closely with Fischer when he installed *When Attitudes Become Form* at the ICA in August of 1969. Fischer stayed with Charles Harrison (of Art & Language), who was employed by the ICA as the exhibitions organiser at the time, and Fischer shared the office with Morris and the installation team. The handling of the artists' books in the installation also relates to Bochner's *Working Drawings* in 1966, in which the materiality of the texts was something to be handled by the audience. Morris founded the bookshop at London's ICA in 1969, after the ICA's move to Nash House. She was well-versed and considered in her attention to handling and presenting artists' books for both display and for sale, having turned the ICA catalogue desk into a functioning book shop selling international titles, with 'two big white bookshelves and an artists [sic] print rack' (Morris, 2014). At the ICA, Morris collaborated with the poetry department, run by the New York poet Annie Lauterbach, and with Reichardt. The three brought poets Ed Dorn, and Ted Hughes in for readings; publisher Jonathan Cape and artist Dieter Roth had editions sold there under Morris' management. The book shops, both at the ICA and at Nigel Greenwood Inc. became a site of interaction between word and art.



As Tate curator Andrew Wilson claims, *Book as Artwork* was an important moment in the confirmation of artists' publications which were 'by then a well-developed means of materialisation and distribution' for conceptual art practices (Wilson, 2016, p.132). What I want to call attention to is not the importance of publications to conceptual art. Wilson, as well as Ruth Blacksell, have both recently researched publications and typography in conceptual art in depth. Morris' organisation of the exhibition in its visual display presents a new configuration of text as art, of the gallery space as a site of handling and reading artist's books (Blacksell, 2013), and it is the curation on which I wish to focus. The exhibition at Nigel Greenwood Inc. marked a moment where the books as artworks entered the gallery space, a space which the artists were presumably, initially, trying to critique by producing relatively cheap objects to be distributed and handled outside of the main. That is, the works first developed as artists' books which were responding to a challenge to the art market and a desire to make artworks which were portable, democratic, international, and accessible. Through Celant's observation of this phenomenon across conceptual art and his desire to document it in the form of a list, the works are then collated and exhibited within the context of the gallery, as objects, vertically, and behind Perspex. The encounter the audience has with the book has shifted from the intimate experience where they are handled and read individually, to the gallery in which they are encountered in a setting that is, as Wilson observes, a 'semi-public' space (Wilson, 2016, p.136). As Reichardt in 1965 was presenting poems in a manner audiences were more accustomed to encountering visual art in –poetry installed on the walls of the gallery space – Morris was presenting language, in the form of the artist's book, within the gallery space.

In April of 1974, Barry Barker replaced Morris at Nigel Greenwood and took over running the bookshop (Morris, 2014, p.176). Barker would, several years later, also move to the ICA and take up the role of director of exhibitions there when Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, which is the subject of the next chapter, was first shown in 1976. 1972 was the year of the landmark exhibition of home-grown British conceptual art: *The New Art*, at the Hayward Gallery. Curated by Anne Seymour, who was specialised in the art of the international avant-garde, and who was on a six-month secondment from her employment at the Tate Gallery, *The New Art* was exhibited at the same time as Morris's *Book as Artwork*, and was on view at the Hayward from 17 August and 24 September 1972. It was the 'first substantial institutional survey of British Conceptual art' and 'turned the tide' in the British art scene as Seymour introduced fourteen significant artists developing conceptual practices for the first time to a London audience (Amiel, 2016). Included in the exhibition were works by: Keith Arnatt, Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Michael Craig-Martin, David Dye, Barry Flanagan, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, John Hilliard, Richard Long, Keith Milow, Gerald Newman, John Stezaker, and David Tremlett. Joy Sleeman has recently reflected on the importance of sculpture to the exhibition: 'Although it was not primarily an exhibition of sculpture – as the use of the more generic term 'Art' suggests – the majority of the exhibitors had a connection to sculpture; [...] half of the 14 exhibitors studied or taught in the sculpture department of Saint Martin's School of Art' (Sleeman, 2012). Many of the artists also, however, were engaging language in their practice either making the totality of work, or in combination with photography to make a juxtaposition with either sociological, linguistic, or philosophical interrogations. This includes Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Michael Craig-Martin, Barry Flanagan (who had performed a work, *Finger Poem* (1965) at *Between Poetry and Painting*, and Gerald Newman and John Stezaker (both of whom would be included in 1979, along with Burgin, in the Arts

Council touring exhibition *Languages*, organised by Karen Amiel, who was also profoundly impacted by Seymour's bold exhibition (Amiel, 2016)). As conceptual art in Britain began to gain its earliest institutional support, so too did public institutions and dealer galleries begin to experiment with the ways in which language could not only be considered as artwork, but be exhibited as artwork.

One can begin to see the importance of private dealers and galleries in the development of text and language art in earliest exhibitions, prior to, and in dialogue with, the major exhibitions of conceptual art in larger public institutions. One can also witness the importance of independent art book shops within galleries as an avenue by which text began to enter the gallery space as an autonomous entity, a field within conceptual art in its own right. The relative ease and speed with which Morris et al could import and distribute artists' books, and the internationalism of the titles, extended and surpassed that of the exhibitions' programmes at the same time.

### ***Artists' Bookworks, 1975***

Following Morris's and Celant's 1972 exhibition at Nigel Greenwood, the British Council organised a touring exhibition of artists' books in 1975. Curated by Martin Attwood the exhibition was titled in two languages, *Artists' Bookworks / Kunstwerk in Buchform*. Since *Book as Artwork*, there had also been an exhibition of artists' books at the Stedelijk Museum, Moore College in Philadelphia, and *100 Publications*, organised by Paul Maenz and Ger de Vries (Attwood, 1975). Within her essay for the catalogue, Morris, citing Celant, refers to conceptualism's use of language as emerging from Fluxus's use of printed matter and mass communications, and classifying that it used information 'in the form of post-cards,

catalogues, magazines and small publications to inform the public' (Attwood, 1975). These systems, Morris argued, were pioneered by gallerists Seth Sieglaub between 1966 and 1969, and later by Fischer. Exemplary would be Sieglaub's *Xerox Book* (1968), combining 'the ethics of cheap mass production printing with... self-referential ideas' (Attwood, 1975). Though *Artists' Bookworks* lacked the internationalism of Morris's and Celant's 1972 exhibition in the 120 titles included (something to be expected given it was organised for the British Council), it presented a hybrid type exhibition of text art than that which I have discussed so far.

Installation shots of the exhibition taken from the catalogue show the works both on walls, to be viewed, and placed open on tables (fig. 1.16). Handling the books was permitted, expected, but the manner in which this took place took its cue from a system of exhibition-as-library. Four pages of the catalogue are dedicated to explaining the classification system for the works, and the way in which an audience should encounter them. 'Every book or publication in this exhibition has a catalogue number' it begins (Attwood, 1975). Explaining the system of classification, the catalogue reminds audiences to 'Please return each publication carefully into its correct slot' (Attwood, 1975). Like a reprimanding librarian, the text is in bold in the original catalogue as noted. Attwood experiments with the library as model by which the audience can encounter these works. In his introduction to the catalogue, G M Forty, then director of the Fine Arts Department within the British Council, writes something that seems startlingly resonant. Reflecting on the 'curious anomaly' of an exhibition of books, which are undergoing a 'three-pronged attack of radio, television, and film' the familiarity of such 'new means of communication' has freed a younger generation of artists from 'any possible inhibitions about the sanctity of these sheets of paper which we call books' (Attwood, 1975). Forty goes on to reflect on these artists' astute awareness of the different relationship between a book and its author, and an audience within a gallery, with

the former offering an experience both 'peculiar and private' (Attwood, 1975). Unlike concrete poetry or conceptual art, 'Artists' bookworks [were] not a clearly defined aesthetic art movement' (Attwood, 1975). Rather they are part of the conceptual art movement's use of language, but a part that operates as a hybrid between the literary and visual arts, perhaps more so than any other form of text art, at least so far as their curation in the 1970s evidences.

### **Conclusion: From the Space Between Poetry and Painting**

After *Between Poetry and Painting* and *Concrete Poetry* at UBC, and the 1970 survey of concrete poetry at the Stedelijk Museum, which toured to Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Oxford, and Liverpool, concrete poetry receded from view in visual art public institutions. This was, I believe, due to the assimilation of text into the broader fine art practices, though not aided by the struggle to tour exhibitions seen as challenging and difficult to a general public, as *Languages* was (Johnstone, 2016). In the early 2000s, text in contemporary practice began to resurface in survey exhibitions in public art institutions, and art school galleries, including *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* at the ICA in London, and *We Are Grammar* at the Pratt Institute in New York City, in 2011, curated by Dave Beech and Paul O'Neill and featuring works by over forty contemporary artists making work with text across two-dimensional mediums, sculpture, installation, and video in the decade preceding the show. In 2015, Kettle's Yard in Cambridge presented a survey of Ian Hamilton Finlay's concrete poetry. Bronac Ferran and Will Hill curated a complementary exhibition in the Ruskin Gallery at Cambridge School of Art, titled *Graphic Constellations: Visual Properties & the Properties of Space*, which had a clear relationship to the 1964 concrete poetry exhibition at Cambridge, and included graphic and typographic works from the 1960s including work by Liliane Lijn. In 2014, *Bob Jubobe* was an

exhibition of the concrete poetry of Bob Cobbing, held at Chelsea Space, London, and was part of a year-long series of events to coincide with the republication of Bob Cobbing's *Concerning Concrete Poetry*, and explored his impact on contemporary art practice. Such resurgence of text, and interest in its historical art precedents revealed and responded to artists' attention to the materiality of language in new ways. I go on to explore this in the latter three chapters of the thesis.

Exhibitions which occurred in the late 1960s-early 1970s in New York, Vancouver, and London, attempted to make sense of the rapid and dramatic changes made by artists' engagement with text as a new material. Though text has since the 1960s been accepted as being in the artists' toolbox, it has not been sufficiently addressed in all aspects of its offering as a medium, material, and subject. This resulted in several curatorial strategies, some of which become foundational for later exhibitions in the following decades, as artists continue to grapple with text and enter post-conceptual practices, critiquing conceptualism from within its own methodologies. Some of these exhibition strategies are rarely encountered now.

Although the concrete poetry and conceptual art movements overlapped in their attention to the materiality of language as part of the larger projects within their respective international movements, the historicisation of the movements has placed concrete art in a marginal position. There has been unacknowledged influence of the experiments with language from the concrete poetry movement, and an ambiguous relationship of conceptual art with concrete poetry. This has proved problematic in the context of contemporary curatorial strategies exploring precedents for the use of text in art today, for they result in a necessary

'corrective' to the art historical development of text (Sladen, 2016). For this reason, the survey of exhibitions of text in/as art and the mapping of these early curatorial strategies for displaying and presenting text to an art audience, make part of my contribution to knowledge. If art history has been ambivalent to the importance of concrete poetry, and its relationship to conceptual art, in the materiality of text in the 1960s and 1970s works discussed in this chapter, then has it also been ambivalent to the materiality of text in the use of text in art that followed in the late 1970s and 1980s by artists who were feminist, or black, or gay, or lesbian. Here, language becomes a political material.

## 2: Critiquing Text from Within: From Informational and Analytical Texts to Textual Subjectivities in Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-9)

### Introduction

In 1976, Mary Kelly exhibited the first three parts of her seminal work, *Post-Partum Document* (1973-9) at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, in a solo exhibition. She referred to these parts as 'Documentations'. The *Post-Partum Document* comprises of 135 objects, classified by Kelly into six sections, which interrogate the social and psychological processes that shape the mother-child dyad. Informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis and by feminism, Kelly's work is now considered a landmark in feminist art, and in conceptual art. Kelly's slightly earlier project, *Women and Work* (1973-5), made in collaboration with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, explored the gendered experience of industrial labour outside of the home in a South London metal box factory. This project marked the introduction of text into her practice, though in *Women and Work*, text was juxtaposed with photographs, video, and audio recordings. The *Post-Partum Document* extended the integration and interrogation of text and language in Kelly's artwork.

By the mid-1970s, text was present and accepted within the artist's tool box. Text was however, still challenging to public institutions and particularly, to regional art galleries. Though it was accepted by artists and critics as an autonomous art medium, it was by no means commonplace or easily digested by an art-going public (Amiel 2016; Johnstone 2016). Since the late-1960s, conceptual artists such as Lawrence Weiner, Carl Andre, and Dan Graham had made linguistic turns in their practices in ways that engaged language in a specific dialogue with conceptual art: text challenged the status of the art object, and it presented the possibility of a democratic, international art medium that transcended



borders. Kelly, along with feminist artists such as Adrian Piper, Nancy Spero, and later in the 1970s and early 1980s, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, would engage with text in a new way that marked the rupture of post-conceptualism from conceptualism. These artists critiqued conceptualism from within, using its own methodologies and aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics), specifically, I will argue, through their use of text.

In this chapter I attend to Kelly's use of text within the *Post-Partum Document* (and consider the artwork as a *document*) to explore how the *Document* marked a shift of the use of text within conceptual art practice through several key markers. First, Kelly treated text as a found object, with no presumed, innate naturalness to the linguistic order underpinning that found object; second, Kelly used text informed by psychoanalysis to bring personal and political subjectivities of maternal experience into the work at both the level of content and structure; and third, Kelly developed a way of exhibiting text, with what I refer to as the intertextual installation, which was signaled by a discursive, chronological, and narrative encounter for the audience. Julia Kristeva introduced the term intertextuality in 1966, suggesting that (literary) texts were not the product of singular authors but of interconnected relationships with other texts, and of the linguistic structure (Kristeva, 1986). In the 1976 exhibition at the ICA, Kelly wrote: 'I am trying to show the reciprocity of the process of socialization in the first few years of life. It is not only the infant whose future personality is formed at this crucial moment, but also the mother, whose 'feminine psychology is sealed by the sexual division of labour in childcare' (Kelly, 1976, n.p.). Thus, here the artist introduces a complex layering of voice, character, division of labour that extends beyond a questioning of language in art as seen in the language-centric early conceptualism, and which required a material consideration of text in order to explore such subject matter. Kelly, I will argue, challenged

the binary of audience as reader or viewer in the encounter of the textual art object, and presented the possibility of audience as writer of their own critique of the work. I do not argue that Kelly's primary intention with the *Post-Partum Document* was to make a radical shift in the use of text in conceptual art, or even that it was an aim of the project at all. The *Document* addresses other complex themes, in depth – gender, identity, their relationship to psychoanalysis and the acquisition of language, and the mother child dyad – but Kelly's addressing of those themes, through the medium of text, resulted in a change in the way in which text was used, materialised, and conceptualised. The feminist critique of conceptual art enabled a new materiality and aesthetic of language in conceptual art to emerge.

The *Document* is the only solo exhibition attended to in such depth in the thesis, however, Kelly's use of text to develop an intertextual exhibition, and the previous lack of attention to Kelly's use of text, warrants the space this chapter provides. It also draws attention to Kelly's role within conceptual art in London at the time of the late 1970s, wherein she was included in some series of exhibitions of conceptual artists, but left out of other important group exhibitions, a point I return to at the end of the chapter. Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, along with other feminist, second generation conceptual artworks made of language, has been overlooked as a foundation for the use of text as a material in contemporary art practice, and addressing this is part of my original contribution to knowledge. Feminist art of the 1970s used language because it made the work *look like* conceptual art. I will return to this later in the chapter.

### Conceptual Art and Kelly's Work 1972-1975, *Pre-Post-Partum Document*

Kelly's turn to language overlapped with that of other conceptual artists, such as Weiner, Kosuth, and Smithson. Kelly never turned entirely to language as an autonomous medium in her practice, but rather, embraced language within her conceptual, feminist art practice. In 1970, Kelly experimented with performative sculptures, as seen in her early project: *An Earthwork Performed* (1970) (fig. 2.1). The work was a 'systematic series of actions' in which a typewritten text on a notecard, written by Kelly, instructs her action: to shift a pile of dirt from one place on the ground to a place immediately adjacent (Bhaba et al., 1997, p.10). Kelly's use of the term 'earthwork' in the title acknowledges the practices in land art such as that of Smithson, at the time. Equally, the performative action of a text instructing an action can be seen in relation to Fluxus. The textual component of Kelly's little-known work is an example of what Liz Kotz articulates as the use of language in conceptual art; the 'event score', wherein a set of written instructions direct an artist to carry out an action (Kotz, 2007). Kelly's moving of the earth is recorded in black and white photographs. But, as curator Judith Mastai observed: 'Kelly's practice, while feminist, was not aesthetically or politically distinct from other conceptualist art practices at the time' (in the early 1970s) (Mastai, 1997, p.22). In *An Earthwork Performed* text is as arbitrary as a dictionary page in Joseph Kosuth's *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) The Word 'Definition'* (1966-68): both inward looking and replaceable, in that any word's dictionary definition would supply a similar result (fig. 2.2). Kelly's work lacks a sense of subjectivity, and an engagement with politics beyond art. Both aspects would develop in her more mature work.

*Nightcleaners* (1972–5) (fig. 2.3) was Kelly's first project where sociopolitical critique and artwork inhabited the same frame, here, within a filmic work. Made with the Berwick Street Collective, which included Marc Karlin, James Scott, and Humphry Trevelyan, as well as Kelly, the film explores the 1972 campaign to unionise office cleaners. Originally *Nightcleaners* was intended as a union campaign film. The film was made shortly after the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 in the UK, which sought to prevent discrimination between men and women in the terms and payment of work. Due to the complexity of the campaign as it emerged through the three parties involved – the cleaners, the Cleaner's Action Group, and the unions – the Collective adopted a more self-reflexive approach to the film making. This approach resulted in implicating the filmmakers, as well as the audience, in the work, questioning labour that often goes on unseen, behind closed doors, and undervalued. For example, if the filmmakers were recording a cleaner cleaning a room, then the process demanded that the film record that event in its entirety. Though *Nightcleaners* was both political and feminist, despite the artists' use of reflexivity, the subject was not the artists' own experience of labour, but an interrogation of other women's labour. As a result, the artists maintained a distance between the subjectivities of the person performing the labour, and the artist making the work. Victor Burgin similarly explored social critique and language at this time, also with photographic imagery.

Kelly was politically active long before her politics began to manifest in her work. She was involved in the Women's Liberation Movement in London, and participated in several study groups in the early 1970s, including the History Group (with Laura Mulvey), and the Lacan Study Group (alongside Juliet Mitchell). The readings of Lacan in particular would come

directly in dialogue within the *Document*. Kelly writes of the group's work in the Lacan Study

Group that:

We argued that the psychic economy was related to the unconscious by the laws of primary process, and it therefore required a theoretical method appropriate to that object, namely, psychoanalysis—Freud's certainly, but more controversially, Lacan's reading of it. This we initially discovered in the work of Althusser, laboriously pursuing untranslated references, not out of academic interest, but out of a sense of political urgency: to change our lives and what we saw as the ubiquitous conditions of 'all' women's lives, blatantly enforced in the workplace ... and more subtly sustained in the home through the naturalization of the woman's role in child care (Kelly, 1997, p.xviii).

Such a reading of Althusser, informed by Marx and reflecting directly on 'the imaginary relations to the lived conditions of existence', was contentious among some members of the Women's Liberation Movement of London at the time (Carson, 1998, p.50). Between 1970 and 1973, the Women's Movement in London was dominated by a 'populist-socialist spirit' (Carson, 1998, p.51). Therefore, for Kelly and fellow members of the History Group, the conditions of women's daily lives were at the core of any ideological struggle for women, and vice versa. Kelly was also active in labour campaigns. Her involvement with the unionisation of office cleaners informed *Nightcleaners*, but she was also an active member of the Artists' Union, of which she was a founder. On the back of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 (which was not effective until 1975), Kelly and Margaret Harrison established the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union, which sought to end racial and gender discrimination within the arts, and establish a network with women's groups in other fields and industries. It was in the initial work of the Women's Workshop, that *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* (1973–5) emerged.

*Women and Work* is a collaborative work Kelly made with Harrison and Kay Hunt. It marked a suturing of Kelly's art practice and politics for the first time within her then-developing

installation-based works. For *Women and Work*—which was importantly, another ‘document’ as the title tells us—the artists assumed a methodology of acting as pseudo-anthropologists, carrying out field study-style research and accumulating material ‘presented to as data’ (Wilson, 2016, p.91). Together, they interviewed 200 employees of a metal box factory which employed both male and female shift workers in Bermondsey, South London. The resulting exhibition of the artwork at South London Art Gallery presented audio interviews, texts of daily schedules, and black and white photographic documentation (fig. 2.4).<sup>1</sup>

Juxtaposed against the *Women and Work* texts are a grid of black and white photographic portraits of the female factory workers, often smiling, and seemingly candid. The aesthetics of the photographic black and white grid in the project are similar to Hans Haacke’s exploration based on social critique, which investigated the real estate holdings under property groups affiliated ambiguously with the Shapolsky family in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Harlem in *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) (fig. 2.5). Haacke’s work composes 142 photographs of buildings, mostly tenement blocks, and typewritten sheets of data of the property (such as its address, size, assessed value, owner and so on) and exposes the city as the product of market requirements, not of social needs. In their portraits, the women in *Women and Work* are anonymous, though their names are noted in other textual elements of the project. A gap develops between the texts and the images, suggesting a space which in Wolfgang Iser’s literary theory, enables the reader to have ‘set in motion a process which will lead to the formation of the aesthetic object as a correlative in the mind of the reader’ (Iser, 1978,

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<sup>1</sup> Now South London Gallery.

p.110). The photographs and texts become distinct objects from one another, rather than the text captioning the image, or the image illustrating the text. In this, one can see a shift in Kelly's understanding of the relationship of image and language, from that of her contemporaries, such as Burgin, who, in artworks such as *Possession* (1976), would diametrically oppose image and text in the language of advertising to trigger a response in the viewer (fig. 2.6). Instead, Kelly began to develop a purposeful gap between writing to describe and instruct an action, and writing and photographic imagery existing simultaneously in the same space, and same artwork, but without direct correlation. Mastai refers to this as 'the use of written text as a strategy of intervention, to insert analytical readings into visual images' (Mastai, 1997, p.17). Within such writing, Kelly allows space for the viewer's imaginings and inflections, creating a discursive space. The use of discourse here, is directly related to Michel Foucault's definition of discourse as referring to one, the ways in which knowledge is constituted; and two, the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations inherent within the construction of knowledge, as well as the power relations between them (Hook, 2001). This use of text as autonomous objects rather than captions suggests the potential for the sophisticated use of text that would follow, creating a reflexive space for critique. *Women and Work* established, for Kelly, an attempt to explore ideas of social critique informed by her activism in feminism and labour campaigns, through an installation-based artwork made of both representational images and written language.

Though the photographic portraits are anonymous, the audience begins to learn their names in the accompanying texts. By comparison, Haacke names no occupants or tenants of the real estate holdings, and his research was made in New York City public records. The audience do not know which of the images of workers is Joanna Martin, Shrink Wrap Operator. But the

text for the 'Daily Schedule of Joanna Martin, age 21' provides intimate detail with sparse writing that accounts for Martin's day, recording the time from when she wakes, to the hour at which she prepares a second evening meal for herself and her husband once the baby is asleep: information that Martin shared with Kelly, Hunt, and Harrison during interviews in the project's making (fig.2.7). As typewritten texts on white A4 paper, mounted on the wall, these documents appeared visually similar to the text in conceptual art which had dominated the language-centred conceptualism of the 1970s: sparse text detailing an action, in black and white. The performance scores of proto-conceptual artwork wrote instructions for an action to happen. Weiner's statements used the imperative to describe an action that could take place or that had taken place (but that need not take place). In contrast, the daily schedules recorded in text an event that had already happened, and made visible Joanna Martin's experience of labour, paid and unpaid, inside and outside the home. They also introduced a diaristic narrative to the texts. (The Equal Pay act only attended to paid labour outside of the home). In *Women and Work*, the audience can then see the text positioned within the gallery as a record, a document looking out, and not as a proposition looking in.

With *Women and Work*, Kelly, Harrison, and Hunt broadened the subject matter available to post-minimal conceptual art to include feminist social critique. But Kelly had not yet challenged the critical understanding of text as a material tool for both presentation and interpretation of ideas-based practice. Juli Carson observes, what Kelly 'learned in the process of collaborating on *Women and Work* [was] what was left outside their analysis: the domestic site of labor, [which] in fact contextualised the women's position within their day jobs at the Metal Box Factory' (Carson, 1998, p.46). This realisation instigated the shift from



the indexical traces of labour within the factory to the marks of labour from the domestic sphere.

### **Post-Conceptualism and the Linguistic Turn: Critiquing the Text from Within**

If modernist art was, as Andrew Wilson puts it: 'autonomous, self-referential, defined by its own conditions', then 'Conceptual art drew its material, content and criticality from the world which it existed and acted within' (Wilson, 2016, p.10). Within the early conceptual artwork of artists such as LeWitt, Weiner, Graham, and Andre, the 'world' being critiqued was very much the world in which they inhabited: the art world. Language was turned to for its potential to challenge and critique the object status of art. The political climax of the anti-Vietnam war movement, and Paris 68 were present throughout art. But the predominantly male artists practicing in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s conceptual art movement (with the exception of a few, such as Hanne Darboven), had presumed naturalness in their use of language. Wilson observes that feminist post-conceptual art is defined as such for it critiqued conceptual art from within its own methods (Wilson, 2016, p.10). Craig Owens saw the use of language in art as it emerged with conceptual practice as a defining rupture within modernism. Ursula Meyer saw that 'Conceptual Art completed the break with traditional esthetics that the Dadaists, and notably Marcel Duchamp, initiated [sic.]' (Meyer, 1972, p.ix). To Owens, the use of language was a crucial moment signifying the emergence of postmodernism. He writes: 'the eruption of language into the aesthetic field [...] is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism' (Owens, 1979, p.45). Owens however, attributes the use of language to the writings of Smithson, Morris, Andre, Judd, Dan Flavin, Rainer, and LeWitt (though he states that the 'eruption' is 'by no means limited to' only these artists (Owens, 1979, p.45). Carson sees the use of psychoanalysis as an

interrogative tool as the *Document's* break with conceptualism, writing: 'The extent to which the *Document* pro-actively waged an intervention against conceptualism's denial of psychoanalytic considerations of the subject, and the manner in which Kelly did so by utilizing conceptualism's formal and methodological strategies of seriality, quotidian documentation, and semiotic interrogations of the visual, has been grossly underestimated in much recent scholarship on conceptualism's period between 1965–1975' (Carson, 1998, p.44). Kelly's methodology in the *Document*, whereby she used language to critique who could speak within art, and how to speak to issues *beyond* art, resulted in a new aesthetic of text in art or text as art.

By 1979, Kelly completed six years of meticulously collecting, recording, and reflecting on the psychoanalytic basis of the mother–child dyad with her infant son through the material products of that relationship. The resulting artwork is a chronologically-based work of diagrams and text, found objects and ephemera of the labour and experience of caring for children, creating a mixed-media installation of six parts, or 'documentations'. In total, the *Document* presented 135 wall-based units, including panels, Perspex boxes, and slates. In these units were preserved objects from the otherwise ephemeral products of infant care, such as speech utterances and nappy liners: matter that is secreted by the child, but only intelligible or of interest to the mother (caregiver). The soiled liners were captioned with a typewriter script detailing the infant's intake of solid food on a given day, with precise measurements. Baby vests were typed over with a Lacanian schema of psychoanalytic terminology. Black slates etched with a child's early attempts at writing were captioned by the artist in both handwritten and typewritten commentaries. When the first three documentations were exhibited at the ICA in 1976, the Women's Movement was at its peak

in the UK. In its titles, texts, objects, and transcriptions the *Document* has recourse to another order of experience: the 'historicisation of the debates' of political history and personal experience (Kelly, 1987). The *Document* dealt with the taboo subject of maternal experience in language, and specifically in the language of conceptualism, Kelly brought subjective experiences, the maternal, and invisible, unpaid, domestic labour of the artist's own experience into the frame of art practice.

Griselda Pollock claims feminist art practice such as Kelly's demonstrated 'a tight classifying tendency, grids, graphs, careful drawing, pristine lines, [and] subdued colour' that was 'characteristic of contemporary conceptual art practices at the time', aligning the *Document* with 'the procedural *look* of conceptual art' (Pollock, 1987, pp.174-175). The *Document* was, as Kelly saw it, the major project in her 'long-term critique of conceptualism' (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). Social critique, and art for action, had also emerged largely in the conceptual art practices of two other artists: Victor Burgin and Stephen Willats. Victor Burgin's social critique took place in photographs, and in photographs and language. In his early work, included in *When Attitudes Become Form* at the ICA, one can see a direct relationship to Wittgenstein's 'notion of looking at something and thinking about it at the same time' (Wilson, 2016, p.37). *Photopath* (1967-9), for example, showed a series of photographs of the ICA's wooden floor in a 1:1 ratio, placed on the same floor (fig. 2.8) so that the photographs represented was concealed directly underneath them, yet on view within the photograph at the same time. The work thus epitomised 'seeing and not seeing' (Wilson, 2016, p.37). Later, Burgin began to experiment with the perception of the viewer as directed by the work, and with the relationship of textual caption to photographic image, challenging the differing relationship of language and image as signs within artworks. For Stephen Willats, there is an

evident sociological use of language, and socio-political exploration of the disenfranchised, namely single mothers and elderly women, in his projects such as *Living with Practical Realities* (1978) (fig. 2.9). The three panels of this work display Willats' method of montaging photographs (both of the tower block in which his subject, Mrs. Moran, lived in Skeffington Court in Hayes, and staged photographs of Mrs. Moran going about her daily chores, for which she collaborated with Willats), with text and interconnecting lines in which Willats attempts to draw out causal relationships of class, living conditions, and social impact for the viewer. Kelly's work can be seen in alignment with Willats' and Burgin's in their shared use of art, and language in art, as a call for social action. To Kelly, the women's movement had two aims: the practical improvement of conditions, and the recognition of the subjectivity of the female experience (combined with the need for a theoretical apparatus with which to discuss it) (Bhaba et al., 1997, p.9). Where Kelly's work began to differ, was at the level of content – in the introduction of the maternal to conceptual art practice – and at the level of the linguistic, with the subjective experience of the artist inflected in the text.

### **Text as Found Object and the Presumed Naturalness of Language**

Within the *Document*, Kelly creates an interface between Lacan's psychoanalysis and feminism. Hélène Cixous' seminal text, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', extends from Lacan (Cixous, 1976). To Cixous, women and men enter into language as structure (which Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, the social world of linguistic communication which one must enter into in order to deal with others) in different ways. As such, the subject positions available to either men or women are also different. Cixous' arguments for an '*écriture féminine*' (or *women's writing*), are forty years later, somewhat dated for being overly essentialist and binary, based on difference. However, written in 1976, at the same time as Kelly's ICA

exhibition of the first three Documentations of the *Document*, they are relevant, if viewed critically with the benefit of hindsight that has come with queer theory. Combining the Lacanian phallogocentrism of the Symbolic Order with Derrida's logocentrism (the prioritisation of speech over writing as a system of signification), Cixous and Luce Irigaray arrived at the concept and neologism of phallogocentrism. *Écriture féminine* interrogates how one can disrupt the phallogocentric. Cixous' questioning of women entering the Symbolic Order explores how women can be free if one is thinking/writing in the language of the patriarchy. The phallogocentric is based on binaries in which the first is prioritised over the second: good/evil, man/woman, speech/writing, order/chaos. All of the first categories are aligned, and to Cixous, they form the basis of Western thought. Thus, as Lacan argues, the child must separate from the mother (Real) in order to enter the Symbolic Order. To Cixous, the female body becomes unrepresentable in language, because it is incompatible with the male. Cixous then makes a leap in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' from the maternal to the female, and from the body to sexuality (and this is a leap based on Freudian interpretations of female sexuality), but for the relevance of *écriture féminine* to Kelly's *Document*, I will stay with the maternal body. 'Women must write women', Cixous claims, 'woman must write herself' (Cixous, 1976). She slips in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' between the biological 'woman' and the structural signifier within the Symbolic. If one focuses on the latter, and not the pleasure of 'jouissance' that comes from writing with the body (not literally with the body, though she does depart down some avenues of breast milk as ink), but as a bodily experience that denies the phallus, then writing has the potential to create a new signifying system, outside of the phallogocentric (Cixous, 1976).

In the *Document*, Kelly treated text as a found object, but one which carried with it no presumed, innate naturalness to the linguistic order underpinning that found object. This marked a significant shift from the use of language in the male-dominated, linguistic conceptual art of the preceding ten years, such as that of Kosuth's use of dictionary definitions. Kosuth used language, in both works such as *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) [Water]* (1966) and his essay 'Art After Philosophy' to demonstrate the discursiveness of art, but while Kosuth challenged the tautological nature of art, he presumed the medium of language to be neutral for his aims (Kosuth, 1969). Kelly made no such assumption of the neutrality of language. To Kelly, the *Document* required the combination of material objects, both language and ephemera, and the form of the exhibition in order to explore the Lacanian critique of subjectivity. She writes that the exhibition could not be a film for 'It needed material things that I could frame, both literally and metaphorically, as objects' (Kosuth, 1969). While baby vests and nappy liners presented a literal kind of 'material thing', language presented a 'metaphorical' object (Kosuth, 1969). Julia Kristeva suggests a phallogocentric understanding of language which is inherently foreign to women, and proposes that *écriture féminine* can be a mode of operation to resolve this imbalance: 'To work on language, to labour in the materiality of that which society regards as a means of contact and understanding, isn't that at one stroke to declare oneself a stranger/foreign (*étranger*) to language?' (Kristeva, 1969, p.1). Kristeva suggests it is not only the content, but the material form of written language, that possesses a strangeness and alienating potential (Kristeva, 1969, p.1).

'Documentation I' (Analysed Fecal Stains and Feeding Charts (Experimentum Mentis I: Weaning from the Breast))' presents the viewer with soiled paper nappy liners of the infant,

mounted in Perspex boxes and hung at regular intervals as a mounted installation (fig. 2.10). To make each one, Kelly put the liners through a typewriter, annotating the stains with her infant son's food intake for the day. One reads tablespoon and ounce measurements of pureed vegetable and fruit, cereal, and formula milk supplement, and the time of day at which it was given. In a second typeface, printed in the bottom corners of the rectangular liners, are the date and a number, which denotes the consistency of the stool staining the nappy according to a schema devised by Kelly. Kelly made one such record each day during the month of February 1974. Like Joanna Martin's 'Daily Schedule' in *Women and Work*, Kelly's texts in 'Documentation I' record an event in a document and present it for the audience to view. When viewed collectively in sequence, the text of 'Documentation I' begins to construct a serial narrative. Terry Smith commented to Kelly on the use of found objects (such as baby vests): 'By introducing such material, such a central subjectivity, the *Document* signals a major break with the main concerns of early conceptualism' (sic) at its level of content (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.458).<sup>2</sup> Kelly observes that: 'Previous conceptual work had remained rather distant from *that kind of materiality*' (emphasis added) (Bhaba et al., 1997, p.16).

Through the use of text as a found material, Kelly invites the audience to critique the maternal experience without picturing the mother. A baby's vest, with its wearer's body absent, holds the creases of its careful folding. The vests act as an indexical sign in the *Document's* 'Introduction' (fig. 2.11), pointing to the infant's now-grown body that once fit them (Bhaba et al., 1997, p.16). The leaf and flower specimens of 'Documentation V' and the

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<sup>2</sup> Smith was a member of Art & Language from 1972-6.

baby's hand imprints of 'Document IV' demonstrate other found materials, such as language, instead of photography. Writing becomes an object that, in its physical form, records and inscribes, evoking the Derridian idea of the trace. Always contingent, the Derridian trace suggests the 'mark of the absence of a presence' in relation to the 'originary lack' that seems to be the 'condition of thought and experience'. Both the vests and the text hold presences of an absence; both are treated as objects with contingencies and potentiality. For Kelly, psychoanalysis in Europe grew directly out of the Women's Movement, as opposed to an academic status in America. Hal Foster implicitly criticised Kelly and Burgin for a 'fetishism of the sign', when he was speaking at the ICA in 1983 (Kelly, 1983). Kelly later countered this, speaking at the ICA later in 1983, saying that Foster could only make this critique 'because fetishism, for him, had no basis in psychoanalysis...and was not grounded in politics' (Kelly, 1983). For Kelly, though, the use of language and objects as signs in the *Document* was grounded in the politics of representation, particularly tied to 'socialist feminism' (Kelly, 1983).

### **Psychoanalytic Subjectivities and Kelly's Use of Text**

The *Document* proposed the use of psychoanalysis in the context of an artwork. It would be only partial for Kelly to investigate the mother-child dyad and the entry into the Social Order, without interrogating the medium of language itself. Kelly used text informed by psychoanalysis integrated 'subjectivities of experience into the structure and content of the work' making Kelly's interrogation of language the form, the content, the subject, and the underlying structure of the work (Wilson, 2016, p.10). Kelly placed the linguistic material of



the *Document* into an internal visual dialogue with the found material.<sup>3</sup> In *Theorizing Modernism*, Johanna Drucker uses psychoanalytic theory to explore subjectivity in modern art, claiming that: 'The concept of subjectivity can thus be...first...a means of describing the activity of the producing subject, or artist, secondly, in an analysis of the receiving subject, or viewer' (Drucker, 1994, p.108-9). Drucker continues: 'Thus visual art...cannot be characterized as a form of *expression* of an existing self, but rather are elements of the on-going *formation* of the subject through representation' (Drucker, 1994, p.108-9).

The introduction of solid food as the infant is weaned from the breast marks the first physical separation of the child from the dependency of the mother since birth. To Lacan, a permanent trace of weaning is left on the child's psyche as an interruption of the biological process (Lacan, 1938). Lacan also sees the image of nourishment as the basis for familial life. Kelly records the end of the child's dependent nourishment on the mother and the attempt to control it, through meticulous recording of data. Here, Kelly uses written language to impose a distance between herself and the object of her study, who is of course, her own infant. The use of Latin and the treatment of her son as a subject, a somewhat anonymous stand-in for any infant at this point in the work, remove Kelly from the frame of subjectivity, despite the undoubtedly personal subject matter. All the small activities associated with caring for the child – dressing, feeding, changing etc. – are to Kelly, as dependent on a system of signs as language; they cannot exist outside of language. Kristeva proposes with the Symbolic Dimension that all social practices have experience of a social law or Symbolic

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<sup>3</sup> The History Group was one of a series of theoretical consciousness-raising groups, founded in 1970 after the first Women's Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford, and included Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey and Juliet Mitchell.

Dimension (Beardsworth, 2004, pp.96-100). Thus, even the unconscious discourse of the mother in those events is incorporated into language, which Kelly achieves with the voices of the *Documentation*. She is, at the same time, giving voice or language to an area that has no language, that has been overlooked. Yet, as Drucker suggests of feminist artists of Kelly's era, the personal and the representational are suppressed so as to maintain critical relevance of the time (Drucker, 1994). Presented as a text written in the infinitive, and as an instruction lacking a personal pronoun, 'Documentation I' adheres to this conceptual art standard. 'Documentation II' however, marks a shift in the use of first-person pronouns, referring to subjects as mother or son, and developing a longer syntax.

'Documentation II' focuses on the transition from single-word utterances to patterned speech (syntax). Mounted one above the other, the top object is a wooden, lined frame that acts like a stamp pad or typographer's drawer for letterpress (fig. 2.12). A small ledge holds the rubber stamps that put the words the audience see in the work in reverse; beneath, the words are in their correct left-to-right stamped impression. The text depicts what Kelly refers to as the 'utterance' (the sound made by the child), the 'gloss' (what Kelly infers that the child means by the utterance), the 'function' (the child's intended action from the utterance), and the age of the child on the date of the recorded speech act. Kelly is interviewer, and prompts her son, asking him 'wh-' questions and 'models' his speech with hers in an attempt to improve his verbal skills (Kelly, 1988, p.46). She guides him as she helps him enter the Symbolic Order. As the mother/artist/observer, Kelly assesses 'bah' to mean 'put it back' as the child rejects the incorrect shoe he has retrieved. Like a director, Kelly prompts the child/subject, building a sequence between the parts of the work. Here, Kelly begins to use the text to introduce and distinguish the voices as various characters containing various

subjectivities and distinct from one another. Beneath the first textual object of the rubber stamp and its impression, each isolated example within 'Documentation II' shows a second text: a typewritten transcript of the recorded conversation for that session. Most often, the conversation is between mother and son, although sometimes includes the father, Kelly's childminder ('S'), or the childminder's daughter ('A'). At times, Kelly contradicts the objectivity with her self-reflexive worrying, placing her own voice in the frame, like a voiceover. When she goes to Brighton for a week and returns to her son having developed a stutter, she feels it is her fault for having been away (Kelly, 1998, p.100). The texts in this documentation are not yet diaristic, although they do hint at the reflexive treatment of text to come, with Kelly's annotations in parentheses following the uttered speech events. Kelly's investment and interrogation in language is so specific and sustained as she operates from a position outside of language.

One way in which Kelly explores the psychoanalytic in the text is in the use of voices of the subjective in the work, represented by different textual signs. Up until 'Documentation II' and 'Documentation III', the audience has been aware of the voices feeding the narrative of the *Document*, but they have been less clearly distinguished from one another. The infant has been voiceless, mute, and spoken for by his mother or through indexical products that speak for him. In 'Documentation III', the child's development of verbal language parallels the physical separation from the mother. Distinct voices, other than that of the mother, emerge to construct the characters of the *Document*. These voices are reflected in the text. In the child's development, Kelly claims, the 'moment of emerging syntax coincides with the termination of the mirror phase, around 18 months [of age]' (Kelly, 1983, p.72). Kelly follows through the termination of the mirror phase in the textual form. Here, in 'Documentation III',

the visual depiction of the text also abandons the textual mirroring seen in the previous documentation, where the rubber stamp presents the words in reverse, above the text that can be plainly read. The three columns of text per page are written in three distinct typefaces/handwritings. The first is typewritten in sentence case, and records the conversation with no distinction between mother and child. The second is also typewritten, but is in uppercase; the artist-analyst-mother assumes a hierarchy over the child, annotating the recorded conversation with comments such as: 'HIS PRONUNCIATION ISN'T VERY GOOD'. The third, written in script by hand, is the artist/mother diarising her reflections on the broader context around the time of the recording. Using three typefaces/visual scripts to connote the three voices of subjectivity, Kelly constructs the text with 'three levels of consciousness' (Kelly, 1983, p.xiii). The voice(s) can be equated with the subconscious drives or desires of the artist-mother-analyst and the infant, each one typographically indexical to the drive of the character behind it. These notebook-like records are framed within a Lacanian grid that overlays the text. Yet, upon any hierarchy that the artist-mother-analyst attempts to impose through the text, the child scribbles in crayon. His scribbles remind the audience that no attempt to control or pre-determine the child's acquisition of language can override the independence of the self that is emerging as a result of the language being learnt. Suggestive of the Derridian idea of writing *sous rature*, the child scribbles over the top of the mother's text, but her writing remains visible beneath it. In this documentation, for the first time in the project, the typefaces and scripts are used to denote voices of characters within the work. The use of voice is a strategy that Kelly adopts from her experience with film to develop the subjectivity of the work.

The triad of texts in 'Documentation VI' shifts to handwritten marks as the child writes for himself. This is accompanied by hand-printed writing of the artist as observer/teacher in the exergue, and typescript of the artist as mother in the diary reflection, in which Kelly specifically ties the acquisition of the child's written language to the coincidence of the mother's social subordination as they both enter the complex institutional practices and systems of representation. Once established as independent discourses within the work, then the mother's/artist's distance from the subject can shift with its textual form from the handwritten text where the personal is integral to the text, to the observing typescript in the later documentations (fig. 2.13). The third tier of text in 'Documentation VI' is inscribed on the stone in a typewriter typeface. Here, Kelly 'inserts the inter-subjective discourse of the letter into a complex of institutional practices and systems of representation which produce the social subordination of the mother' (Kelly, 1983, p.167). The typographic depiction of the three voices from 'Documentation III' has shifted from typescript in lower case (artist observing child) to typescript in upper case (artist observing self as mother); thereby, the observation retains the data-entry typewriter script to maintain detachment, but the uppercase asserts seniority over the child. A handwritten cursive script (of the mother reflecting) implies a presence of the author and, as Sonja Neef suggests of handwriting and handwritten signatures, a 'presumed authenticity' (Van Dijck, Ketelaar, and Neef, 2006, p.11). Kelly differentiates her use of the object from the minimalist sculptors of the 1960s with the reintroduction of the subjective gesture. Writing in *Screen* in 1981, Kelly claimed such minimalist practice 'denied gesture' and presented an empty space akin to a loss for the viewer (Kelly, 1981). *Fort-Da* (1974), is an early photographic work of Kelly's, which explores the pre-verbal play and intimacy of the child and mother in a series of photographed hand

gestures of the two. The infant clasps his small fist around the mother's phallus,-like thumb indicating a language of the Social Order even before words.

More so than any other part of the *Document*, column R3 of 'Documentation III' suggests a diary. Here, the narrative draws the viewer into the work. What is removed from the *Document* in terms of the representational image, is replaced with the narrative text, affording the audience a pleasure in engaging with the work. Here, the subjective narrative is most evident. As the voices of the characters have developed in the text over Documentations II and III, here, the audience can experience the mother's subjectivity. Over the columns in the diary schema, Kelly places a grid as a revised presentation of the traditional artificial perspective system, originally used to depict perspective in Italian Renaissance paintings. The letters V and DP suggest the vanishing point for the object (the child's conversation) and the distance point, which Kelly states 'inserts the lack of object into the dialectic of the Oedipus complex' (Kelly, 1983, p.78). Playing with perspective, Kelly thus treats verbal language like a shot within a filmmaker's lens. Drucker writes that: 'Film criticism of the 1970s and 80s was one area in which the intersection of theories of enunciation derived from structural linguistics was fruitfully brought to bear on the analysis of the function and structure of visual images' (Drucker, 1994, p.111). The schema thus presents a system of rules, adapted by Kelly, to position an eccentric pseudo-scientific perspective of the maternal subject within a conceptual framework.

Kelly is 'resolute' in her 'avoidance of photography' within the *Document*, which is an avoidance on Kelly's part of visual representation of the mother (Kelly, 1983, p.xii). The lack of photography also marks a conscious departure from the aesthetic of some conceptual

practice, such as Burgin's (Macksey and Donato, 1970, p.451). To literally show the mother would bring the taboo subject of the mother, and her own subjectivity too visibly within the artwork to make it credible within conceptual art circles of the mid-1970s, and it would also shut down the avenues for critique available to the audience. Within the *Document* there is no single image of the artist/mother, with the exception of a photograph taken by Ray Barrie (Kelly's partner and father of her child) used in the preface of the book form of the *Document*. In the image, Kelly kneels and her toddler son sits on her lap during a recording session, likely for 'Documentation III' (fig. 2.14). Lippard likens the child's position to a representation of the child as phallus, as he sits upright on her lap (Kelly, 1983, p.xiv). This photograph provides the only visual depiction in the work of the boy acquiring language at his mother's knee. Cixous concludes in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' that the 'old circuits' of the Phallogocentric order in the nuclear family need to be broken up so that the Symbolic is not recreated every time a child is born; it needs to be 'demater-paternalized' she writes (Cixous 1976, p.890). She critiques the Freudian nuclear family, seeing it as generating of ideas of castration. There is, however, a second, much less-circulated photograph of Kelly and her son in the same audio-recording session. Also taken by Ray Barrie, Kelly's gaze meets the camera's lens, and the child stands behind his mother, his face obscured by hers (and by her hair). His arms are around her neck, in an embrace, but also in a clench, depicting a simultaneously loving yet threatening drive of the child (fig. 2.15). Language enabled the subjective experience of women to be placed within conceptual art, while avoiding the figurative referent. As Terry Smith reflects of the *Document*: 'The degree of psychic, unconscious, actually traumatic emphasis was unusual for conceptualism' (sic) (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.456). What psychoanalysis offered Kelly was a method by which the underlying motivations of the subjective experience could be revealed. Text offered a way for

it to be revealed without being exclusively subjective to herself, but open to an audience for their subjective critiques.

It was crucial within the *Document* that photography not be used so as not to give a 'representational image of the women' but rather so that her 'presence or trace' is visualised (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). When Kelly began the *Document*, it was specifically to document the division of labour in the mother-child relationship and the process of socialisation in the first few years of life, focusing on the question of what Kelly called the 'feminine psychology' of the woman (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). Over the chronological span of the project, that exploration shifts to a re-address of those problems with psychoanalytic theory, thus paralleling questions that were being asked at the time. It shifts from sexual division to sexual difference within a very specific relationship. Text, as one of the found objects within the project, becomes one of a series of visual sign systems. Thus, in contrast to the dominant use of language in conceptual practice, the use of language replaced the use of photography in order to present a visualisation that occurred in the audience's encounter. Laura Mulvey summarises this strategy in dialogue with Kelly in 1983: 'The absence of the iconic allowed theory and fantasy to both appear' (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983).

### **The Intertextual Installation**

Kelly's treatment of text, and her interrogation of language, culminated in the first exhibition of the *Document* as a chronological series of its first three parts in its 1976 ICA staging. Here, one can begin to see the intertextual installation emerge. This format is signaled by a discursive, chronological, and narrative encounter for the audience. Texts which engage subjectivity are presented in a way which layers meanings, voices, and interpretations so that



the audience encounters them as a heterogeneous, diegetic experience. Until the exhibition at the Yale Centre for British Art in 1984, and then again at the Generali Foundation exhibition of the *Document* in 1998, the work had not been shown in its entirety as an exhibition. Rather it was exhibited in parts as those were assembled and completed over the years of its development since 1973. The first complete assemblage was in its published form as a book in 1983. In 1975, it was shown in Newcastle as Part I; in 1976, Parts I-III were shown at the ICA; in 1977, Parts I-IV were shown at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford; in 1979, Part VI was shown on its own in a group exhibition at the ICA; and in 1983, all parts were united in the publication of the *Document*. It was shown in full again in Manchester in 2011 at the Whitworth Gallery.

The intertextual layering of narratives with theory within the *Document* related to experiments occurring in feminist film at the time. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's 1977 film *Riddles of the Sphinx* fused experimental film techniques with feminist theory. In a scene in which the role of unions organising childcare is discussed, the camera pans 360 degrees for an extended take. The feminist film theory that informed Mulvey's work also informed Kelly: the potential of sequences, and of 'long takes that were... suggesting a montage of ideas', and the possibility of establishing a heterogeneity and layering of ideas, rather than a tautological, linguistic statement (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). Within the exhibition of the *Document*, in the exhibition of Parts I-III at the ICA, the installation of the text attempts to 'emphasise real time' (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). Through the 'levels of diegesis', Kelly interrogates the 'heterogeneity of discourse', to reveal three layers of discourse, or three ways in which the audience is drawn into the work (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983). First, there is the experiential narrative of the mother's voice; second, the empirical narrative which frames

the work; and third, the psychoanalytic reading, which paralleled the feminist debates of the time, which also offers an unpicking of first level of reading (the mother's/Kelly's experience). The heterogeneity of discourse however, reveals within it a 'heterogeneity of form' (Kelly and Mulvey, 1983).

The installation at the ICA differed from the use of text now familiar to specialist art audiences of conceptual art practice. This development was a critical response to Art & Language's proposal for the essay as an art exhibition, articulated in the group's first issue *Art-Language*, published in May 1969. Here, Art & Language emphasised the group's position specific to the presentation of written language in an art context. To Art & Language the mounting of an essay 'implied' an 'object (paper with print upon it)' as 'conventional [and not conceptual] visual art content' (Art & Language, 1969). Kelly had been 'curious' about the work of Art & Language in England, as well as that of Kosuth in New York (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.451). She states: 'I remember [in the late 1960s and early 1970s] being very confrontational with people like Art & Language, and very definitely engaging with people like Joseph Kosuth, and I thought 'if women don't do that — make this critical overview — then their work will not have the kind of presence that it needs to, historically' (Kelly and Pollock, 1989). Kelly interrogated the textual form of the index, also used in the work of Art & Language.<sup>4</sup> To Carson, 'Kelly's explicit interest in the index was polemically engaged with the work of the Art & Language group' (Carson, 1998, p.45). In 1972, Anne Seymour included Art

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<sup>4</sup> In *The New Art* catalogue (1972), the group are named as Art-Language. However, more recently they are referred to as Art & Language (Wilson, 2016), or Art & Language group (Blacksell, 2013). For consistency, I refer to Art & Language, as their relevance and mention occurs in the thesis beyond *The New Art*.

& Language's work *Index* at the Hayward Gallery exhibition, *The New Art*. *Index* elaborately classified 350 texts, many of which the group had published in its own journal, and displayed them within filing cabinets in the gallery, which were classified by an indexing system they devised. In the same way that the neutrality and power within language was assumed as natural, Art & Language also assumed its classifying systems as objective, and embraced them without critique. Art & Language's use of the index 'made no direct semiotic interrogation of the indexical sign' and rather treated the index as a literal cataloguing device for art-as-information (Carson, 1998, p.45). The texts included had all been 'published elsewhere, or circulated amongst its editors'; the *Index* of the exhibition was, simply put, 'an elaborate filing system' (Carson, 1998, p.45). Art & Language paid little regard to their audience, or their audiences' encounter with the texts. In one of their catalogue texts for *The New Art*, 'Mapping and Filing', written by Charles Harrison, the text refers repeatedly to the 'we' of the group, and the importance of the texts to them, and their art practice (Harrison, 1972, p.14). Their use of text was monumental in its volume, but offered no subjective reflection on its relationships, reflexivity, or intertextuality. It was information to be received. The 'positivist beliefs' of group members like Kosuth 'underlay' the *Index* as a tautology that seeks no investigation of its own materiality or potential beneath its surface (Carson, 1998, p.45). To Kelly, however, the index presented a model for presenting text in/as an art installation (whether accompanied by found objects or not), by which to log and classify the information gathered through the *Document's* making 'with an annotated set of theoretical discourses, to which the "subject" of the *Document's* intertextually refers' (Carson, 1998, p.45). The subject of conceptual art in the purist, Wittgenstein-enthused, Kosuth-driven strand of practice was art itself, to Kelly, it was 'how the subjectivities of the mother and

infant, reciprocally imbricated within a psycho-sexual linguistic structure, [which] could be indexically represented' (Carson, 1998, p.46)

The three parts of the *Document* at the ICA in 1976 created a discursive space within the art installation, specific to written language, using seriality as a structure that could then be encountered non-sequentially, as each viewer might direct their experience of the work. Like Burgin, the perception of the viewer was highly considered. One can see these differ from the instructions and descriptions of actions in Burgin's use of text in his early work, and as in the work of Weiner, 'which presented text as propositional cues for the viewer/reader in their encountering and perception of the work' (Wilson, 2016, p.37). Burgin's sequential use of text foreshadowed Kelly's use of text and chronological series in the *Document*. In *The Position* (1969), eleven sections of text are typed onto strips of paper, and pasted on the wall. Burgin intended for the texts to be read sequentially by the viewer as they walked around the room. The text in the work 'directed' their encounter (Wilson, 2016, p.37). Kelly's use of text in the *Document* was directly informed by her experience in film and feminist film theory. By the time she came to make the *Document*, Kelly was resolute that text and installation allowed 'a kind of temporal experience that could be more self-reflexive' than film (White, 2007). One can see the artist's employment of filmic strategies of sequence, chronology and captioning through the viewer's encounter with the textual work. Although the linguistic form was paramount for the *Document* from its early stages, Kelly was reluctant to realise the project as a book, and she did not publish it as such until 1983. The exhibition is 'narrativization of space: you walk around it and encounter objects intimately in real time', replicating for the audience the chronological experience of the project's making (White, 2007). Kelly's reluctance to produce the work as a book stemmed from an anxiety about

losing the 'intertextual system' of an exhibition that is 'potentially self-reflexive', where the relationship between one part and another are determined by a viewer's subjective engagement and not a linear viewing (Kelly, 1983, p.xxi). The footnotes and bibliography, which were isolated at the end of the exhibition at the ICA are instead 'interspersed [throughout the book] with the illustrations' in an effort to 'close that gap', as Kelly puts it, 'to pull the visible more firmly into the space of the readable' (Kelly, 1983, p.xxi). She reflects: 'Typographical variation [in the book] was one way of attempting to avert that kind of closure, of trying to maintain the heterogeneity and openness of the 'original'' exhibition (Kelly, 1983, p.xxi). Using typographic cues to denote the voices of the *Document*, enables Kelly to engage the 'shifter as a subset of the index' (Carson, 1998, p.57). That is, personal pronouns shift from 'You' or 'I' depending on who is speaking, but in the *Document* the audience can inhabit any of these shifters for they fluidly appear throughout the text. This, Carson contends, 'accelerate[s] the heterogeneous flow of signification' and enables the 'indexical' to be not only 'imbued with the symbolic' but also resembling something, i.e. be 'iconic' (Carson, 1998, p.57). Through the text's materiality, one can see a representation of a small group of characters that Kelly draws her audience into, although the audience is omniscient, and able to jump back and forth in chronology, in a way the subjects of the work cannot.

As the *Document* develops, Kelly's texts require a greater span and depth of attention from their audience, growing from short captions in the early documentations to lengthier passages in the later sections. This, in part, reflects a natural development as the child's own use of language increases in confidence and length, as he enters the Social Order. But it also marks a crucial shift for the presentation of text to a viewer as a durational experience to be

read. The conceptual gap between word and image which began in *Women and Work* develops further, to allow the audience to speculate and reflect on the work. In the *Document*, this gap widens further still between the found objects and text, which correspond to multiple indices at once. Language offered a possibility to draw the audience into the work in a way that other art mediums did not at the time.

Cixous' *écriture féminine* challenged the binaries of phallogcentrism: man/woman, good/evil etc., and suggested the possibility for a new order if such binaries were overridden. The binary of looking/reading that early conceptual work proposed with its language-centred conceptualism is challenged by Kelly, who presents a third mode of engagement that is neither looking nor reading, but writing. The fungibility of visualisation and language within a single discursive exhibition suggests a possibility. She states: 'I wanted to avoid setting up an opposition between image and text. Ideally, each should hold the possibility of becoming the other, or perhaps the same, that is writing' (Kelly, 1996, p.xxi). For Ruth Blacksell, works such as works Art & Language's *Indexes* (1972), or Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966–7), demonstrated the turn to language in conceptual art practice as a turn away from looking, and a turn towards reading (Blacksell, 2013). But such an articulation, I argue, only reinforces a binary that second generation, feminist, conceptual artists sought to overturn. Kelly instead orients her audience towards the Barthesian concept of a 'writerly' text, in that they are guiding the encounter with the text (Barthes, 1974).

Following the 1976 ICA exhibition, the *Document* received some critical attention in the specialist presses, particularly in feminist reviews in publications Kelly herself had contributed to, such as *Spare Rib*. (Mulvey, 1976). But these reviews emphasised the subject of the

work—the mother-child dyad—and the sociopolitical critique informing Kelly’s exploration of that relationship. Kelly was close to feminist film theorist Mulvey (Mulvey interviewed Kelly when Mulvey was making *Riddles of the Sphinx*, and incorporated some of Kelly’s debates on the sexual division of labour, unions, and childcare into the film, and they collaborated at feminist magazines, as well as being members of the History Group reading group together). Mulvey writes that Kelly presented a ‘crucial examination’ of the ‘deeply traumatic emotions and unrecognized elements’ of motherhood (Kelly, 1983, p.201). In *Studio International* Jane Kelly (no relation) also reviewed the *Document* favourably, though her emphasis on Kelly ‘evolving a feminist art practice with relevance to men and women in our society’ also positioned the work’s importance in its politics (Kelly, 1977, pp.55-56). Both reviews omit to mention the *Document*’s use of written language in relation to conceptual practice. As a result, the radical shifts that Kelly had begun to develop, exploring the possibilities of text as a discursive installation, were overlooked.

### ***Languages, 1979***

Feminist artists using language made work that looked like the conceptual art made of language that was experiencing curatorial and critical attention, such as in international exhibitions such as *Prospect 68*, *When Attitudes Become Form*, and *Documenta 5*. Using the linguistic methodology of conceptual art, meant works such as Kelly’s could be positioned within the emerging field of conceptual practice and critique it from within. In 1972, Seymour’s *The New Art* at the Hayward Gallery heralded conceptual art practice in Britain, yet included fourteen male artists, and no female artists. Kelly’s exhibition at the ICA was the last in a series of conceptual artist solo shows between 1975 and 1976, curated by Barry Barker, at the ICA. With the exception of Hilla Becher, who together with Bernd Becher had

the first exhibition in Barker's series in January – February of 1975, Kelly was the only woman to exhibit in the series.<sup>5</sup> Liliane Lijn, who was developing conceptual works that engaged language and sculpture, and was receiving curatorial attention in Paris, was left out of the ICA series entirely, as well as *The New Art*, though she was one of the five female selectors of the 'feminist' 1978 Hayward Annual, an exhibition largely panned by critics (Pollock, 1979; Curtis and Lijn, 1998). Keith Arnatt's *Trouser – Word Piece* (1972), which was included in *The New Art*, is made of two juxtaposed photographs. In one, presented on the right of a diptych and in the catalogue to *The New Art*, Arnatt was photographed against a sunlit wall, wearing a black and white placard upon which is written: 'I'M A REAL ARTIST' (fig. 2.16). On the left is a text, titled and authored by the artist, which quotes philosopher John Austin and attempts to explore nuances of meaning in grammatical structures. In the same year, Arnatt inscribed vinyl lettering, again black on white, in an uppercase text, each letter about a foot-high stating: 'KEITH ARNATT IS AN ARTIST' on the wall of a gallery in the Tate, for the *Seven Exhibitions* series. The use of the subject of the self was uncommon in conceptual art, but for Arnatt, such subjectivity still rooted its exploration to speaking about art, inward-looking, and presuming the 'I' that refers to himself without question. Margaret Harrison was particularly

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<sup>5</sup> The ICA exhibitions of conceptual artists between 1975-6 curated by Barker were: Bernd and Hilla Becher, 18 January – 16 February 1975; Marcel Broodthaers, 11 June – 20 July 1975; David Lamelas, 9 July – 3 August 1975; Art & Language, 19 September – 12 October 1975; Bernar Venet, 17 December – 11 January 1976; Victor Burgin, 16 January – 8 February 1976; Andre Cadere, 13-20 March 1976; Hamish Fulton, 18 March – 2 April; Lawrence Weiner, 7 April – 2 May 1976; John Murphy, 6-30 May 1976; Douglas Huebler 4 June – 3 July 1976; Michael Craig-Martin, 8-31 July 1976; Dan Graham, 4-14 August 1976; Mary Kelly, 23 September – 16 October 1976; Daniel Buren, 26 October – 17 November 1976; David Tremlett, 23 November-14 December 1976.



damning of *The New Art*, writing in 2000, that: ‘to some of us conceptualism ended with *The New Art*...conceptual art was a mirror of the world it criticised’ (Archer et al., 2000). Seymour had included no women within *The New Art*. Willats was also not within the exhibition, though Burgin was. Despite being the heralding exhibition of British conceptual art, the landscape it presented of British conceptual art practice was rooted in language, photography, and action that looked inward. By comparison, Adrian Piper’s use of language (specifically, photographed language written on the body) in the *Catalysis* series, namely *Catalysis III* (1970) is distinctly outward looking to invoke reaction, and change within the audience. The photographic documentation of Piper’s performance shows the artist wearing a white shirt on which she had painted in black the words: ‘WET PAINT’ (fig. 2.17). Walking in Manhattan to the department store, Macy’s, to buy gloves and sunglasses, Piper’s intention is to instigate a reaction within the audience who she happens upon, or who happens upon Piper. To Piper, the work only has meaning as a medium of change, challenging ‘conditions of separateness, order, exclusivity, and the stability of easily accepted functional identities that no longer exist’ (Piper, 1970).

In 1979, Dutch curator Rudi Fuchs, then employed as Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, was commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain to purchase a selection of works which he saw significant and important to current art making in the UK. This was part of a strategy of the Arts Council to ‘shed new light’ on contemporary British practice, by appointing an international art figure to make a selection, from which a touring exhibition would be created (Fuchs and Johnstone, 1979). Guided by Arts Council officer Karen Amiel’s knowledge of London artists working in conceptual practice, Fuchs made a selection of artists without making any effort to tour studios beyond London (Fuchs and Johnstone, 1979). The

mandate for the exhibition was an idea Amiel had sold to the Arts Council. Having been the first officer to travel to *Documenta*, Amiel felt strongly that the exhibitions needed an international perspective to give them critical rigour beyond the Arts Council mandate of promoting popular exhibitions. This was slightly at odds with the Arts Council's agenda, which was to tour work to the regions, with the result of encouraging its collection by institutions and enjoyment and education by the public. Fuchs was one of those brought on to essentially consult on a purchase exhibition: artworks that the curator would advise the Arts Council to buy, and then would be grouped into a touring exhibition.

Fuchs felt the artists he subsequently selected, with Amiel's assistance, had been somewhat 'neglected as a group of artists' by the Arts Council, which Fuchs suggested was due to the work not 'being [as] visually attractive' as contemporary paintings (Fuchs and Johnstone, 1979). Fuchs felt the most pressing and innovative work was that which was coming out of British conceptual art practice, particularly works made of either photography or written language. Having made his selection, he then instructed the Arts Council to purchase works by eight artists including Art & Language, Victor Burgin, John Stezaker, and Stephen Willats. Along with some works purchased after Richard Cork's *Beyond Painting and Sculpture*, these were the first conceptual works to enter the collection. At the time, the Arts Council was the only public organisation, bar the Tate, which was collecting contemporary art at all in the UK. Due to the small budgets and the Arts Council's mandate that Amiel and her successor, Isobel Johnstone, had to work with, their purchases were driven towards emerging artists. There were at the time, only a handful of private galleries in London, with Nigel Greenwood Inc. and the Lisson carrying the most influence. In 1979, Johnstone had just taken over as an exhibitions officer, having left the Scottish Arts Council, where for four years she ran its

collection.<sup>6</sup> Fuchs' purchases were already well underway before Amiel left, and it was Johnstone's job to tour the resulting exhibition, which Fuchs' titled: *Languages: An Exhibition of Artists Using Word and Image*. Fuchs was a 'rigorous conceptualist' and Johnstone found the resulting exhibition 'too intellectual for galleries outside London' (Fuchs and Johnstone, 1979). Tasked with securing venues for the exhibition tour, Johnstone could only secure one venue for the exhibition, when she managed to persuade Bridget Brown at the progressive Third Eye Centre in Glasgow to take the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, subsequent touring shows of purchases by the collection had to have 'more popular appeal' (Dingle, 2009).

*Languages* positions the artworks against a curatorial proposition of communication, in relation to the world, and exploring text and photographic image as, what he termed then as, 'new media' (Fuchs, 1979). (In 1979, photography was collected in a separate department from visual art in the Arts Council collection). In an archival film on the occasion of the exhibition opening in Glasgow in which Johnstone interviews Fuchs, the two reveal a tension that the 'challenging' nature of the photographic and language works present to the audience (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979). Fuchs acknowledges that he anticipates the works were difficult for audiences, for they 'look so unlike art', and more like newspapers in that they present 'information' (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979). Johnstone questions the demands required of the audience to engage with the work, asserting that 'the work is very challenging for the public, because they are expected to read it carefully, not just look at it and expect to

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<sup>6</sup> Johnstone would stay with the Arts Council for over 20 years, and ultimately was Curator of the Arts Council Collection.

<sup>7</sup> The Third Eye Centre was as a contemporary art exhibition space. It dissolved by the early 1990s, and was replaced by the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow in 1992.

get an experience...which is easy emotionally' (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979). Fuchs responded with something of a diatribe about the importance of conceptualism, the relationship of the works he had selected to that of Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner which he had, by then, shown at the Van Abbemuseum, and the radical change this work has offered to the subject of art – the first of such scale 'since the Renaissance', he argued (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979).<sup>8</sup> Yet Fuchs also sees the 'layout', 'design' and the 'typography' as precise and aesthetic with the aim to bring a 'point more forcefully', referring to the works of Gerard Hemsworth in which texts defining painting are placed on a canvas (fig. 2.18) (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979). One can also see this use of layout in *Can you find a way to get us out of this place* (1977), where Willats presents series of three panels on which he has montaged black and white photographs of a group of four – a family with grown children in a domestic setting pointing at a map, and images of semi-urban terraced houses, and places of work: factories, gasoline stations, shops, and offices. Job titles ('Inspector') linked on black lines to places of residence to places of work and annotated by statements ('I could only stare at my means of escape'). The earnestness of the work is disengaging for the reader is not drawn in, but instead talked at. Willats himself is absent in his subjectivity as he considers the structures and limits of class-based housing in capitalist society. Fuchs' selection, which totals eight artists, also includes Hemsworth, John Murphy, Bruce Robbins, and Gerald Newman. The works selected are fairly simple in their presentation to the audience: Burgin's *UK 76* (1976) is a series of 11 black and white photographic prints; Hemsworth's presents five texts on card, such as *No more/no less 9* (1976). John Murphy and Bruce Robbins both show Lettraset works on paper,

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<sup>8</sup> Fuchs showed Joseph Kosuth the previous year at the Van Abbemuseum in a solo exhibition titled *Tekst/Kontekst* from 10 June to 9 July 1978. Lawrence Weiner was included in a group exhibition at Van Abbemuseum 1971.

and Willats' work is composed of panels of three featuring photo, gouache, ink and Lettraset on card. Fuchs sees this material as antagonistic to the audience: he writes in the catalogue essay that anyone finding the work 'difficult to understand' or 'obscure' is 'expecting the wrong things...miracles and revelations' (Fuchs, 1979, p.3). Amiel and Johnstone each reflect how Fuchs' international career placed demands on him that meant he had little time for the Arts Council exhibition (Amiel, 2016; Johnstone, 2016). Instead of expecting such 'lofty experiences', he writes with a tone of condescension, you should 'look at this art as if it were television; read it as if it were a newspaper' (Fuchs, 1979, p.3). I make note of the materials in which the works are presented, in order to consider such work in regional galleries in 1979, where the impact of conceptual art had little been felt was a drastic shift from the painting exhibitions which would have been more typical of the Arts Council tours. Fuchs' selection of works shows a strong relationship to the work of Joseph Kosuth, who was the US editor of *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* which Art & Language published, and who showed in a solo exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum in 1978 (thus during the period Fuchs would have been selecting the works for the Arts Council – the process took two years).

Though small in scale, and limited in terms of its tour, this exhibition is surprisingly neglected for the offerings it made to text in art at the end of the 1970s in Britain, and the works it positioned at the centre of these debates. Both Willats and Burgin have retrospectively been described for their use of language as investigating art as action, a call for the political address of class struggle, as has Mary Kelly.<sup>9</sup> Yet curiously, *Languages* included only work by

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly, Burgin, Willats, as well as Margaret Harrison, and Susan Hiller, are all grouped together in the 'Action Practice' section of the Tate's 2016 retrospective examination of conceptual Art in Britain, curated by Andrew Wilson.

male artists. This is despite Fuchs articulating his interest in the works as an address and questioning reality, and about the world. Margaret Harrison and Kelly were artists known in London at the time, Kelly in particular had some profile – the *Post-Partum Document* first showed at the ICA in 1976; *Women and Work* was at the South London Art Gallery a few years prior in 1975.<sup>10</sup> Fuchs' selection meant the works of Willats, Art & Language et al became part of the Arts Council Collection. By contrast, Kelly's sections of the *Document* which the Tate subsequently went on to purchase, were not bought until 1984. The *Document* and Kelly, as an artist, only began to receive a second wave of critical attention in 1987, after being included in the Channel 4 series: *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s*. Fuchs' selection also marked his summation of the challenging work exploring language being made in Britain at the time, as the London art scene came out of the 1970s. Given the failure in touring the show, it would be 23 years before the Arts Council developed and toured another exhibition on language, with *Words* in 2002.<sup>11</sup> Johnstone closes her interview with Fuchs by asking whether language will now become part of visual practice, to which Fuchs' answers 'absolutely' (Fuchs and Johnstone, 1979). Arguing it is as important as Cubism for the breaking of the single view-point painting, Fuchs sees the use of language in the exhibition, the potential, for the first time, for the artwork to have an engagement and an

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<sup>10</sup> Documentation III of the *Post-Partum Document* was only purchased by the Tate in 1984. *Women and Work* was not purchased by the Tate until 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *Words from the Arts Council Collection* was selected by Johnstone and Fiona Bradley, and included works by 29 artists from the collection. It toured to City Museum & Art Gallery, Plymouth; Arts Centre, Aberystwyth; City Art Gallery, York; Oldham and The City Gallery, Leicester. Artists included were Anya Gallaccio, Tracey Emin, Mona Hatoum, Gilbert & George, and Ben Nicholson.

argument with an audience, that it requires the audience to ‘talk with it’ (Johnstone and Fuchs, 1979). Its presentation, both in a sparse catalogue, and in its sole staging in Glasgow, gave little opportunity for the audience to talk with anything. Installed as flat works on walls, and with Johnstone struggling to extract anything from Fuchs’ lean offerings into an education programme, the work was received as highly esoteric and disengaging for audiences (Johnstone, 2016).

## Conclusion

Now, four decades after British institutions began contextualizing and presenting the experimentation occurring within linguistic practice and conceptualism, one can begin to look back and explore those crucial works left out of the conversation in the first place, and further overlooked as the period entered retrospective historicisation. Carson argued the importance of the screen in the *Post-Partum Document*. Drucker reasserted the studio and the material after neo-conceptualism. Now we are able to begin to attend to the complexity of the work in all its details, Kelly’ use of text being one. The analysis of the use of text in the *Post-Partum Document* presented within this chapter is one of my contributions to knowledge: that if one goes back and attends to the use of text in important historical works of art - which use text, but may not be text-based – one learns important ways of understanding the use of text in art in the present (and so, the use of text in the present) that are outside of the dichotomy of conceptual art and concrete poetry. One of these ways is a feminist revision of text in conceptual practice.

The *Document* comes to a conclusion when Kelly’s son writes his own name in 4.515B of Documentation VI. She reflected later: ‘At that point, in a way, he’d become the author’

(White, 2007). Yet the *Document's* end is coupled with the mother's/artist's perceived castration/social subordination, and she separates herself from the text. In the final slate, the father, Ray Barrie, is once again cast as the impetus for the separation of the child from the mother, insisting the boy stay at school for the full day, including for his school dinners, having previously taken lunch at home. The child's learning and nourishment have come full circle, being completed through the working hours of the school day, outside of the home, without the aid of his mother.

Speaking in 1990, Kelly reflected to Terry Smith that she felt the *Document*, and *Women and Work* in particular, were historicised in terms of feminist art, and 'not usually seen as a conceptual work' (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.454). Since the late 1990s, however, the *Document* has been repositioned with respect to its importance to conceptual art, evidenced by its inclusion in important anthologies and surveys of conceptual art (Alberro and Stimson, 1999; Bird and Newman, 1999). Yet, Kelly's contribution to text art continues to be largely overlooked. The representation of a subjectivity associated with feminism led to a blind spot to the use of language as a form in Kelly's work precisely for its reflexive nature and potential for critique it offers. As Smith puts it, with the exception of Acconci and Nauman, 'subjectivity was one route that early language-based conceptual art didn't take' (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.456). In Walter Benjamin's 1934 essay, 'Author as Producer', he insists that 'for a work to be of political significance, it must not purely produce thematically some critique of the institutional structure, it must effect change in that structure' (Drucker, 1994, p.125). Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* is not only political due to the use of feminist subject matter and exploration within the work, but for the way it opened up text to a subjective, narrative potential within conceptual art practice, and how it used text to mediate between the two.



### 3: The Politics of Subjectivity and Text as Social Material

#### Introduction

Jenny Holzer's series of posters consisting of brief lines of text (such as 'hiding your motives is despicable') pasted on walls in streets in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the late 1970s and early 80s; Barbara Kruger's early paste-ups of text (such as 'You Are Not Yourself') written in Futura Bold Oblique collaged over found black and white images from magazines in the early 1980s; or, Glenn Ligon's use of text from Harlem Renaissance writers such as Zora Neale Hurston in his paintings from the mid- to late-80s. These are artworks which have all been historicised with attention to their use of language as a tool to criticise power (Dunlop, Nairne, and Wyver, 1987; Ligon and Rothkopf, 2011). These artists each explore issues of representation: of money, of power, and of gender, and in the case of Ligon, of queerness and race in America (Blazwick et al., 1983). The works have been regarded and chronicled for the artists' use of text as a semiotic sign disrupting the transmission of the signifier and signified with coded meanings within our culture, its stereotypes, and clichés. Specifically, they have been historicised and curated for their use of text with image, or as image.

Kruger's works from this period of the 1980s are particularly well known – recognisable to a point that they bear a visual signature of the artist in the use of black, white, and red text, overlaid on grainy magazine images blown up and semi-distorted in black and white. Indeed, when I have mentioned 'text art' or the topic of my research to friends, colleagues, or family, Kruger's work is often first made reference to in their response, so well known is it. This is in part due to the proliferation and influence of the art market, but largely also due to the recognisable semiotic image that Kruger creates with words.

These works by Ligon, Kruger, and Holzer critique the representation of identity. In this chapter, I will explore how Kruger, Holzer, and Ligon demonstrated a very different use of language than that which was evidenced in the conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly by the male artists in the US and the UK such as Robert Barry, Art & Language, or Joseph Kosuth. They also differentiated their work from that of Mary Kelly, who used a dense application of psychoanalytic theory. The works of Kruger, Holzer, and Ligon instead constructed an image with words, sometimes in juxtaposition with an image, sometimes as text alone. Such a shift would not have been possible had Kelly not introduced the subjective within the conceptual, psychoanalytic framework that she did in the late 1970s. But Kruger's and Holzer's use of language was both 'distanced and removed', and yet involved 'the body and the figure' in a forthright way that hoped to engage an audience and cause change in the world outside of the art upon which the art was commenting (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). Both Kruger's and Holzer's early use of text in this late 1970s period was marked by the exploration of ideas and subjects that engage with issues of identity and representation, by critiquing conceptual art by using its own methodologies, and by subverting and challenging the gendered privilege of language.

### **The Politics of Subjectivity**

Both subjective experience and the material became unfashionable in the art of the 1990s and early 2000s as neo-conceptual art became dominant (Drucker, 2005). Kate Love 'scrutinize[s] experience and its relationship to art and the politics of subjectivity' arguing (through her interpretation of Giorgio Agamben) that the incapacity to have and communicate experiences' is one of the few certainties remaining (Love, 2005, pp.157-158).

Thus, what we share is not only our lack of experiences but our lack of ability to communicate this lack.

Liam Gillick's *The Wood Way* (2002) at the Whitechapel is one example of a well-regarded contemporary installation which attends to materiality, but of which the resulting critical appraisal does not. Gillick's work marked the 1990s and received international acclaim. *Wood Way* was an encompassing installation that fused utopian texts with colour-filled natural light filtering through Plexiglas (fig. 3.1). Gillick selected mass-produced materials for the installation, including anodised aluminium and plywood, for their set of associations in the world. Plexiglas is the stuff of shop fittings and police riot shields, and plywood suggests flat-pack furniture and processed consumption. On the surface of this work, materiality seems attended to in the installation. As Julian Stallabrass puts it, in *The Wood Way*, Gillick is 'meditating on the condition of utopian thinking and construction in what appears to be a definitively post-utopian time' (Stallabrass, 2002, n.p.). Art historian Bill Roberts attends to Gillick's use of font. He acknowledges Gillick's use of text, specifically in the use of Helvetica as a 'post-Fordist' strategy that speaks to social and cultural criticism (Roberts, 2013).

Roberts addresses the typeface Gillick uses but delves no further. Yet Sean O'Hagan, critic for *The Observer*, falls shorter still. O'Hagan called the artist a 'consummate colourist' for his use of orange, pink, and brown Plexiglas in contrast with plywood, and the interaction of natural light in the gallery space in East London (O'Hagan, 2002). While O'Hagan pays attention to the sources of Gillick's texts (B.F. Skinner's 1948 Utopian novel, *Walden Two*, for example), he fails even to mention the typeface Gillick uses to write Skinner's words, let alone discuss it as another mass-produced material. O'Hagan's attention to the text's form is slight. He writes: 'Great swathes of text run across the back walls of the gallery, the words running into

each other without punctuation or space' (O'Hagan, 2002). In a review that otherwise focuses on the physical manifestation of ideas in Gillick's installation, the materiality of the text is overlooked – what it looks like, how it is produced. This is not uncommon. The typeface recedes from view in O'Hagan's account of the installation; it is left unconsidered in the review, though Gillick considered it, clearly. How did Gillick arrive at such attention to materiality of text in the 1990s?

It was the feminist artists of the 1970s whose 'movements reawakened interest in self-representation in symbolic, visual terms' (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). As Griselda Pollock puts forward in her conversation with Kruger in a 1991 presentation at the ICA, London: 'Women and minority artists had a compelling motivation for exploration of visual practices grounded in legible representation, in modes that communicated a broad-based community interest rather than a modern aesthetics of autonomy' (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). Consider Pollock's assertion in comparison to the position of Sol LeWitt, for whom 'conceptual art was an emancipation of the artists from the contingencies and creative vicissitudes involved in the production of the actual work' (Hilder, 2016, p.154). LeWitt reflects on making the conceptual artwork 'mentally interesting to the spectator' which results in the desired effect of the work becoming 'emotionally dry' (LeWitt, 1967). In *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*, Johanna Drucker explores the return to the material in 1990s work, and with it, Drucker argues, there emerged a return to emotion. Drucker observes that: 'current mainstream sensibilities have an indisputable debt to [the] feminist movements [of 1970s and 1980s postmodernism] in art and theory' for they opened up the field of artistic practice to be heterogeneous and diverse (Drucker, 2005, p.80). I make the argument that the material and emotion in contemporary practice, has precedents in the predominantly

feminist artists' use of text in the second generation of conceptualism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this chapter, I contend that it is precisely because feminist artists and artists critiquing the representation of identity had more at stake than just art, that they engaged language with methods and strategies demonstrating an attitude to text that was inherently material.

John Bird and Michael Newman summarise the shifts in practice at the end of the first period of conceptual art in the mid-1970s from critiques that were inward facing within art to 'Critical approaches to issue-based art on a more micro-political level, [which] involved ... feminism, anti-racism and local struggles' (Bird and Newman, 1999, pp.8-9). This shift, Bird and Newman, suggests the emergence of a second generation of conceptual artists, who inherited the possibility to freely move between media 'concerned with the deconstruction of originality, with replication and simulation' but who also 'further reflections on the status of the object, the framing of the artwork and the broad set of cultural and social relations which determines the conditions of production and reception of art' (Bird and Newman, 1999, pp.8-9). Along with Jeff Wall and Martha Rosler, Bird and Newman highlight Kruger as one of these artists. Alexander Alberro summarises the shift between the use of language in the first generation conceptual artists and the second generation conceptualists thus:

[There are] distinct differences between [...] post-conceptual art and the linguistic conceptualism of the late 1960s. The latter, with its emphasis on a purely formal language..., [is] one that correlates historically with the legacies of reductivism and self-reflexivity. By contrast, artists such as [Victor] Burgin, [Jenny] Holzer, [Mary] Kelly, and [Barbara] Kruger theorize language beyond the purely analytic and formal, situating it within a synthetic, discursive practice determined by a system of control and domination. From this perspective, language is perceived in and of itself as the very medium by which ideological subjectivity is always already constructed [emphasis added]. In other words, in direct response to the formal neutrality of conceptual art of the late 1960s, the post-conceptual work of artists such as Burgin, Holzer,

Kelly, and Kruger in the 1970s argues that language is inextricably bound to ideology (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, pp.xxviii-xxix).

Alberro articulates the key difference of the use of language between the conceptualists and those that followed in the 'discursive practice' which shifted from a presumed transparency and neutrality of language to engaging with language as a 'system of control and domination' (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, pp.xxviii-xxix). David Joselit attributes the 'differing attitude [that arose between the first and second generation of conceptual artists] towards the intersection of language and authorship ... in great part to gender' (Joselit, Saleci and Simon, 1998, p.46). Precisely because these artists – Kelly, Kruger, Holzer, and later Ligon – were writing in a language of the oppressed, they had to embrace the visual and material in the text, in its textuality, so as to convey and communicate the experience of language alone to their audience, rather than communicates with language an esoteric idea about art. Words fail, and thus need their materiality to achieve the artists' aims. Kruger, Holzer, and Ligon each had something else at stake, beyond art itself, which was a politics of subjectivity. The artists, I argue, produce a political subjectivity in these works, not only through the text but through its material form, and its exhibition display.

Throughout the 1970s, Kruger famously worked on the photo desk of *Mademoiselle* and *Vogue*, laying out the magazines and pasting in placeholders for the copywriters to later drop in text (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). The 'substitutional' practice of layering text and image in her work as a commercial artist merged into her practice as an artist by the 1980s (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). In 1978, Kruger self-published an artist's book, *Pictures/Readings*, her first work in which text and image develop a relational dialogue with one-another (fig. 3.2). A staple-bound booklet, the work demonstrates an indication of the interests that would come

together in her later works for which she became known. The text and images of the booklet explore spatial sense in relation to image and written language. Kruger imagines the lives of the inhabitants of the homes she photographs from the outside, whilst walking around Los Angeles. Each narrative text is several hundred words long, depicting stories with nameless characters. Juxtaposed with the texts are black and white photographs of close-crops of typical American domestic architecture: windows and corners of white stucco buildings. The work demonstrates Kruger's early attempts to resolve questions that arise in her mature work. Questions such as: How do we read a picture? How can the audience become an active participant in it? In these early works, Kruger treated the image and language as two distinct entities.

Later in 1978, Kruger developed her second series using text: *Hospital Series*. This was a four-panel work in which images and texts are still opposed to one another, but presented on a wall not in a page. Here the texts are increasingly abstract and cryptic, moving away from the narrative imaginings of *Picture/Readings*. In this work, the audience sees two images in each panel: one black and white photograph of hospital furniture and medical objects – curtains, tongue depressors, waste bins – juxtaposed against found images of illustrations, likely from newspapers or magazines. For *Pictures/Readings*, Kruger imagined scenarios, characters, and wrote the texts to juxtapose her images. In a work by John Hilliard, *Cause of Death* (1974), the audience sees a similar use of language to direct meaning to the image and create a mistrust in the audience of the visual and verbal sources of meaning. Four black and white photographs of the seemingly same and apparently dead male body lie on a rocky beach. Each are cropped slightly differently from the rest, presenting a different scenario. The captions support this difference, with each image captioned differently: crushed, drowned,

fell, and buried (fig. 3.3). At this point in her practice, Kruger was presenting unified narratives between seemingly differing texts and images. Unlike the narrative paragraphs of text in *Pictures/Readings*, Kruger shortened texts in *Hospital Series* to phrases such as: 'Go away', 'Not now', or 'Not that'. This marks a shift towards the short texts which developed in her well-known work in the 1980s. Within these early works of image and language, Kruger treated the text much as it had largely been treated in conceptual practice: as caption. Joselit reflects that: 'It must have seemed natural to male conceptual artists working in the late 1960s and 1970s that the discourse they produced *belonged* to them – culturally and legally. But a number of feminist artists working in the 1970s began to understand the 'possession' of language as a profoundly gendered privilege' (Joselit, Saleci and Simon, 1998, p.46). This idea echoes the feminist writing of Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* in 1980 (Spender, 1980). Kruger's exploration of privilege was further investigated in her curation of an exhibition, which she was invited to do in 1988 at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York. Kruger, who has working class roots in New Jersey, chose to exhibit portraits from the collection, under which she presented statements in her signature style to pose questions such as: 'How is fame produced?' and 'How is value produced?' This exhibition, *Picturing Greatness*, furthered her interest in text responding to images and images to text, outside of the frame of their initial representation. Yet within her curation, as in her use of text in her early works, Kruger juxtaposed text with image to create a continuum of reading-seeing within and outside of the pictorial frame.

It was not until the early 1980s that Kruger introduced collage into her work. Here, the text and image merged in the same pictorial frame, materially layering language and image as well as layering the act of reading and seeing. This can first be seen in her paste-ups, small-



scale works of found imagery layered with text. The imagery was sourced from her work at Condé Nast, torn from image references, magazines, and books as a growing resource of reference pictures. These are the analogue form for art direction before digital software such as Photoshop, Quark, and InDesign dominated graphic design. In these early paste-up works, the audience sees the layers of text and image as physically placed on one another. The edges of a text suggest collage, though they are printed and shown as a composite image. These works are the first of Kruger's in which the image and language inhabit the same frame and begin to develop a symbiotic relationship for the audience. Rather than juxtaposed as image and text, where the audience oscillates between reading and seeing, looking at the image in the MoMA exhibition *Picturing Greatness*, for example, and then at the text captioning it, here, the audience encounters both at once within a single frame. The element of collage can also be seen famously in work of Dadaists John Heartfield or Hannah Hoch, though they bore little influence on Kruger for her education came through work, not art school. One can see this less famously in the work of the artist Lorraine O'Grady, *Cutting Out the New York Times* (1977), which predates Kruger's text and image collages made since the early 1980s (fig. 3.4). O'Grady attempts to appropriate the public language of journalism, and force randomness into words taken from their contextual meaning. By contrast, rather than appropriating language, Kruger positions the use of text as a strategy that extends directly from her work in design on the photo desk at Condé Nast (Bollen, 2013). In Kruger's early works, one can see how the artist shifted from texts captioning an image and generating their meaning in relation to the image, the texts which became the image. Kruger, was, as Pollock puts it, developing a visual language for 'the semiotic systems of our culture, its stereotypes and clichés around questions of money and power and gender' (Kruger and Pollock, 1991).

Pollock is careful to distinguish Kruger's use of language from the subjective and diaristic texts in feminist art using text. Instead, Pollock challenges where the subjective locus of Kruger's work lies, posing the question to Kruger:

But what would it be to break with that and examine the subjectivity of the work? Feminist analysis addresses the structures of representation, and how such difference has been constructed. But another kind of feminist discourse has probed the structures of representation as an effect of the process of subjectivity and therefore asks: who is there when this is said? Is there an author thereby making it, who becomes a woman, or engenders the spectator? Can this work be read in the mode of psychoanalysis and can we then arrive at another set of questions – not with attention and expressivity, but with accountability? Not with the New York capital of the Western art world. What is the subject of the art that comes from your practice – what is the subjective locus of the practice? Who is realized by the practice and who addresses us in the work? (Kruger and Pollock, 1991).

Kruger, in response to Pollock's affirmation of the denial of the subjective, is clear to assert that the work intends to be forthright (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). Kruger uses the pronouns 'we', 'you', and 'I' to position her viewpoint in a way that engages the viewer within the critique contained – materialised – in the text. Some of Kruger's most recognisable lines of texts from works of the 1980s include those taken from popular music such as 'We don't need another hero'; to feminist protests such as 'Your body is a battleground'; to straplines seemingly taken from advertising such as: 'Buy Me I'll Change Your Life.' The pronouns offer a shift from the non-subjective text of the proto-conceptual performance scores that was prominent in Fluxus, drawing the reader into the text. Pollock questions of Kruger's artwork: 'Who is actually speaking here? Who is being addressed? And, where is the spectator?' (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). This question challenges the assumption of the language use seen in conceptualism. In the work of Kosuth, for example, *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) [Water]* (1966), one of the artist's appropriated dictionary definitions, there was no question to the

authoritative voice of the artist who was speaking and addressing an audience, whether directly or through an appropriated text. It was presumed to be natural.

To art historian Craig Owens, 'shifters' do not imply the 'speaker and addressee to shift positions,' but rather that the roles have a 'noncommutability' that "you' – must never be 'I'" (Owens and Bryson, 1994, p.193). The potential of fluidity exists not in the pronoun but in the text, which shifts from 'code to message...from impersonal to personal' (Owens and Bryson, 1994, p.193). Art historian John C. Welchman borrows Owen's term and further observes Kruger's use of pronouns as offering a 'pronominal indeterminacy' (Welchman, 1997, p.342 and p.415n49). The inclusion of personal pronouns in works like *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face)* (1981) implicates viewers by confounding any clear notion of who is speaking. A shifter allows a general statement to speak to an individual. Luce Irigaray asks: 'How can I be distinguished from her?', thus alluding to the problem: simply using a pronoun is not enough to draw an audience into a work and take on its subjective locus. (Irigaray, 1985, p.17). For example, Michael Craig-Martin's *Kid's Stuff 1-7* (1973) consists of seven small rectangular mirrors, mounted and captioned with handwritten notes which invoke the pronoun: 'I feel I know myself' or 'How strange it is to be my present age' (fig. 3.5). The act of looking at one's self and reading a text using the pronoun does not invoke the audience or inflect the artwork in them. Rather, it furthers the presumed naturalness of language from the position of dominance to even use the 'I', for there is no questioning that language does not belong to them. My 'I' is not the same as Craig-Martin's, nor is it the same as another spectator's. For Craig-Martin to suggest each audience member may inhabit the text, simply by inserting a pronoun and a mirror into the work, fails to escape the privileged subjectivity of the artist who authors it, and further displays the audacity of the assumption

of language as neutral when coming from a position of power. A pronoun invokes the personal, but it is also anonymous. Kruger largely avoids the first-person pronoun, instead using the second person 'We,' 'You,' or 'They' in her most effective works asserting collective action over individual experience. Welchman observes the reiteration of the text, which is delivered to the audience twice, as opposed to the singular delivery of the image, in Kruger's titling methodology (Welchman, 1997, p.343). Naming all her works 'Untitled' disavows giving them a 'proper name', but requires a caption to clarify and distinguish one 'Untitled' work from another (Welchman, 1997, p.343). To make this distinction, Kruger restates the text in the artwork again, in parenthesis as part of the subtitle. This invites the viewer to encounter the text at least twice: in the artwork, and in the title. Kosuth too uses the untitled strategy, though in his parenthesised subtitle, he clarifies his position on, rather than repeats, the text of the artwork. The strategy looks back to her earlier artworks, *Pictures/Readings* or *Hospital Series*, which juxtaposed text and image, with the text captioning the image and sitting outside of the frame. In so doing, Kruger also emphasises the importance of the texts as the defining characteristic of the work, rather than any image, which is never mentioned in a title.

Welchman positions Holzer in a trajectory of titling that he attributes to feminist artists in the 1970s and 80s engaging with strategies of appropriation. This trajectory includes Cindy Sherman with her *Untitled Film Stills* (1972-6) which 'refused the title'; Sherry Levine, who 'deployed [the title] as a site for the postponement and re-routing of visualist authority', and Kruger who, as I have discussed, 'made [the title] over as a parenthetical iteration of the slogans within her images, merging the title with the image on somewhat equal terms' (Welchman, 1997, p.343). Thus, Kruger's texts developed from a system of juxtaposing image

and text. From first experimenting with the caption, Kruger condensed both into the frame of the image. By contrast Holzer 'effectively collapses the work into the expanded field of the caption', where the title, the caption, the image, and the text become condensed in the singular object of the textual form (Welchman, 1997, p.343).

Kruger and Holzer each oriented the reader towards an idea through encountering text as a semiotic image. Where Kruger acquired her material through her work on magazine photo desks, Holzer was presented an extensive reading list of theory, philosophy, and literature on her graduate Independent Study Programme at the Whitney Museum of American Art. These texts became the source material for her written aphorisms within which she condensed canonical works by the likes of Mao and Lenin to single lines, which were offset printed on paper and fly-posted around Manhattan's Lower East side (fig. 3.6). By 1979, she had written around 100 *Truisms*. The only subject 'off limits' to Holzer in *Truisms*, as observed in an article by Jeanne Siegel, was art (Siegal, 1985). This presented a diametric opposition to the textual, conceptual art of Kosuth, a few years prior. For Kosuth the investigation of art was art itself (Harrison and Wood, 2003, p.857). For Holzer, as she explained to Siegal, *Truisms* enabled her to: 'make observations on almost any topic' (Siegal, 1985). Kruger's strategy to this end, as argued, was based in a deconstruction of the image early on, and placed within gallery contexts to critique and subvert from within the art institution. Holzer's strategy exclusively employed text, without any image. Placing these early works in public space, outside of the gallery space, as fly-posted posters in Lower Manhattan, Holzer sought to catch a passerby off-guard and disrupt them with an unexpected encounter. Holzer stated she intended to 'make more explicit statements and to establish more direct contact with a larger audience than would visit galleries' (Tate, 1986). With her hundred-plus *Truisms*,

Holzer would paste up a different poster each week in different neighborhoods of New York City. She would print each week's poster on different colours of paper, so that viewers recognised them as new, and recognised 'that the posters were part of a series' (Tate, 1986). In order that the posters retained a visual similarity to one another each one was a hundred words long, set in twenty lines. As Holzer's career became more established, she was invited to exhibit the artworks within galleries. Very early on in her career, Holzer received curatorial attention for *Truisms* when it was still a relatively new artwork. For example, *Truisms* was included in the exhibition *Artwords and Bookworks: An International Exhibition of Recent Artists' Books and Ephemera*, held at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in February – March of 1978, curated by Judith A. Hoffberg. Holzer also received solo exhibitions at private and public institutions early on, with a retrospective exhibition at Barbara Gladstone Gallery in 1983, and at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York slightly later in 1989. In their gallery installation in the early period, she would attempt to retain the work's aesthetic as a street poster, and thus, as a confrontation of text to the spectator. As Holzer stated in 1986: she likes '[the posters] to be pasted directly on the wall, from floor to ceiling with their edges overlapping slightly so that no wall shows through' and the artworks completely cover the walls in lines of text (Tate, 1986). By the mid-1980s the form of the artworks evolved from the posters to other appropriated, recognisable forms of signage: such as programmed LED electronic displays like those which might be seen at an airport kiosk. When organising a joint exhibition of Kruger and Holzer in 1986 in Jerusalem at the Israel Museum, curator Suzanne Landau wrote: 'In putting Holzer and Kruger works together, we can experience simultaneously a new development in reading, a different kind of attitude toward the spectator' (Landau, 1986). That attitude was to engage the spectator,

or audience, rather than treat them with aloofness or antipathy. Kruger and Holzer each wanted their audience to engage with their texts instantly and with immediacy.

The development of text in Victor Burgin's practice offers a bridge between the linguistic conceptualism of artists such as Art & Language and the use of language to question the 'structure of representation' (Burgin, 1986, pp.16-17), more often seen in the feminist works of Kruger or Holzer. In the late 1960s, Burgin produced two works which were purely textual (in that they did not incorporate photographs as his later work did). *This Position* (1969) presented eleven sections of text typed on a strip of paper and pasted to the gallery wall, to be read sequentially by the gallery viewer. *Room* (1970) similarly was made of eighteen sentences typed on paper in a sequence and pasted along the walls of the gallery at regularly spaced intervals. Wilson suggests that the 'large gaps between sheets distribute the spectator's attention around the room itself, contrary to the traditional rectangular painting that channels visual attention' (Wilson, 2016, p.93). In *Lei-Feng* (1973-4), a series of nine photographs juxtaposed with text, Burgin explicitly demonstrated the indexical relationship of the linguistic sign to the visual signifier. In one work of the series, a black and white photograph of a group of middle or upper-class twenty-somethings lounge in an interior setting with glasses of wine, and strewn copies of *Vogue* magazine, as they laugh in a relaxed manner at a joke. Underneath the photograph, Burgin presents the caption: 'The young soldier Lei-Feng asks his instructor if he may be assigned to a combat mission. When refused, he cannot hide his impatience.' In 1963, Lei-Feng was immortalised in the national propaganda campaign of the Communist Party of China under Mao Zedong, as a dead soldier and model of selfless devotion to Mao. The juxtaposition between Burgin's appropriated quote and image from the two sources is clear, but Burgin further clarifies the definition of

the indexical sign in a caption to the right of the image, which is exaggerated to the point of detriment (fig. 3.7). To Liz Kotz, Burgin (as well as Douglas Huebler) each produce the most 'systematic and sustained bodies of work that juxtapose texts and photographic images' in 1960s conceptual practice (Kotz, 2007, p.218). Within Huebler's and Burgin's respective bodies of work, Kotz argues, one can trace a 'crucial shift from a perceptual and phenomenological analysis (emerging out of minimal sculpture) to an overtly semiotic analysis (engaging with the forms of media culture') (Kotz, 2007, p.218). The semiotic model emerged in writing in the mid-1960s such as Roland Barthes' essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (Barthes, 1977, pp.32-51). By the time Burgin made *Possession* (1976) (fig. 3.8), his texts were more brief and his juxtapositions more powerful in their impact. Though the work is now often encountered in reproduction as a single image in books and catalogues, the work was originally printed as 500 copies of a poster which were fly-posted throughout Edinburgh, where it was commissioned by the Fruitmarket Gallery. The text: 'What does possession mean to you? / 7% of our population own 84% of our wealth / The Economist 15 January 1966' is broken by a stock image of a white couple embracing which juxtaposes the text. With this work, Burgin presented text in unexpected locations outside of the gallery. Burgin also suggested that the site of the work is 'in the viewer's thought processes' for he wanted to use the language of advertising to encourage viewers not to simply consume images and artworks, but to produce them and 'generate their own meanings' (Wilson, 2016, p.101). Yet Burgin was included in important group exhibitions on language and conceptualism in the UK, such as *Languages* (1979), where Kruger and Holzer did not enjoy similar inclusion in the US.



## Text as Social Material

Glenn Ligon acknowledges the importance of Holzer and Kruger in the mid-1980s in New York (Ligon, 2015). In Ligon's work, the language is always quotation and in his paintings, it is always stenciled. One of Ligon's earliest paintings incorporating text is a near exact copy appropriating a well-known sign from the Civil Rights movement. *I Am a Man* (1988), appropriates the civil rights declaration made famous by its use in the Memphis Sanitation Workers' strike (fig. 3.9). The strike was instigated when two black sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were accidentally crushed to death in the mechanical machinery of a garbage truck on 1 February 1968.<sup>1</sup> Ligon appropriates the words 'I am a Man' as source material from the posters of the striking workers used in 1968, a text of importance politically and culturally in America, as a slogan of the civil rights era. Ligon adopts the hand-lettered typeface from the original protest posters and paints the text in black on white in a mixture of oil and enamel paint on canvas. In the original posters, the text was rendered in red on white, but Ligon's palette often adheres to the monochrome, and in this work, Ligon's treatment of the text corresponds with all the photographic documentation of the strike, where the posters are seen in black and white (though they were originally lettered in red). In contrast most of Ligon's texts in his paintings are stenciled, which offers Ligon a way of painting letters in a 'semi-mechanical' yet still maintaining a 'painterly' quality to the letters (Vogel, 2011). But in *I Am a Man*, the texts are hand-painted copies of the straight strokes of

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<sup>1</sup> City rules for sanitation workers forbade black employees to seek shelter from rain anywhere but in the back of their compressor trucks, with the garbage. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous 'I've Been to the Mountaintop' speech there before the 1,300 workers gathered at the Mason Temple in Memphis. The following day, he was assassinated.

the original poster's lettering. In the process of copying the text, Ligon traces a historical event by tracing the path of the letters which now stand for it.<sup>2</sup>

Where handwriting implies a presumed authenticity of the artist, stenciling imposes distance between artist-audience-text (Van Dijck, Ketelaar, and Neef, 2006, p.11). To Ligon, text provides the artist and the audience with a shared voice. The words 'I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background' repeat for over twenty lines in an early painting in black oil paint on a white door (*Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)* (1990)). Painted by hand in a capital letter stencil, the text becomes increasingly distorted as it descends the door (fig. 3.10). The line is taken from a widely anthologised essay by the Harlem Renaissance writer and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston: 'How it feels to be colored me' (Hurston, 1928). The texts in the work are intentionally difficult to read in their form, because the ideas within them are difficult. The physical manifestation of the text is a reflection of the ideas in the text. Written in 1928,

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<sup>2</sup> Ligon returned to *I Am a Man* in 2000 with *Condition Report*, questioning how the statement's meaning shifts over time. The work is a silk screen print of his 1988 *I Am a Man* juxtaposed in a diptych with a facsimile of the same image upon which the artist, like a museum conservator, has written flaws, cracks, and marks made to the work in the twelve years since its making, highlighting further the idea of history as a process carried in signs. After making the work, Ligon commissioned a friend who was an art conservator to prepare a condition report on the work. This second work, featuring the same text, 'I Am a Man' also shows the notes of the conservator on top of Ligon's text: highlighting each crack and fleck that has emerged in the surface over 12 years. The cracks that have developed in the paint's surface as the oil and enamel mixture dries is a metaphor for the cracks in history between the picket signs, held by black workers in the Civil Rights movement, and Ligon, taking on the voice of the phrase and working in New York two decades later.

Hurston writes of her self-discovery of both her race and her pride, as she describes leaving her neighborhood and facing the realisation, for the first time, of her race through a sudden awareness of difference (Hurston, 1928). The short essay only covered two pages when it was originally published, and Ligon extracts a brief single line from it: 'I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background'. The line Ligon selects is one of several in which Hurston emphasises how she *feels*: 'I feel my race', she goes on to write. 'I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry...I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall' (Hurston, 1928). In Ligon's stencil typeface, the words are rendered in black with a fuzzy edge, like a photocopy made repeatedly which loses sharpness over time. Ligon draws lines with pencil over the white gesso covering the door, but the character spacing lacks kerning, instead done by hand as he writes and paints the letters, guessing and judging line breaks as he goes. One can see line breaks and gaps where Ligon ends a word too soon, or where Ligon mistakenly repeats letters on the next line (Rothkopf, 2011). Through the stencil, the words become increasingly illegible. The visual representation of the text thus embodies the confusion between the perception of one's self, and one's perceived perception by the outside world (Rothkopf, 2011). Painted on an abandoned door, the scale of the painting mirrors that of a human figure. In this early painting, Ligon uses the first-person pronoun 'I'. Ligon says he became 'fascinated by sentences with the word I in them' (Rothkopf, 2011). Who was the 'I'? Here it is borrowed, quoted, not Ligon himself. Ligon sidesteps the body, suggesting it instead in the dimensions of the door, without placing the body directly in the work. Robert Morris' *I-Box* (1962) similarly presents the human figure on a scale that equates the body with the word 'I'. The box features a door in the shape of the letter 'I', opening to reveal a black and white photograph of Morris standing naked, facing the camera and filling the frame of the 'I' (fig. 3.11). In Morris' early work, one can see the artist,

positioning himself within the text, and within the artwork. Thus, the audience reads Morris' 'I' to stand for himself. Ligon, in contrast, removes himself from the work and uses the text to introduce a shared identity between the artist and audience. Irrespective of race, gender, nationality, the audience encountering Hurston's language through Ligon's textual painting takes on the 'I'.

Ligon's use of 'I', can be seen to respond to Kruger's earlier work and the changes that resulted in the appropriation of language into art after conceptualism. Across a decade, since Kruger's use of shifters, which make use of the pronouns 'we' or 'you' to suggest an anonymous collective identity, to Ligon's 1990 untitled work which brings in the 'I', one can trace a trajectory of the pronoun, from the feminist introduction of 'Me' into the visual field of text art, to the assertion of a presence of 'I,' troubling the possibilities for the speaker and audience. Compare Ligon's work with paintings by Christopher Wool, whose texts are comparatively benign. In contrast, Wool lacks the urgency of those who do not have a stake in the power of the system. Other artists have also responded to Ligon's texts, adopting his appropriated source texts and further exploring them through manipulating and adjusting the visual, material representation of the text and the language construction. Hank Willis Thomas, painted an homage to Ligon's work, with a 2008 series *I Am a Man*. Willis Thomas' appropriates Ligon's text and adapts it further still, altering not only its visual representation, but the text itself. Willis Thomas splices, cuts, and rearranges the sign's original text to build new meanings. Presented as a series of framed paintings, grouped together in two lines on the wall the audience reads texts such as: Be a Man, A Man I Am, I Am. Amen, I am the Man, Who's the Man (fig. 3.12). The phrases depart from the initial civil rights declaration and Ligon's direct appropriation of it. By changing the text, Willis Thomas asserts a role of

authorship. But the consistent materiality of the text ties it to Ligon, and the Civil Rights sign before. Yet, typographically, Willis Thomas, like Ligon, adheres to the style of hand lettering in the original strike posters used in Memphis in 1968, though he follows Ligon's monochromatic colorway, and not the red and white of the picket signs, thus making his work an interpretation of Ligon's artwork more directly than of the original source material.

Another re-interpretation of the appropriated sign is seen in artist Sharon Hayes' series of nine actions in New York City in 2005: *In the Near Future*. In the actions, the artist held placards proclaiming appropriated protest statements, including the phrase 'I Am a Man' (fig. 3.13). Describing the project as 'a set of anachronistic and speculative actions in an ongoing investigation into the figure of the protester', Catherine Grant writes that the photographs documenting the project show 'the melancholy and absurdity of a one-woman protest in the middle of busy streets' (Grant, 2011, p.269). Grant emphasizes the attachment and desire of Hayes to her source material: collective action and historical modes of protest, rather than a strategy of appropriation that builds a distance and irony between the artist and the mantra, between Hayes, a white, homosexual woman in New York post-millennium, second wave feminism, and the black male striking workers in Memphis in 1968. In the photographic documentation of Hayes' action, the artist stands holding the picket sign in New York City, confronted with two male police officers. The police officers' backs are to the camera as they gaze together at Hayes and her sign, similar to how the spectator views the reverse of Ligon's sign in *Ruckenfigur*. The audience reads the sign as if standing behind the officers. The artist is mouth open, in mid-sentence. In Hayes' interpretation, the intertextual relations between the sign, its meaning, and its form, take on yet another set of contingencies. Hayes challenges the rights assumed by men through the appropriation of a language that is not her own.

Hayes writes in black and white, referring to Ligon, to the art appropriation of the sign. She increases the gap to Memphis further still. Hayes sign is printed digitally, not painted by hand, suggesting a distance from the text in her treatment of it. In all of these works, from the Memphis original to Hayes' action, the word 'Am' is underlined. Such emphasis highlights the presence of the speaker – I am – and questions how language defines us, as we define it.

In 1974, a collective of self-described 'socialist feminists' formed in East London, made up of cartoonists, publishers, photographers, illustrators, and writers (Gibbs and Dhillon, 2016). Named by founder member, photographer Jo Spence, as The Hackney Flashers, the name was to invoke the photographic process as well as the arresting quality of the work, which located itself in political education and agit-prop. In 1975, the Hackney Flashers (all work is authored by the collective), developed their first significant body of work, *Women and Work*. (They were unaware of Kelly, Harrison, and Iverson's similarly named work at the South London Art Gallery that same year (Gibbs and Dhillon, 2016)). *Women and Work* was an exhibition of black and white photographs and text which explored women's labour, specific to the campaign for equal pay. In making the work, the Hackney Flashers realised that behind the women whose labour they sought to make visible was a supporting labour force, even less visible, of women carers, such as those working in nurseries and childminding. This led to the collective's second major project, *Who's Holding the Baby* (1978). Their second exhibition developed in sophistication as their political ideas were explored in the work, but also in their formal treatment of the subject. The focus of the work was not to make visible the women's labour force of carers supporting the main labour force, but to expose and explore the lack of availability of nursery places. Posed with the question, 'how do you make visible an invisible problem? How do you present a lack?', the Hackney Flashers were forced to develop a new

visual language. This led them to use collage, montage, and to combine graffiti with photography. One image within the exhibition exemplifies this: in which a photograph of an exterior brick wall of a building in Hackney has montaged onto it a domestic interior, which could be happening within the building, or any like it. A woman leans over a bucket, washing, while two young children sit at the kitchen table eating. Wet laundry hangs above their heads. The photograph is layered onto the brick wall by hand, with its edges cut to match a jagged line of brick. Above the montage of the interior is a line of text: 'Who's still holding the baby?', in a black, bold, sans serif typeface. Towards the centre and bottom of the main image, is further commentary, voicing for the children who cannot speak (literally, babies too young to speak, and politically, without voice). A graffiti image of a baby in a pram has a speech bubble coming from it, demanding: 'where's my free nursery?'. At the bottom of the brick wall is a graffiti call to arms, directly addressing the audience: 'Stand up for your rights' it reads (fig. 3.14). The Hackney Flashers do not consider themselves artists, but rather political educators or social activists. Yet their work considered its format so it could easily travel and be installed in gallery and non-gallery spaces alike. *Who's Holding the Baby?* was presented on twenty-nine panels, made of lightweight, durable material that was robust and easy to hang. It was first shown at the Centreprise Community Centre on Kingsland Road in East London, in 1978. Fundamental to their project was a desire to communicate with wide-reaching audiences, and to effect change.

## Conclusion

In the Upper Galleries of Kruger's exhibition at Modern Art Oxford in 2014, a full-room wrap of text includes for the first time happy-face emoticons, or smileys. The spatial expansion of text messages into the installation demand to be read as texts, but present something else,

placing the reader in the work, expand the frame of the screen to the scale of the gallery. *The Guardian* and *The Observer* art reviewer Laura Cumming criticised the exhibition for rehashing the same old tropes to no new effect (Cumming, 2014). Condescendingly, Cumming asks: 'Why bother to examine what you feel, ... when you can just use a dumb old smiley?' Cumming's summary misses the point entirely on the radical condensing of language into image form in the digital age. Like Cumming, *The Independent* art reviewer Zoe Pilger, finds Kruger's work dated. Arguably, Kruger largely uses the same tropes she did thirty years ago, however, the context has radically changed. Many of us now speak like a Kruger paste-up. Many of us post messages, constantly, to loved ones, friends, colleagues and to the digital world at the same time, writing what is on our mind in 140 characters. If one focuses on the largely inconsequential changes to Kruger's recent works, then one would miss the major changes outside of the text, the changes to how we use language now. Kruger's work foreshadowed Twitter by thirty years. Kruger herself sums up the contemporary circumstance: 'Language still exists, but the economies have changed' (Kruger and Blazwick, 2014).

The artists explored in this chapter each use language from a position of marginalisation, periphery, or oppression. Within their texts' language and their texts' materiality, the artists attempt to make the audience feel the experience of otherness in language, through language. As one reads it, the work produces you as you produce it. As the artists consciously distanced themselves from linguistic conceptualism, they embraced materiality, in a move towards a critique of representation. This had the result of producing a new subjective locus in the site of the audience. The image becomes contained in the text, and thus connotative and semiotic. The materiality of the language further engenders the spectator in the work.



That is, the materiality enables an experience of reading that furthers the possibility for the spectator to experience the subjectivity of the oppressed in a way that they cannot if they read the work as a text isolated from its semiotic image of language.

## 4: Beyond Language: Time, the Body, and Pleasure in the Materiality of Contemporary Text Art

### Introduction

In a London gallery in 2011, the white interior walls were filled with irregular horizontal lines of handwritten text in black ink describing artist Fiona Banner's account of looking at the singular historical document of the Battle of Hastings, *The Bayeux Tapestry*. In Los Angeles that same year, an eight-foot-tall plywood ampersand was lit by solar-powered lights which flickered on and off in a spare lot in Culver City, California. At the South London Gallery in 2013, a tunnel of tightly stretched, coloured yarn was created as it was stretched and hung from the facing gallery walls of the main exhibition hall, creating a crisscrossing cascade of reds, purples and blacks, and revealing letters spelled by the shape it weaved as one walked through it. These three artworks—*1066* (2011) by Fiona Banner, *The Electric Comma* (2011) by Shannon Ebner, and *Too Much Night, Again* (2013) by Pae White—present their audiences with text art that demands a physical encounter. They demonstrate a new attention to materiality in the use of language by artists today. To each of the artists Banner, Ebner, and White, text becomes exaggerated in its material form, occupying space and requiring a spatial encounter. Realised in human-scale and larger, presented as objects and installations to be walked around, seen from behind and navigated spatially, the written word in these works presents reading and seeing as something to be encountered with the body.

More than forty years after the emergence of conceptual art, the word has become commonplace in contemporary art practice. The linguistic conceptualism of the 1960s was driven by an opposition to the visual. Johanna Drucker summarises the problem of this earlier period thus: '[Joseph] Kosuth's "Art After Philosophy" might be read as the death knell for

modernist investigation of self-conscious formalism. If material doesn't matter, then formal means are irrelevant and fine art is, in essence, reduced to its inventory of ideas' (Drucker, 2005, p.77). But even a fleeting glance at the field shows material considerations across fine art practice are active and vibrant. Artists now explore text's materiality, with no sense of being beholden to the dematerialisation argument of the 1960s and early 1970s. Art historian Tom McDonough observes the proliferation of text as material in contemporary art in his 2012 Hilla Rebay Memorial Lecture at the Guggenheim, New York: 'The Artist as Typographer'. Within this lecture, McDonough does not question the legacies that have informed this attention to materiality (though he hints at concrete poetry as the genealogy for what he calls the 'artist-typographers' (McDonough, 2012)), instead surveying the evidence of materiality in the typographic experimentations of contemporary artists including Shannon Ebner, Adam Pendleton, and Dexter Sinister. I argue that such contemporary practices as these have not emerged directly from 1960s linguistic conceptualism, nor from concrete poetry of the 1950s and 1960s as some recent curatorial propositions have suggested.<sup>1</sup> There has, rather, been an overlapping history of text emerging as material in both of these movements. But such contemporary art practices also develop in part from feminist critiques of conceptualism, in the movement's second generation. Drucker writes: 'The advent of conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s signals the realization that the only valid reinvention of artistic practice had to be grounded in idea rather than in production' (Drucker, 2005, p.82). Drucker is correct in attending to the way in which the works have been historicised, rather than a lack of material considerations of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, the ICA, London, 2009; *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2012; or *Marking Language*, The Drawing Room, London, 2014.

production and aesthetics in the original period. Group exhibitions of text in contemporary art have, however, overlooked the importance of text, writing and written language in favour of feminist-informed second generation conceptualism. This is a period in which materiality was embraced for its potential to communicate with the art audience. In this chapter, I explore how artists who operated from a position of difference – whether feminist, black, gay, or lesbian – engaged language in the late 1970s through the 1980s, and how their practices have influenced this new materiality seen in text art today, either implicitly or explicitly.

Drucker locates the return to the material in 1990s practices, arguing that: ‘The combination of “idea” and material in a synthetically imaginative mode of art making has revitalized conceptualism while extending its reach’ (Drucker, 2005, p.78). She does not turn to text to make this argument, but instead to materially-rich works in installation, photography, and sculpture, such as Nancy Davidson’s *Buttress* (1997) (fig. 4.1). Davidson’s work consists of a totem-like sculpture of five round, bright pink latex objects which suggest the shape of female buttocks, dressed with tight silver fabric that resembles underwear. Clearly signifying a gendered code in their material, Drucker suggests that Davidson’s ‘use of material objects and iconography calls attention to their situatedness within contemporary mass culture’ (Drucker, 2005, 162). In the repetition of forms, Drucker likens the work to minimalist sculpture, whilst also seeing that it ‘affirm[s] precisely the potential of “art” to participate in material contemporary culture while embodying an individual inflection’ (Drucker, 2005, p.162). Drucker contends that such a ‘reconceptualization’ shifts the ground to such a degree that the critical terms on which contemporary fine art is historicised need to be re-thought (Drucker, 2005, p.78).

Drucker traces how it was feminist practices of the 1980s that reintroduced the material – what she refers to as the ‘formal voluptuousness’ – come to be recognised across art practice and mediums (Drucker, 2005, p.77). Without specificity to any one medium, but speaking of fine art practice more broadly, Drucker argues that it was the feminist artists whose ‘movements reawakened interest in self-representation in symbolic, visual terms. Artists operating from a position of otherness or difference – feminist artists, black artists, gay artists – ‘had a compelling motivation for the exploration of visual practices grounded in legible representation’ – a term also used by Griselda Pollock in conversation with Mary Kelly in 1991 – ‘in modes that communicated a broad-based community interest rather than a modern aesthetics of autonomy’ (Drucker, 2005, p.77). Feminist artists sought a turn to the material in order to address concerns more broadly than those within art circles. Materiality offered a point of access for the audiences which was crucial to those engagements. Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Adrian Piper, and Glenn Ligon have challenged the presumed naturalness of language. Materiality could be legible; it could communicate and represent ideas in ways that linguistic conceptualism in pursuit of formlessness could not. They used language to look outward to critique the world, at the same time critiquing conceptual art from within. The artists explored in this chapter are female, though not articulated specifically as feminist in the way the previous generation was.

The works in this chapter are not ignored in contemporary curatorial approaches; for the most part, they are included within the scholarship on text art. Ebner for example, exhibited within *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2012 (which I return to later in the chapter), and Banner’s language works have been shown

widely and internationally. She was included, for example, in the Arts Council Collection touring exhibition, *Words* in 2002, which presented a broad survey of text artworks held within the collection. However, the impact of the feminist genealogy on the materiality of text in contemporary art which marks their work is left out of curatorial scholarship owing to the lack of attention and inclusion of feminist, conceptual art using text from the 1970s and 1980s in contemporary group exhibitions on text art. Addressing that impact is something I seek to correct within this chapter. Banner, Ebner, and White all embrace language with criticality. But they are already insiders of the contemporary art dialogue and so are not required to critique the use of language in art obliquely from a position of marginality. I have shown how the use of text in practices such as Kruger's was to effect change, to 'reach out and touch someone' (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). The artists here present an experience with words, which engages the audience as active participants in an experience based in language.

How does the physical form of written language speak to the body of the viewer? In this chapter I explore language that is gestural, expanded, compressed, and encountered with the body—specifically in artworks whose subjects may otherwise be beyond words (subjects such as war, pornography, insomnia) and the very impossibility of language to fully convey that which we see, experience, or feel. In these works, I explore how the audience experience extends from reading or seeing to something more experiential: a mode of feeling, where the audience encounters the text not just with the eyes, but with the body. I will make a detailed analysis of Fiona Banner's works – her (as she refers to them) 'wordscapes', and her 'performance nudes' are afforded the most attention and space in this chapter for they have developed from a practice invested in language since the 1990s, and one which, I argue, is distinct from her peers precisely for its feminist influences. Shannon Ebner's photographic

series of words abstracted from their linguistic context and placed concretely within landscape and public space acquire new meaning; and Pae White's gallery-based installations shift in readability, and thus, meaning and context, in relation to the viewer's orientation. McDonough suggests that 'artist typographers' practice a 'wild semiotics' in flipping classical semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure and exploring the lack of arbitrariness in the materiality of language (McDonough, 2012). Where transparency of the linguistic sign is purposefully replaced with an opaque materiality, they challenge their audience to see 'the other side of the sign' (McDonough, 2012). Free from the bounds of conceptualism, and from the direct responses to it in the 1970s and 80s, these works, explore the materiality of language itself. The sign becomes physical form, and language an object: a form to be manipulated which enables a new sense of pleasure not seen in language-centred conceptual art, or the feminist art of the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Textual Materiality and Experience**

One interpretation of Banner's language-based artworks is that they follow Wittgenstein in the use of language in conceptual art predecessors, investigating the tautological impossibility of ever fully describing in words that which one experiences when one has a viewing experience. Since the early 1990s, Fiona Banner's use of written language in her art practice has crossed mediums of drawing, sculpture, neon, publishing, and installation. Across the varied use of text in her work, Banner explores the relationship of the self in increasingly objectifying acts of violence: from the gaze of watching cinema, to the portrayal of war for the cinematic screen, to the objectification of the body in pornographic film. Within these explorations, Banner's approach to language offers a form by which the gaps between representation and reality, and the process of looking and reading, are slowed

down as they become a physical experience with the body. Banner's work suggests: what if text is not being used to describe the fact to which it corresponds, but rather to convey the experience contained within language, or the impossibility of such experience?

Banner refers to her texts of films as 'wordscapes' (Button, 1998). She has however, also referred to the works as 'wall drawings' or 'still films', terms which suggest a tension between landscape and language; image and language; and film and language (Fionabanner.com, 2016). The texts are lengthy, usually handwritten, transcripts—on sheets of paper or directly on the gallery wall—that record Banner's experience and reflection of looking at a visual source, usually a film, and transcribe her observations with attempted objectivity. Banner's filmic source material, which ranges from Hollywood movies, to Vietnam war movies, to pornographic films, translates a visual, two-dimensional moving image to the relatively static form of text, yet retains a quality of movement and a bodily presence in the artwork. Banner came to language as an art medium early in her career, while she was still completing her MA studies at Goldsmiths College, London between 1992 and 1993.

Following her MA studies, Banner showed work twice at the artist-run space City Racing in Southeast London. Run by John Burgess, Pete Owen, Keith Coventry, Paul Noble, and Matt Hale, City Racing was based in a disused betting shop beneath the organising-artists' squatted flats and studios in a mansion block behind the Oval cricket ground. In 1993–4, Banner showed several early wordscapes in pencil and ink on paper installations. These were early film-based transcriptions of her experience of watching *The Desert*, *Bullitt*, *Go Faster*, and the *French Connection*. Banner's City Racing show was her first solo exhibition anywhere, and one can witness the difference in her approach to text to the approaches to other art practices at the time. For example, Jeremy Deller and Colin Lowe also showed at City Racing



in the same period, Deller having a solo exhibition in 1992 and Lowe featuring in several group and solo exhibitions in the early 1990s. Their approaches to text were either as statement, information, or commentary—all of which were symptomatic of a direct but unsophisticated correlation to the use of language in 1960s' conceptual art, with a tongue-in-cheek humour replacing the 1960s' sense of political or artistic urgency. Deller made a light projection of the words 'Charlie Chaplin Walked These Streets' onto the pavement outside the gallery (Chaplin had lived in Kennington as a child and young adult). Colin Lowe and Roddy Thomson presented an eight-page mock exam on art comprehension, *The Self Examination Board*, which they handed out at the opening of the *Imprint 93* exhibition, curated by Stewart Home. Typeset on A4 paper, Lowe and Thomson's document resembled in its form a secondary school examination, containing multiple choice and fill-in-the blank questions, such as: '14. Name the most original, acerbic, witty and thought-provoking and twisted, pock-marked English critic? (sic)' (Hale et al., 2002, p.78-79). Lowe's and Deller's use of language demonstrates art as emerged directly from language in conceptual art. Lacking the hard linguistics and philosophical rigour of Art & Language or Lawrence Weiner, but borrowing the brevity and economy of language that we came to know in such works, has produced one-liners and glib use of text in contemporary art. Banner is neither of these.

Text as a sole material of an artwork was present throughout the fine art practices of the 1990s. Many of these works feel safe and unprovocative in their relationship of the textual form to its message. Consider Mark Titchner's heavy metal typeface works, making proclamations such as 'An Image of Truth' or 'I want a better world. I want a better me', which appeared in public site-specific installations and gallery-settings alike, or Martin Creed's 'word-based sculpture' such as *Work No.203: EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT*

(1999) (fig. 4.2). These continue a detached use of linguistics, wherein the material relationship to the text is tenuous, and where the presumptions made of language fail to address its inherent flaws, biases, and lack of neutrality. An artist places a found text in a found typeface which seems to contradict the text's content. It befits what Mira Schor calls recipe art:

Embodied in the high-concept, one- or two-sentence description, the recipe ingredients usually include something from the real cleverly juxtaposed with something else from the real, or something made with a material from the real not ordinarily an art material; something that references the real; something made from something else (e.g., a minimalist sculpture made of chocolate, a similarly monumental cube made of millions of wooden toothpicks, Richard Serra—leaning-plates made of red lipstick, etc.). Recipe: something from popular culture + something from art history + something appropriated + something weird or expressive = useful promotional sound bite (Schor, 2010, pp.230-231).

She continues that such work favours being reviewed: 'The work is selected for review because it can be written about efficiently. It is not necessary to see the piece' (Schor, 2010, pp.230-231). Though Schor is referring to physical materials – lipstick, toothpicks, chocolate, for example – the same criticism can be applied to text (as material) combined with text (as message). Reviewing Liam Gillick's installation *The Wood Way*, O'Hagan refers to Gillick as a 'conceptual prankster' who makes a 'mischievous extension' of the gallery space (O'Hagan, 2002). To make such a joke, one needs to be in on the joke. Johanna Drucker sees removing materials from their context as a glib marker of postmodernism. A decade and a half prior to Schor's writing, Drucker, reviewed Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux*, writing: 'The appropriation of postmodernism has the glib effect of leveling the specificity of materials, texts, artifacts, by removing them from any context' (Drucker, 1986, p.20). She continues 'Postmodernism is based on a kind of essentialism, which assumes the object is what it is, in itself, by itself, containing in its actuality the full force of an identity which may suggest a history we all adhere to as a fictional construct anyway' (Drucker, 1986, p.21). Banner

presents an alternative. Left out of the joke, pushed to the margins, Banner is one of several artists who critically address text, and who do so through calling attention to its materiality. After conceptualism, there are artists who continue to presume language is neutral, and those who question that presumption.

Kate Love writes on the role of communication in translating lived experience. Upon her first reading of Agamben's *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, Love understood Agamben to suggest that 'contemporary men and women have lost their ability to *have* or to *speak about* their experience', thus substantiating a clichéd, postmodern, post-structuralist subjectivity (Love, 2005, p.158). None of the mundane events Agamben lists – standing in lifts, sitting in traffic – will amount to experience for Agamben, for 'experience...has its necessary correlation...in authority' (Agamben, 1978, p.16). He writes: 'No one seems to wield sufficient authority to guarantee the truth of an experience, 'unawares of their own 'power of words and narration' (Agamben, 1978, p.16). Love, however, reflects that 'the reader is led staccato-like' through Agamben's list, which in itself is to 'equate the numbness of one event with the horror of another', for in the list of mundane daily chores, Agamben also throws in tear gas, and gun shots, surely not your daily occurrences to most (Love, 2005, p.16). One can see a comparable staccato to Banner's wordscapes, wherein the droning description of on-screen filler is punctuated by the episodic action. Love makes a departure from Agamben, surmising that authority is irrelevant as is the level of mundanity of any experience, for 'you don't have an experience *then* put it in to language but experience is always already *in* language' (Love, 2005, p.164). This suggests the failure within *écriture féminine*, (discussed in the previous chapter as a kind of women's writing, pioneered by Luce Irigaray) but it suggests a potential within materiality. For if every

experience is gendered, then language too is inherently gendered, and thus it is impossible to escape the cycle, whether inside language or outside of it. It is here that Love turns to the performative. If, in the understanding of the performative use of language put forward by J.L. Austin, words do not say, but instead words *do*, this enables a way in to the otherwise limited relationship of text interpreting art (Austin, 1962). What I suggest is to consider moving beyond Love's use of the performative to address the theory/practice binary and texts that interpret art, to the performative in the encounter of text artworks. That is, how the materiality of the text in these language-based works *does* something to the audience, rather than *says* something to them.

Banner's wordscapes reassert the context of the appropriated subject matter through the materiality of text. The text the audience encounters is already mediated, as a filmic source, translated into the artist's text. Banner's wordscapes translate existing forms, usually visual texts such as films or live models, into linguistic texts of thousands of words written in hundreds of lines, so dense they are not intended to be read in a linear fashion, but rather immersed in. Love distinguishes from 'actual experience' and experience which 'transcend[s] any linguistic/structural/historical determination' (Love, 2005, p.161). The wordscapes operate somewhere between the two models of experience Love describes, as real experience and as discursive interpretation. The artist views a moving image-based subject, and transcribes her account of its visualisation into words, which she scrawls on large sheets of paper or directly onto gallery walls. Sometimes, Banner's wordscapes are framed and placed on the floor against the wall; other times, they are hung directly on the wall without a frame; and others still, as installations wherein words are written directly onto the interior walls of a museum or gallery. From the same period as her works in *City Racing*, her earliest

wordscape was a 1994 piece made from the source material of the blockbuster action film *Top Gun* (1986, dir. Tony Scott). The wordscapes offer several key avenues for exploring how the use of text began to change in contemporary visual practice. As works of translation, Banner takes a cultural source (a 'text') that exists first as a visual, moving image, and shifts the same content or plot into a subjective account in the relatively static form of a sheet of words. Within the text are Banner's inflections on what she has watched, but an audience will also bring their inflections to Banner's words. Mieke Bal writes of the passerby of a piece of 'graffito', who is invoked in the text which reads: 'Note/ I hold you dear/I have not/ Thought you up' (Bal, 1999, p.2). Bal writes: 'the identity of the "you" has by now come loose from the implied term of endearment that personalized him or her. So, the passerby looks again, tripping over this word that says "You!" as if in an Althusserian interpellation' (Bal, 1999, p.2). Banner's wall texts are distinct from Holzer's fliers and posters of *Truisms*, which also acted like graffiti, and Kruger's works, which invoke the audience with the second person pronoun. As with Hollywood blockbuster movies such as *Top Gun*, the audience may likely have encountered the source first as movies. The audience may not even recognise the content as the same. The wordscapes also shift between several cognitive functions at once. As Banner watches the film, she writes what she sees, and the audience reads it. Agamben writes: 'Standing face to face with one of the great wonders of the world... the overwhelming majority of people have no wish to experience it, preferring instead that the camera should' (Agamben, 1978, p.17). The camera is a mediator between real experience and observed experience.

Following her focus on Hollywood cinema (a subject area she still intermittently explores with new wordscapes), Banner developed an extensive body of text artworks based on the genre

of Vietnam War movies. Banner watched well-known films, all authored by male directors on subjects of war, such as *Full Metal Jacket* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987), *The Deer Hunter* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1978), *Born on the Fourth of July* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1989), *Hamburger Hill* (dir. John Irvin, 1987), *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1987), and *Apocalypse Now* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), and then wrote her texts accounting her viewing of them. These texts were spliced together to culminate in a 1000-page, self-published monumental book, *The Nam* (fig. 4.3). The works also exist as wordscapes shown in galleries. The visual format is carefully considered in relation to the text: a panoramic, expansive film like *Lawrence of Arabia* (dir. David Lean, 1962) in *The Desert* (1994) is mirrored with a broad, panoramic sheet of paper, the dimensions of which recall the cinema screen, on which the words force the eye to sweep across (fig. 4.4). Banner published the texts under the title of *The Nam* (1997) herself through *The Vanity Press*—her own press. More so than earlier wordscapes, *The Nam* as a totality is even more ‘unreadable’ than previous works for its dense text and stream of consciousness prose (Banner, 1997). More than the Hollywood blockbuster, the Vietnam War genre suggests the excess of violence and historical events being mythologised and fictionalised through the American movie-making machine. At the same time, the anti-hero of the genre opens up the possibility for negative representations of war in mainstream cinema. By transcribing, translating, and condensing the moving image to text, Banner removes the highly stylised visual elements that glorify war, and presents an alternate version of the same cultural text to highlight the numbing of our critical perception of images in a visual culture. Instead, *The Nam* exists as a transcript that bears witness to the artist’s watching of the movies, which she writes in the present tense throughout. For example, *Apocalypse Now* begins ‘Trees, like palm trees in the distance, fill up the foreground’ (Banner, 1997). Banner handwrote her first wordscapes in pencil on large single sheets of paper. She

then framed them and placed them against walls, resting them on the floor, or occasionally mounting them on walls. Later, she began to hang the sheets unframed, allowing the materiality of the paper, its curled edges and corners being revealed to the viewer and showing the surface on which the text sits as part of the work. Subsequently, she developed some wordscapes off the page entirely, instead writing them as installations directly onto the gallery wall. Such installation foregrounds further the text as the primary material and support, removing even the paper which supports the text. Dense in words, they offer multiple points at which the audience can begin to encounter the artwork, too dense to be read as narrative from start to finish. Rather, the viewer's eyes grab ahold of a phrase and then dart to another.

Where Banner's relationship to conceptualism is ambiguous, Shannon Ebner takes a more direct response to conceptualism in her use of materials both textual, and sculptural. Ebner constructs alphabets. She mines materials that refer back to minimalism, such as cinderblocks. From these, Ebner photographs the materials in letterform shapes, and constructs alphabets. With readymade materials, Ebner builds letters to construct phrases, palindromes or short poems, as well as characters, such as asterisks and ampersands. Its materiality is temporary: erected, photographed, then taken down and typically encountered as an image in a gallery or site-specific setting.

Between 2002 and 2006, Ebner developed the series, *Dead Democracy Letters* (fig. 4.5). Trained as a photographer, these were the first works of Ebner's that, as McDonough states, 'foreground the materiality of text' (McDonough, 2012). *Dead Democracy Letters* are a series of black and white photographs of signs that Ebner constructs out of ephemeral materials,

including corrugated cardboard, house paint, wooden splits, and plywood. Ebner builds her signage in desolate but nondescript American settings. She then photographs, and dismantles them. The backgrounds are blustery California cliff tops, the La Brea tar pits in Los Angeles, barren dirt roadsides, and vacant urban lots. Vaguely familiar, and without any architecture or people, the landscapes provide backdrops for her temporary signage. Six feet tall and three feet wide, the letters of the temporary sculptures of *Dead Democracy Letters* are assembled by the artist to mimic the proportions and positioning of the famous Hollywood sign. Made at the time of the Iraq War and the invasion of Afghanistan, Ebner appropriated words that make up the artworks from the discourses of American propaganda and politics. These letters would then form the template for further letters used in the series. The artist would then prop the letters up with plywood stilts and erect them in their site-specific locations for photographing, battling wind to keep them upright (Ebner, 2013). In *U.S.A.* (2003), the letters that spell out 'Nausea' catch a glint of light on their surface, seemingly held in a moment before a gust topples one over. By photographing the texts, Ebner goes through a process of first expanding the texts to be larger than life, removed from their context and situated in the land as physical objects she builds with her hands then compressing them back into a two-dimensional plane, where their encounter is as an image. 'Democracy' and 'freedom', for example, were taken for their specific use in speeches by President George W. Bush (McDonough, 2012). Building temporary signage of these words—meaningless in the context in which Ebner sees President Bush use them—Ebner sought to isolate these words from their initial context and erect them as sculptures, writing the meaningless words from public speech back into the American land from which they came. The viewer's encounter takes place not in the site in which the photograph is taken, but in the gallery. These works demonstrate a shift away from image-based photography, which



had established Ebner's early practice, to photography in which the subject is a linguistic object. As the meaning of words is transformed from political contexts and rhetoric, Ebner transforms their materiality from physical structure to photographed image.

McDonough sees Ebner as one of the contemporary 'artist typographers' who instead of assuming the transparency of the linguistic signifier, as in orthodox semiotics, challenges the linguistic signifier through making evident its materiality (McDonough, 2012). Ebner's use of the physical differs from Banner's: the experience of writing is not for the audience. The audience encounters the work as a photograph to be read. It is for the artist to experience, and translate that into an image. Ebner explores the potentiality of language when materiality is forced back into its form. Where Banner translates a visual image to text to highlight our insensitivity, or de-sensitivity, to the visual imagery of violence, Ebner translates language to a visual image to explore our insensitivity to the power of language.

### **Duration and Time**

Materiality of language effects the audiences' experience of time with a work. As an installation or visual work, it is challenging, if not impossible, to read an entire wordscape from start to finish. Partly, this is owed to the appearance of the text of scrawling handwriting in dense lines; and partly, it is for the boredom it imparts on the audience. Banner's transcripts of watching the films are documents of a durational event. Thus, the audience dips in and out as one encounters one of her texts, at times reading and, at others, glancing at the mass of words. Elizabeth Freeman challenges Western modernity's representation of itself as time-based: forward marching in comparison to a slower pre-modernity (Freeman, 2011, p.58). Freeman argues that the 'neoliberalist project continues to

reconstruct time' as it depends on the 'idea of capital's movement as itself an inexorable progress' which will one day accommodate everyone, leaving no one 'behind' (Freeman, 2011, p.58). Within Banner's wordscapes, she appropriates the time-based medium of film, and renders it in a linear translation that in its material form becomes meaningless to time. Compare with Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), in which Gordon slows down Hitchcock's film to play it in its entirety over twenty-four hours. Like in Banner's wordscapes, no audience encounters the work in full from start to finish. And, like in Banner's wordscapes, Gordon appropriates a well-known Hollywood source material. But where Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* retains its defined start and end-point, running on the linear narrative of time-based film, Banner's re-orientates the appropriated medium to a non-linear experience for the audience.

In 2001, Banner made the wordscape *Arsewoman in Wonderland* (2001) (fig. 4.6), which used a pornographic film as its source material.<sup>2</sup> The movie features a cast of Alice in Wonderland characters in sexual scenarios. In the several thousand words of *Arsewoman* text, its typographic form constructs a durational process for the audience wherein the language is difficult – near impossible – to read from start to finish. As a result, the text is seen as a visual whole, but read in fragments. Fiona Bradley writes of Banner's wordscapes that: 'Time becomes an intrinsic part of the work – it is a record of the duration of a film, but also a diary of a portion of the artist's life' (Bradley, 2002, p.60). The duration of film, as a time-based medium, translates to Banner's texts. But, time itself is a subjective construct, which one can presume normal owing to our familiarity for the regular rhythms of the clock. Like the other

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<sup>2</sup> *Arsewoman in Wonderland*, the movie that seeds the artwork, was made by an American former porn actress who works under the pseudonym Tiffany Mynx.

wordscapes, there are no returns in *Arsewoman*, meaning that the reader cannot visually locate a start or end of a line in the flow of words. With no returns, and with the large sheet on which the text is printed stretching across the walls and reaching the floor, the audience must physically stand in the space and move their head as they read it. One can therefore see what other audience members are reading as they read it. The eye may pick up certain words, and miss others. By making a linear, narrative reading visually impossible, Banner makes the reader experience the content as she watched it, scanned not read. Agamben writes: 'Standing face to face with one of the great wonders of the world... the overwhelming majority of people have no wish to experience it, preferring instead that the camera should' (Agamben, 1978, p.17). At the time it was first shown in 2001, and then exhibited the following year in Banner's room for her Turner Prize nomination, the work was reviewed overwhelmingly for its shock value of placing pornography within the art institution for all to read (BBC News, 2002). Similarly, reviews of Tracey Emin's textiles focused on the experiential subjectivity, rather than the reflection of the experiential on the theoretical. Love writes, 'that if you include a reference to something explicitly experiential in your art, it often causes more consternation than if you were trying to speak *on behalf of* another's experience – whereupon ironically you actually accrue a greater deal of gravity and poise' (Love, 2005, p.165).<sup>3</sup> Consider the appropriation of a television source, for a video-based artwork by comparison. Dara Birnbaum *Technology/Transformation Wonder Woman* (1978), appropriates found video footage of excerpts from the television series *Wonder Woman's* trademark 'spin' and highlights its ridiculousness through obsolete repetition, as our

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<sup>3</sup> Love refers to Emin's textile work incorporating language around 2000 as reviewed by Adrian Searle in *The Guardian* as compared with the reviews of Richard Billingham's equally personal photographs of his family in the series *Ray's a Laugh* (2000).

attention is called to the female protagonist's actions through watching them repeatedly. Four minutes into Birnbaum's piece, the screen goes blue and instead of the image of the Diana Prince character spinning, we are presented with the audio of a disco single 'Wonder Woman Disco' by The Wonderland Disco Band. The lyrics rolling up the blue screen in a white, early digital type that reads like the closing credits: 'I-aaahhh', 'I-aaahhh', 'I am wonder,' 'Wonder woman.' The element of text to this work which further calls attention to the objectification and obsolescence of the subject matter through its use of repetition. The work's critique however, remains within the site of the source, the appropriated footage, the representation of Diana Prince as Wonder Woman, and the obsolescence of that image.

Gallery-based art presents a scopophilic engagement of the audience in varying degrees: the pleasure is derived from looking. Here, Banner disrupts that engagement to replace it with a reading experience, though one that itself challenges reading. Catharine MacKinnon asserts a hard line on pornography as ultimately harmful to women, and that pornography does not simply depict objectified sex but 'creates the experience of a [female] sexuality which is itself objectified' (MacKinnon, 1989, p.328). The offending objectification, to MacKinnon, whose arguments are strongly heteronormative, exists in the image, and in the production and consumption of that *image* (MacKinnon, 1989). Camille Paglia however, opposes the 'puritan feminists...of the 1980s' who, she argues, reached an inevitable failure of their campaigns to push *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines out of convenience stores when faced with the explosion of the 'freedoms triggered by the Web' which made pornography widely available (Calrk-Flory, 2014). To Paglia, campaigns such as MacKinnon's aligned feminism with right-wing Christian groups. In *Arsewoman*, Banner's audience experiences the pornographic imagery through her textual mediation: through her choice of words, her typography and

layout, the events she chooses to accentuate, and those she chooses to leave out. Like the children's game 'telephone' in which players whisper a message to one another until the player at the end of the circle repeats what they have heard out loud, usually amidst giggles to those at the start of the circle, for the eliminations of some words and humorous misinterpretations of others, Banner's translation incurs inevitable slippages, distortions, and oversights. Unlike Banner's Hollywood film sources, which one may recognise, presumably few, if any, of us have encountered the original source film here. The word's image is not explicit, but reading the text becomes an exercise in questioning the consumption of images for pleasure. The lack of visual representation of a human figure in Banner's *Arsewoman* meshes with the facelessness and namelessness of the performers from Mynx's film: reduced to 'she' and 'he'. Love writes of the 'incredulity that greeted' Derrida's 1973 proposal of the possibility of writing 'as [a] woman': fueled largely at the time by the impossibility given that he had not 'experienced "biological womanhood"' (Love, 2005, p.161). Though categories of gender are more fluid and less fixed now, the indignation which met Derrida suggests, as Love argues, that one's experience 'is the thing that you, and you alone, could have access to and own as your "own"' (Love, 2005, p.161). If it is not possible to write another's experience, is it possible to experience another through reading, to inhabit the text?

### **Reading with the Body**

Banner translates her experience of an aesthetic object into wordscapes as an experience mediated through the camera, and into language. How this language is encountered by the audience presents a physical experience, where the artwork is read by the body. Banner's use of the materiality of language replaces the temporality of film, and offers instead to the audience an experience that is physical, and one which suggests pleasure. Freeman

foregrounds bodily pleasure in the experience and representation of time: 'pleasure is central to the project – that queers survive through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies' (Freeman, 2011, p.58). To Freeman, the use of the body is an act of resistance through pleasure.

Within the Vietnam War movie wordscapes, Banner translates the visual imagery of war to text, so that the image-making must occur within the audience's own imaginative faculties, as in Scarry's 'dreaming-by-the-book' (Scarry, 1999, p.40). Let us consider this first in relation to war imagery, that which one encounters in the media, and in cultural representations of war such as films. Susan Sontag suggests that the image of war can convey the experience of war to an audience that is desensitised to images, rather than conveying or documenting the act of war (Sontag, 2004). Sontag sees war photographs as anaesthetizing: one may feel shock or upset, but then one continues to live with the image (Sontag, 1979, p.20). But Banner is not conveying war imagery, but the already mediated, sanitised Hollywood imagery of an imagined picture of war. It is the very numbness of image, that Banner translates into text, and thus calls our attention to its numbing quality of its staccato. Banner is not 'in the field' but rather, in her living room or studio, watching a video. Thus, Banner calls attention to that desensitisation of the imagery of violence, and the gap between representation and reality. But how then, to engage the audience with this fact? For to present an image of the impotence of experience surely is not enough. For this reason, Banner's attention to the materiality of her wordscapes extends to the way they are presented within exhibitions so that the encounter for the audience becomes a physical experience.

Written in the present tense, Banner is present in the text, and so too is the reader. For example, *Lawrence of Arabia* reads: 'The sound of waves crash and echoes from somewhere else. You see them lapping at the shore' (Banner 1993-4). Banner shifts between the senses of sight and sound without qualification in the text, in the same way one would experience them in a film. Banner's exploration of subjects of objectification and desensitisation to imagery can be understood as a study of subjects that similarly resist language. Reading in a bodily way, walking around the text the way one walks around a sculpture brings the physical dimension back to the text, further implicating the audience in the text. Elaine Scarry explores the impossibility of language to convey physical experiences, such as pain, in *The Body in Pain*. She writes: 'physical pain—unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content (Scarry, 1985, p.9). It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language' (Scarry, 1985, p.9). When a person experiences pain, there is an inability to accurately describe it, and linguistic function is replaced by an overriding physical sense. In pain, one's body feels overwhelming and words fail. Within Banner's wordscapes, the intention is not to experience that which Banner is conveying in language, but to have a direct experience with the language itself. In *War Porn* (2009) (fig. 4.7), Banner fused her studies in pornographic imagery and war imagery in a single wordscape. It was also the first artwork in which Banner wrote the text without a filmic source material, thus writing a text of fiction rather than watching a time-based film, and translating an image into text. In this wordscape, which Banner also published as an unedited splicing of two texts in the magazine *Public* in 2009, Banner melds an imagined, self-authored treatment for a porn film with one for a war film. Several lines of the pornographic treatment read: 'she parts her lips and her gleaming teeth show through, then another girl comes in from the side, confusing arms legs, both the same

as each light skimming flesh' (Banner, 2009). Then, without break, this is followed by the war treatment: 'The other planes on the left, coming in from somewhere else, no more cloud' (Banner, 2009). No typographic cues signal a switch from one genre or voice to the other. The narration remains present in both as the text slips back and forth from war to pornography, creating a hybrid text. There is no distinction of subject. All experiences blend materially in the same text.

Banner's investigation into the cultural production of artefacts of war, war imagery, and war historicising has expanded from cinematic sources to historical objects. *1066* (2009) (fig. 4.8) translates the depiction of the Battle of Hastings, as seen by Banner, from the needlepoint of *The Bayeux Tapestry* to language written on the interior walls of a London commercial gallery. Historian Carola Hicks writes in her analysis of the original tapestry: '[it] provides a far from impartial account of a political event', the last successful invasion of England, and the physicality of battle and war that was inherent in political invasion at the time (Hicks, 2006). Banner translates her description of its needlepoint to words written in ink on a gallery wall, the words rising and falling in sloping lines like the ebb and flow in the stages of historical battle. Sentences run the length of one wall, around a corner, along another. In the close reading of the tapestry, which is a static, painstakingly slow object to read, Banner challenges the notion of authorial power through a singular account. In *The Death of the Author* (1967), Roland Barthes suggests a correlation between text and textile, which share etymology with texture and suggest layers of form and of meaning. To Barthes, any piece of writing contains within it multiple layers and textures. Barthes suggests that 'the text is a tissue of citations', drawn from multiple centres of culture, not one, individual experience (Barthes, 1967). In *1066*, upon reaching the end of a line, the reader must walk back to the beginning if they



wish to continue to the next line, losing one's place in the text as it progresses, as you would if following a single thread in a tapestry. So instead, the eye darts around between text and texture. The spacing between letters varies throughout, building intensity and then giving more space for letters and words to breathe. Some letters lean back, others forward: when squinting, they appear like little soldiers running up the wall.

Similarly, Ebner's *Dead Democracy Letters* also present a physical encounter. The words in the series face the audience head-on, never at an oblique angle. By purposely revealing the framework supporting the letters' physical form, Ebner calls attention to the physical construct of the texts. Like signs in the landscape, they recall advertising of a time gone by. As McDonough observes, we are more likely to be advertised to on our iPhones than billboards now: the previous language of advertising (such as billboards) has become obsolete (McDonough, 2012). In *Landscape Incarceration*, one of the works in the *Dead Democracy* series, Ebner evokes the Hollywood sign, with individual letters poised on the landscape against a big sky.<sup>4</sup> In it, Ebner photographs the text from behind. The Hollywood sign features in Ed Ruscha's painting *The Back of Hollywood* (1977), which he also represents as seen from behind. The audience then takes the position of the artist, looking out through the signage as a linguistic construct, rather than reading it directly. Ebner injects the language of advertising into the text, causing the audience to read it back to front, echoing Glenn Ligon's *Ruckenfigur* (2009), where the neon letters spelling 'America' are flipped so the word is still legible but read from behind. In Canadian artist Ron Terada's photograph *See Other Side of Sign* (2006),

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<sup>4</sup> The famous sign that announces the Los Angeles area, synonymous with the movie industry from its site on Mount Lee, was originally a temporary signage of 14-metre-tall white letters made to advertise a real estate development, 'Hollywoodland' in 1923.

one sees a standing black sign by a roadside in a tree-backed landscape. The letters on the sign are in yellow movable type, the kind one might see in a sign for roadworks. Terada's statement 'see other side of sign' invites the audience to question the linguistic sign, and what might be behind it, playfully placing the text on what one recognises as a physical sign to escape what Frederick Jameson termed 'the prisonhouse of language' (Jameson, 1972). Wild semiotics presents an alternative to orthodox semiotics, which saw the sign as purely relational, instead presenting a fusion of sign and ontological reality, or as McDonough puts it, 'the inscription of language in space' (McDonough, 2012).

In 2002, Fiona Bradley, then Exhibitions Curator at the Hayward Gallery, selected works from the Arts Council collection with Martin Thomas and Isobel Johnstone. (It was Johnstone who organised the purchase exhibition *Languages* at the Arts Council with Rudi Fuchs in 1979). This exhibition was the first of the collection which explored language since Fuchs' show 23 years earlier. Johnstone, writing in the Foreword, recalls that *Languages* 'was cutting-edge and quite esoteric for its time. [In *Words*] we have set out to make a wider selection, one that is still challenging and also engaging' (Bradley, 2002). The range was indeed vast, with works by 33 artists. Its tour was better received than *Languages*, and *Words* travelled to Plymouth, Aberystwyth, York, Oldham, and Leicester over 2002-3. The works, unlike Fuchs' 1979 show, were not selected by the curator for purchase and subsequent inclusion in the collection, but were selected from existing works, already in the collection. It can thus be considered a snapshot of language-based works that the Art Council collection had bought and deemed significant over the period of the 1980s and 1990s. Bradley reflects that the rationale behind the show was to '[respond] to what language was doing [in contemporary practice]' to initiate an exhibition to survey this with 'new material in the collection' (Bradley, 2016).

However, to broaden the exhibition's appeal, Bradley and Johnstone expanded the selection to also include older, language works in the collection, such as a work by David Hockney, *We Two Boys Together Clinging* (1961). This resulted in a less than cohesive survey of the development of text art and the present situation, and more of a sample of a wide range works from the past forty-years which included words.

In 2012, the MoMA staged *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*. Curated by Laura Hoptman, curator of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition brought together works by forty-four artists from both modern and contemporary periods 'working in all mediums including painting, sculpture, film, video, audio, spoken word, and design, all of whom concentrate on the material qualities of written and spoken language – visual, aural and beyond' (Hoptman, 2012, p.181). Within this wide curatorial spectrum, Hoptman presented a survey of contemporary practice through the group exhibition with artworks engaging text's materiality across other media. Hoptman 'divided [the works in the exhibition] into two sections': the first was 'an abbreviated timeline of twentieth-century artworks that treat language concretely' and the second, 'recent contemporary works and projects in which similar interest in language as a flexible and powerful artmaking material can be discerned' (Hoptman, 2012, p.181). Within the catalogue, Hoptman asserts that in these artworks, 'language is meant to be seen or experienced but not read' (Hoptman, 2012, p.181).

Banner was not included in the MoMA exhibition. (Ebner was a key artist in the exhibition, lending the exhibition part of its title). Works which suggested a use of the body in their making of letters – but not a bodily reading – occurred primarily as performances within the exhibition at the MoMA. In particular, Paulina Olowaska and Nora Schultz each presented

works in a parallel performance art programme to the main exhibition, titled: *Words in the World* (April 16 – May 10, 2012). Olowaska's work was inspired by the Czech designer Karel Teige's typographic book *ABECEDA*, and saw three dancers, two female and one male, in a Soviet-style dress of red boiler suits or utilitarian dresses over blue tights, pose their bodies into 26 alphabetic shapes to create letters while poets read aloud to an audience over a loudspeaker (fig. 4.9). Nora Schultz, also included in the *Words in the World* component of *Ecstatic Alphabets* similarly performs numeric shapes with Ei Arakawa in *Countdown Performance* (2007) fig. 4.10). Using a malleable strip of metal, the pair bend the stainless steel in the numerals 10 to 0, holding each for the audience to view, photographing each with a flash, before moving on to the next. The metal holds the marks, folds, and bends of the previous numbers as it becomes increasingly warped, a testament of sorts to its materiality. The shapes created by Olowaska or Schultz cannot be read, for Olowaska's are abstract letterforms which are difficult to decipher, and Schultz's are not even letters at all, let alone words. Despite that these works are performed, that they are made with the body, there is no experience present in their sculptural language. They are simply linguistic or numeric sculptures, which their audience encounter, to be seen as statically as one might words on any page in any book. The presence of a body does not necessitate a bodily reading.

One work in which the body is necessary to navigate and activate the text is that of Pae White. In 2013, White presented a sculptural installation of language that enveloped the audience and oscillated as one moved around the space of the gallery in which it was installed. To enter White's installation *Too Much Night, Again* at South London Gallery (fig. 4.11) was to enter a tunnel of colour. Created by tightly strung red, blue, purple, and black

yarn, pulled at a tension from four level lines on two opposing walls, the string created two planes of colour. Criss-crossing in the centre, the two planes make a roof-like structure. Only when one walked through the path of the installation's centre, did letters visually emerge from the lines rendered by the string on the facing walls, and a text become readable. The scale of the letters measuring the height of the walls, and their vibrant colour seemed to make the letters shout all the louder from the woolen, cocooning environment of the installation. At the same time, they are fragile—imposed on the walls by the lines of yarn, and only legible as one enters the installation. As one walks through the space, some letters recede while others become visible. Reading becomes a physical, phenomenological experience, of the body. Letters can only be seen a few at a time, and words can only be read by the audience as they physically navigate the space. White's words, 'TIGER TIME' and 'UNMATTERING', are monumental in scale but transient in material, and the letterforms are intangible despite the encompassing feeling of the installation. Text, in White's installation, becomes entirely about the experience of reading as a transient, bodily encounter.

This 2013 site-specific installation for South London Gallery presented a Supergraphic creating a textual tunnel. The term Supergraphic is located in an architectural movement of the 1960s and 70s that was defined by architects using the relatively simple act of paint and graphic application to build surfaces to destabilise the architectural structure at an ideational, contextual level. Supergraphics of this period ranged from optic graphics creating spatial effects and distortions on building surfaces, to massive illustrative graphics in a scale that speaks to the visual language appropriated from billboard advertising (Brook and Shaughnessy, 2010). Inspired by a bout of insomnia, White's installation plays on how ideas that are otherwise fleeting can take on a feeling of overwhelming importance in nocturnal

hours. The disruption of the circadian rhythms through jet lag, stress, infants, or illness profoundly alters the body's natural hormonal balance and upsets all other systems of the body. The installation is tactile and textural. Creating a soft tunnel of the words, she creates a cocooning environment that softens the acoustics of the space and invites the audience in, as if trying to create a place where she might again find sleep. The result of White's installation is an experience that is unexpectedly ethereal from the height of the roof space made by the yarn and the web of colours. If lying awake in the night, while the rest of the world seemingly sleeps, thoughts fill one's head. Similarly, the words 'TIGER TIME' and 'UNMATTERING' emerge and dissolve in the installation, relative to the audience's position. (The phrases are taken from words on two old t-shirts that White used to wear while jogging—an activity that had been part of her creative process for 20 years, but that she had to give up due to injury, subsequently leading to her insomnia.) 'TIGER TIME' thus suggests a monster lurking under the bed while lying awake, trying to sleep. 'UNMATTERING' suggests an existential question and a reference to conceptual art and language at the same time. To turn to the artist's own process is to not look out at the world using language, but inwards – a criticism I have made of the linguistic conceptualists. However, what I wish to point out here, is that White makes such an observation with a heightened attention to the audience's engagement with the text. Through the strung yarn, White suggests that all language, and its inferred meaning, is transient. The installation encourages changeability. From every position, shapes, colours and hues are created by the installation shift. From a central path, words become visible and recede. Nearer the wall, details emerge of the work's construction, as the overhead plane of yarn forces you to crouch down. Viewed from the floor looking up, the words become irrelevant and instead the focus is a criss-crossing web of yarn. It matters not what the text even says. This hybrid of the extreme attention to the detail of materiality of White's

language and the self-reflexive content of her text is exemplary of the turn to language in contemporary art practice.

### **Conclusion: Linguistic Pleasure**

In 1991, when Griselda Pollock was in conversation with Barbara Kruger at the ICA in London she posed a question to Kruger, wherein Pollock questioned who the speaker of Kruger's work is, and who is being addressed in the work. Considering the wordscapes of Banner, which have hereto been explored, as well as Ebner's *Dead Democracy Letters*, and White's 2013 installation at the South London Gallery, the experience of the text has changed radically due to its materiality and its installation. Who the work implicates, and what the text produces in its reader is now intertwined with the materiality of the text (Kruger and Pollock, 1991). The works explored in this chapter, particularly Banner's wordscapes, were made at a time free from the constraints of conceptualism at its first moment. The artists are also free from the critiques of conceptualism that emerged with feminism. The artists are the inheritors of the materiality that emerged from Kruger, Holzer, Ligon et al. And yet, the artists operate in a time in which they are aware of these informing factors. The result is a new textuality and materiality within the work that seeks to go beyond a discussion of art, and a critique of those discussions. It enables the text artworks to extend to experience.

With that experience comes pleasure from textuality. The text within White's installation is meant to be encountered slowly, to be enveloping. Within Banner's the audience is drawn to the materiality of the installation of the text on the wall, or on paper on the wall, as much as the content of the text itself. Ebner's photographs draw our attention to the impermanence of the words in landscape as much as the fallibility of what the words say. With these works,

what a text says becomes secondary to the material form in which it is said. Love, writing on Agamben, poses the question: 'So the issue becomes one of how we can (in all our specificity) begin to re-work a *critical* interpretation of experience in the context of art which might not lead back to the promise of self-presence but might be truly responsive to the openness and contingency of experience itself' (Love, 2005, p.167). Within the texts that Banner, Ebner, and White put forward, their own self-presence recedes to be joined by that of the audience. In so doing, the text becomes an open site.



## 5: Texts to be Looked At

### Introduction

In Perspex vitrines, thousands of shapes are assembled and laid flat in groups. Ranging in size from a few millimetres to nearly twenty centimetres across, the objects are arranged together by their commonalities in shape, material, and size. Made of buttons, cardboard, disused motherboards and other electronic parts, cut-offs, off-cuts, and takeaway cutlery, this detritus makes up part of an alphabetic artwork by Paul Elliman that he has been assembling for over 20 years. *Found Fount* (1989–present) is a growing archive of letter-like forms that Elliman has found in the everyday environment, with which he constructs ongoing, typographic and alphabetic groupings (fig. 5.1). Various series within the project, such as *Dead Scissors*, a series of broken scissor handles that Elliman uses to present a typographical letter ‘S’, are dated with shorter dates such as (2004–present).

*Found Fount* presents its audience with components of text. In it, Elliman displays the possibility of text, but it is at its most basic level, the potential of text contained within forms within which Elliman sees letters (but which the audience may not have otherwise seen in such letterforms). In this chapter, I will argue how it is a text artwork, even though there is no text to be read in any traditional sense, and explore from where this approach to the materiality of language may emerge. With the artwork, Elliman creates the potential for text in the construction of a typographic alphabet. He leaves for others – the audience, collaborators – to realise the development of that alphabet into something recognisable as words. Elliman’s *Found Fount* thus presents a text to be looked at, for there is not necessarily anything beyond the individual letterforms to be read. The title of this chapter – ‘Texts to be

Looked At' – thus looks back then to the canonical work by Robert Smithson, which accompanied the first *Language* show at the Dwan Gallery in 1967, in which Smithson showed his drawing *A Heap of Language* (1966). This work, discussed in the introduction and chapter one, presents a list of synonyms for language, written in pencil in a triangular shaped 'heap' of words on the page. In the accompanying text which Dwan used as a press release, titled 'LANGUAGE to be LOOKED at and/or THINGS to be READ' (1967), Smithson proposed that the words in his artwork were not simply there to be read, but to be encountered visually, to be looked at, as well as experienced as objects which contained within them conceptual and sculptural potential: 'Look at any word long enough, he writes, and you will see it open into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void' (Smithson, 1968, p.107). Liz Kotz takes Smithson's proposition as the anchoring of *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (2009), as she explores the use of language within the linguistic conceptualism of the 1960s. But why use language or text to make an artwork if not to be read? Does the act of looking make reading obsolete? How does focusing on individual letters and characters emphasise the materiality of the text in art practice around the millenium.

The artworks explored in this chapter present possibilities that continue to challenge and defy the art object through the use of language, but encourage an audience encounter of seeing, and a visual and material consideration of language. What meaning do letters have without being part of a word, when they demand to be seen because they cannot be read? Why would artists use words at all if not to be read? When language becomes object, it is abstracted from its signifier. One cannot read the works in this chapter in any kind of conventional way, but does that mean they cannot be read? In not being readable, these

works offer the potential of language. Single letters are still read of course, but they are read as letters or phonemes, not as ideas or thoughts, but the potential contained within the forms of language.

Elliman's work stands a far distance from the language-centred work of conceptualists such as Art & Language and Joseph Kosuth in their use of text in art practice, 40 years prior, wherein language was communication. Here, with Elliman one can see words broken down further into linguistic components which are objects before and above anything else.

Smithson and Mel Bochner proposed in their text artworks in the late 1960s and early 1970s the material potential of the word, as one can see in Bochner's *Language is not Transparent* (1970), with the words scrawled directly on black paint dripping on the wall, and calling attention to the text's materiality as well as its support. Some exhibitions, such as *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* in 2012, have attempted to position Elliman's project in relation to concrete language experiments. Though Elliman's project makes no overt attempt at the supralinguistic, supranational movement that fueled the concrete poets in the mid-twentieth century, we can see a cross-cultural interest in language emerging from his searching for language in the things around us. He emphasises the object-status of letters, though his letterforms adhere to the Roman alphabet. Anna Lovatt suggests that in Dom Sylvestre Houéard's concrete poetry there is an association of the concrete and abstraction, that the word is appreciated for its visual and material qualities rather than as a referent to a signifier. This treatment of words as objects, Lovatt argues, furthers a degree of abstraction as the word withdraws from its associated concept, and from its signifier (Lovatt, 2014).

This work offers a new development of the materiality of the printed word in contemporary art practice. Elliman simultaneously pulls away from the communicative function of the linguistic in *Found Fount*, as he drives towards a more physical experience of language. What is the audience's encounter with text in such work? It was not until the conceptual artists such as Kosuth in their treatment of language attempted to strip language of its object-ness. Consider the proto-conceptual works of Man Ray, such as *Untitled Poem* (1924) (fig. 5.2), wherein Man Ray presents a form on a page that recalls and resembles a poem in stanzas and smaller sections that represent words, but in place of recognisable text the audience instead encounters black bars. The work resembles a poem and evokes a poem, yet there is nothing to read. The form of Man Ray's *Poem* is recalled and reimagined by Marcel Broodthaers' work, in which he makes as an homage to Symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé's 1897 work of the same name, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A throw of the dice will never abolish chance*) (1969) (fig. 5.3). Broodthaers replicates the form of Mallarmé's poem in the form of a book of twenty photolithographs, along with line breaks, page breaks, and the layout on the page, but the text, like in Man Ray's poem, is replaced with black bars. The referent to Mallarmé's poem is in its visual form, not its linguistic form. Works such as Elliman's, as well as those of Fiona Banner, Shannon Ebner, and Tauba Auerbach explored in this chapter, come not from a tradition of the formal object of the letter seen in proto- and early-conceptualist work? Influenced by lineages in the Lettrist movement, feminist critiques of conceptualism, concrete poetry, and to a degree, conceptualism which embraced materiality, these contemporary text artworks respond not only to lineages in art history, but to changes in the material encounter of language in everyday experience in the digital age.

Jamie Hilder observes how the Lettrist movement is more often ‘pair[ed] with concrete poetry’s mid-century output’ because the project, founded and led by Romanian-born French poet and artist Isidore Isou, was ‘framed as a stripping away, or rejection of meaning, because [it] operate[d] below the level of the word – at the letter’ (Hilder, 2010, p.10). Hilder however, sees the Lettrist movement, which Isou consolidated in his manifesto in 1942, as closer to ‘a history of the twentieth century avant-gardes than to the history of poetic experimentation’ (Hilder, 2010, p.10). The intention of ‘stripping away’ rings familiar with conceptualism too, however. To Isou, who saw himself in a role of destructive self-importance, with staged scandals, there were two phases in an art form’s cycle. These were the Amplic (*amplique*) and the Chiseling (*ciselant*). In the Amplic, art was swelling in its integral relationship to the functioning of society. In the Chiseling, a medium was both reduced to its form and separated from daily life. Isou saw himself and his fellow Lettrists at the end of the Amplic phase, and thus the bearer of poetry’s salvation. Hilder observes that ‘the work of the Lettrists emphasized the structure and shape of letters, but the letters of Isou and the Lettrists were often not conventional letters at all, but symbols’ (Hilder, 2010, p.11). Isou’s examination of language as stripped down and existing as letters and symbols bears consideration in the discussion of these contemporary artists’ works with language, though I do not contend that Elliman, Banner, Ebner, or Auerbach are following any direct conscious lineage of Lettrism.

## **Punctuation**

Before exploring Elliman however, I turn again to Fiona Banner, whose wordscapes were encountered in the previous chapter. While the wordscapes present a physical, durational writing-as-artwork to be encountered as an object that should be read as much as be seen,

the works explored in this chapter offer only components of language. Specifically, these are isolated letterforms and punctuation marks made in sculptural forms. Banner's wordscapes developed in parallel with her practice, in more sculptural forms exploring language. Banner's full stop sculptures are gigantic typographic full stops rendered in 1800 point in bronze or polystyrene. Within them, one can see Banner's awareness of modernist sculpture (in the ironic recalling of Brancusi's shapes in ovoid forms) and minimalist sculpture (placed on the floor, not a plinth to be walked around in their encounter, like Andre's floor pieces). Expanded beyond their linguistic function, they make linguistic signs obsolete as sculptures out of their context in sentences, and in massive scale. Banner made her full stops between 1997 and 2004. She has more recently developed large sculptural installations of fighter planes within the Duveen Galleries of the Tate Britain—*Harrier and Jaguar* (2010) (fig. 5.4)—with a decommissioned Harrier jet hanging nose-down in the imposing gallery, and a decommissioned Jaguar laid polished on the gallery floor. These works refer back to Banner's *The Nam*, the uncomfortable reality of the image of war as a stylised image of beauty rendered in the function of killing.

In 1997, Banner began to make large-scale sculptures of punctuation marks. These measured over a metre across. The first of these artworks was *Neon Full Stop* (1997) (fig. 5.5). This was also Banner's first neon sculpture. Modest in scale, *Neon Full Stop* is a single neon point clumsily crafted by the artist from bent glass. It is mounted on the wall above a small wooden box, which sits on the floor and contains a transformer to power the illuminated mark. Through the late 1990s, Banner continued to experiment with punctuation as a form. Ten years later, she returned to the material of neon in further fabrications of letterforms. In 1998–9, as Banner pursued punctuation as a sculptural form, the scale was expanded from

the relatively diminutive first neon full stop. *Polystyrene Full Stops* was a series of large, sculptural forms, measuring from two to four and a half feet high. The light material that serves as a packing insulation for other objects, it was given a presence and seeming weight that defied its actual density. These works were titled after typefaces: *Slipstream*, *Nuptial*, *Palatino*, *Times*, *Gill Sans Condensed*, and *New Century Schlbk* (1998–9) (fig. 5.6), for they were accurate expansions in three-dimensions of the full stops in the typefaces of the same name at 1,800 points. Banner made the works by sanding down the polystyrene blocks to the precise dimensions of the large-point typefaces. They mimic the perfect forms of Brancusi's ovoid sculptures. In their expanded scale, the minor variations between the typefaces become apparent. What appears a uniform full stop on the printed page, a tiny dot, differs from large spheres to ovoids when realised as large-scale sculptures that enhance and enlarge the differences in forms.

The use of such materials as polystyrene suggests mass-produced objects: light and temporary in their importance. Johanna Drucker writes of the material use of objects from mass culture and industry: 'Since the 1960s, fine art has looked the popular culture rival squarely in the face in thematic, material, and production terms. Rejecting the earlier tactic by which it refused mass culture through resistance and esoteric formal means, fine art has tried to absorb the successful strategies of commercial culture' (Drucker, 2005, p.74). While Drucker refers specifically to the use of the image in mass media and advertising, in contrast with the use of the image in photographic fine art or art photography, the comparison can be applied to the use of mass materials in these sculptural works. Polystyrene is typically a packing material, a material to fill space. When installed in a gallery, Banner also exhibits the packing boxes for the sculptures. The boxes, like the punctuation sculptures, suggest a denial

of a tactile experience for the audience (in their presentation in line with typical works in a gallery). Yet their placement on the floor, and not a plinth, and their material informality invites touch. The names of the fonts are displayed on the boxes. The mass material and the transportability of polystyrene suggest a transience of the linguistic object. A full stop is part of the framework of a sentence; it does not build words or sentences. With these works, Banner began exploring the result of removing written language from linguistic function or meaning to explore it as a formal system. In so doing, punctuation becomes an object to be experienced as a visual object, performed not on the page but in the space of the exhibition.

Jennifer DeVere Brody, a theorist on performance, race, and queer studies, argues that punctuation is a performative element of written language (DeVere Brody, 2008, pp.57-61). DeVere Brody sees the rise of the dot in corporate typography as symptomatic of a cultural shift towards digital media. Large companies such as Bergdorf Goodman and The American Association of Railroads (which features straplines on its corporate website such as 'Training. Technology. Community Outreach.') had their logotypes and branding redesigned in 1998 to replace hyphens with dots, which were deemed to be 'cooler', 'classier', and 'more computery' (DeVere Brody, 2008, pp.57-58). Such advertisers wanted a 'new, updated style' that evoked the cultural shifts of the dotcom era (DeVere Brody, 2008, pp.57-58). DeVere Brody thus sees the relation of the increasing use of 'dots' as responsive graphic design, but also as a mark of power. She writes: 'To end is an authoritative act...to periodize is to speak with specific endpoints in mind' (DeVere Brody, 2008, p.61). Banner made her first full stops in the same period that DeVere Brody makes her focus—the late 1990s, suggesting the relevance of typography as a form and subject matter in the cultural landscape at the time, at the end of the dotcom boom.



Though Banner shifted away from the full stop, and focused on her wordscapes, performance nudes, and other sculptural works in the years surrounding the millennium, she returned to examine the full stop in 2004. This time, she shifted away from the light, impermanent material of polystyrene and selected a material diametrically opposed in weight, mass, and relevance: bronze (fig. 5.7). Banner cast her full stops in this classical material, and then painted them black with the industrial paint used for car bodywork. Their surface, in shiny, black lacquer appears viscous. With such paint, Banner uses the material form to shift the sculptural full stops away from the classical bronze ovoids of Brancusi, and towards an object that speaks to mass consumption.

The linguistic sign has featured with a similar aesthetic in feminist artwork in the late 1960s and 1970s, specifically the work of Italian artist Ketty La Rocca. La Rocca was active in the mid-1970s with a body of work that included performances and photography, in which she explored language as a gestural form. Within this practice, La Rocca also explored the linguistic signifiers of full stops and punctuation. La Rocca emerged in 1960 as a poet, and her artistic practice developed out of her work as a member of the visual poetry collective Gruppo 70. Writer Cay Sophie Rabinowitz sees La Rocca's *Virgole* (1970) as a historical precedent to Banner's punctuation sculptures in bronze. *Virgole* is an installation of three black PVC-covered commas installed on the gallery floor (fig. 5.8). (*Virgola* is Italian for comma, though La Rocca's spelling of the title also recalls the Roman poet). Like Banner's full stops, these sculptural punctuation marks become monumental black marks on the gallery floor. Both La Rocca's and Banner's interest in using linguistic signs to comment on language

suggests a drive within their practices to challenge normative forms of communication, whether gallery viewing, or grammar in writing.

In 2007, Banner returned to neon and made a series of 26 works. In form, these expanded from the single full stop to include all the punctuation marks of the typographic alphabet in one (*Bones* (2007)), and each uppercase letter of the Roman alphabet in another (*Every Word Unmade* (2007)) (fig. 5.9). The lines of the letters are wobbly, deliberately showing the lack of skill of the artist in bending the neon. Banner exhibits the work as a typographical alphabet, a series where each letter is hung individually and in alphabetic sequence, with electric cords linking from one to the next. Calling the work an 'unmaking of language', Banner uses the letters to present the potential for words without representing any text beyond their alphabetic form (Fionabanner.com, 2007). Neon is a difficult material to handle without training, and Banner's uppercase letters demonstrate an intended naiveté and lack of skill in the labouring of their production. In their neon form, the letters demonstrate a struggle for Banner to control their outcome, to control language.

Banner's full stops demonstrate her consideration of characteristics unique to written form. The full stops are typographically accurate to their point size, but placed on the floor of a gallery so the audience walks around them, rather than sees them on a page, which requires the full stops to be negotiated as physical objects. They demonstrate the artist's interest in text as something not to be read, but to be seen, felt, and navigated spatially. One can see this idea also in her wordscapes, despite their two-dimensional rendering on a large sheet of paper or directly on a wall. In Banner's exploration of written language, the form offers her an opportunity to critique the structures of power that define us, through a tool of their

definition. Breaking that tool—written language—down to a single unit, enables her to start again at the level of a typographic unit of punctuation marks and individual letters. She then rebuilds language by her own hand and as she intends. As a result, in these works of punctuation marks and individual letters, it does not matter that they do not collectively provide the audience with a text to read. Instead, they provide the potential for the audience to explore the inner workings of the parts of language, and to construct their own text.

### **Alphabets**

Punctuation is the rule system for language, the tools of grammar, but it is not language itself. The alphabets constructed by artists present the possibility of language providing the audience with the potential for communication in the form of the letter. Following Ebner's *Dead Democracy Letters* her next textual series saw the artist build an alphabet from a modular grid of cinderblocks, which she hung on a wall-size pegboard, and photographed. In the works in the series *Strike* (2009), Ebner photographs individual letters, and with the photographs, builds words, and often palindromes, as the letterforms are hung consecutively as framed photographs, light boxes, or spliced together in a stop-action video animating the text with a movement and liveness (fig. 5.10). The hung cinderblocks form a Tetris-like, modular grid of a typeface. It is made from the material of minimalist sculpture, such as the cinderblocks in Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966) (fig. 5.11). It is a hybrid textual form to comment on the immateriality of language through a material text. Ebner calls it a 'photographic modular alphabet' (The Hammer Museum, 2011). Photographing each letter enables Ebner to print the images repeatedly, as a pre-existing typeface of her own making that existed in a modular form (Ebner, 2013). Featuring in the *Strike* series is a typographic strike (which gives the work its name). Ebner uses the strike between words and as a line

break. The strike, as a concept and as a typographic character, has multiple uses particularly since the internet—a forward slash, a link, a pause, a break in communication—as well as its figurative use as an industrial withdrawal of labour as an act of protest. Ebner puts the two together to test when language itself stops working. The cinderblock, as a material, also possesses vernacular connotations to architecture, industry, and as a building material of temporary shelter in military conflicts.

After constructing the alphabet, Ebner used it to make further text artworks. In the midst of the second Bush administration, and during the US war in Iraq, Ebner wrote 18 ‘broken’ palindromes, out of the *Strike* text, where the words were disrupted by forward slashes (or strikes) (The Hammer Museum, 2011). This saw Ebner returning to poetry for the first time since the mid-1990s when she worked for the poet Eileen Myles (Lange, 2010). An example is the nonsensical palindrome, ‘LIVE DIRT UP A SIDE TRACK/CARTED IS A PUTRID EVIL’. Ebner puts a forward slash between ‘track’ and ‘carted’, typographically breaking the ease of reading an already awkward line. Like the obsolete technology of telegrams, where the word ‘stop’ would mark a break in sentences, Ebner’s forward slash marks the space between words, building a gap between reality and its typographic representation.

Since 2009, Ebner has experimented with the *Strike* alphabet in moving image with the artwork *Between Words Pause* (2009). The looped video shows a series of spliced stills of individual letters, almost too fast to read. Like stop-motion animation, the text is momentarily still with a sculptural quality; as they build into words, a dynamic energy builds between the letters. Instead, what the audience sees is single letters of the cinderblock font, shot individually, and experienced as images of isolated letters. The speed at which they play

makes any text unreadable beyond the isolated letters. The grid of the pegboard that makes the mount for the letters appears to oscillate slightly from frame to frame, owing to a slight movement in the placement of Ebner's camera when shooting the letters, and resulting in the text appearing to optically move toward the viewer. The forward slash or strike appears again to mark breaks in lines. Shots of the blank pegboard also break letters and lines. The strike is not in the cinderblock typeface, but a black shape that echoes it, edited to appear over the *Strike* alphabet. Intermittently, an asterisk appears between words, and 1:28 into the video (which plays on a loop, making it impossible for the viewer to visually mark a point as beginning or end) the pegboard is replaced with a blank white surface, and a blurred asterisk in a solid black line appears in each corner of the frame consecutively. The eye's saccades (a rapid, jerking movement of both eyes between two foci) are noticeably choreographed as one follows the character form in its jumps on the surface of the image.

Curator Laura Hoptman proposed that many of the artworks in the 2012 MoMA exhibition *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* are 'animated, atomized' (Hoptman, 2012). With this turn of phrase, Hoptman suggests a physical vibrancy in the linguistic form and the audience's encounter with it, even when that encounter occurs in a two-dimensional work adhering to traditional gallery viewing behavior. Auerbach was included in the exhibition of twelve contemporary artists (along with Ebner, and Elliman, though not Banner) and numerous historical artists at the MoMA. Auerbach made her first explorations with language with gouache-on-board paintings of single letters. This series of alphabetic characters were each isolated from their sequential role and linguistic potential. In her work following her graduation from Stanford with a BA in Studio Art, she worked as an apprentice in a sign painting shop in San Francisco. Here, she developed a precise and exacting style of painting,

particularly in paintings of letterforms. The content of her work in the late 1990s–mid-2000s foregrounded written language: through paintings using handwriting, typography, and fonts. Auerbach’s development in her practice—from individual letterforms to an interest in new alphabets and systems of communication as a subject—began in 2006, with an appropriation of a full alphabet as a source for a series of paintings: *Visible Speech. Alexander Melville Bell’s Visible Speech (Vowels)* (2006) (fig. 5.12) is a gouache, ink and pencil drawing on paper of red characters that resemble letterforms. The consonants work of the same series is in black and white (fig. 5.13). The typographical form the viewer sees in these works suggests an alphabet, but does not form a legible text. Like Braille or Cyrillic, the language is unreadable to all except the minority who are trained to read it. For nearly all of us, it is a purely a visual form.

*Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabetics* was published by Alexander Melville Bell in 1867 as a phonetic system for the deaf to learn speech.<sup>1</sup> It was an attempt to transcribe all verbal sounds in any spoken language into a graphic form where sounds have a physiological signifier. Drucker, in her volume on the writing of alphabetic letters, also examines phonetics as a key development in 19<sup>th</sup>-century printing responding to a need for a phonographic language for use in journalism (Drucker, 1995, p.249). Drucker identifies the 19<sup>th</sup>-century need for phonetic typography in the journalistic trade and in law, both of which required swift and exact recording systems. This led to phonographic shorthand, which was another system of visible speech (Drucker, 1995, p.247). In the 1830s and 1840s phonographic methods were developed by Isaac Pitman, whose work led to modern shorthand. Drucker attributes the success of Pitman’s phonetic shorthand to its basis on the ‘familiar conceptual

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<sup>1</sup> Melville Bell is the father of Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone.

categories' of consonants and vowels (Drucker, 1995, p.250). However, it was also for this reason that more advanced linguistics could not use Pitman's shorthand. Throughout the 1840s, Pitman, with linguist Alexander Ellis, attempted to develop a universal phonetic notation system that was accurate and advanced enough for technical linguistics, dubbed Fonotypy: 'the typographic equivalent of the Phonographic shorthand characters, and consisted of a full set of typographic letters designed, carved, punched and cast' (Drucker, 1995, p.254). Its success remained modest, unlike his shorthand. As Drucker points out, the universal notation system's relative failure, despite great investment of time, money, and research, was as much to do with 'the political temper of the times' as the phonetic system itself (Drucker, 1995, p.255).

Bell's characters departed from Pitman's in their relationship to pre-existing lexical signs. Where Pitman attempted to merge existing writing of alphabetic characters with intuitive phonemes of their sound, Bell entirely abandoned all references to the alphabet and attempted a new system of symbols based on physiology, specifically the placement of the tongue and lips in the pronunciation of sounds. The common visual codes within Bell's Visible Speech system—the symmetries, the thickening of letters, the addition of the bar—seem familiar. They suggest an alphabetic system to us, even though the audience are not literate in the system and so cannot read it. Any context for the signs, any contingency, would have to be learned, but it hints at familiarity, suggesting to us *possible* contingencies. The familiarity that attracts Auerbach to Bell's system as a subject matter demonstrates what his system attempted: intuitive phonemes. However, Drucker suggests that despite the physiological intuitiveness that Bell was striving for in the notation of Visible Speech as a language system, it was ultimately too 'foreign to the eye' to succeed (Drucker, 1995, p.258).

In fact, typography may have been Bell's downfall in more ways than one: as Visible Speech was not based on existing alphabets, it needed a bespoke type to be cast in order to be printed and distributed, which was a great expense, and limited its circulation (Drucker, 1995, p.258).

Bell's system, for all its well-meaning aspirations, never caught on. Perhaps it is for this reason that it interests Auerbach: a language system in which no one is literate becomes a series of signifiers lacking any relative context, except the context of the work itself. In Auerbach's painting of the appropriated symbols, the artist's signature of precise brushstrokes renders the phonetic characters measured and exact. However, they are signs that point nowhere. The characters seem familiar but unidentifiable, resembling not vowels, but a row of adapted lowercase 'fs' turned upside down, facing left, and with hints of ligatures. In Bell's diagrams of physiological symbols for the English elements of speech, the spoken language is divided into the expected consonants ('p in pea') and vowels (including 'e in eel' and 'e in shell'), as well as glides, also known as semi-vowels ('w in now'), and diphthongs or gliding vowels ('oy in boy'). Bell's consonants are all round characters, evocative of E and F in the Cyrillic alphabet, and like the open shape of the throat in pronouncing them. The vowels are longer strokes, like that of lower case 'fs' in the Latin alphabet, indicating the length of time the sound is held.

In her paintings, Auerbach makes no typographic alterations to Bell's characters. They are appropriated unaltered from a linguistic, phonetic context to a visual art one, and copied by Auerbach's precise painting. From viewing Auerbach's *Visible Speech* (it is a painting that one encounters in a traditional viewing of a gallery, as an object on the wall), the audience would



likely not regard it as more than abstract symbols with alphabetic references, because the audience is not literate in the system. Auerbach's interest in linguistic systems brings to the viewer those that could be read out loud, but are not, because the viewer is not sufficiently literate. In her paintings, these lost elements from a system of inscription become visual objects to be seen because they cannot be read. Auerbach's experimentations with *Visible Speech* suggest a development from a section of textual practice in conceptual art from the 1960s: that is, text that presents misinformation, or an overwhelming amount of information. In the conceptual art practices of the 1960s, one can see a precedent for works that stem from the linguistic practices at the time, developing a visual work of art to be seen, not read, particularly through the presentation of information through numerals.

*The Whole Alphabet, From the Centre Out, Digital, V* (2006) marks a shift from the precise typographic paintings in Auerbach's early work. One sees her shift from paintings of a visible typographic letterform to paintings of a condensed linguistic system in the pictorial plane (fig. 5.14). With this work, Auerbach no longer appropriates letterforms as she did in her earlier work. Instead, she begins to modify typographical forms and writing systems in her paintings. With a script that evokes the seven-segment display characters of an alarm clock, multiple strokes are contained within a single, eight-sided form. The broken dashes and geometric forms recall the early digital display characters, often seen on train departures boards or clock displays. Auerbach adds four extra strokes. These are not required to display the digits 0–9, but are necessary to write the Latin alphabet, thus diagonal dashes cross each internal square of the simple digital form for the electronic display of Arabic numerals. With one version in monochrome and one in colour, these works, rendered in gouache and pencil on

wood board, condense the alphabet into a single form from which no specific letter can be named, but all letters are suggested.

*The Whole Alphabet, From the Centre Out, Digital, V* is indicative of Auerbach's later developments in increasingly abstract, conceptual painting that explores logic and mathematics. Her fundamental interest is in systems of logic and perception unites this work with the earlier typographic experimentations, increasingly moving signifiers away from their signifieds and isolating them as abstract forms whose previous meaning is located in their ever-diminishing referents, so she may push the characters to the point of obsolescence.

Within *The Whole Alphabet*, one can visually trace the signifying system into a visual image. Set at a slight slant, like an italicised digital typeface, *The Whole Alphabet* is a linear kaleidoscopic representation of the alphabet. Demonstrative of the methods that Auerbach began to practice at this point, she catalogues the alphabetic letterforms as specimens, and one can see graphic representations for how many letters have diagonal strokes, or horizontal ligatures. The result is something that resembles no letter or word that can be read, but suggests the potential for written language. Rather than text-based artworks to be read, Auerbach's textual paintings suggest what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the 'imagetext' (Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell, 1994). Auerbach's *The Whole Alphabet* is an example of a non-linguistic visual image made of written words, which signify the research and provide a point of departure for the viewer. Written language becomes an image-based representation of the research, condensed into a picture. The seven-segment display character is designed to be used on screen, and to constantly change. One can see in *The Whole Alphabet* how Auerbach is extracting the digital character from its context and placing it in a painting, where it is essentially redundant, fixed in the plane of the image. It is the same act she

performs with Bell's *Visible Speech*. Auerbach's typographic paintings foreshadow her interest in systems as logic as source material. Her projects that use written language thus often explore linguistic systems in contexts where they have failed, or where their primary function is redundant.

I return now to Elliman's work *Found Fount*. Elliman has developed arguably one of the most sustained and long-standing investigations into graphic forms of communication typefaces, and letterforms of the practices explored in this thesis. Since the 1980s, Elliman's art practice has explored language in works ranging from sound recordings to published magazines. For over 20 years, he has amassed a collection of typographic forms, collectively grouped under the title of *Found Fount* (1980s–present). It offers a unique commentary on text art in the form of the linguistic character, made over a period of time that spans before, during, and after the onset of the digital revolution.

Elliman completed a foundation course in art at Portsmouth Polytechnic in the 1980s. Keen to be a part of the arts and listings co-operative magazine *City Limits*, Elliman borrowed a friend's portfolio and got a job working on the publication's design. He did not want to be a designer, but was motivated by a sense of collective action within the publishing project (Elliman, 2014). Many of the original staff of *City Limits* joined the publication after leaving *Time Out*, a competing listings magazine founded by Tony Elliot with an original structure based on collective decision-making and equal pay for all staff. Such a utopian drive within artists in their use of publishing can also be seen in the 1960s' work of Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, and Printed Matter, Inc. founded by Lippard and LeWitt, as well as contemporary work of Tauba Auerbach, with her Diagonal Press (2013–). Elliman proposes that written

language is not something made material from a conceptual imagining, but the inverse. To Elliman, who sees 'letterliness' in shapes, fonts are things, and they come from the material around us (Elliman, 2004). Text, Elliman proposes, is everywhere. Elliman has collected material ranging from lids to paper clips to cardboard off-cuts. In each item, he sees a potential of language. The work's title plays on the old spelling of the word 'font' — as a fount of knowledge. The resulting 'collection of things' presents the viewer with what Elliman calls 'sets of letters that echo the collective form of society' (Elliman, 2004). A paper clip can be bent and pulled into a letter *s*. A scissor handle (*Dead Scissors* (2004-present) may resemble a *p* or a *d*, depending on how the user positions it. Elliman collects this material in piles and boxes in his studio. When exhibiting the collection, he selects groups of material and assembles them in piles according to the likeness of material and shapes of letters suggested in their form. A single piece may be sold, commissioned, and turned into a graphic letterform for printed material. Once taken from the collection as a whole, a piece cannot be used again. The work is thus a collection of materials that cumulatively present shapes that suggest alphabetic forms. Each can be used to structure a typeface in which no single character repeats. Each letterform is therefore unique to the object which gives it its shape. One collection within the work is a series of shapes like the collection of the capital letter E in ferrite metals, the material suggesting transmission or interruption. A collection of the letter U are fragments of chains of broken bike locks. Pointing to the stolen bike, the sign and the referent exist at once, pointing to each other and to somewhere else. Importantly though, the work, as it is presented to a viewer, never constructs a word. Instead, Elliman constructs a found typeface, assembling materials that suggest letters, but that need not build words. Rather, it exists in its endlessly adapting accumulation. In the mid-1960s, Mary Ellen Solt wrote *Moonshot Sonnet* which she published in *Concrete Poetry: A World View* in 1968,

calling her work the first sonnet ‘to successfully address the moon since the Renaissance’, for it used a scientific notation system developed through space travel, a newly developed notation for marking off sections of the moon which she encountered in *The New York Times*. Thus, the work itself requires a gloss (Solt, 1968, p.307). It is unreadable to any audience not familiar with such specialised scientific notation, and appears like black marks in rows and columns. Once one acquires the gloss and context that Solt provides, the referents become clear, though it is still not a text to be read in any conventional sense.

*Found Fount* has rules, though they apply only to Elliman. In *No More Rules*, Rick Poynor discusses the shift that defines postmodern graphic design as a break from rules, as typography becomes troubling to the reader, presenting visual obstacles rather than clarity (Poynor, 2003). Any form in the collection can only be reproduced to make a letter once. To Elliman, this allows the typographic forms to maintain a crucial relationship between the art object and its typographic origins. This relationship recalls Robert Smithson writing in the text ‘LANGUAGE to be LOOKED at and/or THINGS to be READ’ where he states: ‘A is A is never A is A, but rather X is A’ (Smithson, 1967). Smithson points back to an oppositional system of semiotics, wherein the linguistic signifier related to its signified, and presented a semiotic closure. Signs related only to other signs and not to external objects in ontological reality (McDonough, 2012). Smithson, in his ambiguous way, suggests the ‘prisonhouse of language’ as articulated by Fredric Jameson, and suggests that the linguistic signifier needs to include both the external world and the importance of inscription (Jameson, 1972). For Elliman, recycled rubbish and purchased items from shops come from the circulation of materials that support capitalism — the supporting materials of capitalist infrastructure.

Through his collection of objects in *Found Fount*, Elliman suggests that language emerges from the physical spaces we inhabit, and questions how we acquire language. Among his influences, Elliman cites works from anthropology (George Psalmanazar's false Formosan alphabet) and literature (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as the monster learns to read from his four treasured books and overhearing the cottagers), which question the acquisition and construction of language, both written and spoken (Elliman, 2014). In a critical text written by Elliman on the Dutch designer Karel Martens, Elliman reflected on finding Marten's collections of printing ephemera while researching his text in the artist's studio. In contrast to Elliman's *Found Fount*, which is 'part of a splintered struggle between technology and language: the world as a giant machine broken down', Marten's collection suggests to Elliman 'the world perceived...as a printing surface' (Elliman, 2008, n.p.). *Found Fount* suggests the inverse: the world and word as a printed surface: rather than having the potential to be inscribed, the world is a landscape in which language is already written. In the same text, Elliman cites Jean Baudrillard's *System of Objects*, and contends that a materialist view proposes that our objects shape us by shaping our practices and perceptions (Baudrillard, 1968; Elliman, 2008).

*Stealing Beauty*, at London's ICA in 1999, put forward an interpretation of new design that had emerged from a necessity of designers using found objects rather than high-end production, when faced with a crushing design job market in the 1990s economic recession. The exhibition included graphic designer Alex Rich's *Almost Typography* (1997–), wherein Rich collects and assembles 'lottery tickets, the torn-off flaps of cardboard boxes, council estate maps' and rearranges them to create patterns and form 'order out of chaos' (Catterall, 1999). Rich's work was shown alongside the work of collaborative architecture practice, muf

and the fashion design of Ann-Sofie Back, which the curator Claire Catterall viewed as being representative of design that referred to their past, reacting against it, or encompassing a knowledge of it (Catterall, 1999, n.p.). Such design evidenced a drive not to make more language in the form of typography, but to find it. *Stealing Beauty*, retrospectively viewed, presented a survey of graphic design at the cusp of the digital revolution. The work within the exhibition is remarkably tactile and material in hindsight, while bridging an attempt to grasp the potential of the digital.

At a moment when everything — pictures, texts, information, language — becomes immaterial, occupies digital space, and is stored in the cloud, Elliman began the very physical act of collecting stuff: excess, debris, and noise of city streets. In *The System of Objects* (1968), Baudrillard discusses the shift between use and non-use of the collected object. As Elliman interprets Baudrillard, no object can be isolated from its place in the world, and therefore, never possessed. Instead, things exist in circulation (Baudrillard, 1968, pp.255-283). To Baudrillard, the value of physical objects is contingent on their active public use or circulation within their networked systems (Baudrillard, 1968, pp.255-283). Baudrillard writes: 'Possession cannot apply to an implement since the object I utilize always directs me back to the world' (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994, p.7). Elliman, by taking detritus and found objects out of capital circulation and rendering them letterforms, invests a new purpose and meaning in the objects. By placing them as letters and artworks, he recirculates them, both in a consumerist role and in a linguistic function (Elliman, 2004, n.p.). In *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, *Found Fount* was displayed in vitrines as collections of objects that shared letter-like similarities. Such installation reinforced the sculptural quality of the work as a collection of objects. Typically, Elliman displays the collection in gallery exhibitions

as a loose collection of objects placed in groups on the floor or on open tables, so they may be handled. However, due to the logistic restriction of the sheer volume of visitor numbers that the MoMA receives, the objects were placed in vitrines (Elliman, 2014, n.p.). Elliman's project is an attempt to develop a new typographic system from which we can make words, and thus, construct meaning.

Banner's, Auerbach's, and Elliman's practices operate in the typographic unit: isolated letterforms, not complete sentences or even words. Auerbach's early paintings focused on individual letters. Elliman's are assembled in collections, but only build words if placed in such a context by a user of his typeface. These practices suggest a stripping back of language so that, fundamentally, any construction beyond that new foundation must be the responsibility of the viewer. Importantly, they develop the significance of viewing letterforms in parallel with a conceptual understanding of the use of written language in art.

## Codes

Codes embed and disrupt the communication process. Codes require a key, like a gloss. They exist to defy readability. André Thomkins, a concrete poet, explored words that function differently in multiple languages, in the case of *Dogmat/Mot* (1966/65) French, English, and German. Going through foreign language dictionaries – German/French, German/English, and French/English – Thomkins devised a cross-reference of words that can operate in two or more of the languages and placed them on card discs mounted in a box. The discs can rotate, thereby allowing them to align with different counterparts and present new combinations and relationships. The ten discs are mounted in an inverse triangle. Words such as *regal/regal*, *fort/fort* slip in and out of meanings and pronunciations depending on the



rotation of the discs and the audience's encounter with them. Thomkins replaces the subjective with the mechanical, challenging the stability and signification of language. Hanne Darboven's detailed writing practice of mathematical notations and musical composition can also be seen in relation to Fluxus event scores in her use of musical notation. Yet, Darboven spent most of her career working in isolation, whether in New York or Germany, and had little contact with relative developments in art practice. Her artworks are never intended as a set of instructions or descriptions of instructions. Rather, Darboven uses the score as a system of organisation and classification of information. Darboven's work develops a system of language of its own. In 'The Dematerialization of Art', Lucy Lippard and John Chandler go so far as to describe Darboven's textual works of mathematical notations as a kind of 'blind man's art' (a term she borrows from artist Sol LeWitt), akin to Braille, where the works 'pass directly from the intellectual to the sensuous, almost entirely bypassing the visual' (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.46-51). In artist Terry Atkinson's letter to Lippard, in response to 'The Dematerialization of Art' and republished in Alberro and Stimson's *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Atkinson argues for the aesthetic value of mathematical notation, as can be seen in Darboven's *Construction Drawing* (1968), whether or not the equation makes sense (fig. 5.15) (Alberro and Stimson, 1999, p.52-57). (Atkinson was not discussing Darboven's mathematical notation specifically, but the beauty of an equation in science more generally). For Darboven, numbers present a form of writing with no textual content.

In 2011, Sang Mun, a South Korean artist and a graphic designer based in the US created the typeface ZXX. During his mandatory two years of national service in Seoul, Mun worked alongside US troops in the National Security Agency (Print Magazine, 2012). It was here that Mun learned to code. At the Rhode Island School of Design, Mun combined his knowledge of

code with his desire to challenge the surveillance he witnessed at the NSA, and his skill in design. Mun turned to typography. There he designed ZXX, a typeface that presents text that is legible to a human reader but that cannot be read by computers, specifically it cannot be read by the digital surveillance programmes used by the National Security Agency (NSA) (fig. 5.16). Mun writes: 'The name ZXX comes from the Library of Congress Alpha-3 ISO 639-2 – codes for the representation of names of languages. ZXX is used to declare no linguistic content; not applicable (Mun, 2012). Mun's stated intention was not to 'solve' the problem of a lack of freedom of communication in the digital age through our use of text, but to raise awareness of it (Print Magazine, 2012). This aim was no doubt magnified with the 2013 whistleblowing, attempted extradition, and arrest of former NSA analyst, and exiled American Edward Snowden. Slavoj Žižek has stated: 'we 'feel free' because we lack the language to articulate our unfreedom' (Žižek, 2002, p.2). To Mun, typography presents one possible, visual language to articulate in language the lack of freedom of thought. Where Darboven's and Thomkins' work was created in a time of the Cold War, when the ability to code communication was linked to the survival of the human species, code has a very different connotation now, in the digital context within which Mun makes his work. All language entered into any digital format undergoes a process of coding. Yet, despite layers of digits and numerals of code constructing a message, what one sees typographically, as a letterform remains on the surface, the same.

## **Conclusion**

A text artwork may not present any text that can be read in any conventional sense. Such works, I argue, are not based in text, but extend from it and demonstrate a new materiality in art practice. The artists' challenge to language in such artworks lies not in communicating an

idea about art to an audience (or *not* communicating it, as the case may be), but in challenging the very foundation of language which make communication possible. Operating then 'below the level of the word' and at the level of the letter, these works have a lineage with Isidore Isou and the Lettrist movement, however subtle or oblique (Hilder, 2010, p.10).

From where do these works come? The Lettrist movement bears useful comparison, but their genealogy is complex and multi-layered. Due to the space made available by the feminist use of language in the second generation of conceptualism, it became possible for artists in the 1990s to explore language at the foundational level of the letter, in a material way, in order to make challenges to language and its function in art, and in society. These linguistic forms suggest to artists an antidote amid the increasing lack of materiality available in our digital communications. In exploring language at the level of the letter, these artists suggest a demand for close attention – a close reading – of text in art, wherein it seeks not to comment on ideas in art, but explore the problems inherent within language itself.

## 6: Visual Language and Material Contingencies

### Introduction

I return here to conceptual art as it is invoked within text artworks by Pavel Büchler and by Janice Kerbel. In the artworks discussed, materiality is not only embraced, but crucial to the linguistic exploration of their projects. This, I will argue, marks a significant shift in the use of text in art after conceptualism. In this chapter, the artworks again are texts to be read, as well as seen, though they present a more straightforward experience to the audience: as texts presented vertically, framed or unframed, on walls in gallery-based installations.

However, the materiality of the text within the artwork invokes and reveals layers of context wherein the linguistic constructs the meaning.

First, though I return to Robert Smithson's writing, which I touched upon in the introduction. In 'A Sedimentation of the Mind', Smithson articulates the cracks within and between words as 'fissures' (Smithson, 1968, pp.100-113). He writes: 'At the bottom of both the material and the print is the beginning of an abysmal number of fissures. Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any word long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void' (Smithson, 1968, p.107). Likening 'words' to 'rocks', Smithson draws a parallel between his earthworks, and his writing practice. Smithson thus suggests a challenge to the theory/practice binary (something Kate Love also observes), stating that: 'Poetry being forever lost must submit to its own vacuity', and that journalism or art criticism 'fears the disruption of art language' (Smithson, 1968, p.107). Smithson suggests that art made of language presents a commonality between earthworks and writing, a point of possibility

‘along the avalanches of language and over the terraces of criticism’ (Smithson, 1968, p.107). Smithson’s earthworks were widely shown at the time in which he wrote the essay in 1968. Yet, he had not yet made his most famous earthwork, *Spiral Jetty*, but he had made his *Non-Sites* (1968), which were ‘gallery installations that transgress[ed] the boundaries of the museum through literal and symbolic dialogues with remote sites—wilderness areas, or the wastelands on the metropolitan fringe’ (Lauder, 2015). Smithson’s understanding of language and earth suggests the capacity of both as similar materials, materials which ‘have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art’ and at the same time suggesting ‘conceptual crystallizations’ (Smithson, 1968, p.100). He writes: ‘The entire body is pulled into the cerebral sediment, where particles and fragments make themselves known to solid consciousness’ (Smithson, 1968, p.100). Thus, within the gaps between linguistic signifier and signified, between the physicality of a word and its referent, presents an abyss of contextual possibility.

In this chapter, I explore text art in contemporary art practice which reveal an embrace of the studio, and a critical engagement with typography. One key work, Büchler’s *After Joseph Kosuth, after Douglas Huebler, after Lawrence Weiner...* *Artforum*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1997, p. 16 (2003–9), is made in direct response to a conceptual artist’s (Douglas Huebler’s, in this instance) position on form; and the other, Janice Kerbel’s *Remarkable* (2007) explores the use of digital printing and design of letterforms within a series of text art. These works are diverse, and are in no way representative of a coherent movement. Within them, language’s material realisations present particular histories. In the artworks discussed in this chapter, typography, and its production, becomes a central element of the aesthetic production of artworks after conceptualism. I position these two practices against one another in this

chapter, for the following reason. One: Büchler, in the work explored, looks back to conceptualism to invoke the importance of materiality in linguistic possibility. And two: Kerbel uses the materiality of language to look forward to an imagined future. Materiality in language fixes the text artworks in a moment in time, in which the audience encounters them.

### **'Not forms or colors'**

Pavel Büchler's practice interrogates an indirect inheritance of language from conceptualism. Büchler's first encounters with conceptual art in the 1970s were through catalogues and reproductions that he read and saw in Prague, where he lived at the time. Originally from Czechoslovakia, Büchler came to the UK in the early 1980s, and has long since lived and worked in Manchester. In 2003, Büchler began an artwork that saw various manifestations until 2009. *After Joseph Kosuth, after Douglas Huebler, after Lawrence Weiner... Artforum, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1997, p. 16* (2003–9) is a text artwork which on the surface is comprised of words 'not forms or colors' which Büchler appropriated from the pages of the magazine *Artforum*. The work's title and date suggests a progression or a continuation of a process. It has existed in multiple forms in the six years in which it was made, from text on a page to text on a gallery wall. The materiality of these multiple forms provides an evolving context of meaning and referents to the seemingly superficial text.

In 2003, Büchler first made *After Joseph Kosuth* as an A4 computer printout, with the intention of it being further photocopied in unlimited numbers (Büchler, 2009). The text was selected from a 1997 *Artforum* article in which Kosuth interviews Huebler, and the two have a retrospective discussion on their involvement in conceptualism. Kosuth makes a comment

on formlessness in conceptualism, stating: 'So what art *looked like* didn't matter outside the ideas it was meant to serve. The point was artists work with meaning, not forms or colors' (Kosuth, 1997, pp.15-16). Büchler redacted the quotation to: 'not forms or colors', which he then mechanically enlarged and scanned.<sup>1</sup> On the A4 sheet, the title and Büchler's name was added at the bottom of the A4 page in the same typographic style as the original text in *Artforum*, repositioning the text as an artwork, outside of its original context as part of a sentence in the structure of an article (fig. 6.1). In 2005, the same artwork was produced in a second version (fig. 6.2), and underwent further digital processes as an A3 inkjet print on off-white paper as a poster publication (Büchler, 2009). Here, the first version was scanned, enlarged, and separated into a CMYK file, which the artist then overprinted four times and mis-registered due to the printer's feeding mechanism. In 2007, Büchler abandoned the digital representation of the text, and from 2007 to 2009, changed to rendering it with watercolour on paper, measuring 55 x 76 centimetres. These were copied by hand from mechanical enlargements of the master, and the title was handwritten at the bottom of the sheet in pencil (fig. 6.3). These later manifestations evidence a shift of the artwork from a textual proposition to a drawing with a textual proposition, as it introduced the artist's hand. Finally, the 2009 version of the artwork saw the same text incorporated in an exhibition of Büchler's work at the Tanya Leighton gallery in Berlin, in which he showed other text artworks with references in the titles and contexts to the use of written language by other conceptual artists, including Marcel Broodthaers.<sup>2</sup> In this final version, the text rests not on a

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<sup>1</sup> *Artforum* is an American publication, and so the spelling of 'colors' is in US English.

<sup>2</sup> Büchler showed the final version of *After Joseph Kosuth...* in 2009 at Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin, in a solo exhibition titled 'L'imitation.' This is close to the title of a 2008 work (*Limitation*), which shows the text 'L'imitation' written meticulously in black ink on paper, so

page but is installed on the vertical plane, perpendicular to its reader and erected from its horizontal plane in a publication, of an interior gallery wall (fig. 6.4). The outline master of the text, hand-painted in watercolour, was created from a photographic reproduction of one of the watercolours in the 2007 version. In this final version, Böhler also added 'after Lawrence Weiner' to the title. Within each manifestation, traces of the previous versions are carried forward and become embedded in the text. Imperfections, flecks of dust, noise, all become part of the resulting linguistic object.

Installations and sculptural assemblages that are completed only 'at the point of their realization in an exhibition or performance space' (as with Joseph Kosuth's work of the mid-late 1960s) have what Martha Buskirk argues is a 'contingent physicality that ceases to exist when the elements of the work are disassembled...and can be profoundly compromised by a careless or imprecise arrangement of elements' (Buskirk, 2003, p.5). Böhler's instructions (which he supplies to installation technicians for the realisation of the final version of *After Joseph Kosuth...*) are precise, despite the relative simplicity of the work. Existing as a document supplied to gallery technicians for the installation of the work (which Böhler also supplied to the author), they reveal the importance Böhler places on a specific textual form. In private correspondence between the artist and the technical installation team, of which the audience would not be aware, Böhler is less concerned about the size or position of the text, so long as the text is 'strictly horizontal and proportions of the lettering relative to the available wall space are similar to the text being placed in a single line on a conventionally proportioned sheet of paper' (Böhler, 2009). Böhler instructs the outline of the text to be

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as to mimic print. The text is a misquotation by Böhler of the English work 'limitation', taken from a text by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh on Marcel Broodthaers.



traced, by hand, using a digital template or an overhead projector. By the time of installation, the text would have undergone numerous adaptations from mechanical reproduction to hand-drawn facsimile of a typeface. The outline is not intended to be perfect, but to reflect the 'inevitable and permissible' deviations from the original typeface (Büchler, 2009). Using black watercolour in Van Gogh Ivory Black, the outline is filled by horizontal brush strokes, from top to bottom, one letter at a time, using a medium-sized synthetic round brush. Within the painting process, very small traces of colour in light yellow, blue and purple are to be mixed in at random. Lastly, specks of dust from the original photocopy are to be retained as part of the work, and painted on the wall in the same watercolour style, although their size, shape, and distribution are to be improvised by the installing technician. These instructions are not repeated at length without purpose, for they provide Büchler with crucial testament to the importance of the physical form of the text in its role as the site of the artwork.

Each version contains the mutations and deviations that occur in it from its original appearance as part of an article in *Artforum*. What becomes clear in this specific example of text artwork are the subtle shifts the typographic representation imparts on the context, meaning, and subsequent interpretation of the artwork. Through his appropriation of written language, Büchler reasserts the manifestation of words as a conceptual art form, using Huebler's own words. Text shifts from its original context in an art magazine, a source that writes about art and claims to propagate information on art in the circulation of the art world. In the *Artforum* context, the line is specifically from an article in which Huebler and Kosuth argue the irrelevance of the materiality of written language. Further, he points out the mutations and meanings inherent with every authoring of a text as art. As the installation shifts with its physical contingencies, so does the text.

Consider the work in comparison to the Art & Language's *Index 02* (1972) (fig. 6.5). As discussed in chapter two, *Index 02* is a catalogue of their writings in eight filing cabinets presented on four plinths at eye level. (*Index 01* was shown earlier that year in Kassel at Documenta V). In the installation, filing cabinets and wall texts provide an encyclopedic mass of information in text as art. They are, on the whole, unlikely to be read by any audience due to their impenetrable, vast quantity and dense text. Büchler's project instead demonstrates an act of refinement and editing, down to a single line, pointed to by both its title and its materiality. Büchler thus comments on the cataclysmic influence that his discovery of conceptual art, whilst living in Czechoslovakia, had on him, as well as the creative misunderstandings that arose as conceptual art was translated into cultural and political contexts and into languages for Eastern European contexts. Through several manifestations of the work, different production methods and visual translations of text from one form to another, and through the title, the contextual layers of the work builds. Buskirk states that 'the method and materials that the artist selects [...] are transformed, so that rather than functioning just as the raw matter and vehicle for the artist's aesthetic expression, the materials themselves generate associations that, together with the forms in which they are shaped, establish the subject or content of the work of art' (Buskirk, 2003, p.14). In *After Joseph Kosuth*, a text artwork which stems from a magazine quotation undergoes material transformations, in which the meaning of the text becomes contingent to the changing materiality of the text. The tension between the text and its title, and in the typographic representation of the words, becomes an open site for engagement with the audience.

## Material Imaginings

Where Büchler uses text to look back and unpick the materiality of language in conceptual art, as he inherited and understood it, Janice Kerbel explores the materiality of language to develop possibilities for imagined futures. I return to Smithson's 'A Sedimentation of the Mind' in which he writes: 'When the fissures between mind and matter multiply into an infinity of gaps, the studio begins to crumble and fall like the House of Usher, so that mind and matter get endlessly confounded' (Smithson, 1968, p.110-113). Edgar Allen Poe's 1839 story, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', to which Smithson here refers, ends when a small crack in the roof of a house, a crack which the narrator noticed upon arriving at a remote part of the country to assist an ailing friend, ruptures and collapses the building, with the two corpses of the narrator's friend and his dead sister inside. Poe's story, in the American Gothic tradition, focuses on the possible madness of the friend, and an undefined illness which invokes sensory overload, hypochondria and anxiety in a time before such diagnoses existed. The physical structure of the house is a metaphor for the mental state of the narrator's friend and his sister, who are inside it. Smithson suggests that material can be metaphor, beyond structure, beyond earth, but within language itself.

In a practice concerned with illusion and reality, Janice Kerbel uses text to create a space where image and language, and visibility and invisibility intercept. The text artworks in her practice (a practice that takes many forms, from sound to light to written language) further the space for illusion. In Kerbel's practice the gaps within language, the fissures as Smithson calls it, take us elsewhere, to somewhere non-physical, but imagined. This sounds strikingly like the purpose of writing text in literature. In *Dreaming by the Book*, Elaine Scarry

introduces the concept of *enaergeia*, which is not the imitation of a thing through literature, but ‘the effect of seeing that thing’ (Scarry, 1999, p.6). Let us consider this concept in regards to text art, made of writing, such as Kerbel’s. That is, not an appropriation of texts (as seen in the work of Büchler, Kruger, Holzer, or Ligon), or a construction of an alphabet (such as in Ebner, or Elliman), or in the translation of a source from one discipline (film, in the case of Banner’s wordscapes) to text, but the process of writing for the creation of an artwork to be mounted on walls within gallery spaces. Scarry sees the vivacity of literature as a crucial value of literary aesthetics. She suggests that such writing (in literature) does not perform an imitation, which one could interpret in art as an appropriation. Rather, she suggests something new: an imagining. In Kerbel’s work, I consider not only what the audience sees on the surface of the text, but what it enables us to see at an imaginary level. Material is metaphor and the conceptual idea inhabits a textual form.

I begin first with a work of Kerbel’s from 2009. *Ballgame* is both a sound piece and a text piece. As a sound piece, the work displays a single speaker in an otherwise empty gallery space, broadcasting an announcer’s voice reading a monologue script, bearing influence of Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (Kerbel, 2008). A script, of course, is writing that one hears rather than sees, (or hear and see, in the case of acted scripts of stage or film). Initially, Kerbel’s recording seems to be a play-by-play of a typical baseball game. In making it, she researched baseball statistics to create an impossibly average game in terms of score, strikes, weather, and players’ names. The scripted game sits in the middle ground of statistical averages, yet it is a game that will never happen. As in many of her works, the hook lies in the knowledge that it *could* happen. There is a potential there that Kerbel imagines and then harnesses, and in doing so, she creates a space in which language fills the air with waves, like the sound

installations of Bruce Nauman, treating the voice as sound to be sculpted and fill a space. This work also exists in text form, as a scorecard of sorts, written in the serif typeface evocative of mid-century baseball memorabilia in a narrow version of Caslon (fig. 6.6). In all of Kerbel's works, although the text is legible with clear visual referents, the titles are ambiguous and speculative. They allude to the work but do not describe it. Here one can see a divergence from the tendency towards language-as-information in the early period of conceptual art. Kerbel instead suggests a text in which the subtexts inhabit the artwork, offering the potential for the audience to uncover them.

In a slightly earlier work, *Underwood* (2006–07), Kerbel sets out the exploration of writing in her practice. *Underwood* is a series of love letters Kerbel wrote to the seasons (rather than to another person). The title alludes to the work's mode of production: the work is a series of four letters typed with a digital font based on a classic typewriter script (fig. 6.7).<sup>3</sup> In *Underwood*, Kerbel digitally adjusts the script so that the letter 's' is aligned slightly higher than the main line of the text, suggesting a possible trace of the author, like that used by a gumshoe detective to trace a ransom note. But this is a red herring, as it is a postscript digital font, and so untraceable to a single source. Making typographical interjections into the text, Kerbel calls our attention to the writer's hand—and to the machine mediating the process of creation from artist to text. Where Guillaume Apollinaire used the typewriter as an integral component of the production and presentation of his calligrams, Kerbel pays homage to the Underwood typewriter brand in its virtual obsolescence. In his early development of language as a readymade, Duchamp also used the Underwood typewriter in several key

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<sup>3</sup> Underwood was the first widely available and mass-produced heavy steel typewriter, most popular in the interwar period.

works. In *Fania* (1916), Duchamp employed the Underwood to script a text that he made 'gesturally crude' by drawing over it with a linear profile of Carl Van Vechten's wife (Fania), an exaggerated nose protruding from her face (Joselit, 2001, p.89). In the same year, Duchamp presented a component of the Underwood as a readymade in *Traveller's Folding Item*. No photographs of Duchamp's original readymade exist. Shown on a stand, the work is the typewriter cover, displaying the brand name Underwood, draped over nothing: a cover covering nothing, but suggesting that which is hidden beneath it. Installed at a height that encourages the viewer to bend and peer under the skirt, with nothing hidden beneath, the work invites the imagination of the audience to activate it. Duchamp describes the audience encounter: 'The onlookers are the ones that make the picture' (Schuster, 1957). The female figure is cloaked by words in *Fania*, the script typed over her face. To art historian David Joselit, the order reflected in the type in *Fania* is violently juxtaposed with the grotesque hand-drawn caricature-like profile (Joselit, 2001, p.89). For Kerbel, however, the typewriter and the type it produces are not something for masking, or being hidden, but rather a tool providing a tangible bridge between her imagined concept and our experience of it. This bridge is not always the shortest line between two points. Sometimes, typography complicates it, disrupting the process of the reading encounter with the audience. In *Underwood*, typography takes on traces of the author placed in the text to intentionally misguide the reader. In her textile work, Anni Albers made typewriter studies – works made on the typewriter which she used to create template patterns for weaving. In Albers' *Typewriter study to create textile effect* (undated), Albers uses the bracket and hyphen key in a pattern to create a wavy grid effect (fig. 6.8). Here, Albers treats paper as a material, a surface for inscription, in order to create patterns simulating textile weaving. In her 1982 lecture, 'Material as Metaphor', presented at the College Art Association's annual meeting in

New York, Albers, who was speaking on a panel with John Cage (to whom I will later return in the discussion of Kerbel's materiality of language in her practice), assessed materials as 'a means of communication', and that those 'means', when applied to art, are for 'realizing dreams' (Albers, 1982, n.p.). In listening to materials, Albers argued, we become 'truly active' (Albers, 1982, n.p.).

Kerbel's *Remarkable* (2007), is a series of black and white typographical posters originally commissioned for Frieze Art Fair and shown in a solo exhibition at Tate Britain in 2010. The text in the works describes imagined Victorian sideshow acts. The visual associations with Victorian popular culture resemble Kerbel's use of the Underwood font to pay homage to an outdated mode of communication. The type in *Remarkable* is mostly an emphatically pre-modernist series of Egyptian, Grotesque, or slab-serif fonts characterised by their blocky serifs. Such typography is antithetical to that used by conceptual artists, who typically chose sans-serif typefaces lacking adornment, such as Franklin Monotype Gothic (Lawrence Weiner) or Sabon (Joseph Kosuth). Despite being set digitally, both her typography and her layout emulate broadsides and speak to Victorian and earlier publishing and advertising more than they do to 1960s' conceptual art. Broadsides were a form of street literature in which large sheets printed as woodcuts on cheap paper were plastered onto walls. In use from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century and losing importance only with the advent of mass-produced newspapers and cheap novels, they marked one of the first stages in the transition from the oral tradition of history and fiction to the written one. Kerbel's recalling of the broadside evokes an element of steampunk.<sup>4</sup> Although not actually printing broadside,

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<sup>4</sup> Steampunk is a sub-genre of science fiction in which alternate histories are set in the 19th century, in an era when industry was powered by steam. Works of steampunk often present

Kerbel references the Victorian layout for such posters, running the text to the edge and using most of the available space to exploit the full width of the paper.<sup>5</sup> Her posters also speak to the word in the context of Victorian advertising: technological developments in printing had led to increasing speed and reductions in cost as the nineteenth century ended, and this produced what Drucker calls a ‘visually cluttered environment’ of printed ephemera in which graphic design had to be executed with skill to divert readers’ attention away from the competition (Drucker and McVarish, 2009, p.141).

By foregrounding the broadside — an anachronistic method of distribution — with *Remarkable*, Kerbel creates an imagined, deceptive scene. Her non-narrative text tells us of characters and events in exaggerated detail, although the audience is never given a time or date with which to locate them if one were to attend this fantastical carnival of sideshow acts. In other works, including *Bank Job* (1999), Kerbel has also created fantasy situations, with detail heightened to the point that the audience feels one could step into an imaginary world. *The Bird Island Project* (2000–2003) mimics the online marketing strategies of real estate timeshares sold off-plan. While the design and layout pastiches the soft pastel hues, italicised fonts, and clunky webpage design of a real estate development, the language plays on the boredom that may lead someone to the site through a Google search using keywords like ‘paradise’ or ‘tropical island’. ‘You are on your way to becoming a partner in paradise’,

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an anachronistic relationship with invention or technology, reimagining art, culture, architecture, and technology as Victorians may have envisaged them.

<sup>5</sup> Also known as broadsheet, this is a method of printing a large sheet of paper on one side only. Traditionally used for posters and proclamations, the technique and term also applies to newspapers that were historically printed in the same mode.



Kerbel writes (2000-2003). As with *Remarkable*, Kerbel invites us with her language and detail to share her vision for an imagined future. In *Remarkable*, the typography instigates this exchange, opening the reading up to Victorian notions of phantasmagoria and magic.

Given the context of the series in their first presentation at Frieze Art Fair in 2007, the work's title, *Remarkable*, comments on the overabundance of artworks and frenzied collectors trying to do a deal; everything was remarkable if you could establish a referent for it, and yet, nothing was. Kerbel's work clearly comments on the frenetic attitude of the art market at such events at the time, attempting to present a discourse commenting within the art market, rather than outside of it, as Tauba Auerbach has tried recently with the Diagonal Press. Kerbel's posters were fly-posted on temporary surfaces so that each of them confronted the audience several times over, being read repeatedly so they become images, like an advertisement hung at intervals on hoardings, gaining visual impact from repetition.<sup>6</sup> Ephemeral objects, broadsides and playbills are generally destroyed when the next ones are

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<sup>6</sup> Frieze has commissioned artists since its inception in 2003. Frieze Art Fair is co-directed by Matthew Slotover and Amanda Sharp, and was founded in 2003 by the two, who are also co-publishers of *Frieze* magazine. The organisation also includes the Frieze Foundation, the non-profit component responsible for 'the curated programme at Frieze Art Fair, comprising artist commissions, talks, films, music and education. Frieze Foundation is funded by the European Commission's Culture 2007 programme and Arts Council England' (Frieze.com). In 2004, the sales at the weekend fair totaled £26 million. After 2005, figures were no longer released, as they were considered to be misleading due to the sales completed outside of the gallery and the curatorial programme. Frieze also has a direct relationship with the Tate, through the acquisitions fund Outset, which is the first acquisition fund connected to an art fair. Other significant art fairs that have been established for much longer have recently begun commission strands, most notably the Armory Show in New York in 2002.

put up. However, when moved to the Tate for Kerbel's solo exhibition and placed in frames, the works transcended their initial temporary status and the language bends to the new context. The critique reorients; it now comments on the institution and the mechanisation of art that it orders. Unlike the famous work of Pop artists like Warhol, Kerbel does not parody advertising parlance, but instead manipulates the visual language of early graphic design within an art context, to produce a critique that works in various institutions.

The text of a poster from *Remarkable* makes little sense if simply read from left to right. Instead, the experience of the work is seeing and visualising the words and their referents, whether it be 'the explosive beauty of the 'Human Firefly' Iggy Fantuse' or the 'remarkable being of the regurgitating lady' (Kerbel, 2007). Art and design historian David Brett writes on the communicative intention of sign-making, arguing that the attention-seeking gesture of the sign is not decoration (something he seeks to reaffirm as a critical scholarship), but 'graphicity' (Brett, 2005, p.252). To Brett, graphicity is what occurs in the moment when 'the denotative function of advertising ...is clearly absorbed and almost lost' to the visual experience—when we no longer read signs but behold the spectacle (Brett, 2005, p.252). Graphicity is when words slip away and become purely visual. In this moment, something Smithson alludes to as the 'fissures between mind and material', the idea is revealed through the gaps that emerge between the word the audience reads and what the audience sees (Smithson, 1968). Brett uses the example of neon signs of characters in Asian cities at night (Brett, 2005). Kerbel's work could be seen to evoke a similar response in her audience in the space of the gallery.

When answering a question I posed to her about *Remarkable*, Kerbel read several lines of one of the posters aloud to herself: 'Thunder. Lightning. Seismic tremors. Inexhaustible. Infinitely varied.' She commented that in the writing process, she knew how she arrived at a completed phrase, but that reading it left to right, top to bottom, made no sense to an audience (Kerbel, 2010). This suggests that Kerbel, like Büchler, is less interested in writing to communicate a narrative, but more so in working with words as a form to create an experience, with the communication with the audience existing in the material of language. The audience has to enter where he or she sees a gap and is drawn in at the point that typographically grabs him or her, triggering in Iser's theory, an aesthetic object in the imaginary (Iser, 1978, p.110). Kerbel's text is a process, a translation from thought to spoken to written, and once entered, the reader must continue the translation, from typographical mark, to word, to thought. Kerbel wrote and set the text for *Remarkable* simultaneously; rather than writing the piece and then laying it out, adjusting fonts, sizes, and spacing, she developed the words and the way they look at the same time. Not only is this unorthodox to designers, but it is also in direct opposition to a significant shift in printing that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, the period to which *Remarkable* visually points. Drucker notes that in the Victorian period, '[f]or the first time, the tasks and responsibilities of visualizing a layout or sketching a composition were separated from those of printing', a shift which marked the emergence of the graphic designer (Drucker and McVarish, 2009, p.141). Kerbel's approach implies that she pays equal consideration to how the text flows for an audience and to how the words look, as well as how they relate to one another visually. In a contemporary context, the implementation of digital publishing enables the discourse and the visuality to unfold at the same time.

In *Double Attraction, Crystal and Blindspot*, another poster from the *Remarkable* series (2007), the word 'blindspot' sits seven lines up from the bottom of the page. It is in a much smaller point size than the rest of the text, and nearly hidden by the surrounding text (fig. 6.9). Written in uppercase sans serif, 'blindspot' sits alone on a line, with words in larger typefaces above and below it, both typefaces with serifs. The word 'blindspot' reminds us to look closely. Kerbel created a fantasy cast of sideshow performers for *Remarkable*, and *Crystal* and *Blindspot* are among them. *Blindspot* has only one eye and therefore limited peripheral vision and no capacity to judge distance. Hélène Cixous, in 'Writing Blind', states that to write she must escape the day, which 'prevents her from seeing' (Cixous, 1998, p.139). Cixous, along with Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, pioneered the critical practice of *Écriture féminine* in French post-structuralist feminism. Writing is a process that isolates her eyes and her mind. She states, 'I cannot write without *distracting* my gaze from capturing. I write by distraction' (Cixous, 1998, p.139). For Cixous, writing is seeing, and seeing only occurs in blindness, when the gaze diverts her from that at which she looks. The implication here: as an audience, one receives the text in an indirect exchange. If the experience of reading is 'writerly' in the Barthesian sense, then it is through distraction that the message emerges (Barthes, 1967). Kerbel's typographical diversions in the reading process encourage us to engage with the text through the gaps and distractions she provides. Cixous's essay 'Writing Blind' and Kerbel's single, isolated word 'blindspot' serve similar purposes, suggesting one reads not to see the words but to look for the spaces between—for the potential they hold in the creation of the message. If graphicity suggests one finds the spectacle of the sign beholden as an image, then the blindspots Cixous notes suggest that the physical and conceptual gaps in the texts are also part of the spectacle.

Kerbel's typography does not allow a smooth and efficient reading of the text, but rather provokes us to attempt to visualise her fantasy, to stumble over the words, and to pause as one does, to become trapped in the forms generated. Despite the visual quality of the word, we each see the fantasy differently. This is in contrast to Sol LeWitt's work, which integrates language with its subsequent graphic manifestation. Lippard notes that LeWitt's *The Location of Eight Points* (1974) documents the increasingly complex instruction within it until reaching a point of 'logical insanity', which she argues is a 'prime example of the unique manner in which LeWitt has been able to use language as an integral part of his process, providing another, literal way of "reading the artist's mind"' (LeWitt et al., 1978, p.28). The language of a text, title, or label may be deemed by the artist to be necessary as an intermediary between the idea, image and the audience, suggesting that language makes things more clear or exact when images are subjective. But language too is subjective—in part, when it operates as descriptive text, and even more so when it operates as image, as in Kerbel's *Remarkable*.

Despite the hyperbole in her non-narrative sequences, which are akin to tabloid headlines, and despite her typographic heightening of the melodrama of her text, Kerbel manages to slow the process of reading. While her writing casts our interpretations of her words somewhere beyond the wall where they sit, her careful manipulation of the word as material gives us something to hold onto. With the digital revolution, perhaps these material exchanges are more desirable than ever. Before these variables shift, the material word presents the opportunity to fix the circuit of artist, audience, and idea. It is a momentary exchange, as the title of the exhibition suggests. If we don't see it now, we will miss it forever. Like Vito Acconci in works which he published in his magazine *0-9*, such as *ON* (1968), the page or wall which supplies the textual surface becomes a space of performance, in which

the words perform and the audience is implicated. Acconci's texts in *0-9* are, Ruth Blacksell writes 'often non-linear in their arrangement on the page and intentionally disruptive to the linear reading of other surrounding texts' (Blacksell, 2013, p.70). Kerbel's work explores the idea of visibility through forms that promise and withhold making the idea seen, or felt. Text is a screen on which ideas are projected but never realised. Kerbel considers the possibility of making an idea visible without making it seen. Without an image, the work is viewed in the mind's eye of the audience: in their imagination. Text and sound, the forms Kerbel uses most frequently, describe, allude to, evoke, suggest, but do not show. Kerbel's *Remarkable* is about an elusive moment, a slipping time, at which we have arrived too late.

In 2015, Janice Kerbel completed a new text artwork, exhibited as a text piece, and as a vocal performance for the first time in its entirety in Vancouver, Canada later in 2015. The piece had been performed a few months prior, in early 2014, as a sung vocal work in Glasgow at the Mitchell Library, commissioned by the Common Guild. *DOUG* (2015) features nine pieces of digitally set black text, silk screened onto white newsprint paper (fig. 6.10). Kerbel's motivating question in the exploration of the series was whether it was possible to see music. That is, Kerbel sought to question whether a new linguistic system could be devised to translate the aural experience of sound to a graphic treatment of written language in art practice, beyond the graphics of musical notation. Testing whether there might be a graphical methodology to score music with words, rather than notes, retaining musicality within those words, Kerbel wrote the nine pieces of music through a system of writing and setting text. Once scored, they could be performed as vocal pieces, or the nine musical compositions could be presented as wall-based text pieces.

To make the works, Kerbel first wrote nine texts as rhythmic verse. Inspired by narrative ballads and operatic librettos, the verses told nine storylines featuring the protagonist, the ill-fated Doug. She then scored the texts from the verse. Kerbel did so visually, setting the score on an axis she devised so that the notes meander on a grid on the page, reflecting how they sound in their arrangement. Finally, she scored the music. (Kerbel is not trained in music but studied musical composition in preparation for the work). The score ultimately brought an aural means for interpretation to the text. With the system of rules she devised to enable the making of the artwork, Kerbel's use of text positions her practice to be both like a graphic designer, and like the systematic approaches to written language seen in the 1960s' artwork of Sol LeWitt or Hanne Darboven. Kerbel employs her system, and inhabits it as rigorously as possible. Yet ultimately, in her words, the work 'is free from [the system]' (Kerbel, 2015). For *DOUG*, Kerbel first set a grid with a vertical axis to indicate pitch and a horizontal axis to indicate time. She then placed the text, which she had already written as verse, along the axes, word by word, in the same way that a composer places notes along a staff when writing a composition. Sans serif letters denote male (or lower) voices, and serif letters denote female (or upper) voices. Point sizes indicate volume. The typefaces also infuse the text with an economy of the everyday and the readymade, as does the newsprint on which they are printed. Traditional narrative ballad would have been printed on the cheapest paper available in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.

In the translation of the musical score to the text piece, Kerbel sets the text to visually resemble the act it described. Like a Tom and Jerry cartoon character, Doug suffers repetitive violent acts. When Doug is killed in a car crash (*DOUG (Crash)* (2015)), the choral piece is only six seconds long. As a typographic crescendo, it builds to a sudden end. When Doug is killed

by an explosion (*DOUG (Blast)* (2015)), the letters scatter like debris from a bomb littering the air. As Doug drowns (*DOUG (Sink)* (2015)), the reader's eye dips above and beneath the waves of text until he finally succumbs beneath the water line. Dom Sylvester Houédard's typestracts (his term for his typographic concrete poems made on a typewriter) can also be understood as visual scapes, doing away with words and letters in favour of slashes, and Houédard's works present a spatial possibility on the page.

By challenging the juxtaposition of musical notation and typography, Kerbel creates two uncomfortable bedfellows, and manifests a tension between the ways in which the audience encounters language, visually, aurally, and cognitively. Like *Remarkable*, the works defy being read left to right. Many of the pieces, due to their dense kerning or heavy typeface, defy legibility at all. The reader-viewer's eye grasps the odd word or phrase, but the work instead demands it be encountered as a singular image to wash over the eye, in the same way one hears a musical piece not in a linear way of note to note, but as a compositional whole. Due to the rules that Kerbel has devised, the result is not a clean, clear graphic presentation of text but a combined cacophony of language in visual, aural, and textual forms. When *DOUG* was performed at The Mitchell Library, it was sung by an ensemble of six classically trained, professional singers, ranging from female sopranos to male bass singers.

*DOUG* is a challenging piece in terms of the understanding of text in contemporary art practice. It is for this reason I end on it here. Upon first glance, *DOUG (Strike)* (2015) could be perceived as a piece of text art informed by concrete poetry, such as that of Houédard. The text descends from the top of the page like a lightning bolt as Doug meets yet another untimely death, being struck down by the meteorological event. But this superficial reading –



of concrete poetry directly informing contemporary visual practice in the artist's use of text – would fail to penetrate the careful layers of intention and context within Kerbel's work, for these are layers which result from her systems of writing.

There is a long and rich history of artists working with graphic scores, particularly from the proto-conceptual period onwards. For example, one can see this in John Cage's *4'33"* (1952) and in *Notations* (1969), by Cage and Alison Knowles, a collection of graphic scores. In Cage's *4'33"*, the performers are instructed not to play their instruments for the duration of the piece, four minutes and thirty-three seconds, suggesting that any sound may constitute music (fig. 6.11). The second page from Cage's graphic score of *4'33"* shows two vertical lines, with the number '30' written in the lower right of the page. The lines cross the page like the flat-lines of an echo-cardiogram meter with no reading, indicating time as the eye (of the player or the audience) scans them. The axes do not cross. Rather, like in Kerbel's two axes, they present instead two parallel, vertical axes. The work also exists as a typewritten score (and as its performed act), in which the audience sees three sections of the composition listed, and a supporting paragraph at the bottom of the single page describes the performance and the audience's anticipated encounter with it. The typewritten version is demonstrative of Liz Kotz's concept of the language-based artwork as what she terms a performance score, in which 'the notation no longer describes what we hear but what we do' (Kotz, 2007, p.17). Here, Kotz contends, composition and writing become autonomous modes of production wherein the graphic work 'has no determined relationship' to the performance or production of sound (Kotz, 2007, p.17).

## Conclusion

Despite the visual quality of text that is highlighted in these text artworks, Kerbel's treatment of the written word does not indicate a development exclusively from concrete poetry (as an assumption that could be made if one followed the scholarship of UK and American surveys of text art in contemporary practice in the past five years). Rather, Kerbel's rule-based methodology, develops from a history of conceptual art practices evident in works such as LeWitt's sets of instructions for his wall drawings, or Darboven's encyclopedic compilation of information in a mathematical notation system, in order to arrive at a careful composition of text as a visual piece to be read and seen. However, Kerbel's attention to the typographical material also bears influence of the feminist artwork of the 1970s and 1980s. Kerbel's project is heavily invested with a conceptual interrogation of written language. *DOUG* thus emerges from a genealogy of language-based conceptual art, to result in a highly visual end. But Kerbel extends her exploration further still, into the realm of text to sound, suggesting that within the object-based text artwork is the capacity for the ultimate challenge to the materiality of written language as a physical experience. We can see explorations into this same shift, of text to sound, and sound to text, in Ligon's *Come Out* (2014), for example, as well as Christian Marclay's *Surround Sounds* (2014), a silent video installation of animated, onomatopoeic words from Pop Art and the language of comic books such as 'Pow!' and 'Whoosh!' (fig. 6.12).

By using standard fonts such as Gill Sans and Didot, Kerbel hoped the typefaces gave the words some invisibility in the work (in that an audience would not see the typefaces as part of the work, for the typefaces were so familiar that they receded from view) (Kerbel, 2015).

She considered other typefaces in the works' making, but ultimately disregarded them for appearing to be overly designed. Such an anxiety presents a concern that David Coventon, James Edgar and Frederick Williams explore in their 2012 study on the future of typography, *Whatever Next?*, in which the 'traditional creative division' of art from craft persists in contemporary art practice and design (Coventon et al., 2012, p.64). Specifically, Coventon et al see this division when art pieces are made of text in collaboration with a graphic or type designer, or using the methodologies of graphic or type design – an idea I return to in the conclusion as a direction for future research. In Kerbel's *DOUG* the text operates visually but also aurally. Within the artworks that have been explored in this thesis I have made examinations into the dimensions of text and where it can take the audience when expanded beyond the reading experience alone, and along a spectrum of encounters including seeing, feeling, and reading.

## Conclusion: Material Language for a Digital World

Recalling a conversation with Jasper Johns in 1972, critic Leo Steinberg remembered the exchange as follows. Steinberg says: 'I asked him about the type of numbers and letters he uses – coarse, standardised, unartistic – the type you would associate with packing cases and grocery signs' (Steinberg, 1972, p.32). Steinberg asked Johns: 'You nearly always use this same type. Any particular reason?', to which, Johns answered: 'That's how the stencils come' (Steinberg, 1972, p.32). Johns off-hand comment suggests an attitude towards texts and letters as a readymade material, neutral in their context. As I have explored in the analysis of contemporary artworks in this thesis, contemporary artists such as Kerbel and Büchler, are acutely aware of the power and effect that the material manifestation of a text in an artwork has on the artwork's reception by its audience. At the beginning of the thesis, I proposed to explore the proliferation of text art in contemporary art practice, I set out to explore why and how artists were engaging materiality in text in artworks now, how that related to precedents for text in art in the preceding four decades, and what it said of a broader cultural shift to materiality and text in a post-digital context. Kerbel and Büchler, for example, are engaging text in new ways that makes use of these contexts to further the communication of an idea with the audience through the text.

Approaching text as material in contemporary art after conceptualism has enabled my research to explore text artworks spatially, gesturally, and in ways that suggest new modes of reading. Text in conceptual art was never dematerialised. Whether on a page, a wall, or otherwise, text cannot escape its materiality. Nor in concrete poetry was language ever

supra-linguistic, existing purely visually instead of verbally. As I noted in the chapter one, if one places works of concrete poetry alongside works of conceptual art, distinctions such as dematerialisation and materiality are not tenable. In the latter three chapters I have addressed and explored the ways contemporary artists such as Fiona Banner, Shannon Ebner, Paul Elliman, or Pavel Büchler, particularly in the past decade, use text as a material, making part of my contribution to knowledge. This has enabled me to interrogate how such contemporary practices diverge from, or develop from, work that has developed since the 1960s in conceptualism, concrete poetry, and feminist critiques of conceptualism. I have done so in order to question the demands such work places on the audience who encounters it; and to question how curatorial assessments of text in contemporary practice attend to these developments.

To make a brief summary, chapters two and three developed alternative precedents for contemporary text art, looking to the feminist, second generation of conceptual artists who used language to pose questions of representation, power, and culture, and who interrogated those questions through the medium of text. As a main claim of my contribution to knowledge, I staked the importance of feminist art of the late 1970s and 1980s, to the ways text has become used as material in contemporary practice since conceptualism. Artists such as Barbara Kruger, Mary Kelly, Jenny Holzer, as well as Glenn Ligon, and Adrian Piper amongst others, challenged representation in language, through the material use of text. Inherent to this claim is the challenge made by these artists that language is neither neutral nor natural but that it creates political subjectivities. Chapters four, five, and six explored the materiality of language in contemporary art practices, arguing not that these works present a cohesive movement, but rather are individual practices, which nevertheless, share an

interest in exploring what I have called the materiality of text art. Within these latter chapters, my project has explored text artworks in the last decade specifically looking at how artists such as Janice Kerbel, Banner, Elliman, and Ebner use the materiality of text in order to explore written language itself, as well as the ideas contained within the work.

The thesis has sought to explore from where these artworks come from in art historical genealogy, arguing that whilst concrete poetry, Lettrism, and conceptual art have indeed influenced individual artists' approaches to the use of text, art historical analysis of text art cannot overlook the importance of feminist artists, and artists informed by the identity politics of feminism, of the late 1970s and 1980s. It was these artists who turned language away from looking inward at art and outward at the world in their texts. The material qualities that one encounters in text art today allow us to reframe text art of the past, looking beyond the concrete and the conceptual. Feminist artists practicing with text in the late 1970s and early 1980s also returned a sense of subjectivity to the use of text – a political subjectivity – wherein language provided a unique medium through which to engage the audience, and through which their use of text as a form furthered that exploration. My intention is that readers will now see the significance of these artists – Kelly, Kruger, Holzer, as well as Ligon – in not only the subject matters that they brought to the fore with their artworks, such as the entering of the child into the social order and the acquisition of language (Kelly), or the representation of race in America (Ligon), but in the way that they altered the use of text as a visual, material medium, which sought to engage the audience, often with emotion. I put forward in chapter two that Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* is not only political due Kelly's engagement with feminist subject matter of motherhood, but for the way it opened up text to a subjective, narrative potential within conceptual art practice,

and how it used text to mediate between the two. To Kelly, text enabled the artwork to explore political subjectivities and engage the audience at a level of text, message, and aesthetic that created a discursive space for debate of ideas. Kelly's text was not didactic or aloof, but a medium of exchange.

Text is not devoid of context, floating freely to be appropriated without carrying its own histories, meanings, and connotations. Any form of text has a past, and has contexts, beyond its signifier. Through the research of this thesis, my intention is that readers can now re-examine the terrain that was altered by the second generation of conceptual artists who, informed by feminism, engaged with those contexts and materiality, and made it integral to their work, thereby refuting any naturalness or freedom from hegemony that could be suggested of language as material. I return to Lange-Berndt, whom I quoted in the introduction. When Lange-Berndt writes that the 'political decision to focus on the materials of art' carries with it a choice to 'consider the processes of making and their associated power relations' she refers to physical materials, and not specifically to language (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.12). But we can extend this to consider text as material and the 'power relations' inherent in language, as I have explored (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p.12). Though these artists have been largely overlooked by recent group exhibitions of text in contemporary practice, which draw a historical genealogy from the earlier movements of concrete poetry or conceptual art in the US or UK, I have sought to explore how they were not a subsequent development of the 1960s linguistic turn, but a radical shift from the arguments of dematerialisation associated with that movement. They looked outward from art with their use of text, while engaging the form of text in its material qualities: its typography, printing methods, display, and distribution. When entering a gallery installed with a text artwork, it is

my intention that readers will now more fully consider the spatial, gestural, and contextual way in which the words as material are presented in the artwork and considered in the exhibition. As I state earlier in the thesis: by attending to the use of text in important historical works of art, we can understand the use of text in art in the present in new ways, particularly that informed by a feminist revision of language in conceptual art practice.

To address how curators have explored such materiality, I posed whether the curation of text art in the staging of gallery-based group exhibitions had developed from exhibitions that preceded in the initial moment of language in art, in the 1960s, or whether it suggests another approach to curating text art. I began this thesis with *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* at the ICA, and questioned the implications of curators having recently (at the ICA, the Drawing Room, the MoMA, for example), if unintentionally, articulating a binary division between concrete poetry and conceptual art as distinct and definite genealogies for text as art. For though they share a brief overlap in their periods of productivity in the 1960s, there is little in common in the movements. By looking back to historical exhibitions of significance to the development of text art as it is grouped and displayed to public audiences, such as *Between Poetry and Painting, Information, or Book as Artwork*, I have mapped how text has been treated by curators in various public contexts since the 1960s, which makes part of my contribution to knowledge. In the study of recent works of text art, made largely in the past ten years, I have sought out works which present a new and different engagement with materiality, responding to cultural shifts of the moment. These works, I have argued, have been influenced by the materiality that we can see in the feminist artists of the second generation of conceptualism, who challenged the naturalness of language. The thesis has focused on the techniques, the exhibition, and the materiality of text as a form within



contemporary art and the group exhibitions that have attempted to survey it. Future research offers the potential to explore the implications of such materiality of text across movements, across other geographies, and question further the importance of attending to text in detail today. Contemporary text works bear the influence of conceptualism, concrete poetry, and feminist art. But they have also turned to materiality in response to the change in our relationship to the immateriality of language in an era of screens, and have thus instigated a new development in the use of text as material by artists.

Our conventions of gallery-based viewing both enable us and inhibit us in our experience of these works. We are at a bridging moment in our engagement with language as a material in our daily experiences, outside those experiences confined to art galleries. We belong to one of two generations who remember life before the internet and experience life after the internet. To reflect on how our relationship with language has changed, and question why materiality may be desirable, may offer pleasure or connectedness, now. Some works reflected on in the thesis, such as Tauba Auerbach's, have their origins in digital aesthetics and technologies. How artists will move forward in their engagement with text, to explore reading, seeing, communication, and text as something material to behold versus something ethereal, ephemeral, and existing in cyberspace, is a subject for future research.

I have explored gestural texts to be encountered with the body, making a choreographed, performative act of reading in the works of Banner or Ebner; single found letterforms that convey the potential of language and challenge what may even be considered a text artwork in Elliman's practice; and works of Büchler or Kerbel in which the surface text is invested with layers of contextual meaning for the very exploration of a conceptual project. Such practices

are varied, offering multiple reasons for a turn to language. Many of the artists explored in this thesis choose to use words because, I have argued, they question the very act of reading throughout these artworks. One possible explanation for the turn to text in art practice since the late 1990s is the rise of the digital and the resulting change in our ways of using written forms of communication. This rise has affected how artists understand and engage with the materiality of language. Kenneth Goldsmith goes so far as to describe visual poetry today as 'post-digital concrete poetry' (Bean et al., 2015). To Goldsmith, writing in the introduction to *The New Concrete*, the user's interaction with language via a computer – actions we do every day, such as rolling a cursor over a word, pressing 'send' when writing an email, highlighting text and then copying and pasting it in a word document – are all physical acts that engage with text as a new form of material in digital space (Goldsmith, 2015). By clicking on a link, for example, we are literally pressing down on a word through a mouse and a screen. This is a new experience with the materiality of language. Are the image-language of emojis and icons a realisation of the democratisation of language, universal and read visually? Yet Goldsmith, as well as Peter Mayer, sees this as the prophecy of concrete poetry realised beyond the concrete poets' wildest dreams: a digital landscape crossing boundaries and borders, where emojis are instantly recognisable, regardless of language (Mayer, 1996).

The materiality of books is now very desirable, perhaps for the nostalgia offered by a pleasurable tactile object against a sea of so many screen-based, intangible interactions. Andrew Piper, however, challenges the nostalgia of the book and instead explores the future of reading presenting a coexistence of both books and screens (Piper, 2012). The tactility, texture and materiality of books now offers a nostalgic appeal in the digital age. Similarly, in music the sales of vinyl records amidst the era of the digital music streaming of Spotify and

the online track-based music store of iTunes, the US sale of vinyl records surged to a 26-year high in 2015, marking a 52% year on year increase (Britton, 2015). Like a return to vinyl, Bean and McCabe argue how we can see in contemporary visual poetry 'the sensuality of the typewriter has returned' (Bean et al, 2015). The sensuality of the typewriter is also present in works such as Kerbel's *Underwood* (2006-7). Text has taken on new meaning, owing to our constant, frequent, and brief communications via text messages, and social media such as Twitter. The changes in our communication and engagement with written language brought on by the web, have, Goldsmith argues, made 'us see just how prescient concrete poetics was in predicting its own lively reincarnation in the twenty-first century' (Bean et al, 2015). But it has also, I argue, changed the way artists embrace materiality of language as slow, contemplative, tactile.

Two key areas have surfaced as future research subjects. First: the relationship of the internet and post-digital age to the use of text in art. The democratisation of art to increasingly accessible mediums such as digital language, the change in the materialisation of language (for the digital suggests a possibility for language to be both dematerialised in its reduction to binary code in cyberspace and newly material with touch screens), the globalisation and connective networking of communication, the brevity of textual communication – are all new developments in text since the digital age which realise, in part, possibilities imagined with concrete poetry and conceptual art. While concrete poetry sought a transnational visual language, it was conceptual artists who sought systems and practices that were ephemeral, mobile, and seemingly without the constraints of national boundaries (Wilson, 2016). The internet is not without its own new materiality, and we cannot read in the same way we did before the digital age. Thus, the digital offers a new avenue of further

research on the materiality of text in art. There is scope to make future research of this project into more geographies. Second: the relevance of broader geographic exhibitions to the curation of text in art practice. My research makes its focus the US and UK, though this is not an assertion that experimentations in text and conceptual art practice were not ongoing elsewhere, as they were important to many artists of Eastern Europe of the 1960s and 70s, such as Jaroslaw Kozlowski in Poland. However, as my research is as much with the dissemination of the works in the context of exhibitions and focuses on works in the English language, this is where the focus remains. Future research can extend further into the dissemination and presentation of these works, and many other text works, across geographic contexts after the Cold War.

Interrogating specific artworks made in the last decade to uncover how text manifests in contemporary practice, and the curatorial and critical language that supports and explores this interrogation, has been a core aim of this thesis. When I began this project in 2009, I was intrigued by a pervasiveness of text across contemporary art practice, and the lack of critical attention writing on the new, material ways artists were engaging written language.

Curatorial strategies in individual exhibitions have each presented surveys and assessments for how language is being used, where it develops from, and why artists are turning to text now. Yet I do not claim to cover all group exhibitions of text art in this thesis, but rather a sample. Initially in my research, I felt I lacked the critical tools to engage with all of the elements of text in art. It touches design, communication studies, art history, exhibition and curatorial studies, literary studies. Text is so engrained in the fabric of our every day that it is, like Beech and O'Neill proposed in the 2011 exhibition *We Are Grammar*, pervasive but intersectional (Beech and O'Neill, 2011). This thesis has aimed to make a study of such

exhibitions, and of artworks which have been included in them to explore how one might read text artwork in a broad sense, and how one might begin to lay the groundwork for how text cuts across disciplines today in new engagements with the material in a digital age.

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## Appendix:

Mark Sladen, Curator of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* (ICA, London, 2009), and former Director of Exhibitions, ICA. Via Skype, London, 5 May 2016.

KD: Thank you very much for giving your time, I appreciate it. Would you mind talking me through first the idea for the exhibition and how it came about?

MS: Casting my mind back, a friend of mine had been in the Poetry Library at the South Bank Centre and they had some sheets, I think by Dom Sylvestre Houédard, and he showed them to me and said, 'Hey aren't these amazing'. And it got me thinking. It got me thinking about concrete poetry as something that I had only glancingly encountered over the years, and it got me thinking 'is there a kernel for a show here' and I had the sense that there was something a bit zeitgesty going on. It recalled other things I had seen and I thought it would be a good moment to research this and present it again. So, I think, as with many of these – and I haven't made a big specialism of doing big, thematic group shows – but when I have done, there's been an intuitive way, of things popping up on my radar, and wondering how things connect. So, I think it came about in a fairly intuitive way. And whenever I did historic projects at the ICA, I'd be thinking, well 'it is the ICA, and the main function of it is to show very current work', so I'd be thinking about legacies of it. So, I thought is this something artists working now would find interesting, be in dialogue with. So, the fact that I had seen echoes of concrete poetry coming up in the work of contemporary artists made me think 'there's a space here to do a show of concrete poetry and also contemporary work, and play



the two off against each other'. And also, there had been an important show at the ICA at the time, at the time of concrete poetry.

KD: The 1965 show, *Between Poetry and Painting*?

MS: Yes, the Jasia Reichardt show. So, that was an attraction as well, the link to the ICA history. And there was another thing, in that I've always had a strong interest in literary culture as well as visual culture. I find that really appealing territory, that I can enjoy from various angles. I originally studied Literature (BA) and then went on to study Art History (MA). So, I've always enjoyed historic projects and they enable me to fill a gap in my knowledge.

But I think the show that came out of it – I remember I sent Jasia Reichardt some information about what I was planning, when my ideas were half-formed, and she wrote back: 'this is just a soup, you don't have any structural thesis in this, it's just a soup of names!' And I think she had a good point. The show had its virtues, but it wasn't advancing a specific thesis. I think in retrospect; I should have focused on concrete poetry. I think it was a fun show to visit, but I think it could have been a bit more disciplined and had a clearer and more focused second chapter. [Laughs]. Downstairs was focused on concrete poetry, and upstairs there was a room on illustrations of poetry, which is a very different thing, and then there was a room of contemporary work. I think people enjoyed it, but I don't know if it was disciplined or had a clear thesis.

KD: It's interesting, because it was a few years ago, and what I remember most is the downstairs room, which is where the concrete poetry was.

MS: Yes, I think the downstairs was very strong.

KD: Yes, and the upstairs with the contemporary work like Janice Kerbel's. I think over time, the illustrative works such as the Hockney perhaps recede a bit in time.

MS: Yes, I think that's true. It was a bit like that at the ICA, where everything was happening so fast. I had made various loan requests, such as the Smithsonian's.

KD: What was your timescale on the show?

MS: It's difficult to say exactly, certainly no more than six months from start to finish.

KD: So, when it came to the selection of the artworks, was it the historical first and the contemporary later?

MS: No, I think I started with the historical, because obviously working with loans from institutions, you have to work further ahead. And then the contemporary work came in a bit later. I realized MIMA had just bought the Smithsonian drawings and I thought they were amazing. I put in a loan request to get them. And then I ended up doing a room of more illustrative stuff, as I had the Smithsonian drawings and it seemed a shame not to show them. And then there were contemporary artists who I was very sure from the start who I knew I wanted to have in it, and some who came in later, such as Anna Barham. And then there are people whose work I'd always liked, such as Liliane Lijn and her poem cones. I thought there's

this really interesting artist working in Britain whose work I really like and who institutions don't really show. And I think she did very well from being in the show and her work was very well received. I also liked Karl Holmqvist's work a lot and knew his work was going to be in it.

KD: One question in my research is the question of the audience encounter – whether they're read, or seen, or a more physical way of being encountered by the body. The way the work is obviously instigates its installation in some way. Do you have any thoughts on the installation and the audience encounter?

MS: When building a show, I'm always thinking about having a variety of experiences with the audiences – scales, viewing distances, and I do think a lot about the spatial dynamics. I knew there would be a lot of small framed works, so where I could include something to break that, such as the big tarpaulin piece by Ferdinand Kriwet or the wallpaper by Karl Holmqvist interacted very well with the smaller pieces. To be honest, I was thinking about it on that level so it wouldn't be monotonous. Thinking 'how does one vary that'? But I wasn't thinking so hard about how viewers interact with the works in the gallery.

KD: You referred to zeitgeists at the start, and it does seem a tipping point, whether something in the water and other curators picking up on the same thing, but since 2009 there have been several survey exhibitions exploring concrete poetry and contemporary art. So, it's two separate questions: one, do you have thoughts on the relationship of conceptual art and concrete poetry? And two, do you think there was or is a zeitgeist? Can you expand on that?

MS: To answer the first, I had a feeling that the conceptual work had been more canonized and that concrete poetry had been on the fringes and doing a show like this would be a good corrective.

And I definitely felt that at the time there was a zeitgeist. It was one of the main reasons I wanted to do the show. But I don't know how to pin it down more than that. It was an intuitive I had a strong sense for, that contemporary work of this type was bubbling up, and I was keen to see the historic work get referenced more, but beyond that assertion I don't know what I can usefully say more than that. [Laughs].

KD: Thank you so much. That covers everything I wanted to ask – it was really to get a sense of the exhibition, how it came about, and the works within it. So, thank you very much, and enjoy the rest of your evening.

MS: Thank you.

/ends.

Karen Amiel, Exhibitions Organiser and Curator of the Arts Council of Great Britain Collection 1973-1979, and exhibitions organiser for *Languages* (1979), selected by Rudi Fuchs. Via telephone, 18 May 2016, London and California.

KD: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I've been speaking with Isobel [Johnstone] and she said that you organised the exhibition, and she only came in at the end, and so you were the person to speak to.

KA: That's OK. It's always interesting because this was one of the greatest times of my life, living in England and working in that role, it was such a great opportunity.

KD: Great. Well, hopefully this won't take up too much of your time. As I stated in my email, I'm finishing up a PhD at the Royal College of Art and my area of interest is text in contemporary art, so I'm researching important survey exhibitions that make a case for how language is positioned in contemporary art, which led me to *Languages*.

KA: To go back to the beginning, so I started at the Arts Council in 1973. As a backdrop, and maybe Isobel has explained this to you, but the Arts Council Collection started in 1946 in a post-war effort to raise the mood, really. So, they started buying art, but with no rhyme or reason to buying it, and on a pretty small budget. I was only the second curator of the collection, and there was no catalogue. The exhibition programme was designed to extend the reach of the collection into municipal galleries in the regions around England. My predecessor, Catherine Sartre, had started the idea of purchase exhibitions, or maybe I

inherited the concept, I can't remember. So, the idea was we would invite somebody from outside the Arts Council who would help the Arts Council purchase exhibitions, and the idea was they would simply wouldn't have purchases that take place within the department and then sit in the basement of the Hayward Gallery with no context. In those days, you have to understand there was absolutely no patronage whatsoever. There were no collectors of contemporary art. The Arts Council was the only game in town. I had the largest amount of money to spend on contemporary art, more than the Tate at the time. So, everyone wanted to be our friend, and artists were really having a difficult time. And we ran grants and bursaries programmes.

So, I arrived in 1973, and the first exhibition I did was in 1973. It was with Richard Cork, who was the art critic of the day. There was Marina Vaizey who was kind of blousy, and there was Richard Cork, who was the most cutting edge at the time. And I went in, being American, I had a different approach, a bit edgier. I liked Richard Cork's writing, and I started doing my own research. *The New Art* had just taken place in the summer of 1972, and that was a big deal. I joined the Arts Council in 1973, and these were all new names. Keith Arnatt, Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Michael Craig-Martin, were all new to the scene. I'm sure you can research the critical reaction to this exhibition. Anne Seymour was a very thoughtful person, with a fantastic new approach coming on the heels of the Royal College and all of a sudden here we were looking at a kind of non-visual, conceptually-based art and it was new and kind of shocking at the time. There was a photography department and officer, and there were those of us on the art side, and the art purchases were never photographic, because in 1973, photography wasn't seen as a viable art form. So, Anne's exhibition was one of the earliest attempts to show the use of language and use of photography in a major public space in

London. So, to today's audience that sounds insane, but that's how it was at the time. And I remember, Gary Lane was his name, and he was always moaning that he couldn't get the art department to take the photography seriously or even collect it. He bought it and toured it, but it was never part of the collection that I was curator of. So, *The New Art* was a big deal, Richard Cork was a big deal, and the use of photography.

So, it was my instigation that we go to Richard Cork and ask him to do a purchase exhibition. It was called *Beyond Painting and Sculpture*, and it was a purchase exhibition like the Rudi Fuchs one. So, that exhibition had: Keith Arnatt, Victor Burgin, John Stezaker, David Dye, David Lamelas, Gilbert and George, Hamish Fulton, Gerald Newman, John Hilliard in that show. And because we didn't show the collection in London at the time, this was my way of this kind of art and this kind of language out into the municipal area of England. Well, you can imagine what the reaction was: 'What...?'. So, in that show there was film, there was sound pieces, there was a really great sound piece by Gerald Newman – I don't even know what's happened to Gerald Newman – there was a wonderful film by David Lamelas, photographs by Hamish Fulton. It was a totally new approach to looking at art. So, that was a forerunner. And the first purchase exhibition.

Meanwhile, I was the first person to request to go to *Documenta*. I took the approach that the Arts Council should take a much more international approach. As an aside, I was doing other exhibitions in London and doing one at the Serpentine that was with Agnes Martin, Dorothea Rockburn, and Sol LeWitt, and the minimalists and that was the first time that had been shown, and a show with Ed Ruscha and that was the first time that had been shown. And it opened these doors. And I got permission to go to *Documenta*, and Rudi Fuchs was

around and kind of this bright spark. I can't remember if I went to Eindhoven. So, I approached Joanna Drew and I got permission to approach Rudi Fuchs. But I haven't got the catalogue in front of me.

KD: I have the catalogue in front of me.

KA: So, who was in that show?

KD: Victor Burgin, Gerard Hemsworth, John Murphy, Gerald Newman, Bruce Robbins, John Stezaker, Stephen Willats, Art & Language.

KA: OK. So, I was in touch with Art & Language. I was already in an intellectual relationship with Stephen Willats. Victor Burgin I had already shown. And my thoughts about Rudi Fuchs – he was a pretty unpleasant guy. I just remember he was pretty bombastic.

KD: There is an archival video on the occasion of the opening of an interview with him and Isobel, and it is quite uncomfortable.

KA: I remember having arguments all the time with him. I was very, very young when I got that job. I was American. And I was a woman – a girl. I don't know how much of it – and Isobel is way more of a lady than I am – but I had a very tough father and I just wouldn't suffer fools, and I couldn't just sit there and be patronised. And he was very patronising. So, we would have these conversations and I would hold my ground and shoot back and hold my ground. I recall these early meetings – he would come to London and we would have lunch



and I just recall these meetings being really unpleasant. He would talk all over me, and was really dictatorial, and I had already done these exhibitions, I had these relationships, I had been thinking about and reading about these works. So, I can't remember who brought what when we came to the table, but I can remember at some point it got better. Maybe he realised I wasn't a fool, or he calmed down, but basically, he was a bully.

KD: And I suppose a lot of the artists who went on to have quite significant careers in the show, you already had relationships with.

KA: Well, also, this is a context where you couldn't sell a beautiful painting. Let alone a word piece. Lucien Freud couldn't sell a painting. If you were an artist in London in 1972 or 1973, Francis Bacon, Ron Kitaj, and David Hockney were the three main people who were actively selling art in London at the time. And I was the only one purchasing British contemporary art. Oddly, later way down the line the British Museum started collecting. And the Tate, down the line got more money and started collecting. Michael Compton who was the curator there at the time, was a friend and he'd take me out for lunch, and he'd say, 'you know, I think you should actually give up that collection and give it to the Tate', and I'd say 'no way, no way'. So, we went quite a long way to get a museum, and that's the way the whole Liverpool thing came about. So, to be an artist in London was really hard. There was no money and no purchasers, and everyone just wanted to be in America, that's where you could get attention. So, when I'd go to David Lamela's studio or John Stezaker's studio, and they were so thrilled that someone was paying attention to their work. I think it was very heroic of them carrying on. I honestly don't know how they did it. To pursue their practices in an environment where there were no collectors, no support, not very many galleries – Nigel Greenwood and Hester

van Royen were the only two. Barry Barker was there on the periphery too. There was nothing for them. I went to some pretty grim studios; I can tell you. And then everything changed once they were able to show in America. Steve Willats showed in Amsterdam or somewhere, and I remember he said, his neighbourhood pieces (and I felt they were more sociological pieces rather than art pieces but I'd probably have to change that opinion today knowing what I know), I think it was Germany, he started showing in Germany and then things changed.

I mean economically, I worked by candlelight. I had one of the biggest offices, no one wanted it, it was in an air shaft. I had an assistant and we wanted space because we were cataloging the collection. It was winter and there was a miners' strike on for months. I remember it so clearly, I would have light for a small part of the day and the rest of it I worked by candlelight. The government was trying to break the backs of the unions, and it went on for months. I mean, no one had money to take the bus, and so the idea that you would get money for art seemed kind of absurd.

KD: How did you come to the job in the first place?

KA: Well I was in Washington, D.C., and I was finishing my undergrad, I had zoomed through it and finished six months early. And I met John Amiel, he was touring an undergraduate troupe from Oxford and Cambridge, and it was called the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Company, and I met him and we went back to England, and eventually got married. I was looking for a job, and I wanted to be a painter. I had an art degree but I couldn't live on painting. So, I decided I'd go to the top. And I was watching the newspaper, and finally a job

came up at the Arts Council. Not this job but another job, they were looking for a regional arts officer and someone to work on the Hayward programme, and during the interview they said they had a third job. Ironically, Catherine Lampert and I were hired on the same day. We were both from Washington, D.C. at the time, though she had been in London and married and working for *Studio International*. It was funny. I never understood why I got that job. I mean, there were 600 applicants, and that were all college grads. I think I had a different perspective that was interesting for them.

KD: And the office – the air shaft?

KA: That was at 105 Piccadilly. And the collection was housed in the basement of the Hayward. So, if I was doing anything for the collection – they all had to be reframed, and photographed, and catalogued, that happened at the Hayward. This was all published, and I was glad to see that happen.

KD: Back to the *Languages* show. I was intrigued by the lack of women, and I'm interested in the role of feminist art on language in contemporary practice. I'm interested to know if you had any thoughts on that. In particular, I'm thinking about Mary Kelly and the use of text in the *Post-Partum Document* which would have been made around the same time.

KA: Well, at the time, there was really not a word around feminist art in London. The question I used to get all the time was 'do I think it was a male dominated society and did being a woman hold me back in any way?' There were so few women artists in general, I mean forget about language artists. There was an artist – Philomena.... I forget her name. I

think we bought it. It was a piece from her bed, and there was hair and samples and things from her bed, and people were just like, 'ugh'. So looking back in retrospect, it was a very male dominated society. I remember Liliane Lijn who had a studio in London, I don't even know where she is now, if she's even still alive...

KD: She is, she's in London. Interestingly, her career has had quite a boost since she was included in an exhibition at the ICA in 2009 which was about concrete poetry and language in contemporary practice.

KA: OK so there was Liliane, bemoaning that no one was paying attention to what she did and I think people thought 'pushy American' and it was a bit the same with me. I mean, Catherine and I tried to unionise the Arts Council [laughs], and in the end, we did it, but I think it was part of the time, apart from Liliane and Mary Kelly and this woman Philomena who lived on the Isle of Wight, I honestly can't remember anyone. I mean it's curious, I haven't been asked that question before.

KD: So, it wouldn't have even been on the radar.

KA: No, I don't think it was a question of there's all these women out there, let's pick the men. Although what came first – the chicken or the egg. It could very well be that the male dominated society led to the lack of women artists. I just think there was such a lot of machismo rolling around. I mean the stories, it's an old tale. Curators are still looking at this and digging out all this work, and that's in this country. England is another layer down in terms of access. So, who would you say was missing? Or overlooked with hindsight?

KD: Well, it's Mary Kelly in particular that I'm interested in, and the *Post-Partum Document* has been very well-researched and historicised in terms of feminism and conceptualism, and there's a great deal of cross over between what she was doing and what Stephen Willats was doing. But it's very under-researched I feel in terms of its contribution of language to art. And then it's interesting to go back to these exhibition catalogues such as this one, and then Kelly is absent in the initial moment and also in retrospective survey exhibitions that have been occurring in the past 10 years, which articulate different lineages that have informed text in contemporary practice, and she's absent in those. And I think she made contributions to how text is presented in contemporary artworks, the demands placed on the audience, and the shifts between reading and viewing. It's not to say no one knows the *Post-Partum Document*, it's so well-researched, but in that respect it's overlooked.

KA: Well, it's sad to say, but there was no one championing women. I mean Marina Vaizey was the main critic and in my view she was an idiot, you know it was 'she went to this exhibition and she saw this painting', and I just didn't pay much attention to her after a while because I wasn't learning anything. But why Richard didn't look at that, or Anne Seymour – have you talked to Anne Seymour?

KD: I haven't.

KA: I think you should find Anne Seymour and talk to her. She turned the tide. I mean she really went out on a limb in that exhibition. She is a highly intelligent person. You should talk to her about why she wasn't looking at women artists.

KD: And Anne Seymour preceded you?

KA: No, she was at the Tate.

KD: But she was seconded to the Hayward for *The New Art*?

KA: [KA then reads the Preface to *The New Art* over the phone]... So maybe that was it, it was *Documenta*.

KD: You mentioned Barry Barker. Are you by any chance still in touch with him? No one seems to know how to reach him.

KA: No, is he still alive? I hate to say that. OK, here's a couple of suggestions, you'll be able to piece this story together. I think it would be interesting for you to talk to Anthony Reynolds. So, at the Arts Council there was Catherine and I, Anthony, Nick Serota had just left, Anthony Warman, Michael Harrison, David Elliot, and Andrew Dempsey. And the person who was most out there in terms of British art was Anthony Reynolds. And we all knew Barry, but I feel Anthony would know where he is. The other person you could talk to who is a mine of information is Andrew Demspey. He had left when I got there, and then he came back in a very senior role. He took over when Norbert Lynton died, and he would have all of the context before and all of the context after. He can fill in some gaps, because Isobel [Johnstone] came quite a bit later.

KD: When did the purchase exhibitions end?

KA: I don't know. I think they went into Isobel's tenure. I think some works were given to Saatchi, some sculptures were literally put out to pasture in one of the sculpture parks, and I think they went into Isobel's tenure and stopped sometime then. And then things changed a lot, government roles changed and 105 Piccadilly didn't exist anymore.

KD: Thank you. That is so interesting, and provides so much context. I'm sitting here at my desk and looking at these exhibitions historically and it is so fascinating to have these exhibitions placed in a social, economic and political context. Thank you so much, I won't keep you for any more of your time.

KA: Thank you.

/ends.

Isobel Johnstone, Exhibitions Organiser and Curator of the Arts Council of Great Britain (later Arts Council England) Collection 1979-2002 and exhibitions organiser for *Languages* (1979), selected by Rudi Fuchs. Via telephone, London, 19 May 2016.

IJ: So, you're writing about Rudi [Fuchs]?

KD: Well, I'm not writing about Rudi at all. At least I wasn't until now. I was at the Tate the other day looking at the conceptual art show and on the wall, there was a time line naming important exhibitions in the period of late 60s to early 70s. And in that it mentioned *Languages* and said it was curated by Rudi Fuchs. I'm at the RCA, and preparing a thesis on text in contemporary practice and as part of my research I'm going back and looking important survey exhibitions of language in conceptual art and in concrete poetry that have led up to the present moment. Which brought me to Rudi, and to your role in *Languages*.

IJ: Well it's a hard to find show and it's unusual that its referred to as *Languages*. It wasn't only language; it was photography as well. And concrete poetry is a whole other area. Now I fear I'm not particularly well-versed in this particular subject. I came into it from Scotland, and these artists I had never met and had never heard of really, coming from Scotland. Rudi and Karen had already interviewed all of the artists, and the exhibition was already formed, and I have to say that it was the least popular exhibition of any that I have ever worked on.

KD: Well I spoke to Karen [Amiel] yesterday and I have to say it was absolutely fascinating, so thank you very much for putting me in touch with her. She talked me through a lot to do with the development of the exhibition.



IJ: Good. She must have been quite close to Rudi as they visited all of the artists together, and they were all thrilled to be going into the exhibition.

KD: And I think Karen worked with four of the artists prior to the exhibition and had existing relationships with a lot of them – Stephen Willats, Victor Burgin, John Stezaker and Gerald Newman. And she did say she found Rudi quite difficult to work with, coming from different positions.

IJ: Well she was very glamorous, but also very close to American Pop artists. I suppose the American scene was more advanced. But what I picked up from our department was the collection catalogue, the thing that was being prepared when I arrived, the grey book. And there's a list of the exhibitions going back to the beginning of the council, well, before, 1942, and you could see what is happening, and what the Arts Council thought was important. And Karen and someone else, I think it was Richard Francis, said 'you've got to do something with a bit more intellectual rigour' than the other shows which were about printmaking or such, and not be popular, because the collection really tried to be popular. Because its function was, well you say no one was buying contemporary art, the idea of the collection was the work would be touring around the country and then people would see the exhibitions and start to buy contemporary art, well of course no one ever did. Never did. Particularly by these artists. I mean, educationally it was useful to people. You know it's a very invisible but important thing the Arts Council Collection. Our job was to buy, with a limited money, was to buy new work from young artists. So, the *Languages* group fitted very well. Richard Cork had already done that show, what was it called, *The New Art*?

KD: That was Anne Seymour. Karen said it had a very profound effect on her.

IJ: She was very intelligent. She married Anthony d'Offay. The Richard Cork show was around the same time. So, by the time I arrived in 1979, the exhibition was set. I met all of the artists – you should talk to them. I mean Rudi's introduction to the show was a terrible disappointment. He was very busy running Eindhoven, he was this young star curator, and promoting very difficult art. There were so many stars of contemporary art by that point.

KD: So, you had a difficult time finding a space for it?

IJ: Yes, Bridget Byrne booked it for the Glasgow Open Eye gallery – it was an art centre in Glasgow. I don't know how she got on. I had just come down from Scotland, and I knew her. We were friends and she booked it. We were trying to do an education programme and I found it very difficult to write about.

KD: Because I came to the exhibition by mention of it in the Tate, and now I have the exhibition catalogue, which is quite sparse.

IJ: Oh, it's very chilly the catalogue.

KD: It doesn't give a lot away.

IJ: Yes, what does he say – 'look at it like it were a television'?

KD: 'Look at it as if it were television, read it like a newspaper'.

IJ: I mean it's not- there's a lot more to the work than that isn't there? There is a lot behind it, it's very elusive, and John Murphy's is very complicated. Victor Burgin's is more like television I suppose.

KD: The catalogue doesn't have any installation shots – how was the work installed?

IJ: All flat, and framed on the walls.

KD: So, was it a very traditional viewing format? One thing I'm interested in is the engagement of the text to the audience.

IJ: Well I remember trying to write something to help Brigit, and Rudi's text was just hopeless. The artists I think preferred to leave it ambiguous. But the Arts Council's job was to promote and educate, and it was just hopeless.

KD: I don't know if you know, but there is an interview between you and Rudi, it must be on the occasion of the opening.

IJ: I have wiped it from my brain. Is it in Glasgow?

KD: I believe it is, it's on the CCA Glasgow's website.

IJ: I have wiped it from my brain. I thought – what a thing to be landed.

KD: Was it 2002 when you organised *Words*?

IJ: Well that was fantastic. That was with Fiona Bradley, because they gave different people a chance to work on exhibitions and get to know the collection, and that was a fantastic show. She's a very bright woman and that was very well done. But Rudi was brought in as a purchaser, but over the years that changed, works were bought individually not as exhibitions and then we had the challenge of developing an exhibition from bringing a selection of work together.

KD: And when did the purchase exhibitions stop?

IJ: Not long after. We had a disastrous exhibition. George Melly bought something called 'A Cold Wind Brushing a Temple' [laughs] and you just need to look at the catalogue and you get an idea of the problem. And then Julian Spalding who went up to Glasgow, who was at Sheffield – we would involve people in the regions. And he selected an exhibition and used a quote from T.S. Eliot. The whole of the art committee were able to buy one thing, and they'd buy their friends', and we had to stop that, it had to be new artists, and have reason behind the purchasing. But I'm a painter and we went with it. I had to buy Anthony Gormley's field which was a curatorial challenge. It changed when the buying panel became a group of individuals invited to come on for 18 months and they bought independently and as a group, and they often bought very good things. They made the best purchases, the artists. Richard

Cork said, 'I don't know why I'm famous', I've never bought a work of art in my life. He was very good, but he had a young family. It's a big subject the collection and how it has evolved. We were the only collection buying sculpture outside of the Tate. The British Council didn't buy sculpture. Sculpture's just a nightmare, you have to store it. That's what led to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, they have a big store for the collection up there and people can go and look at it set up there, and see if they want to borrow it. So, there we are.

KD: I had one little factual question – between *Languages* and *Words* – do you know was there any other exhibitions of words, and text, or was it such a traumatic experience that no more occurred?

IJ: [Laughs]. I don't recall there was. It was to do with the public liking it. We couldn't force people to take our exhibitions, the collection was always trying to work with people outside London, but you could safely say the *Languages* exhibition was all artists working in London. There were the concrete poets, but that's another area.

/ends.

Kate Macfarlane, Curator of *Marking Language*, Drawing Room, London, 2013. Via telephone, London, 20 June 2016.

KD: I guess I should introduce myself, and explain a little about what I'm doing. I'm finishing up a PhD at the Royal College of Art and writing a thesis about text in contemporary practice. At this point, I'm going back and looking at significant exhibitions, particularly since 2009, but also some historical exhibitions, and I'm looking at exhibitions which have positioned text in certain ways or explored text in new ways, and particularly exhibitions which have explored text in relation to conceptual art and its use of language and concrete poetry and its use of language. I viewed *Marking Language* when it was on in 2013, and also attended the Marking Language seminar, and I just wanted to take the opportunity to discuss the exhibition with you, and pose some questions that I haven't come across so far in the research material.

KM: That's fine.

KD: Would you mind just first talking me through how the exhibition came about?

KM: We had been thinking about doing an exhibition around drawing and writing for quite a few years. It took place in 2013 and we had been talking about it for, I think, 10 years. We had lists and lists of potential artists who could be included. We then began to hone it down. We basically decided we wanted to move away from the earlier exhibitions and concentrate on works that were visually quite rich, and also selecting a few artists to showcase the idea if you like, and not create a survey, and also include a few who were perhaps new to London audiences, such as Johanne Calle and Bernardo Ortiz from Bogota, and Annabel Daou also

hadn't shown in London before. We wanted to make it a really international mix within the limitations of the space that we had. We were interested in language as something transliterated can still have meaning across cultures and across times as well.

KD: How did the partnership, is that the right word, collaboration, with the Drawing Centre work out?

KM: Yeah, we were in New York and we were talking to Claire Gillman, and we were talking about ways we could collaborate, and what we were planning and what she was planning. And it was interesting, right from the start we were looking at quite different artists. She wanted a more historical trajectory and we wanted a focus on artists using language in art today. So it was very new work, and we had four artists make work in situ. And that's a very important part of what the Drawing Room is about, supporting new work and encouraging artists to respond to ideas and be in dialogue with contemporaries and maybe artists they don't know. And so what was important to me in that panel [in the seminar] in which Johanne Calle and Karl Holmqvist were on the same panel, who were coming from quite different cultures, and who wouldn't normally be grouped together, and that was quite deliberate. With artists coming from different cultures and different places and different intentions, and I really wanted to mix it up a bit. So, I suppose that we did want to avoid that idea of automatic writing and automatic drawing, which is probably where the two are most conjoined. And we avoided that in our show. But nonetheless the hand reasserted itself in the works. The work was all handmade, it was unique.

KD: You stated you wanted to move away from earlier exhibitions. Was that from exhibitions in London?

KM: Well there was an exhibition in London at the ICA, that Mark Sladen curated.

KD: *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.?*

KM: Yeah, and there were some artists in there that we had on our list that we were thinking about including and that exhibition seemed to work really well in the context of the ICA, and so that exhibition helped us to crystallise what we wanted to do. So, we did want to, within the exhibition, explore different drawing modes as well, rather than having a very pared down visual language that was close to writing. So, there was lots of colour in there, and the Karl Holmqvist work on walls which was very close to concrete poetry, and the Bernardo Ortiz work brought in a different viewing close to reading a book or something, and approach things on a different scale. So, we were trying to pick out artists who were working in very different visual languages and modes of expression.

KD: Is it just the two artists who are from South America – Ortiz and Calle? And Shakzia Sikander?

KM: She's from Pakistan.

KD: The two works that really resonated me were Calle's and Ortiz's. Is there anything to be drawn from their being South American? Or is that purely coincidental?



KM: Well, we had done the Itinerant Drawing from Latin America, which included 11 different artists and that took place in 2011. And a lot of different artists from Latin America employ drawing as something that is portable, modest of means, they have a fondness for paper, graphics. There were other artists I could have included, but I wanted it to be international.

KD: OK. One question in my research is how the audience experiences the works. Do you have any thoughts on that?

KM: One of our intentions was that if an audience was coming to view the works, they could be viewed on the wall as an image, and you didn't have to take a very slow reading of them, that it was a very different experience than sitting in a library and reading a book. Having said that, Bernardo Ortiz's work required a slower looking. But I didn't want an audience to have to come in and spend hours and hours and hours reading the work to get a message. So, that was one of the considerations and we did rule out artists who were more focused on the act of reading than the act of looking, as it were.

KD: OK, that's really interesting. There seems to be something unique on the act of reading and drawing that the other works don't address, or at least in the same way. The Pavel Büchler work is a bit of an anomaly then, in that it doesn't contain any text.

KM: The idea there is about communication. He had found a book about sign language, so it's about the being able to communicate without words. And we had decided we wanted to have one shared work with the Drawing Centre in New York that could gesture across the

world and link the two exhibitions. Because it was a group of works, I think 10 or 14 drawings, and it could be split, it didn't matter which were grouped, and the idea that straddled the distance. And I suppose there's also the idea of miscommunication, and transliteration and all the slippages of language and that drawing maybe fill the gap, and do that, or help in communicating where language might fail.

KD: That's really interesting. I think in the catalogue you use the words 'written communication' which is distinct from text or text-based or written language. OK, there was a tendency in the works towards the typewritten, which to me invoked both the obsolescence of the typewriter and nostalgia and also the tactility and materiality. Did you have any thoughts on that in how the works were grouped?

KM: That was very important – the material – in how the works were shown. Johanna Calle adapted the typewriter to be used for her works, in a way that isn't nostalgic but in a very different way. The text was taken from indigenous languages that were dying out. And those were the texts that were typed out. And she took words for different forms of rain she'd drawn and cut out, and there was the sense of the hand drawing and cutting, and the work felt like it was doing something different from the other work using typewriters.

KD: And since 2009, there's been several exhibitions that have tried to correct this historical lineage of conceptual art and language in art, and introduce concrete poetry to the discourse, and make a correction of sorts. There is a presence of concrete poetry in *Marking Language*, and the New York show, which I didn't see, seems to draw more of a relationship to conceptual art. Did you intend to draw out that binary, and draw out a relationship of

concrete poetry? Or was that something that you did not want to do, and if any of those lineages exist, let them surface for themselves?

KM: Yeah, well one of the reasons to collaborate, and have the partnership and come together in the book, was to draw that out. The Drawing Centre show drew out that lineage. Karl Holmqvist's work is closest to the concrete poets. His work comes out of concrete poetry, though he wouldn't refer to himself as a concrete poet. And the work is on the wall and using the hand and erasable media – the idea again with Karl's work is so much about the non-precious quality and the urge to communicate, which you have also in Pavel Büchler's work.

KD: OK, that covers everything I was hoping to draw out in speaking to you.

KM: I'm sure you can pick out lots of holes in it. [Laughs]. One can never, especially in the context of the Drawing Room, be definitive. It was an attempt to pick out artists who were taking language as the subject of their work and who were using drawing in a range of contemporary relevance.

KD: Actually, I have one more question, so if you had been developing it for 10 years-

KM: Well we had been talking about it for ten years but the actual making of was more like two years. But we had lists and lists of artists on the agenda for years.

KD: So, what was the impetus that put it on your agenda in the first place?

KM: There was just a natural connection of drawing and writing, and it seemed an institution that explores contemporary drawing has to tackle at some point. And we will probably tackle it again. Language appears in a lot of works about drawing. Have you looked at Graphology at all?

KD: I haven't, no.

KM: That was sort of looking at writing, animation, film and the way they had liberated drawing I suppose. Writing being one of the things that liberated drawing in the 60s. We showed Carl Andre's poems in that, which is why we didn't want to show them again.

KD: I spoke to Mark and he felt there was a zeitgeist, a something in the water moment, and there were a lot of shows of text which followed *POTH*.

KM: Well everything we do we like to think has relevance to what is going on in art practice at the time.

KD: It's interesting because when there are surveys of text work in the big institutions, it's often within the department of drawing, which probably goes back to how the works were first acquired as works on paper? I'm not sure.

KM: Yeah, works like Bochner, that's how they entered the institutions, as works on paper.

KD: OK, thank you.

KM: If you have any more queries, just drop me an email and I can clarify anything I've said.

KD: Thank you.

/ends.

Fiona Bradley, Curator of *Words.*, Arts Council England / Hayward Touring Exhibition, 1999-2001. Via telephone, London and Edinburgh, 29 July 2016.

KD: Thank you for being willing to speak with me. Your name came up when I was speaking with Isobel Johnstone, when I was interviewing her regarding my research. We were speaking about *Words* and she suggested I speak to you as well.

To tell you a bit about my research, I'm at the RCA and finishing a dissertation about text and its materiality in contemporary practice. As part of the research, I'm going back and looking at significant survey exhibitions here and in the US that put forward a different argument of text and how it is being used by contemporary artists and how it is being treated as material. And I came across *Languages* [curated by Rudi Fuchs] which Isobel organised as one of the Arts Council purchase exhibitions in 1979. And then, as far as I am aware, unless you can correct me otherwise, *Words* [in 1999-2001] is then the next text-based art exhibition that comes out of the Arts Council touring programme.

FB: Yes, it was rather deliberate looking back to that Rudi Fuch's exhibition. [Laughs]

KD: [laughs] Yes, so just wanted to speak to you about *Words*, how it was made, and also to position it against *Languages*. So would you mind first talking me through how, logistically, you came to work on the show, and where you were working at the time, and what your role was?

FB: Sure, well I was an exhibitions organiser at the time at the Hayward. I think we were called curators at the Hayward. I was working across the Hayward programme and the touring programme. At that point - I don't quite know what the organisation is like now – but the Arts Council was reasonably separate from the Hayward, and we would talk collaboratively about what might be a topic for the Arts Council exhibitions to look at, and it was about wanting to make a show that responded to what language was doing, and I thought that there was new material in the collection that would be useful to investigate in that way. I was doing some research for a book on language, which I never actually wrote, but I was working on that. So, I came to it from helping Isobel build a conceptual framework, if you like, rather than actually curating the show. And I look at it now and think it feels to me much more like a lecture than an exhibition. My understanding of it is not so much as material art works – I'm actually not sure if I installed it ever as a show. I helped to select the works and then wrote for the book, although saying that, some of the works I know really, really well having shown them before. So, that's how I came to be involved.

KD: OK.

FB: I literally sat at the next desk from Isobel.

KD: So, when it came to making the selection, it was a case of going through works in the collection and making a selection based on those?

FB: Yes, well I actually think it feels quite dated looking at it now. The collection at that time was stored at the Hayward so it was really easy to see something. It's very much a 'collection'

show. Isobel is a very good, collaborative curator, and I think she and I would work together with the curator from the venue it went to.

KD: And you said you feel it's dated now. Can you explain why?

FB: I suppose I would do it very differently if I did it now. Well, the Arts Council exhibitions are about getting work out there and showing it, there's no hang of the collection as it were. I think we thought it would be about recent work and emerging exhibitions and then we thought, 'well, why would we not include other works' such as the Hockney and some of the older pieces. And I suppose it is interesting to see that older work against placards from the 90s which I haven't looked at for a long time. But I was reading the text [which Bradley wrote for the catalogue] this morning and it has a slightly archaic way in which it talks about the internet. Which I suppose, I mean obviously it couldn't predict how much things would change, but I think with the idea of common ownership, it seems quite didactic and fixed. The work doesn't feedback in the way that it might now.

KD: Yes, I find this question of the digital and the internet really interesting, because no one could have predicted how things would have changed. And there's a lot of work coming out of the late 90s/early 2000s that seems to take a position on that, but then can't because no one could have seen where things are going.

FB: Well and I think then, the internet was more of a research tool and communication tool in terms of email, but if you think about how museums now reach out to audiences – or not



even reach out but allow audiences to influence them – it's such a different, such a conceptual shift which we had no foresight of.

KD: OK. So, I spoke to Karen Amiel and Isobel about how works were acquired to the collection, as *Languages* was a purchase exhibition. So, that was different in that Amiel and Fuchs were tasked with going out and purchasing works and making an exhibition of those, whereas you were tasked with making an exhibition of what is already there in the collection. So, going into the collection, do you feel there were any particular gaps?

FB: Well, I have a Surrealist leaning in my work, so I suppose there could have been a more historical leaning. And there would have been works which were hard to show. The Arts Council exhibitions had to be incredibly pragmatic. They had to fit into a particular indemnity policy in terms of insurance, and they had to work with galleries which were not particularly well resourced. In that way, they were a kind of precursor to the Artists' Rooms. I don't know how much you know about the Artists' Rooms. But it sounds terrible now, but it was about 'getting work out to the regions' and helping the regions show the work. And there was a sentiment that the work couldn't be too hard, and moving image work wouldn't have been shown at all, and it all had to fit on one truck. There were all these pragmatic things in these exhibitions, that has to be flexible and portable, and fit different venues, and show for a long time, and not show too much work on paper... [trails off].

KD: I know Isobel felt *Languages* was quite challenging to audiences at the time. Did you feel that by the time you made *Words*, audiences were more open to text?

FB: I don't know. I mean, *Languages* was fairly hardcore. Some of these works [in *Words*] were easier to engage with. I mean, there's various conceptual artworks in there, but I thought one of the most useful things language does is connect us, so I made sure there was very political work in there, very visual work in there. I remember conversations about how dry it might be and I remember saying 'there is no reason it needs to be'.

KD: In my research, I do have a fairly large gap in the late 80s and 90s of survey exhibitions of text. Were there any exhibitions on your radar that you were responding to in your curatorial practice?

FB: No, I don't think so. I think you're right, I think it is one of the reasons we did this. It seemed a kind of opportunistic moment. I think that is to do with what the art was like, as opposed to what artists were doing. I think those exhibitions happen when you have these moments where everyone is doing something similar, and the 90s wasn't really like that. I mean, Martin Boyce's works weren't like language in the way that other works are. There was a bit 'oh great that's got words in it, let's put that in even though it might not be about language in the way that other works were'. [Unclear]... kind of the materiality about it, 90s work and Scottish artists, and if you look at the work at the time, it's about politics and communication based expression and they approach language in a slightly different way. It's how I ended up in Edinburgh because I was interested in Scottish artists.

KD: One of things I was surprised by – or am I disheartened or intrigued? – in *Languages*, Fuchs' show, there is no women.

FB: I knew you were going to say that. [Laughs]

KD: Because one of my main strands of research is how the importance of feminist artist in the late 1970s and 1980s began to use language – both embracing its materiality, but also questioning its subjectivity, questioning the naturalness and authority of language and really working at it from within. To me, it's interesting that Fuchs' show goes up in 1979, Mary Kelly has [at this time] just had the *Post-Partum Document* up in the ICA, and yet there are no female conceptual artists in his show. Obviously by the time your show comes around, things are very different. Fiona Banner, Tracey Emin feature in it. Any thoughts on that? On the importance of language to feminist artists of the 1970s.

FB: I think it's vital. I was just looking at the photographs of Jo Spence last night, and thinking about that. I mean, yes, yes! Feminist practice is very important to that. I think that's maybe, why looking back at the way that I'm writing in this show, looking back, I don't know if it was lack of means, but there's more this show could have done as well in that direction. I would say, I suppose, well certainly when Rudi Fuchs was working and even in the noughties, we were *less careful*. I mean Rudi Fuchs wasn't careful at all. I think those questions were asked a lot less, than they are now. I mean, thank god, they are now. But you just wouldn't do a group show without women in it.

KD: Yes, it seems startling to me, given that it is a purchase exhibition, so it stakes the importance of the works which will then be collected and shown again in the future, and when dealing with something like language, and the purchase is entirely white men.

FB: I think the Arts Council selecting policy has changed, and now the way they do it, they ensure the selectors are diverse, in a way that it wasn't in the past. I mean people like Rudi Fuchs were great, great, but had their particular concerns. It does seem extraordinary that Isobel allowed that.

KD: I think Isobel came in so late, after the work had all been selected, and had the difficult task of selling it to the regions. OK, well I think that's everything I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

FB: OK, I'm not sure how useful I've been.

KD: It's very useful, to get your thoughts on how the exhibition came about. I appreciate your time, and I'll let you get on with the rest of your evening. Thank you.

FB: Thank you.

/ends.

## Illustrations

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caco  
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cloaca

drink coca cola  
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THIS POSITION SIGNIFIES ALL INTERIOR TIME OF SELF SUBSEQUENT TO X AND PREVIOUS TO X'

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Victor Burgin 1969 1950





ROBERT BARRY

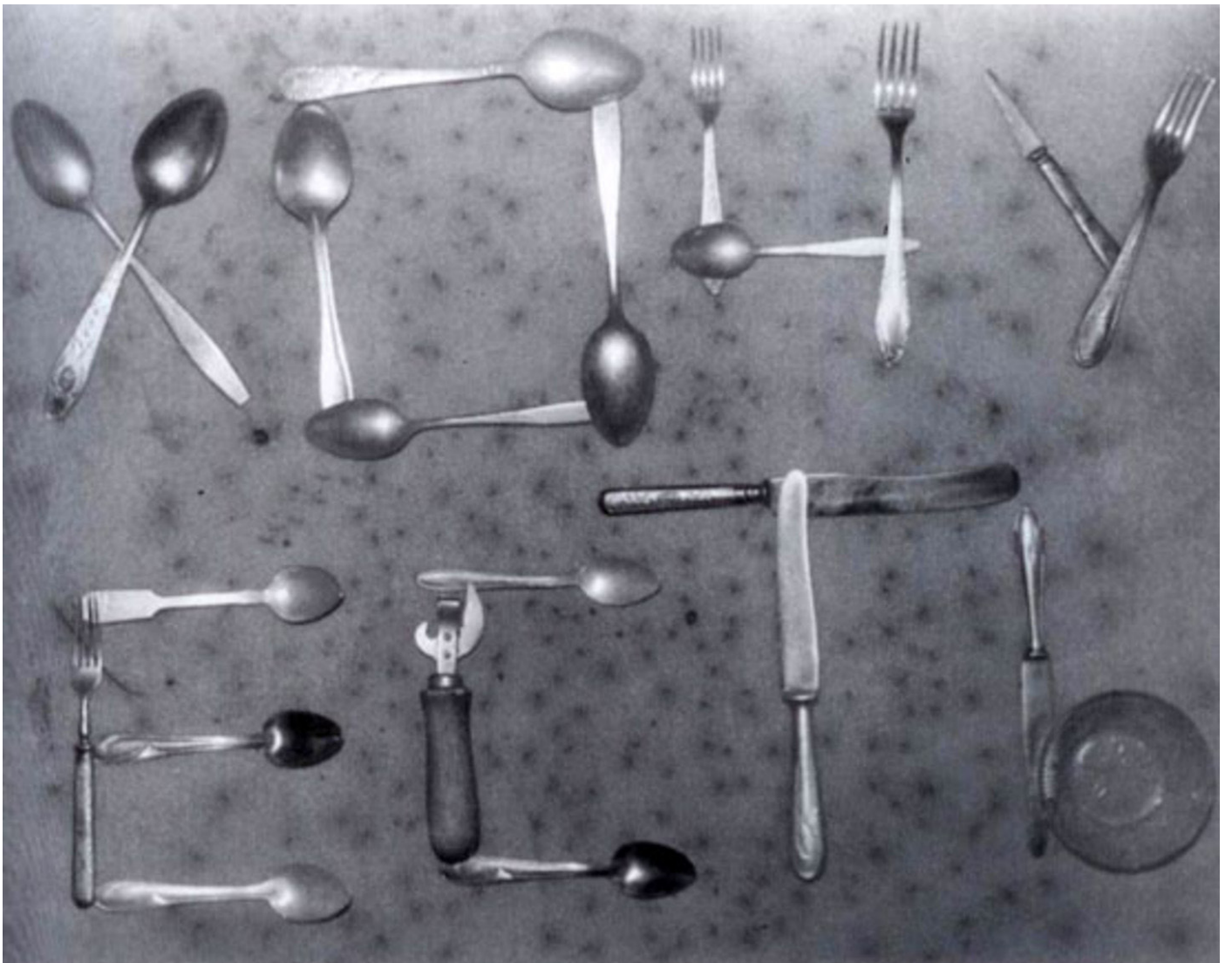
MARCH 10 THROUGH MARCH 21  
THE GALLERY WILL BE CLOSED

EUGENIA BUTLER 615 N. LA CIENEGA BLVD.  
LOS ANGELES, CA. 90069







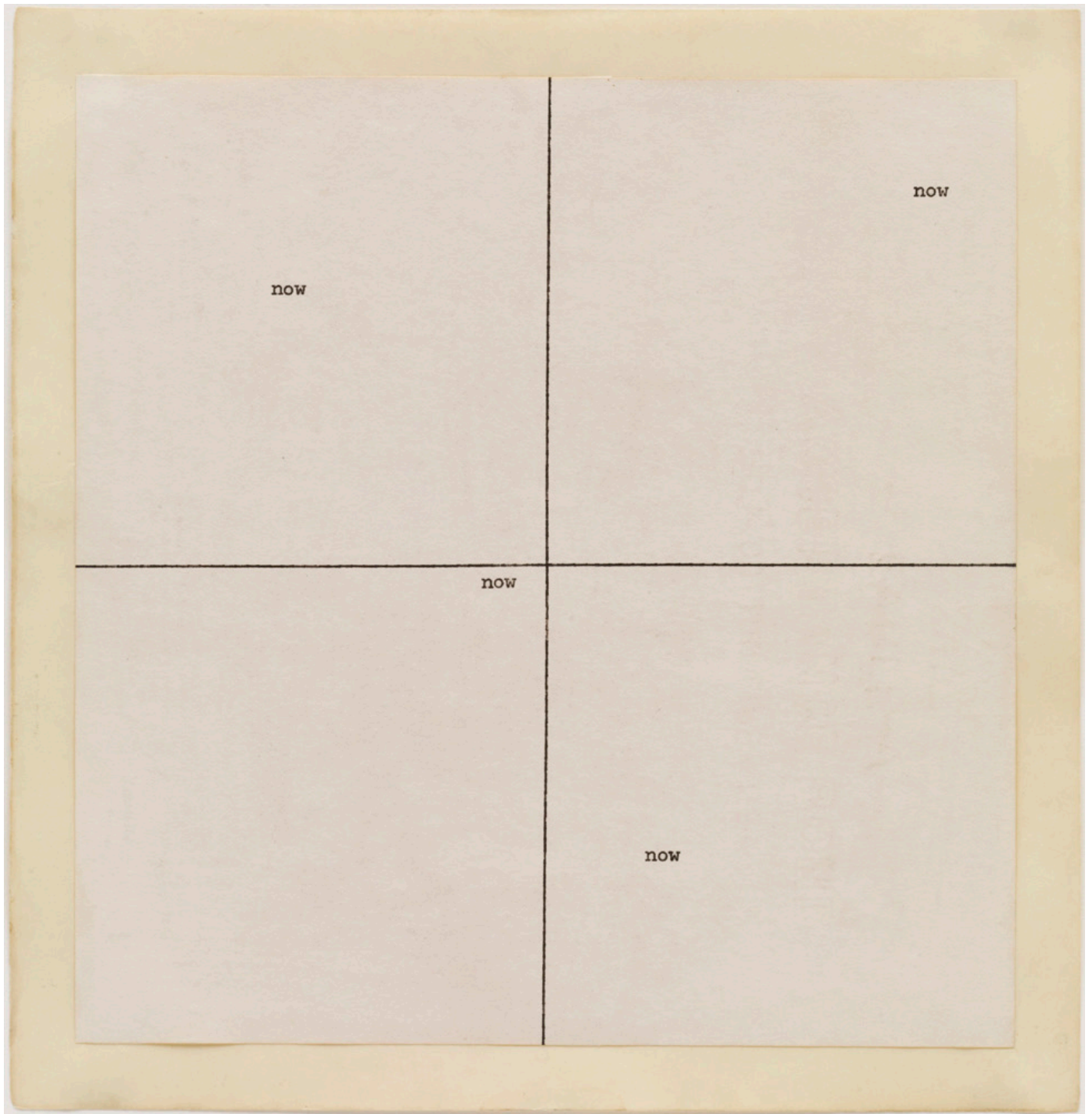




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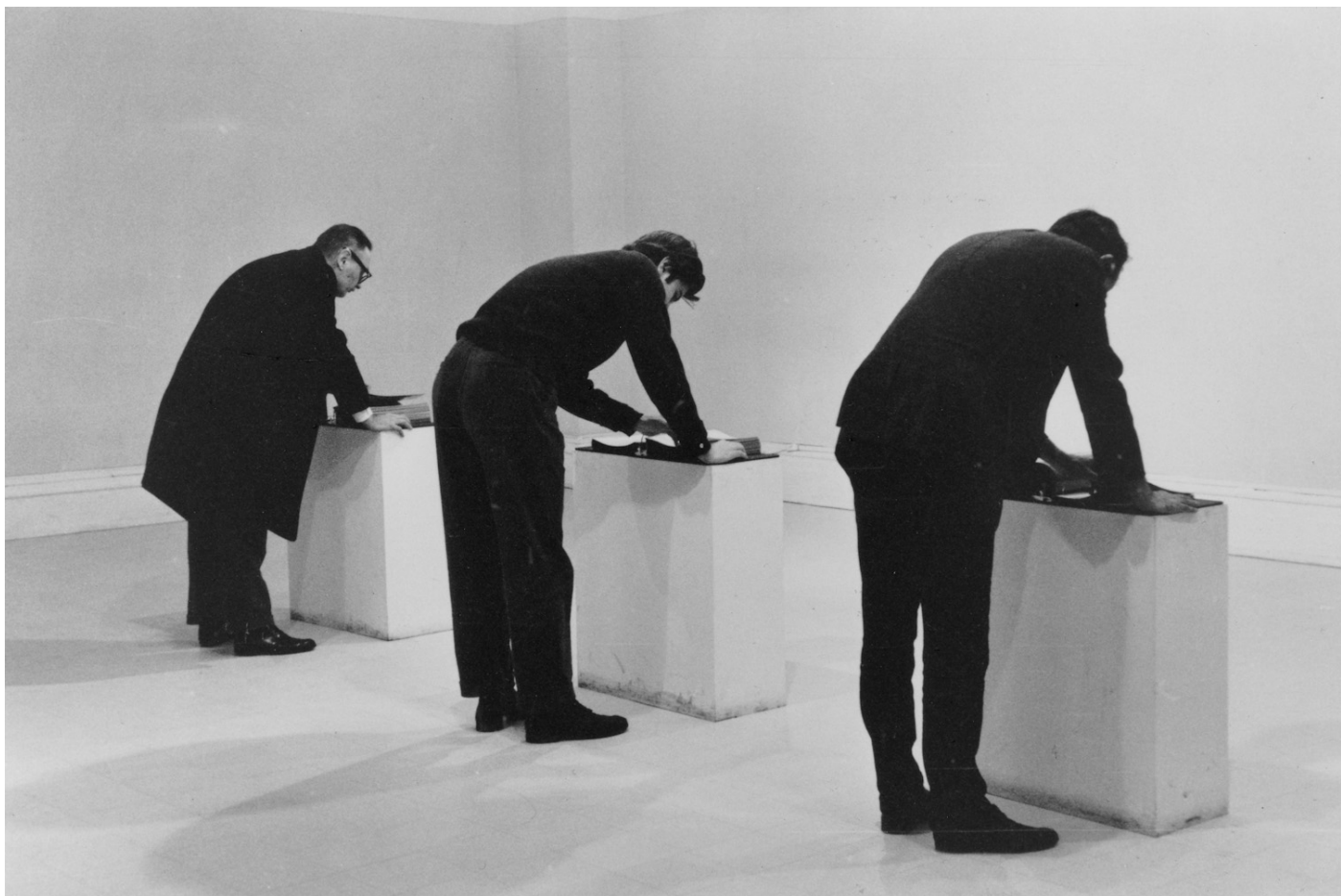








**def·i·ni·tion** (def'ə-nish'ən), *n.* [OFr. *definicion*; L. *definitio* < pp. of *definire*; see DEFINE], 1. a defining or being defined. 2. a statement of what a thing is. 3. a statement or explanation of what a word or phrase means or has meant. 4. a putting or being in clear, sharp outline. 5. the power of a lens to show (an object) in clear, sharp outline. 6. the degree of distinctness of a photograph, etc. 7. in *radio & television*, the degree of accuracy with which sounds or images are reproduced. Abbreviated **def.**



1.6 *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art, 1966*

### SCHEMA:

(Number of)	adjectives
(Number of)	adverbs
(Percentage of)	area not occupied by type
(Percentage of)	area occupied by type
(Number of)	columns
(Number of)	conjunctions
(Depth of)	depression of type into surface of page
(Number of)	gerunds
(Number of)	infinitives
(Number of)	letters of alphabets
(Number of)	lines
(Number of)	mathematical symbols
(Number of)	nouns
(Number of)	numbers
(Number of)	participles
(Perimeter of)	page
(Weight of)	paper sheet
(Type)	paper stock
(Thinness of)	paper
(Number of)	prepositions
(Number of)	pronouns
(Number of point)	size type
(Name of)	typeface
(Number of)	words
(Number of)	words capitalized
(Number of)	words italicized
(Number of)	words not capitalized
(Number of)	words not italicized







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M.L. BOCHNER, 1969



Language -  
 spherology speech  
 tongue length petriolar  
 mother tongue, King's English -  
 dialect, brogue, patois, idiom, slang,  
 & confusion of tongues, Babel, universal language  
 Esperanto, dog, pantomime, dumb show, libretto  
 letters, belles-lettres, missive, humanitas, republic of letters  
 dead languages, classica, express, say, express, by words, polyglot  
 linguistics, dialectal, vernacular, bilingual, literary, colloquial  
 letters, character, hieroglyphic, alphabet, ABC, consonant, vowel  
 diglithony, surd, sonant, labialis, labial, palatal, cerebral, dental, code  
 gutters & syllable, monosyllable, dissyllable, polysyllable, prefix, suffix, cipher  
 word, term, vocabula, name, phrase, root, derivation, index, glossary, dictionary, appian  
 etymology, philology, terminology, verbiage, lexicology, translate, nomenclature, designation  
 misnomer, malapropism, Mrs. Malaprop, nominale, titulus, dub, cognomen, patronymic, title  
 misname, miscell, nickname, take an assumed name, minname, de called, half, half, half, half, half  
 metaphor, sentence, proverb, motto, phraseology, euphemism, paragraph, by the card, grammar, error, blunder  
 digram, selection, syntactical analysis, manilla, slip of the tongue, appellative, heading, gibberish, dog Latin  
 Hieroglyphic, neologism, word, corner, right, bilingualism, pidgin, English, orthography, terminology, thesaurus, cipher

A heap of Language

Smith 66



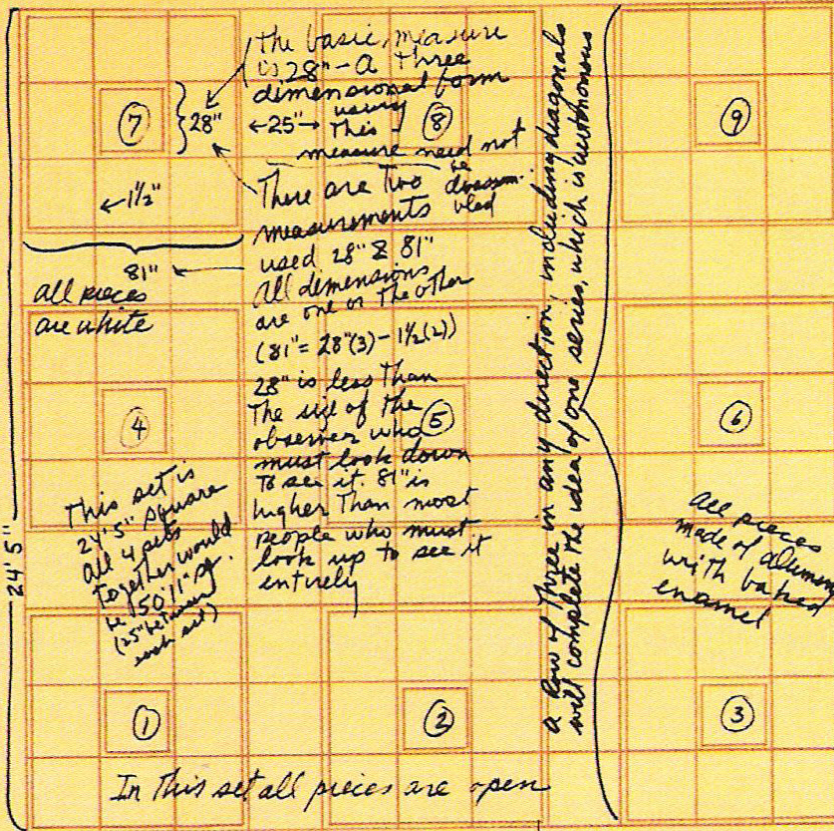
ONE SET OF NINE PIECES

The individual pieces are composed of a form set equally within another and centered. Using this premise as a guide no further design is necessary

The cube, square and variants on them are used as grammatical devices

These pieces should be made without regard for their appearance but to complete the variations that are pre-set

These pieces were made by Trettel and Gratz of New York Jan-March 1967



Each individual piece of the nine is autonomous and complete. All major permutations are accounted for within the set of 9. 4 sets of 9 complete the idea.

The grid system is a convenience. It stabilizes the measurements and neutralizes space by treating it equally.

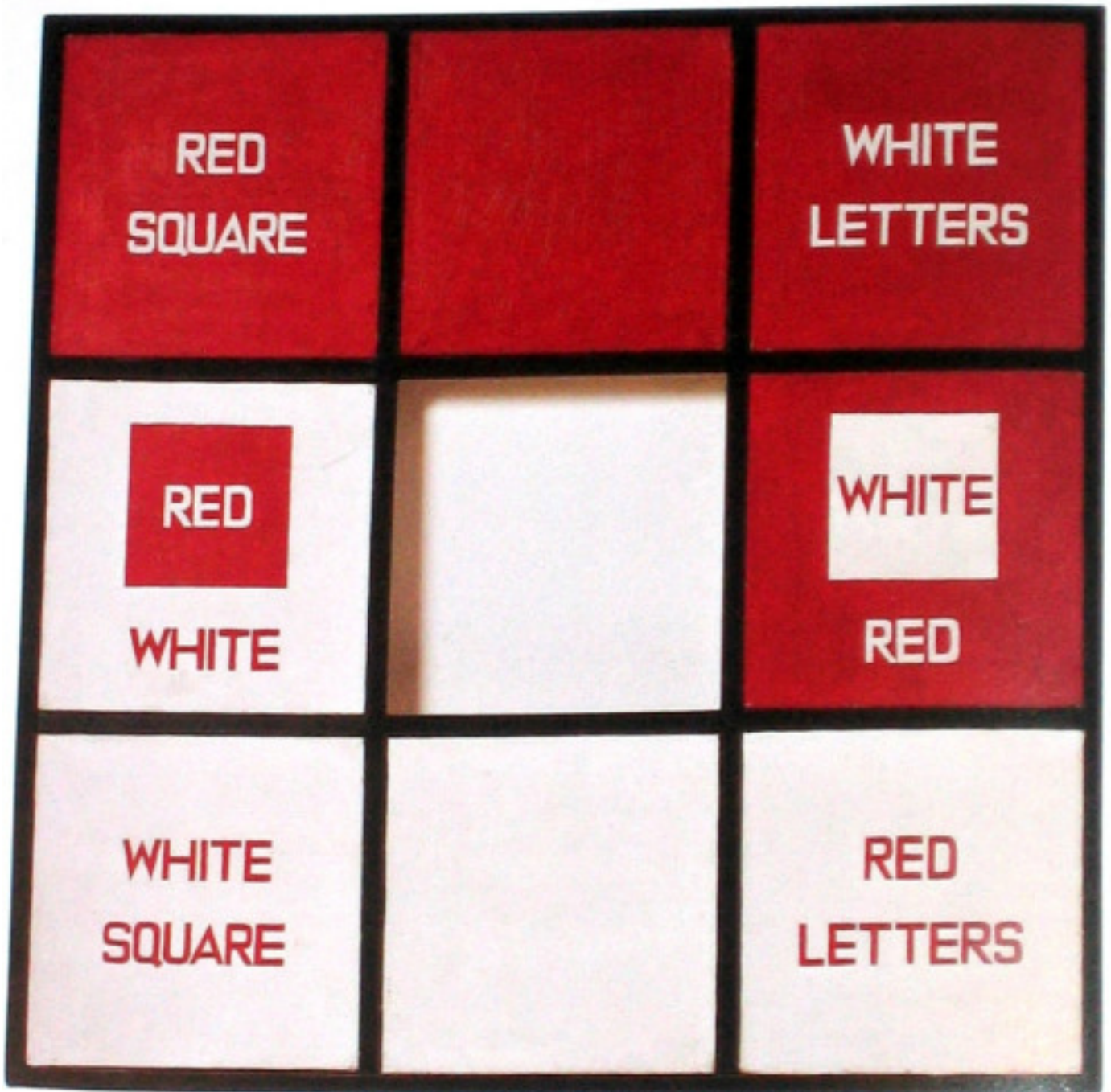
Further variations are in complete sets of nine pieces each. This plan includes only set A. Set B is the same in all respects except the inside form of each piece is enclosed (solid, circled) while the outside form remains open. In Set C the inside form is open and the outside is closed. All forms are closed in Set D. All sets seen together represent the completion of the plan.

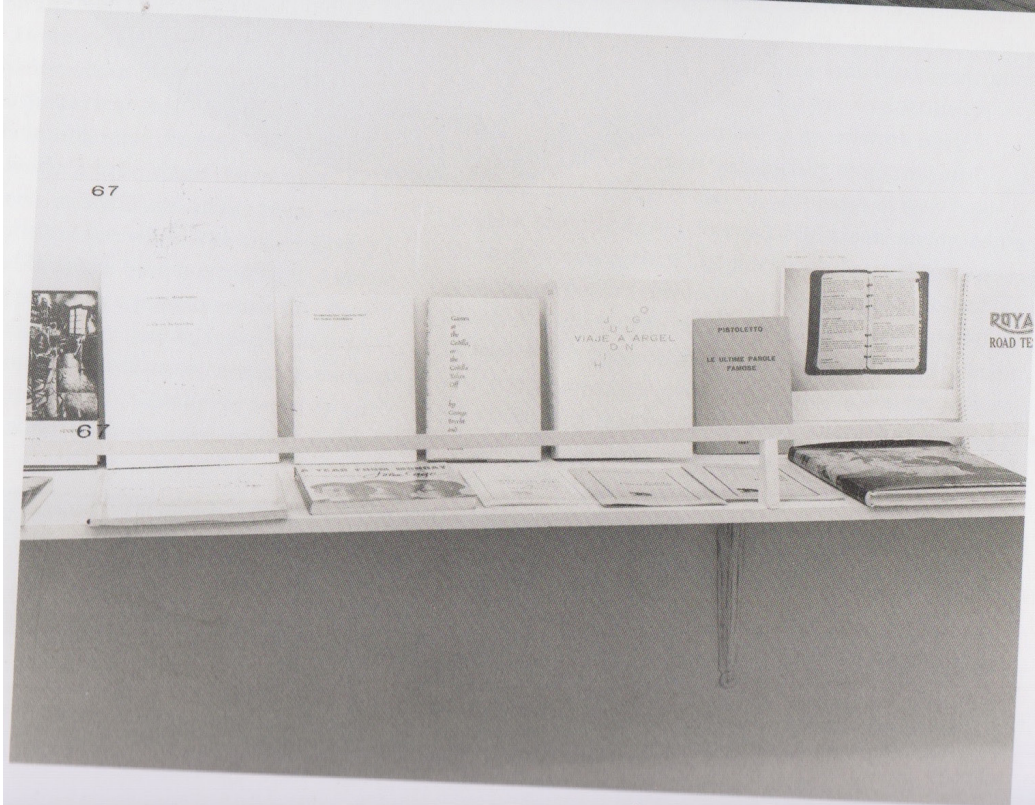
- ① INSIDE 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 81" X 81"
- ② INSIDE 28" X 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 81" X 81"
- ③ INSIDE 28" X 28" X 81" OUTSIDE 81" X 81"
- ④ INSIDE 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 31" X 81" X 28"
- ⑤ INSIDE 28" X 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 81" X 81" X 28"
- ⑥ INSIDE 28" X 28" X 81" OUTSIDE 81" X 81" X 28"
- ⑦ INSIDE 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 81" X 81" X 81"
- ⑧ INSIDE 28" X 28" X 28" OUTSIDE 51" X 81" X 81"
- ⑨ INSIDE 28" X 28" X 81" OUTSIDE 81" X 81" X 81"

Sol Lewitt 1960

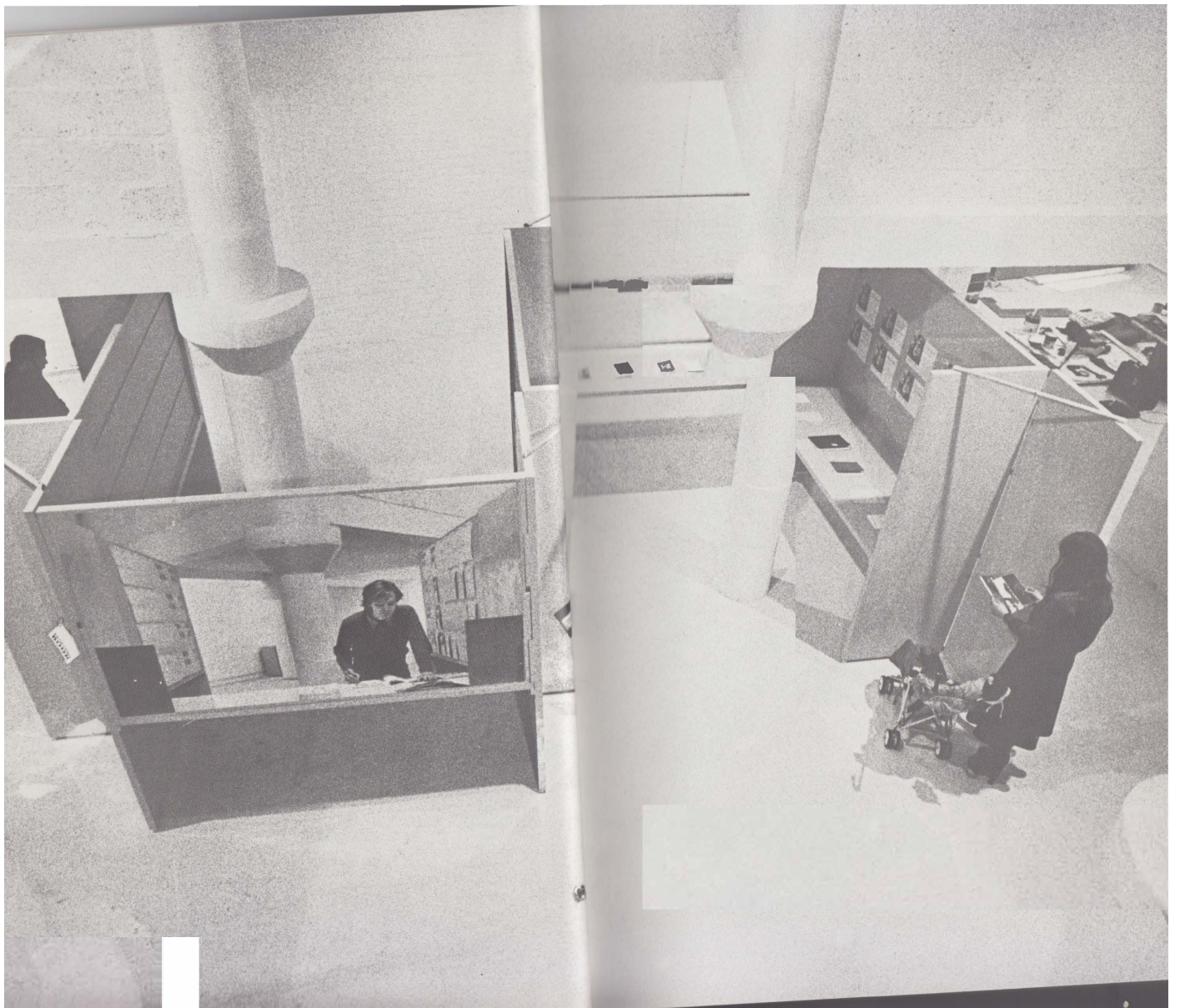
printed by Allgraph Press New York













Event.

Duration...one hour ten minutes.

Equipment. shovel, microphone, two eight millimetre film projectors, tape recorder, video tape, amplifier, loudspeaker, coke.

Four hundred weight of coke is heaped on floor.

First film projector starts running off film of coke being shovelled.  
(after 5 minutes)

Tape recorder, tape of coke being shovelled.

(after five minutes)

Microphone in shovel is switched on and shovelling started.

(after five minutes)

Video tape is started

(after 5 minutes)

Second film projector is switched on

Tape recording amplification switched from recorder to loudspeaker.

(same for duration of film, 20 minutes)

Film ends

(5 minutes)

Video ends

(5 minutes)

Tape ends

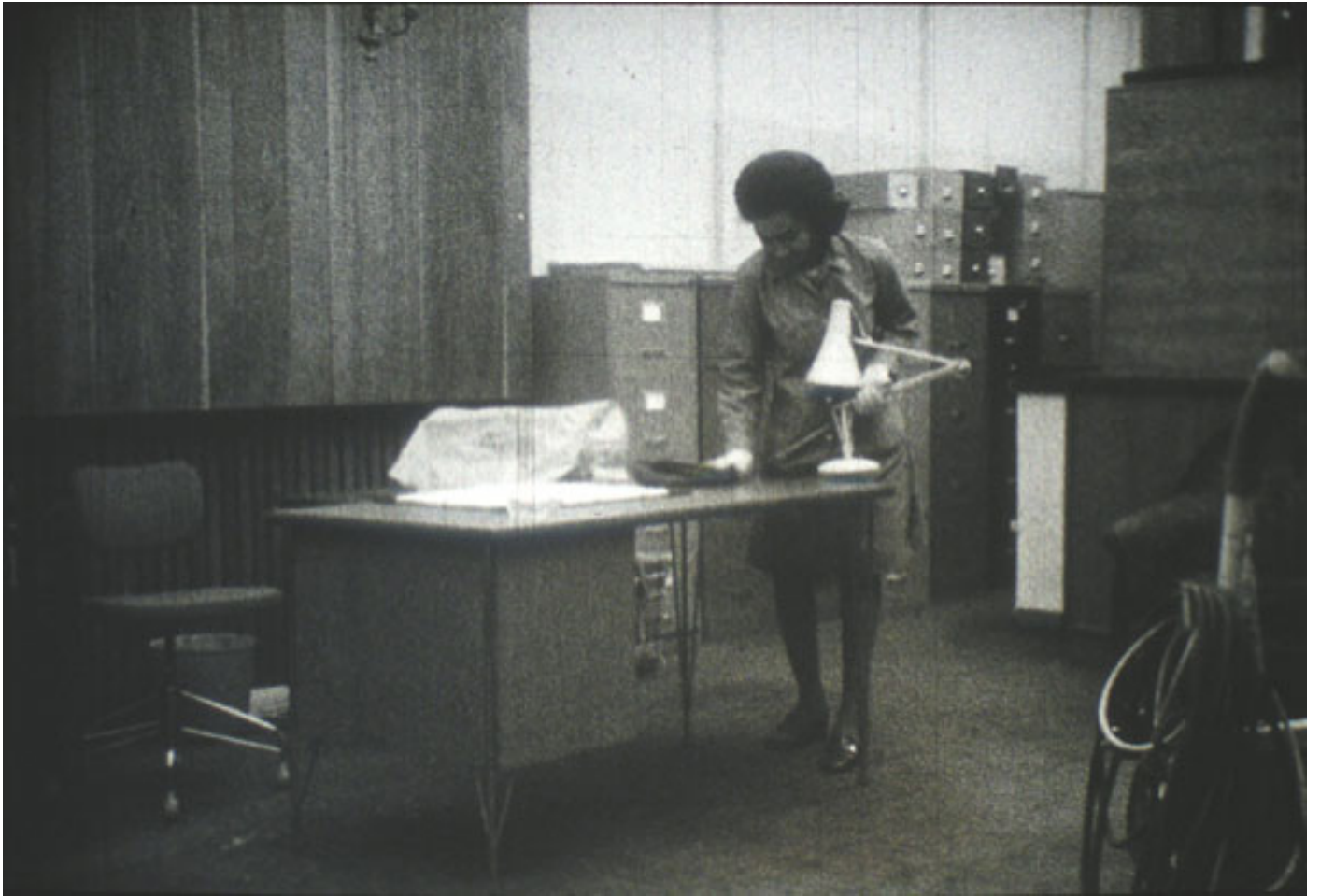
(5 minutes)

Microphone in shovel switched off

Shovelling ends one hour ten minutes after start of event.  
end event.



**def·i·ni·tion** (def'ə-nish'ən), *n.* [OFr. *definicion*; L. *definitio* < pp. of *definire*; see DEFINE], 1. a defining or being defined. 2. a statement of what a thing is. 3. a statement or explanation of what a word or phrase means or has meant. 4. a putting or being in clear, sharp outline. 5. the power of a lens to show (an object) in clear, sharp outline. 6. the degree of distinctness of a photograph, etc. 7. in *radio & television*, the degree of accuracy with which sounds or images are reproduced. Abbreviated **def.**









68 Bradhurst Ave.  
Block 2045 Lot 21  
59 x 75' 6 story walk-up new law apt. bldg. (1901-20)

Owned by Lijuto Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC  
Contracts signed by Clara Moskowitz, President ('67/68)  
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky (according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 7-6-1967 through foreclosure

\$ 96 611.68 mortgage, 7-1-1968, at 6% interest, held by Pearl Shapolsky, 127 E 36 St., NYC (also on 304-06 W 146 St.), half of this mortgage assigned to 428 Realty Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC, 5-5-1969, Harry J. Shapolsky, Pres. (61/3/6)

Assessed land value \$21 000.-, total \$40 000.- (1971)



542 Cathedral Parkway  
Block 1881 Lot 53  
25 x 70' vacant

Owned by Anthony Schimisi Inco., 608 E 11 St., NYC  
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky (according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 2-27-1969 from Polybus Realty Inc., 141 E 7th, NYC, Henry Horn, President

Assessed land value \$12 000.- (1971)



135-37 Chrystie St.  
Block 828 Lot 29  
46 x 100' 6 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by 57 Columbia Inc., 608 E 11 St., NYC  
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, Pres. ('62/65)  
Pearl Shapolsky, Pres. ('63)  
Abraham Hefel, Pres. ('67)  
Harry J. Shapolsky, Sec. ('63)

Principal Harry J. Shapolsky (according to Real Estate Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 2-2-1962 from Martha Perry, 341 W 72 St. NYC \$65 000.- purchase money mortgage at 6% interest, 2-2-1962, due 1-31-1977, held by Martha Perry, 81 Seminary Ave. Yonkers, N.Y. (also on 139 Chrystie St.)

Assessed land value \$33 000.-, total \$60 000.- (1971)

What does  
possession  
mean to you?



7% of our population  
own 84% of our wealth

The Economist, 15 January, 1966



6:00 AM: GET UP, GET BABY  
DRESSED, FED  
7:00 AM: TAKE BABY TO  
MINDER  
7:15 AM: GO TO WORK  
8:00 AM: START WORK  
12.30 PM: DINNER BREAK  
GO SHOPPING  
1:30 PM: START WORK  
5:00 PM: FINISH WORK  
5:30 PM: GET BABY FROM  
MINDER  
6:00 PM: PREPARE BABY'S  
MEAL  
7:30 PM: PUT HIM TO BED  
8:00 PM: PREPARE MEAL FOR  
HUSBAND AND SELF  
9:00 PM: BABY'S WASHING  
CLEAN UP  
12:00 PM: GO TO BED

JOANNA MARTIN, AGE 21  
1 SON AGE 1

SHRINK WRAP OPERATOR  
FULL TIME 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM





Living without the certainty that I will see someone tomorrow.



For company I usually have to wait until people come to visit me at my place.  
What do you propose is the way for me to form new relationships within this isolated tower.



My code



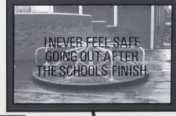
My intention



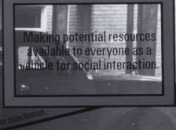
My behaviour



My attitude



Another perception



Another perception



Another perception



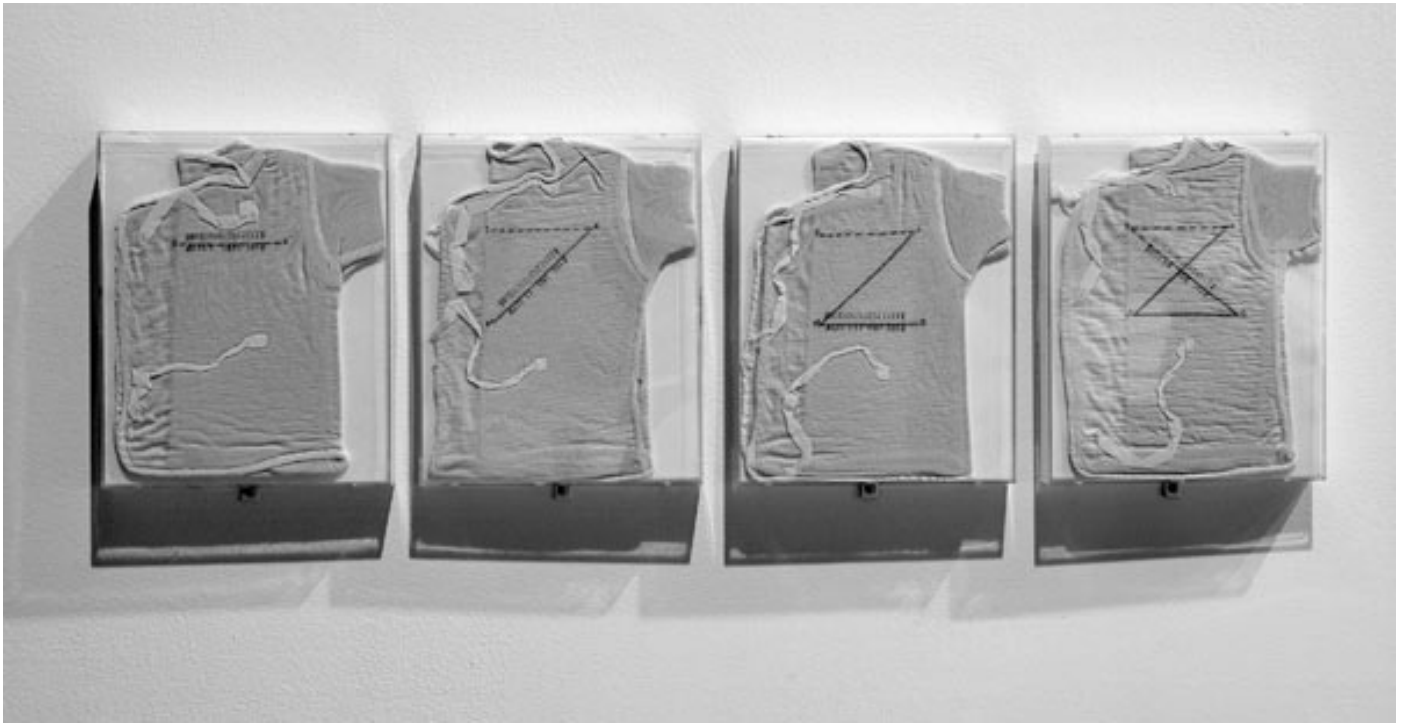


FEBRUARY 28, 1974

08.30 HRS.	4½ OZS. SMA, 2 TSPS. CEREAL, 3 TSPS. EGG YOLK
10.20 HRS.	2 OZS. ORANGE
12.30 HRS.	7 OZS. SMA, 4 TSPS. CARROT, 6 TSPS. BEEF
14.30 HRS.	3 OZS. ORANGE
17.30 HRS.	7 OZS. SMA, 3 TSPS. CEREAL, 12 TSPS. APRICOT
20.00 HRS.	2½ OZS. RIBENA
21.00 HRS.	8 OZS. SMA
TOTAL:	34 OZS. LIQUIDS 30 TSPS. SOLIDS

28 FEB 1974

02



UTTERANCE	/GAH/
GLOSS	KITTY IS 'GONE'
FUNCTION	NON-EXISTENCE
AGE	FEB 6 1975

T2 6.2.75

CONTEXT: M(mother) putting K(non) to bed. 13.00 HRS.  
 SPEECH EVENT(S) /gah/R5  
 5.1 K. /dit-dy/ dit-dy/ e dit-dy/ (seeing kitty out the window)  
 /gah/ dit-dy gah/ (kitty disappears under a car)  
 M. Oh! (seeing it come out again)  
 K. /dere/ dere/ e dere/ e dere/ (excitedly)  
 MOST FREQUENT UTTERANCES: /dere/ e dere/ gah/ dit-dy/ ah-gah/  
 MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCES: 1.78 17 months, 11 days

UTTERANCE	/E WEH BOH/
GLOSS	WHERE IS THE 'P BALL'
FUNCTION	REURRENCE
AGE	MAR 6 1975

T5 6.3.75

CONTEXT: S(mother substitute), A (her daughter) and K (M's son, having tea. 16.30 HRS.  
 SPEECH EVENT(S) /e weh boh/17R  
 17.1 S. Don't spill it. (K playing with tea cups)  
 K. /e weh boh/ e weh boh/  
 S. Go fetch it for me. (no ball in sight)  
 17.2 A. Where are you? (coming into the room)  
 Kelly come on let's go outside.  
 K. /e weh boh/  
 A. This red ball? (bringing a ball)  
 MOST FREQUENT UTTERANCES: /e weh boh/ weh ka/ weh gah/  
 MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCES: 1.65 18 months, 8 days

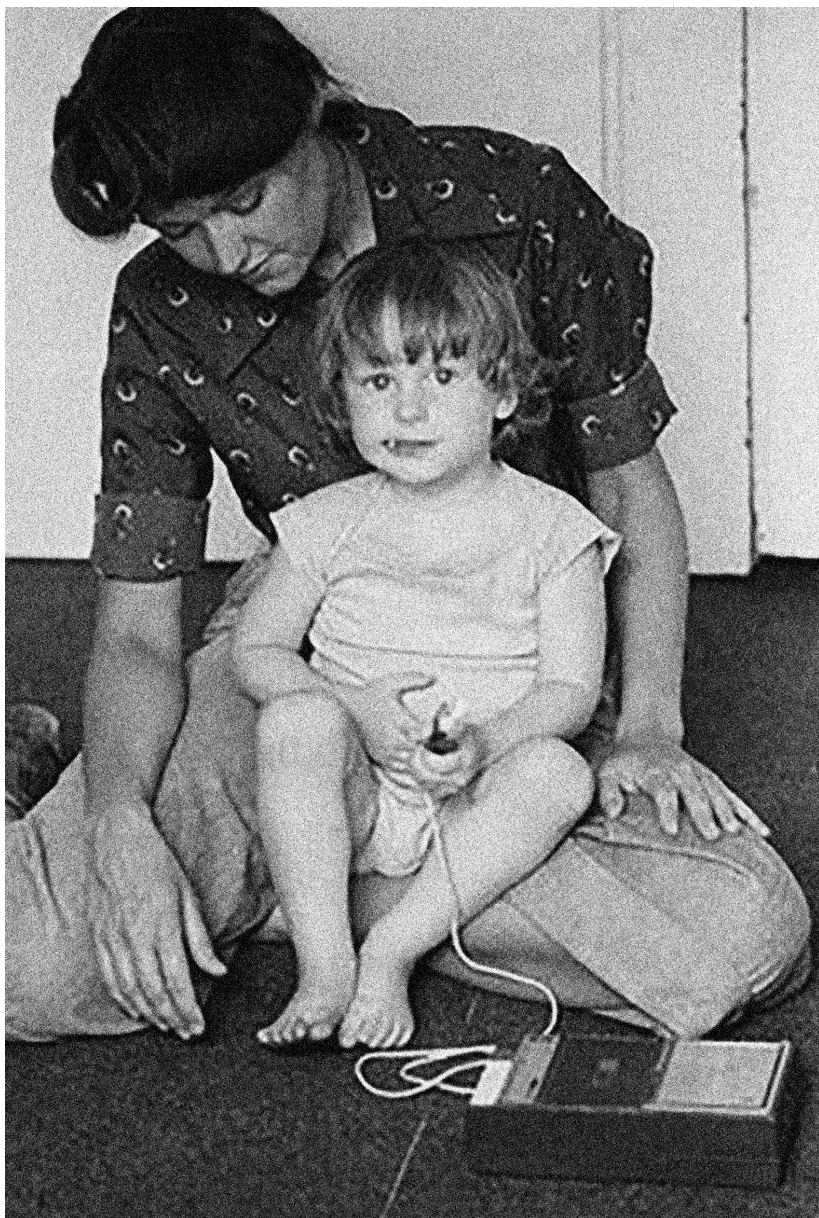


Kelly  
Kelly BTP  
Hi  
Kelly Barrie  
Kelly  
Barrie

(age 4.5) B IS FOR BALLOON. This is the first letter he has constructed with the express purpose of writing a specific word - his surname. He draws P and carefully adds J. Learning to write 'Barrie' has also sorted out his backwards 'b' and the upside down 'a'. B IS FOR ALLIGATORS BURSTING BALLOONS. B IS FOR BEARS PLAYING BAGPIPES IN A BAND GOOD NIGHT LITTLE B. BERTRAM BULLFINCH BASSET HOUND

April 19, 1978: Now Kelly is at school all day. Ray insisted that he was ready to stay for school dinners. He said Kelly was quite happy and I had to admit it did seem to be true so far. When he comes home I try to ask him what he does at school, what he has for lunch, but he's usually not very informative he's in such a hurry to change his clothes and go out to play with Ronnie. They've become very good friends. Once he said he didn't think he needed a mummy and daddy because he and Ronnie could live together and look after themselves. He brought home some flash cards which seem to take the place of our 'a.b.c.' sessions and he keeps a little notebook at school which I can go and look at from time to time. Things have definitely changed, and so quickly. When I told Rosalind that he'd started infant's school she said "well, you're a real mother now"

4515B



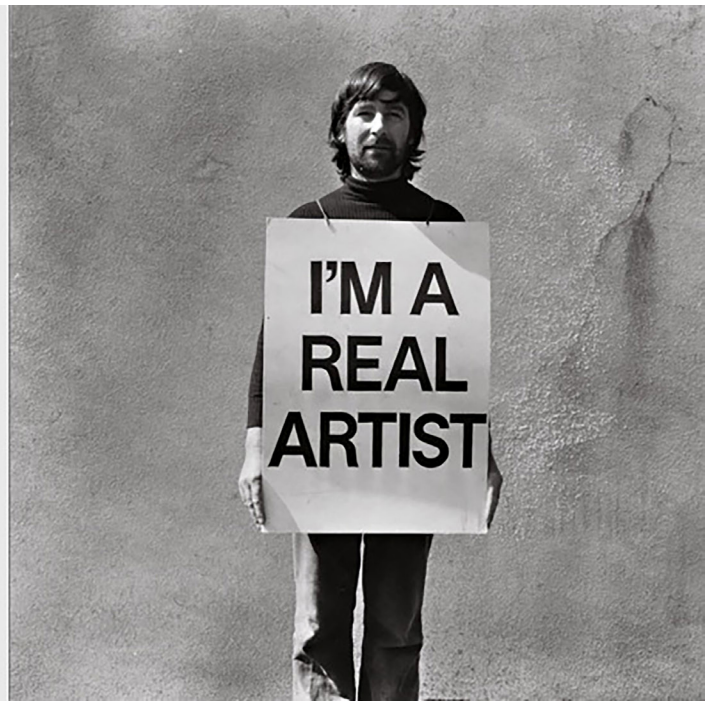




**Keith Arnatt**  
TROUSER - WORD PIECE

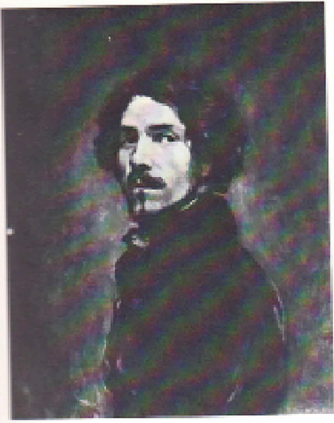
'It is usually thought, and I dare say usually rightly thought, that what one might call the affirmative use of a term is basic – that, to understand 'x', we need to know what it is to be x, or to be an x, and that knowing this apprises us of what it is **not** to be x, not to be an x. But with 'real' . . . it is the **negative** use that wears the trousers. That is, a definite sense attaches to the assertion that something is real, a real such-and-such, only in the light of a specific way in which it might be, or might have been, **not** real. 'A real duck' differs from the simple 'a duck' only in that it is used to exclude various ways of being not a real duck – but a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, &c.; and moreover I don't know **just** how to take the assertion that it's a real duck unless I know **just** what, on that particular occasion, the speaker had it in mind to exclude . . . (The) function of 'real' is not to contribute positively to the characterisation of anything, but to exclude possible ways of being **not** real – and these ways are both numerous for particular kinds of things, and liable to be quite different for things of different kinds. It is this identity of general function combined with immense diversity in specific applications which gives the word 'real' the, at first sight, baffling feature of having neither one single 'meaning', nor yet ambiguity, a number of different meanings.'

John Austin, 'Sense and Sensibilla.'

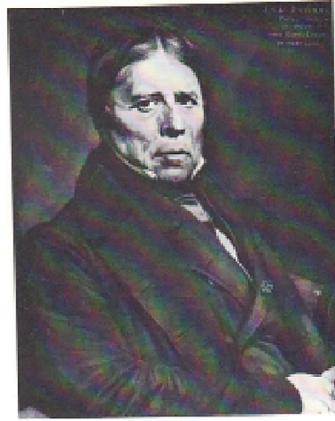








DELACROIX



INGRES

INTENTIONS AND MOTIVES THAT ALLUDE TO A BOUNDARY OF CONSIDERATION

INDIVIDUAL ASSUMPTIONS SUBJECT TO CONSTANTLY CHANGING REFERENCES

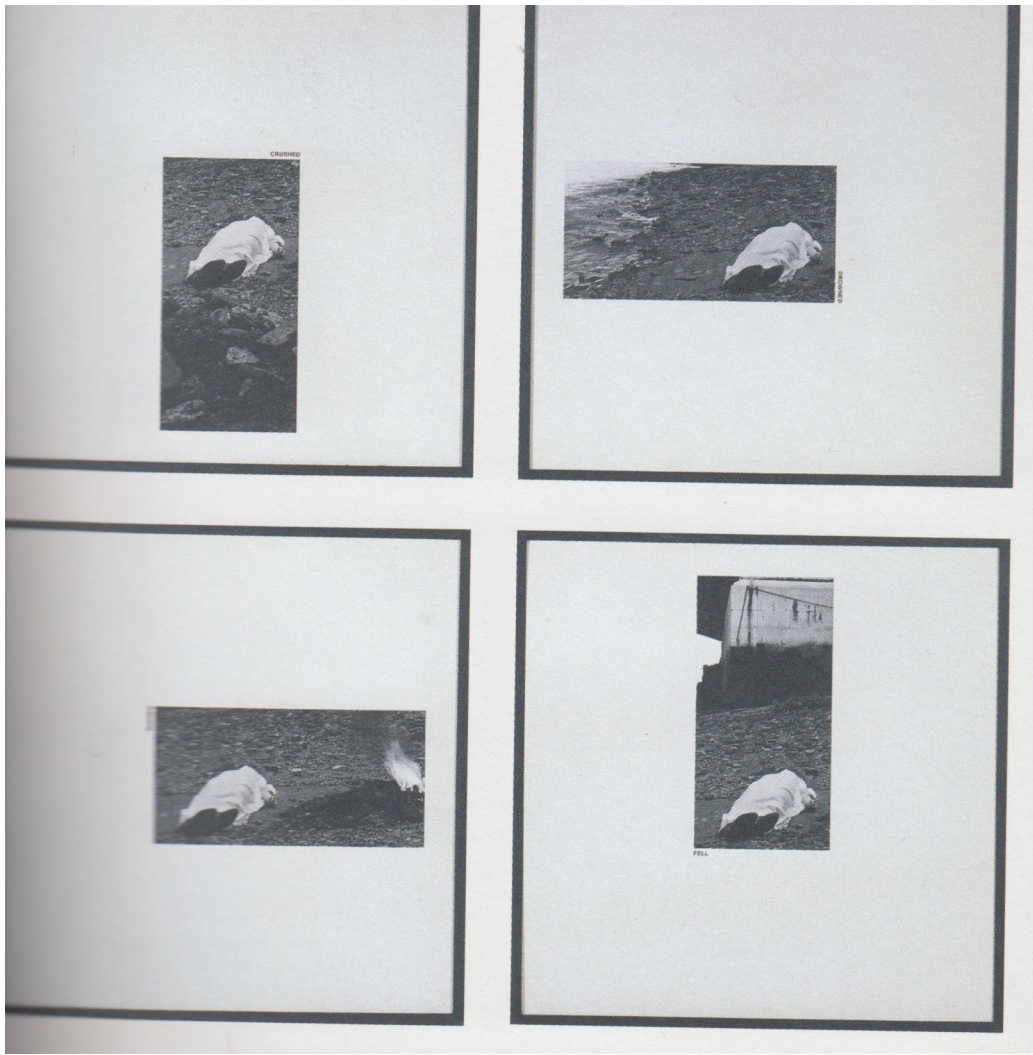
A CONTEXT WHICH INCITES A PARTICULAR ATTITUDE

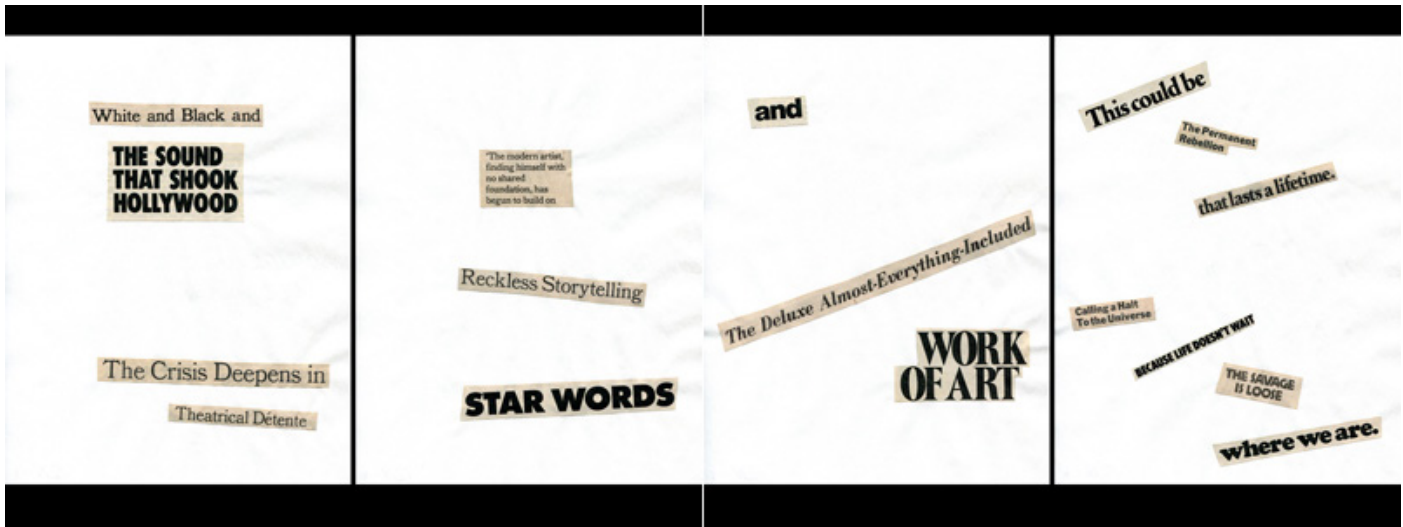


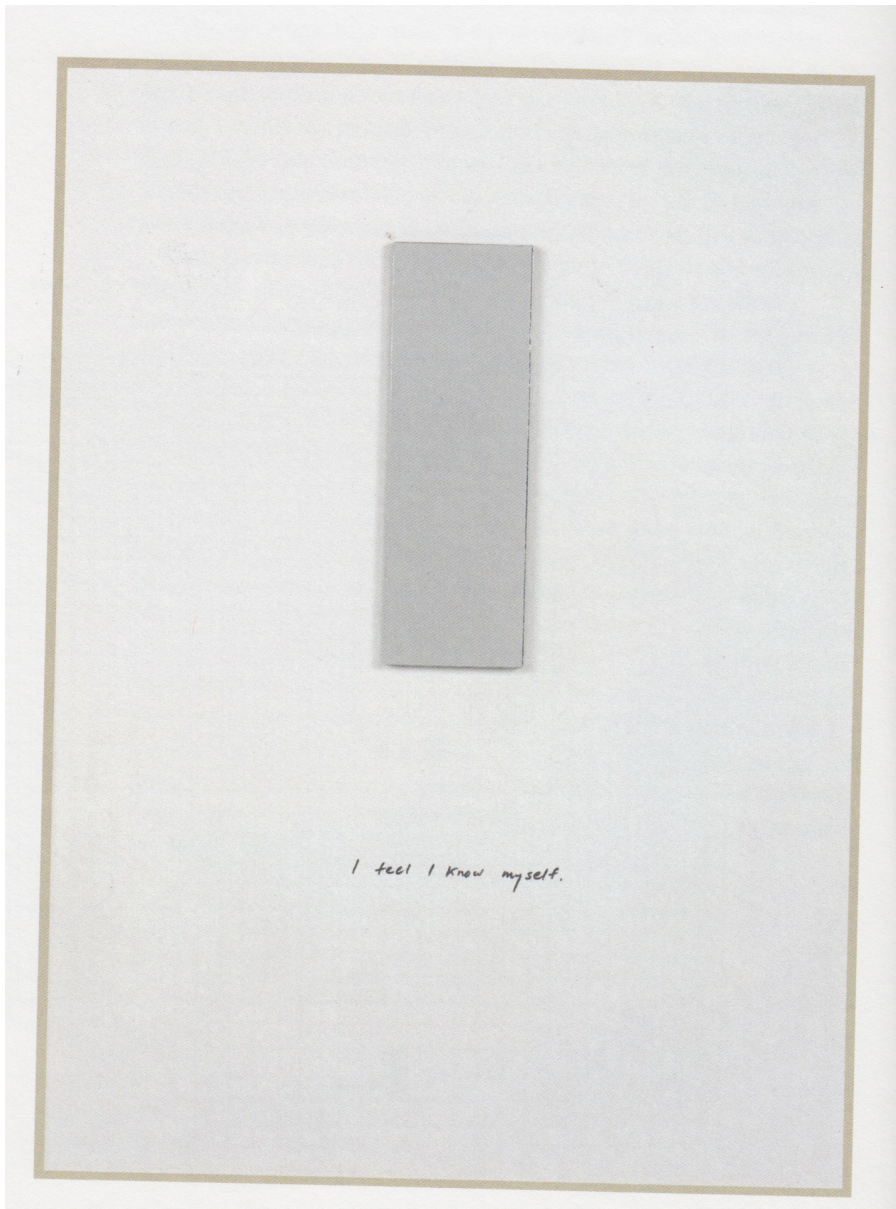


They were tired of the house, so they hired some neighborhood boys to board it up and make sure all was secure. He was 19 and figured it was a good way to make a few bucks. He brought Francine along because they were going to the movies later and she thought she'd sit on the sand 'til he finished work. After about 2 hours she walked up to the house and watched them filling the windows with wood. She told him that when she was little this used to be her dreamhouse. He hammered away, listened half heartedly, and said "Oh yeah?" She and her friend used to sit on the bench across the street and just watch the house. How the trees moved so slowly around it with each breeze. She would picture herself inside making breakfast. She is wearing a white apron which has printed on it a picture of little bees with smiles on their faces hopping from flower to flower. She is making french toast for her husband, who is a successful real estate broker. She tells this to him as he finishes boarding up the large bay window in the livingroom. He rolls his eyes in his head, says "really?", puts his arm around her and kisses her hard on the lips.











THE ONLY WAY TO BE PURE IS TO STAY BY YOURSELF  
TOTAL SUBMISSION CAN BE A FORM OF FREEDOM  
OFTEN YOU SHOULD ACT LIKE YOU ARE SEXLESS  
THE MORE YOU KNOW THE BETTER OFF YOU ARE  
SYMBOLS ARE MORE MEANINGFUL THAN THINGS THEMSELVES  
DESCRIPTION IS MORE VALUABLE THAN METAPHOR  
IT'S BETTER TO STUDY THE FACT THAN TO ANALYZE ITS HISTORY  
EATING TOO MUCH IS CRIMINAL  
YOU SHOULD ENJOY YOURSELF BECAUSE YOU CAN'T CHANGE ANYTHING ANYWAY  
THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA  
CHASING THE NEW IS DANGEROUS  
YOU CAN'T EXPECT PEOPLE TO BE SOMETHING THEY'RE NOT  
SOMETIMES ALL YOU CAN DO IS LOOK THE OTHER WAY  
ANYTHING IS A LEGITIMATE AREA OF INVESTIGATION  
HABITUAL CONTEMPT OR DISGUST DOESN'T REFLECT A FINER SENSIBILITY  
YOU CAN PULL YOURSELF OUT OF ANY HOLE IF YOU ARE DETERMINED ENOUGH  
IMPOSING ORDER IS MAN'S VOCATION; CHAOS IS A VERSION OF HELL  
HIDING YOUR MOTIVES IS DESPICABLE  
TRADING A LIFE FOR A LIFE IS FAIR ENOUGH  
SACRIFICING YOURSELF FOR A BAD CAUSE IS NOT A MORAL ACT  
REDISTRIBUTING WEALTH IS MANDATORY  
CHANGE IS VALUABLE BECAUSE IT GIVES THE OPPRESSED A CHANCE TO BE TYRANTS  
IT IS HEROIC TO TRY TO STOP TIME  
YOU GET THE FACE YOU DESERVE  
THINKING TOO MUCH CAN ONLY CAUSE TROUBLE  
YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF THINGS  
YOU ARE COMPLETELY GUILTESS IN YOUR DREAMS  
CHILDREN ARE THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE  
PEOPLE ARE BORING UNLESS THEY'RE EXTREMISTS  
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WHAT UNTIL YOU SUPPORT YOURSELF  
YOU MUST DISAGREE WITH AUTHORITY FIGURES  
VIOLENCE IS PERMISSABLE, EVEN DESIRABLE OCCASSIONALLY  
IN SOME INSTANCES IT'S BETTER TO DIE THAN TO CONTINUE  
YOU HAVE NO MORE RESPONSIBILITY TO YOUR FAMILY THAN TO OTHER PEOPLE  
YOU SHOULD RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS IN THE SAME WAY  
AT TIMES INACTIVITY IS PREFERABLE TO MINDLESS FUNCTIONING  
IT'S GOOD TO TRY TO STAY CLEAN ON ALL LEVELS  
IT'S CRUCIAL TO HAVE AN ACTIVE FANTASY LIFE  
THE MOST PROFOUND THINGS ARE INEXPRESSIBLE  
SELF-AWARENESS CAN BE CRIPPLING  
ABSTRACTION IS A TYPE OF DECADENCE  
BEING BORED CAN MAKE YOU DO CRAZY THINGS  
DRAMA OFTEN OBSCURES THE REAL ISSUES  
CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY ARE RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT  
DYING SHOULD BE AS EASY AS FALLING OFF A LOG  
THE WORLD OPERATES ACCORDING TO DISCOVERABLE LAWS  
THERE'S NOTHING REDEEMING IN TOIL  
EXPIRING FOR LOVE IS BEAUTIFUL BUT STUPID  
FATHERS OFTEN USE TOO MUCH FORCE  
IF YOU'RE NOT POLITICAL, YOUR PERSONAL LIFE SHOULD BE EXEMPLARY  
SLIPPING INTO MADNESS IS VALUABLE FOR THE SAKE OF COMPARISON  
LEARN TO TRUST YOUR OWN EYES  
TEASING PEOPLE SEXUALLY CAN HAVE UGLY CONSEQUENCES  
THERE'S NO SENSE BEING ANYWHERE BUT THE TOP OF THE HEAP  
YOUR ACTIONS ARE POINTLESS IF NO ONE NOTICES THEM  
A STRONG SENSE OF DUTY CAN IMPRISON YOU  
REPETITION IS THE BEST WAY TO LEARN THINGS

© 1978 BOM 41228



The young soldier Lei-Feng asks his instructor if he may be assigned to a combat mission. When refused he cannot hide his impatience.

The difference between language and iconic imagery is most marked in the case of the photograph. The linguistic sign bears an arbitrary relationship to its referent, the photographic image does not. There is no law in nature which dictates that the linguistic sign 'tree' (or 'l'arbre', or 'baum') should be associated with the thing with which it is in fact associated, this is a matter of cultural convention. In the case of the photograph on the other hand the image is in a sense caused by its referent. Just as there is a causal connection between the presence of an air-current and the direction in which a weathervane points, so a photo-sensitive emulsion necessarily registers the distribution of light to which it is exposed, leading Pierce to describe the photograph as a "quasi-predicate" of the light which stands to it as "quasi-subject".

The *chiaroscuro* of the photographic image replicates, *mutatis mutandis*, that present to the exposed film. What lines and volumes then emerge to our eye are related to their referents, as Volli has emphasised, strictly according to geometrical principles of projective transformation. In an ingenuous assumption the photograph is held to *re-produce* its object. However, the relationship between a photographic image and its referent is one of reproduction only to the extent that Christopher Wren's death-mask reproduces Christopher Wren. The photograph abstracts from, and mediates, the actual. For example, a photograph of three people grouped together may, in reality, have comprised a live model, a two-dimensional 'cut-out' figure, and a wax dummy. In the actual presence of such an assembly I would quickly know them for what they were. No such certainty accompanies my cognition of the photographic group. Barthes found in photography "...precious miracle, a reality from which we are sheltered," but if photographs shelter us from reality it is by nothing more ineffable than a shortage of information.

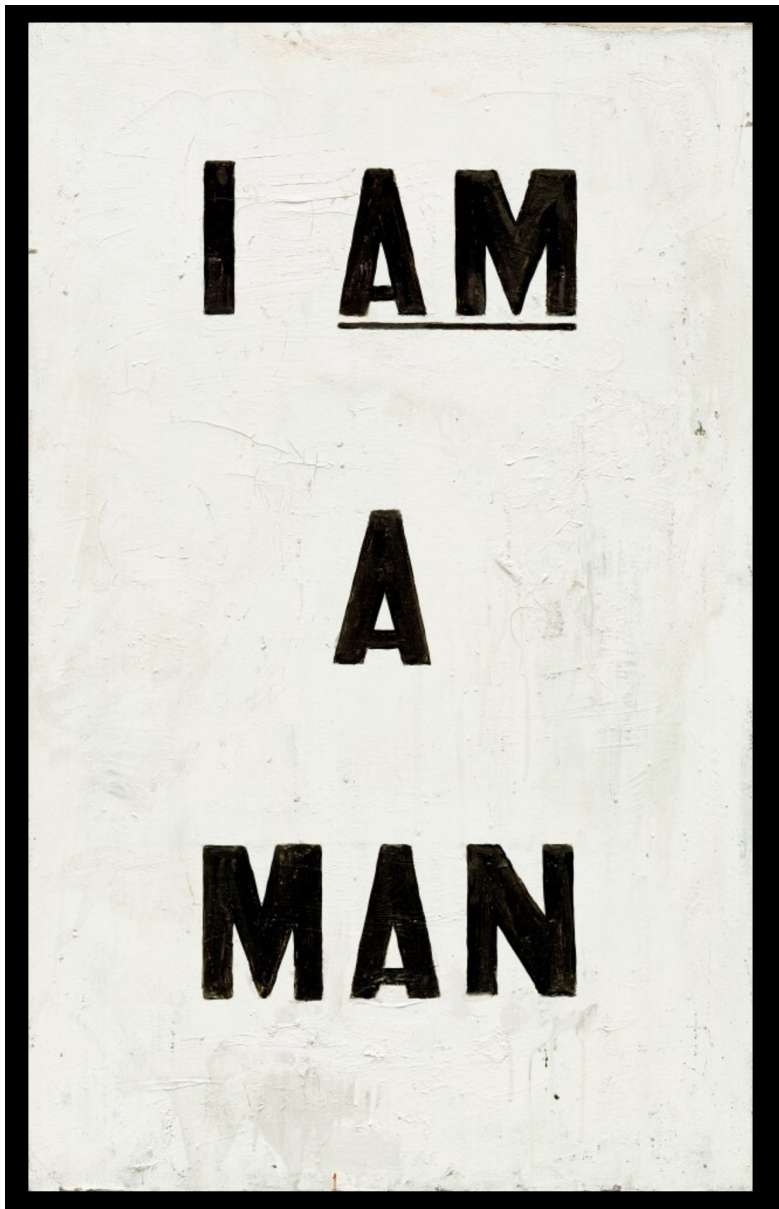


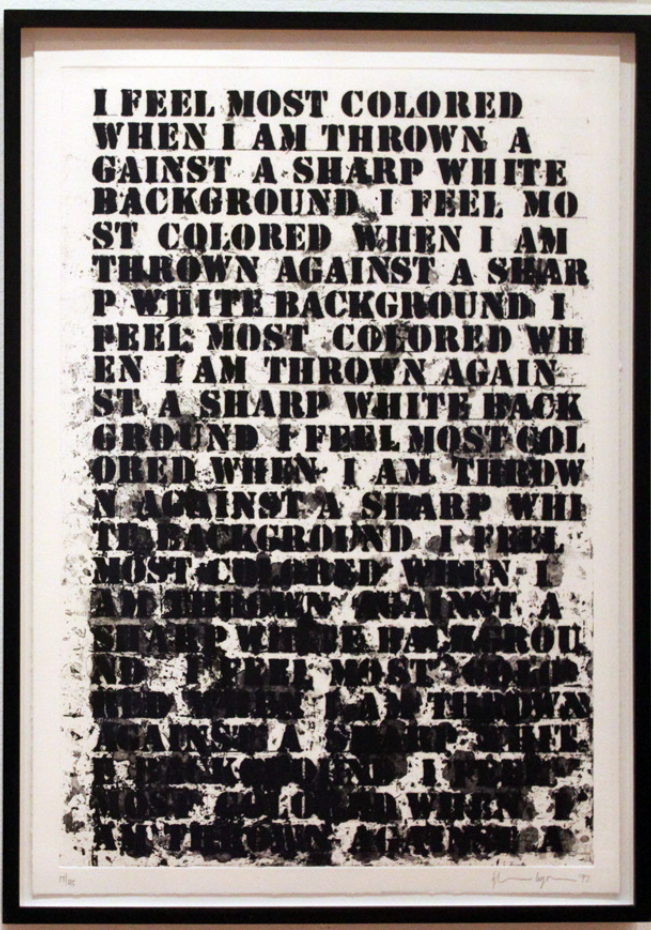
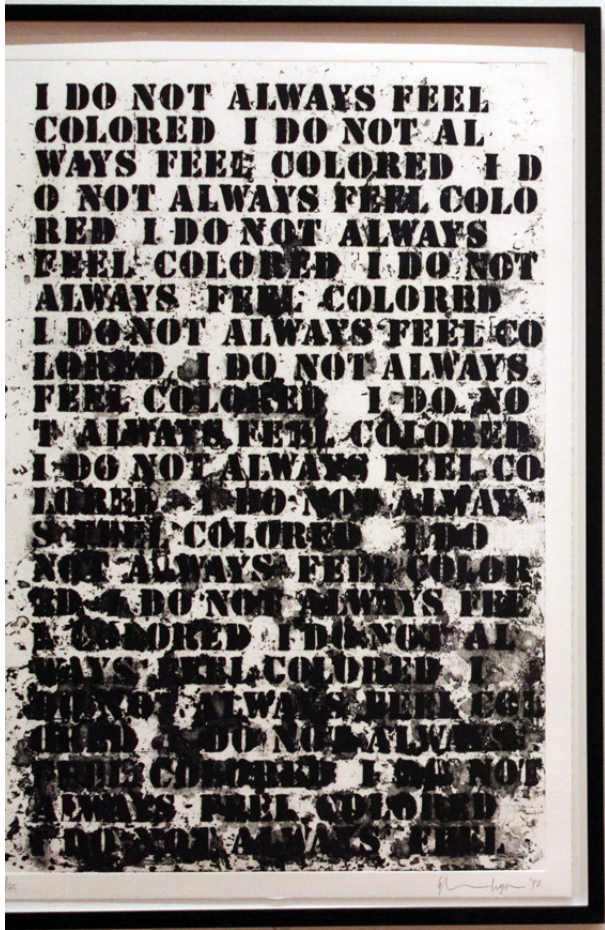
What does  
possession  
mean to you?



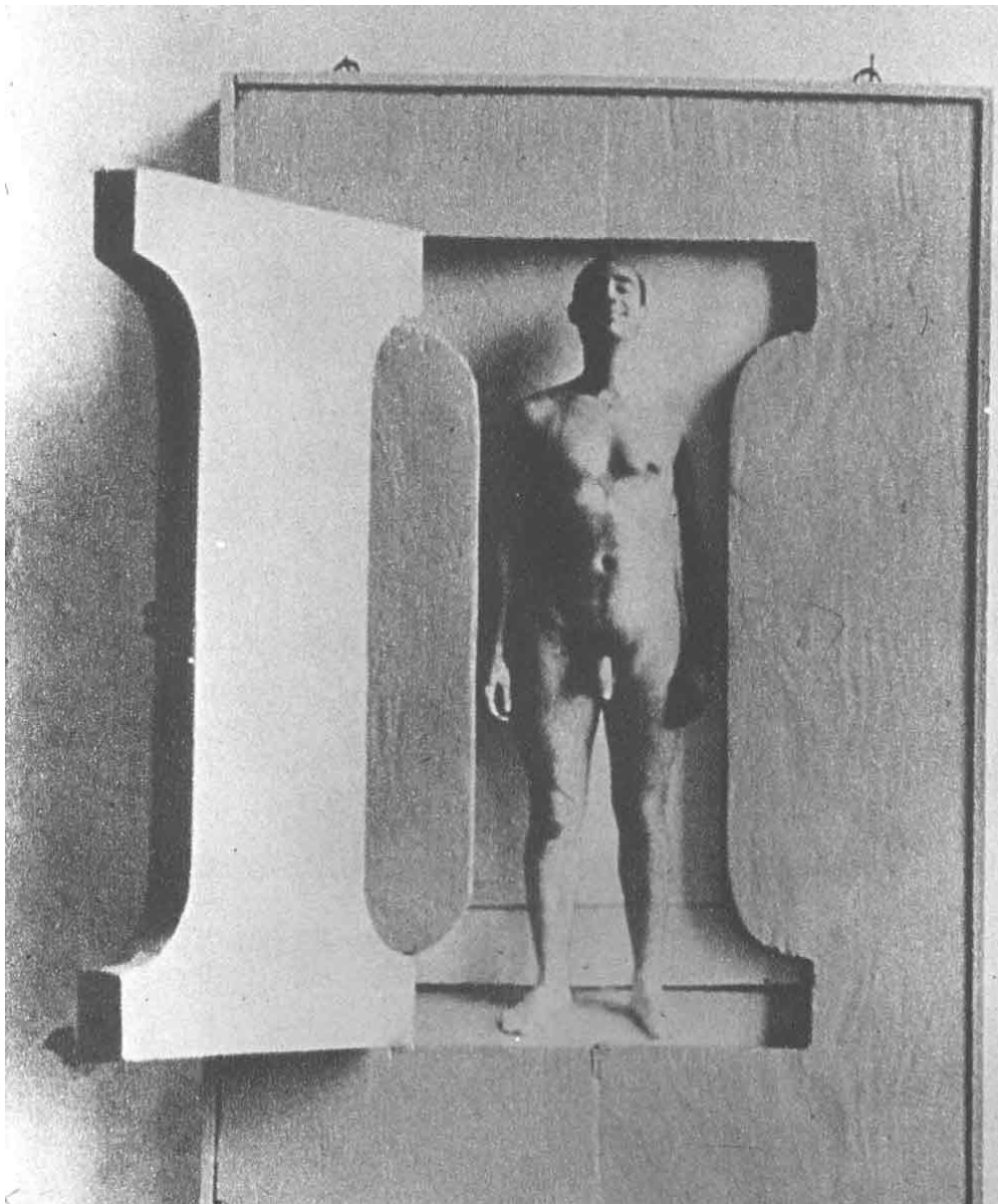
7% of our population  
own 84% of our wealth

The Economist, 15 January, 1966





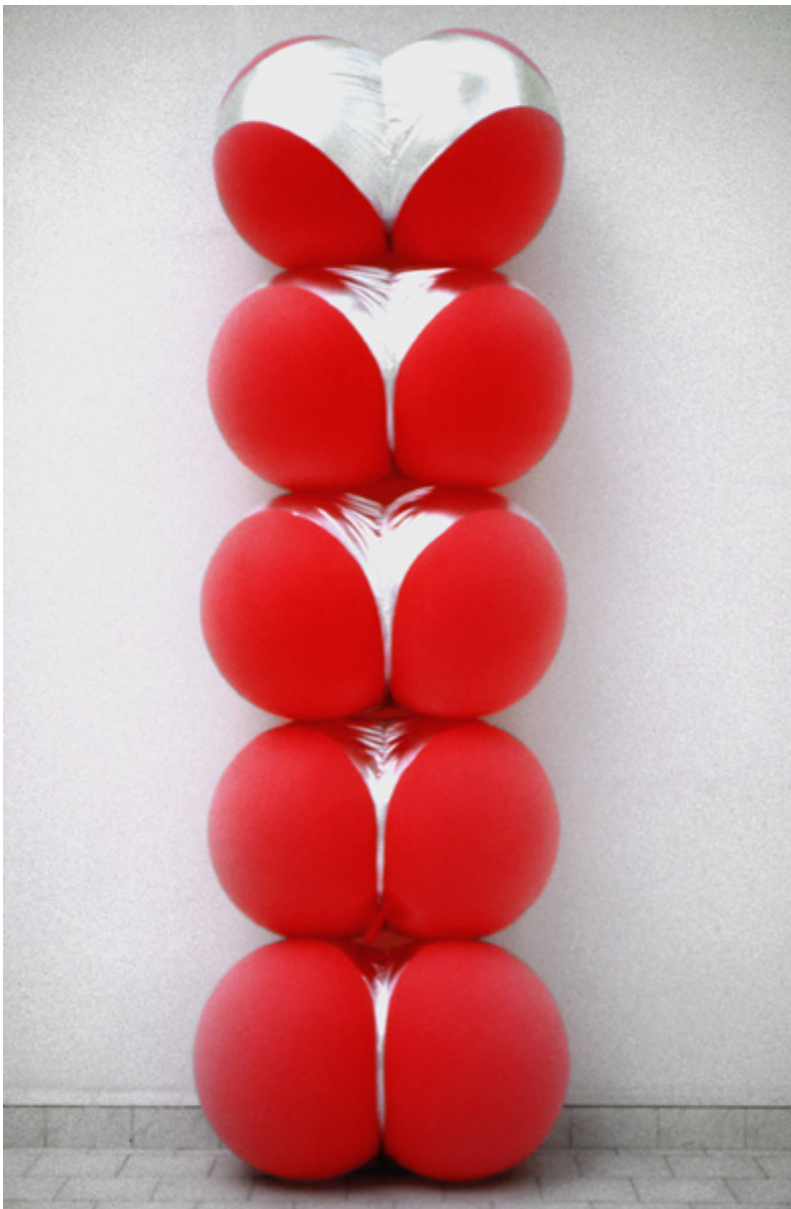




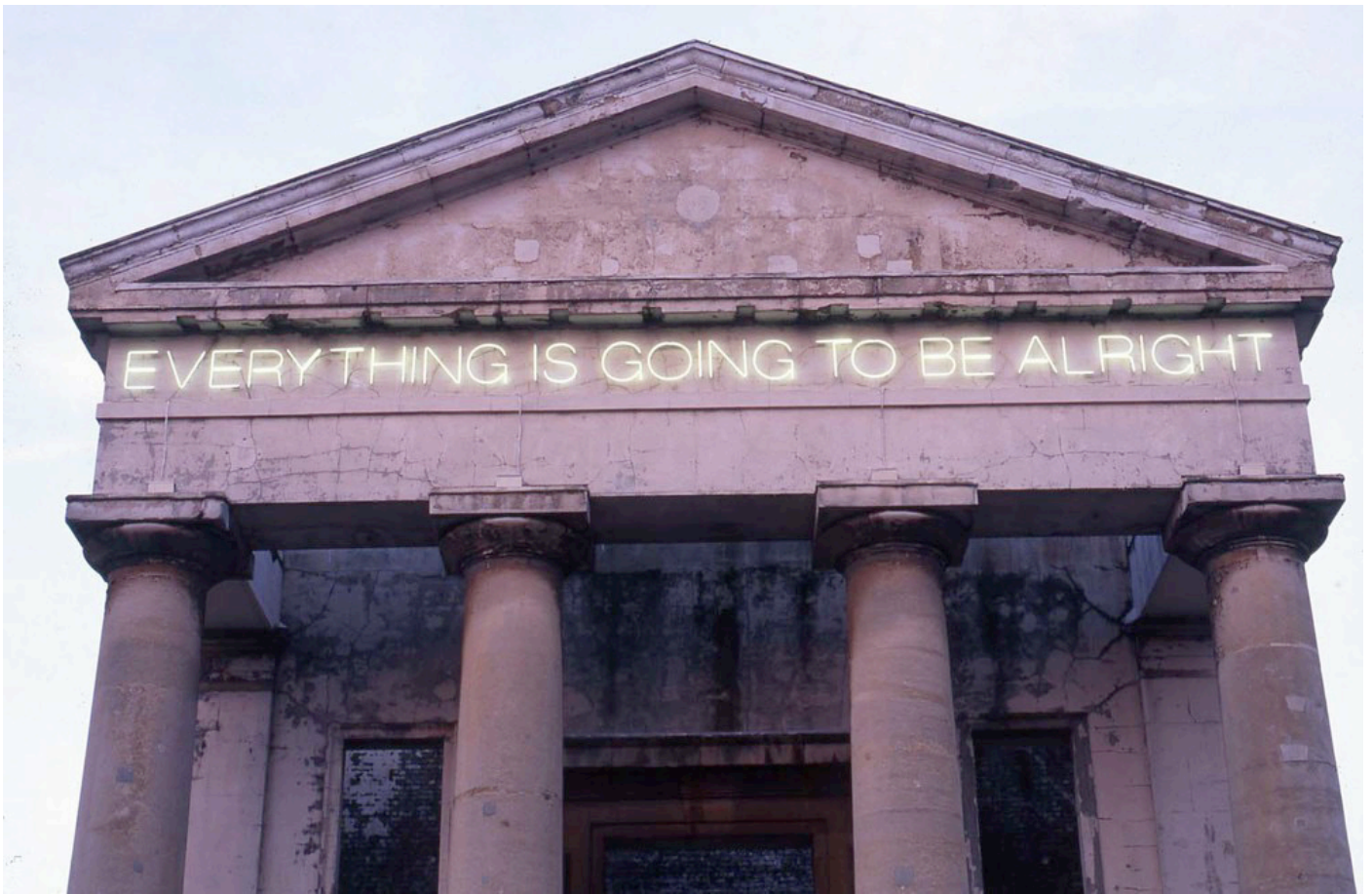


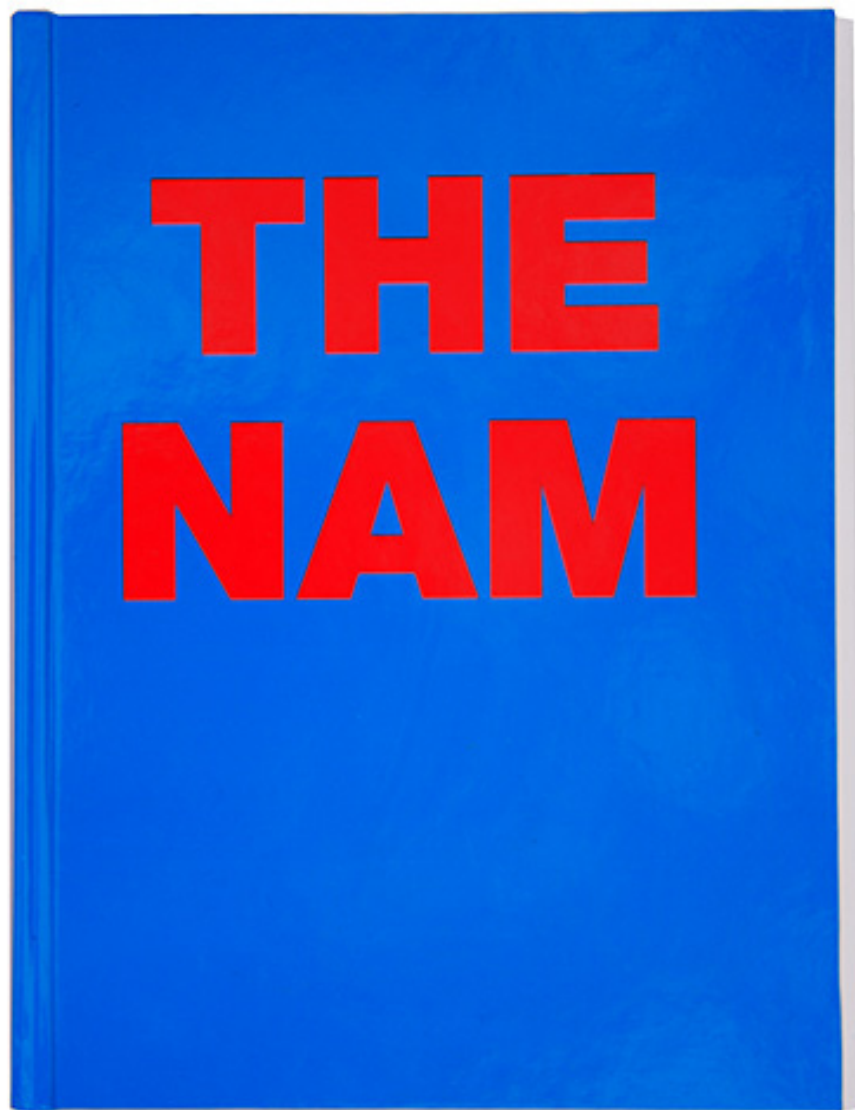






















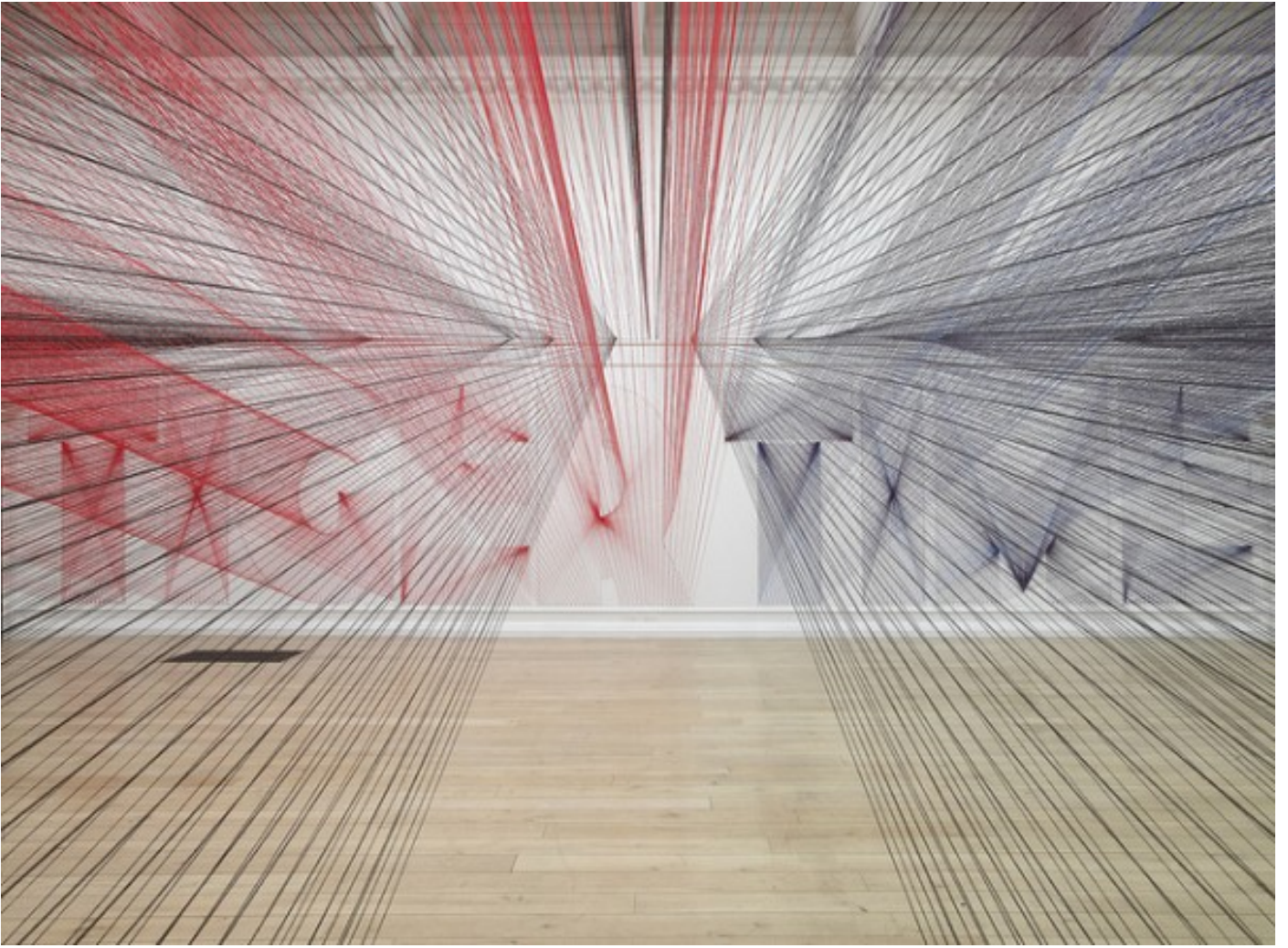
From no where, from the cloud, comes a jet of orange, piercing, railing, curving through the blue like a firework, fizzing, then it pounds into the wing, the wing kindov buckles, crumples into two, like it's made of cardboard. The fire penetrates the fuselage, and through the other side fizzing and dying in the sky behind. A black hole gapes open at the side, opened up like a tin, smoke spewing out, trailing through the sky. The plane starts to dip, waiver, you see him freaking out in the cockpit, eyes squinting, face pouring sweat, skin stretched by the g-force. One of them, the blond one, moving over to the side, taking her partners hand half way and then dropping it, leaving a dark distance between them. From above a massive tracer arcs through the sky and lands just short of the building, the ground erupts, earth spurts up all over the place, bits of stone and shit fly up all over, guys all smoky and muddy rush out and fire up at the clouds, reels of bullets streaking through the fixed machine gun, swinging from side to side, firing madly at nothing, pelting through the distance, the guy shuddering crazily behind the gun, the sound is excruciating, bam, bam, bam.. bam, they keep on coming, the guys face blurred and jarred from the kick-back. Then another tracer comes out of the cloud and explodes right in front of him, the sand erupts like a massive flower, the bloke flies backwards. Smoke and mess shatter the foreground, the building behind starts to fall, machine gun fire still sporting from the blown out window, pelting nothing, bam, bam, straight out into the cloud of smoke. Three or four bodies, warped, useless, fly out of the carcass of the building, landing thud, fucked sacks of flesh, on the charred, fucked-up ground. She's standing there in the doorway light dripping off her shiny skin, neon colours cascade across her, stuck, glistening in the weird, slow, dappled multi-coloured light. Estranged, not smiling, not otherwise. Light catches her cheeks, like tears glistening under her eyes - cool, hot. Lips slightly apart like she might say something but she doesn't, closes them, and licks them, thinking something you'll never know. The light moves round, it's like she's moving, it's strobing slightly, blinking her on and off, her head falls back, hair following, falling away from her shoulders and neck, so you can see the tiny bones in there, poking through her slippery stretched skin, and her face bleached out in the light, two dark dots for nostrils. Skin gray, close, lost in the gloss of sun. Loads of glare making it hard to see, everything explodes into a sudden flash, like an indoor photo, it's just the sun on the wing making it impossible to see shit. Full face of gunmetal gray. The engine roaring auburn fire into he cold blue, leaving a scar of white in its wake. The plane's twisting and turning, showing off to the blind sky. A mad looking face shaking and gagged behind the helmet and snorkel, so all you can really see is his wet forehead and narrow, glare on the cockpit. Nothing happens, just the slow gazing light, blue, purple, pink, a whole orgy of colours, eyes closed, or look closed with the her head so tilted, one strand of hair



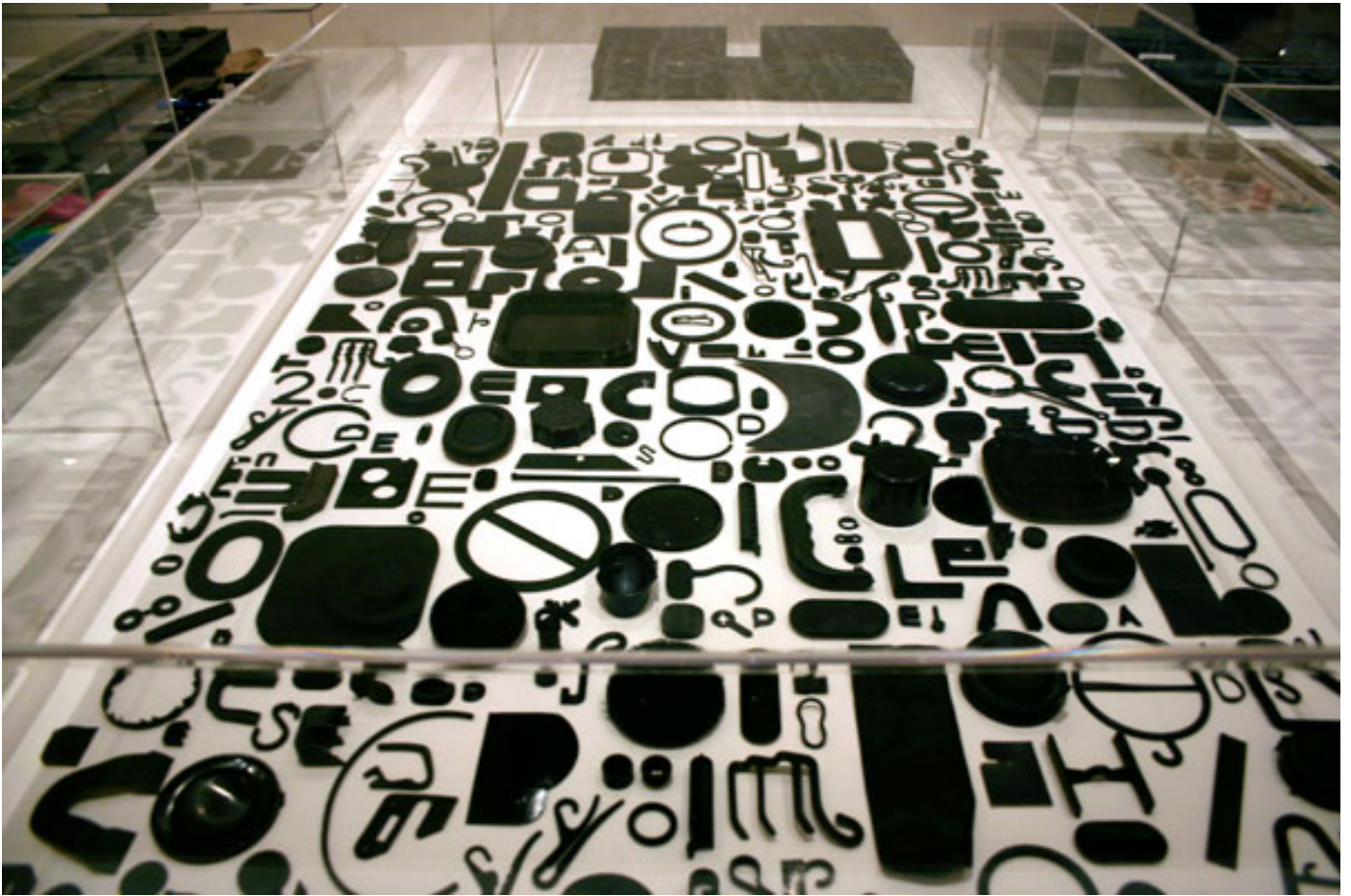




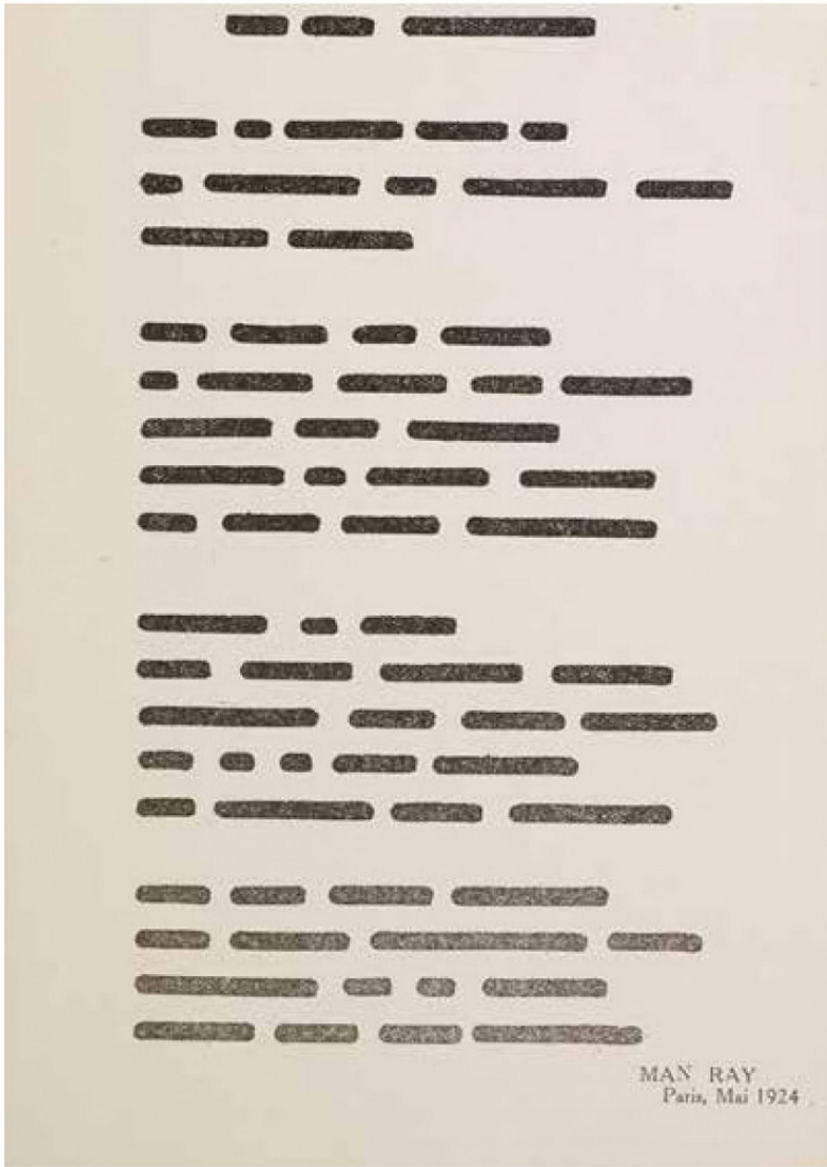




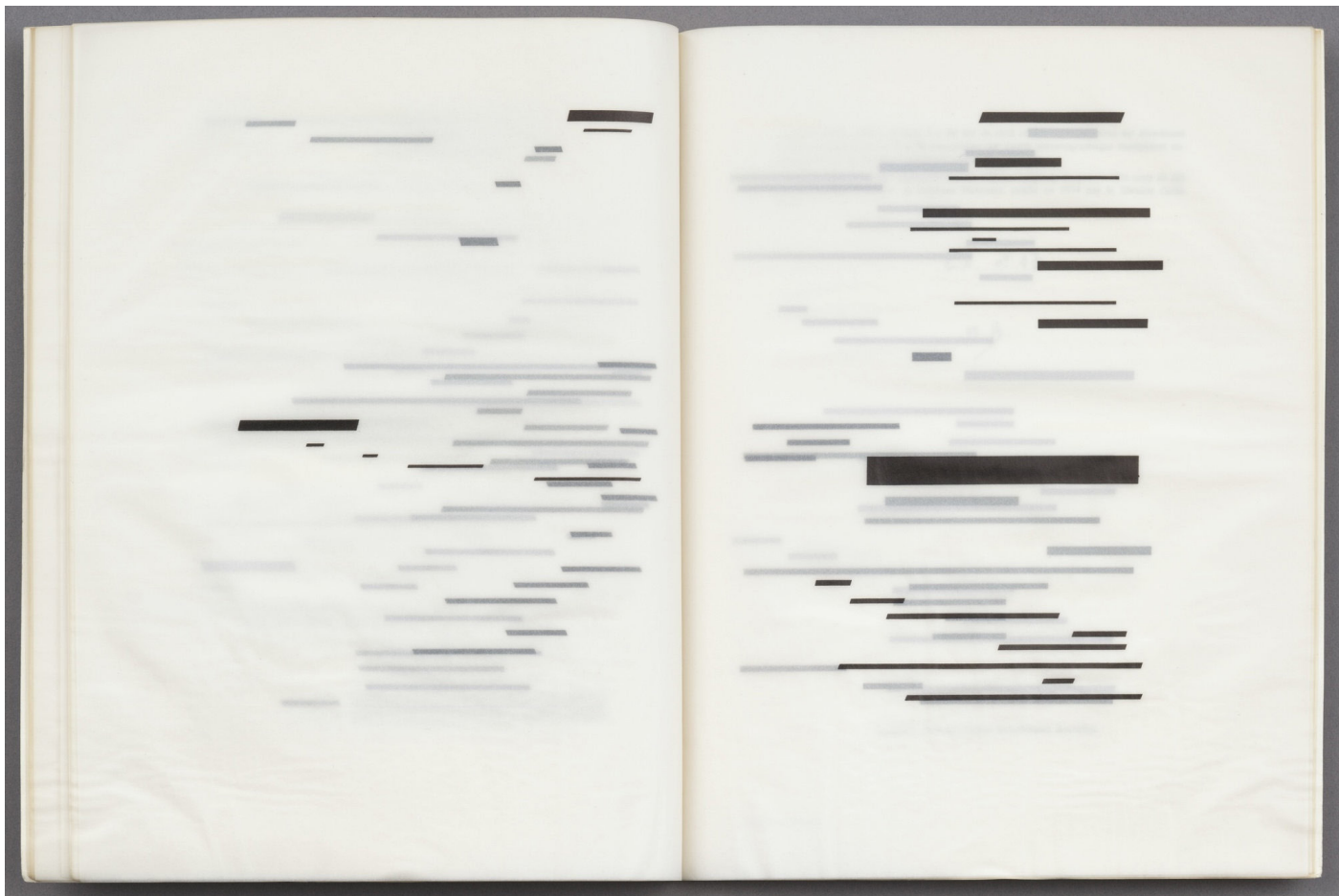




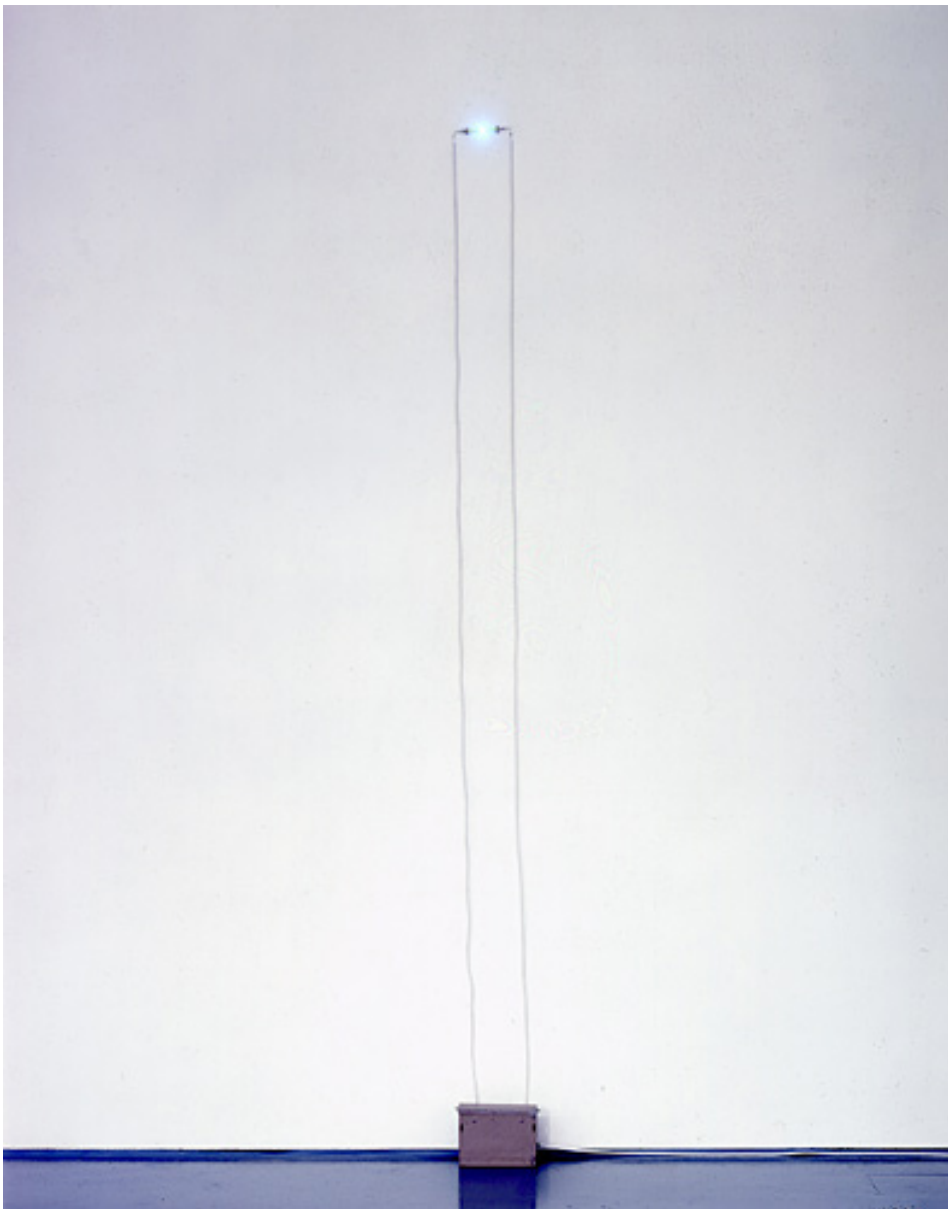




MAN RAY  
Paris, Mai 1924















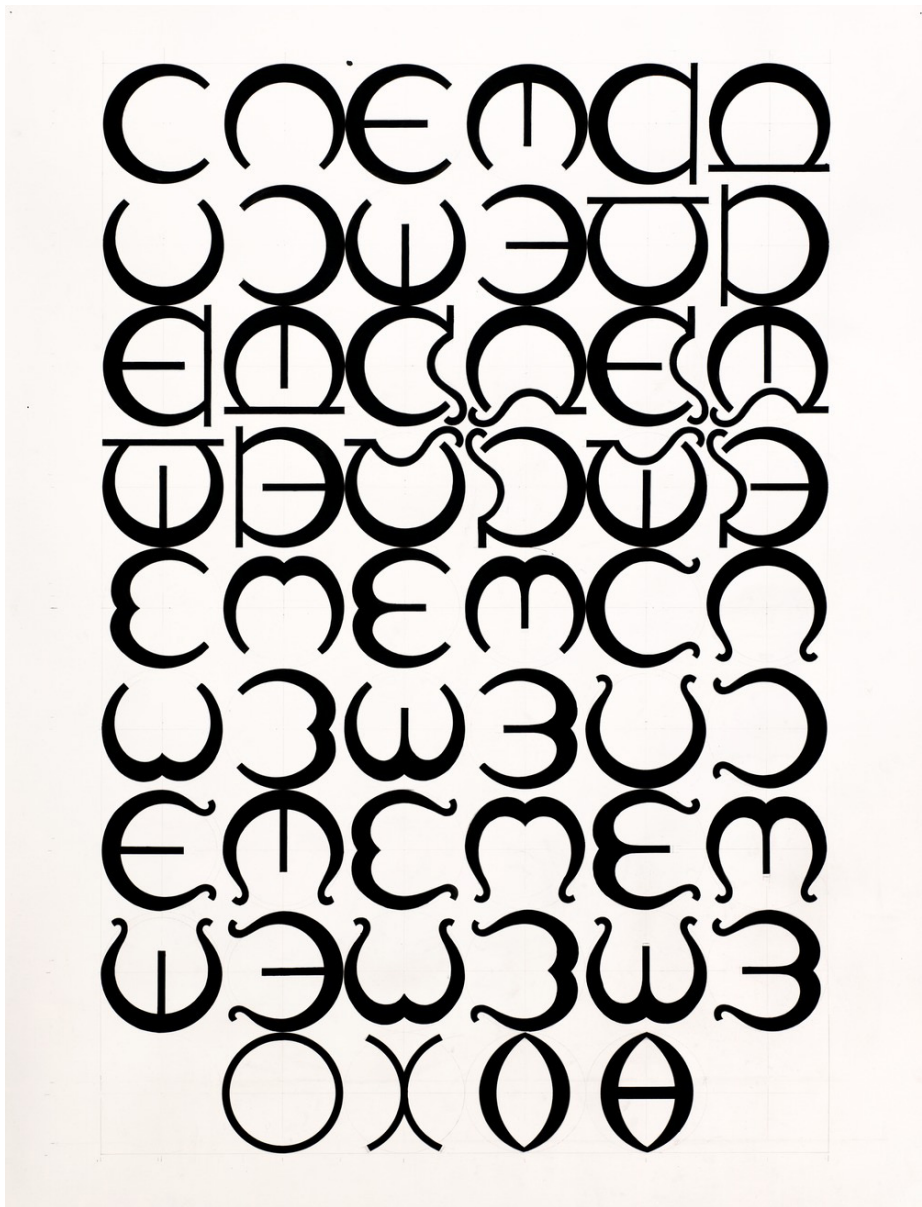




NO / IT CAN / AS IT IS / IT IS A WAR /  
RAW AS IT IS / IT IS AN ACTION /  
NO / IT IS OPPOSITION / NO / SIR /  
PREFER PRISON / RISE TO VOTES SIR /  
RISE / SIR LAPDOG / REVOLT /  
LOVER GOD PAL RISES SIR / REVILED  
DID I LIVE / SAID I / A SEVIL DID /  
DELIVER / SEX AT NOON TAXES /  
SEX / AWARE REERAWAXES / SNUG &  
RAW WAS I / ERE I SAW / WAR &  
GUNS / NOW SIR / A WAR IS NEVER  
EVEN SIR / A WAR IS NOT WON /  
A REW END DRAWN ONWARD /  
WE FEW / DRAWN ONWARD TO NEW  
ERA / LIVED IN TUPAS I DETRACK /  
CARTED IS A PUTRIDEVIL / LIVE ON  
EVASIONS / NO IS A VENDEVIL /  
LIVED IN TIME / EMIT NO DEVIL / LIVE /  
O DEVIL / REVELEVER / LIVE / DO /  
EVIL /




















**not forms and colors**



**not forms and colors**

after Joseph Kosuth after Douglas Huebler after Lawrence Weiner ... *Artforum*, Vol. 36, No.3, 1997, p. 16

not forms and colors

not forms and colors





<b>Visitors</b>	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO	PO	A	E	<b>Home</b>	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO	PO	A	E
Johnson (2), cf	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	Wright (17), 2b	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Wilson (8), 2b	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Bell (26), ss	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Baker (22), rf	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	Young (16), 3b	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Martinez (19), lf	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sullivan (14), rf	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Walker (15), 1b	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	Davis (7), lf	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Brown (4), 3b	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Garcia (35), 1b	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Clarke (9), c	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Smith (2), cf	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Williams (6), ss	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	Jones (3), c	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anderson (12), p	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	White (10), p	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	11	1	2	1	0	3	8	3	1	<b>Totals</b>	13	2	4	1	1	1	6	3	0

<b>VISITORS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>							<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>HOME</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>							<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

Temp: 78.1°F Wind: SE

Sweet Sweet Darling Dear,

Alone at last! It's been days on days on days, and I've craved this second wildly. I felt it creep closer with every tiny change of weather, I tasted it in the lifting morning fog, I smelt it in the air and I swear I even saw it in the clouds. Its retreating approach seemed endless and now, finally, here it is - sweet bliss, I am at last alone!!!

Guess where I am - no, never mind - I'll tell you! I'm sitting at a table, a long wood one out front beneath a canopy of grapes, before all my favourite trees (plum! quince! lime!). Butterflies - or moths maybe, I can never tell - are everywhere, and I can hear the birds but can't really see them from this exact spot. The sky is going Neapolitan, melting from pink to white then yellow, with a narrow dark band of heavy blue carrying the weight of it all before disappearing into whatever once grew in that old field. Corn, I think. Or maybe sunflower. Who knows, who cares!! It smells hot. It's been so so wonderfully hot. My shoulders are tight and itch from the sun.

Did you know that if you add 40 to the number of chirps a cricket makes in 13 seconds you get an accurate reading of the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit? I'm trying to do it now as I write you, but I keep losing count.

I have so many questions for you!!!

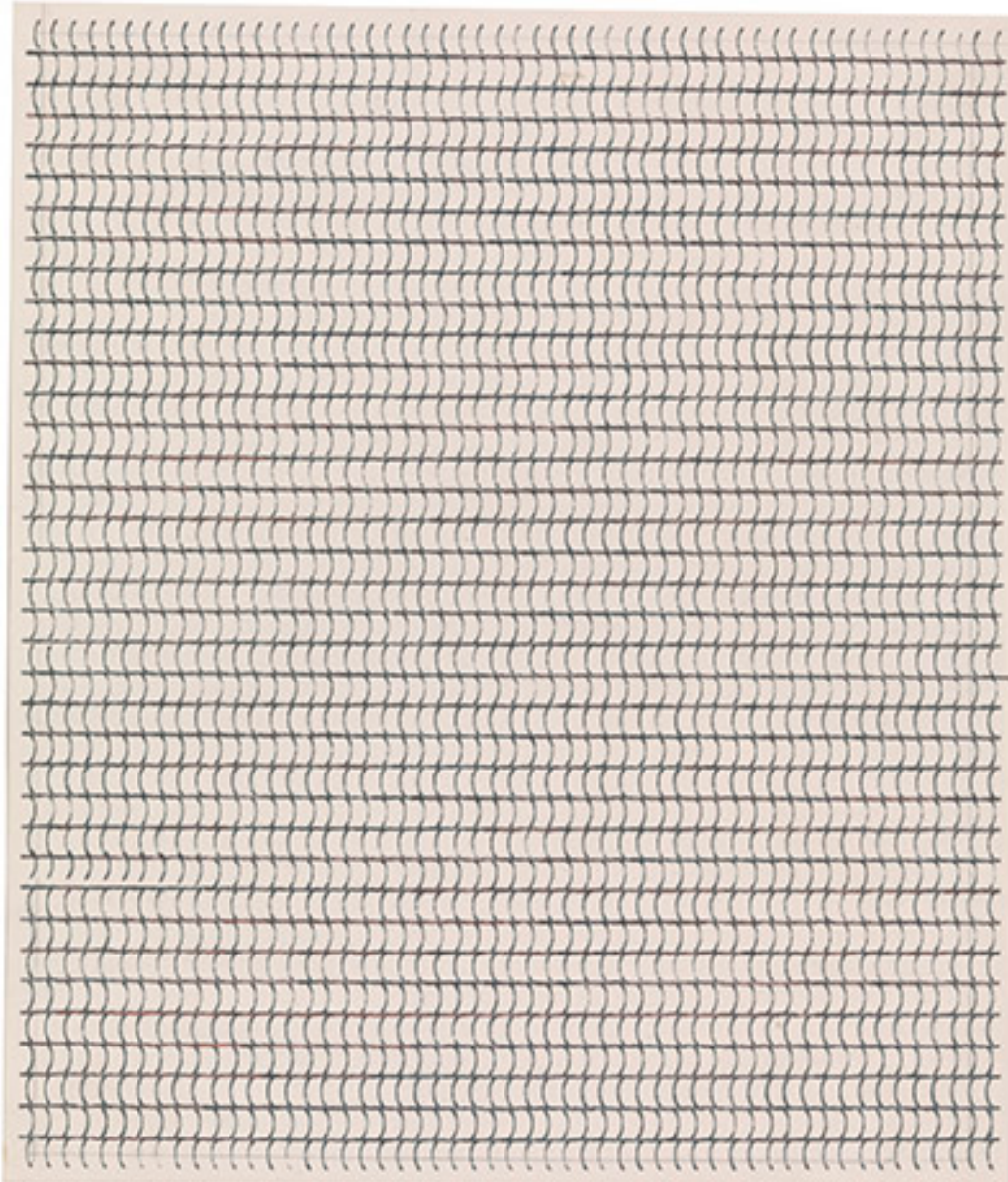
Do you realise that we have never shared mussels and chips outdoors at midnight when there's been a honey moon in the sky? And that we have never floated down a river together on our backs holding hands? I have never ever sat on the handlebars of your bike as you cycle down a steep country lane, nor have I ever touched you on the small of your back while you remove a splinter, or do your taxes. I'd like to swim across a lake with you. I'd like to sit on a rope swing that you build for me. I'd like to put daisies in your hair and watch lightening carve up the sky.

My swallow, forgive me. I don't know what happened. It's late now, not even the same day. I sometimes feel that by writing you I can make time stop. Things always feel arrested during these moments when it's just you and me only and we're cradled in this warm still world. I wish it would last. I wish it would just go on and on and on. I wish it would always be summer.

I spotted the last plum this morning, perfectly ripe. It was hidden casually between two folded leaves, camouflaged in golden light. Seemed somehow wrong to take it, though its time had clearly come. Breathe deep now, as I do... When the spirit moves my darling, I will write again.

Until then, my heart.





!DOUBLE ATTRACTION! !DOUBLE ATTRACTION!  
!!DO NOT OVERLOOK TODAY'S DOUBLE ATTRACTION!!

GAZE FIXEDLY INTO  
**CRYSTAL**'S  
FORSEEING EYE

AND A Peaceful STILLNESS Befalls You, A Gentle Flowing CALM Of The Kind Induced By PSYCHOTROPICS Alone – All  
That Surrounds You Fades To A SOUNDLESS HAZE As UNWANTED THOUGHTS Dissolve Into Vapour – TIME Rushes Past Like A  
Leaf On The Wind – LIMBS SOFTEN, COLOURS MERGE, MINDS OPEN And

**HIDDEN TRUTHS, DISTANT FUTURES**

COME TO LIGHT IN THE  
**CLOUDY GLOW OF HER MONOCULAR STARE.**

*Look No Further*

**RICHES! TRAVELS! PASSION! HEALTH! HEARTACHE!  
DECEPTION! HARDSHIP! DESPAIR!**

In The SINGULAR FOCUS OF HER GUIDING WHITE ORB  
( clearing the air of negative vibrations and electromagnetic toxins ),

**FAR BECOMES NEAR AND THEN BECOMES NOW.**

Vague Random Images Yield Dazzling CLARITY — specific & general, casual & solemn, urgent & fanciful —,  
Revealing Your Fate, Seeing You Bravely On Your Way.

**- AND -**

Like A Lizard To A Rock, Like The Sun To The Moon, Like A Fugitive To The Night,

**BELIEVE WHAT YOU SEE BUT BLINK AND YOU'LL MISS**

Not the BIGGEST, Not the TALLEST, Not the SMARTEST, Not the STRONGEST; Not the SMALLEST, Not the SHORTEST, Not  
the DUMBEST, Not the WEAKEST,

**BASHFUL FROM BIRTH**

HUMBLER THAN BOILED CROW. The Most Modest, Most Elusive, Most Confounding and Inconspicuous,

IN THE VERY **CORNER OF YOUR EYE**

catch a fleeting glimpse of

**THE SHYEST PERSON ALIVE**

BLINDSPOT.

**MASTERFULLY ECLIPSING YOUR GLANCE**

WITHOUT EVER SHOWING HER FULL CRYPTIC SELF

( unexplained by psychology, metaphysics, religion or the occult; neither transparent, reflective, patterned or subterranean )

The **QUICK SILKY** Moves Of This **PERIPHERAL PRESENCE**

WILL DEFTLY DEFY THE MOST

**VISUALLY ASTUTE.**





4'33"

FOR ANY INSTRUMENT OR COMBINATION OF INSTRUMENTS

*John Cage*

