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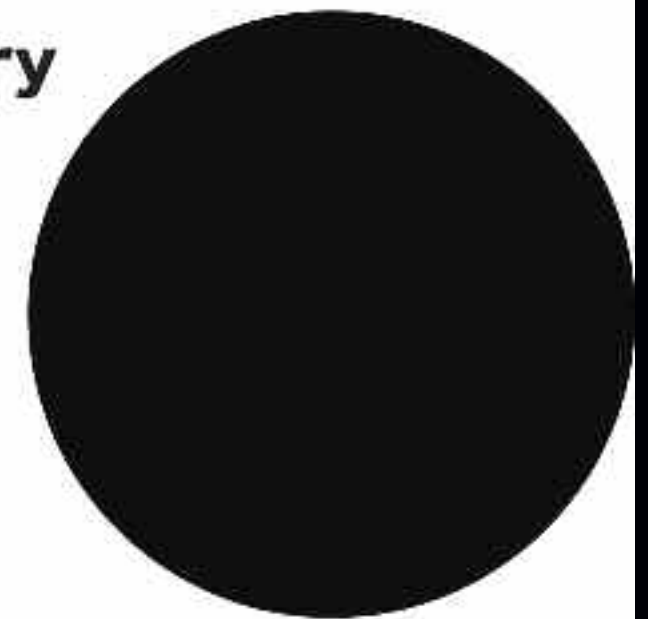
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Coming up in 2011
New commission and solo exhibition by Irish artist Sarah Browne

Printed Project
Issue 14
The Conceptual North Pole
Curator / Editor: Lytle Shaw

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Printed Project
ISSUE 14

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Curator / Editor: Lytle Shaw

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Introduction

Lytle Shaw

Passing frozen explorers from the 1960s and 70s, new parties from the camps of art and writing have recently set out for a still poorly mapped disciplinary territory we might call the Conceptual North Pole: there, antiquated terms like ‘inspiration’ or ‘influence’ would give way to a cross-disciplinary poetics involving nominally shared though constantly remade strategies, structures, and terms: installation, site, document, procedure and history are just a few. What are the attractions of this meta chart-making domain? What are its lurking terrors? What kinds of histories and critical vocabularies might bring its salient features into sharper relief? How, simply, do we document it? Above all, what has changed since the pioneering forays into this area forty years ago?

The interviews that follow were organised around this call to reconsider the legacy of conceptualism from an interdisciplinary as opposed to a narrowly art historical perspective. If the conceptual moment of the late 1960s stages a fundamental uncertainty about art’s relation to writing, and to language more generally, why is it that art history alone has told this story? What happens to this history if one pays equal attention to writing’s, and especially poetry’s, involvement with serial practices, site-specificity, institution critique, and other terms central to the conceptualist legacy? The result, I hope, might be more than just the dusting off and celebrating of some unjustly neglected precedents in poetry. Instead, such an approach might cast new light on that difficult to chart but enormously generative domain *between* art and poetry. As the now normative accounts of site-specificity and institution critique seem increasingly to describe art at some historical remove from us, perhaps a sideways glance at what poetry has made out of the same crises in the late 1960s can productively defamiliarize the critical terrain – and ultimately even suggest new ways to proceed. Similarly, criticism of contemporary poetry has had an impoverished vocabulary for thinking poetry’s increasingly generative relation to sites and institutions. What if poetry critics did not simply borrow art historical terms, but explored the ways in which poetry, too, made part of this history?

These concerns, developed in different ways throughout this issue of Printed Project, are also the point of departure for two forthcoming critical books, one organised around the linguistic dimensions of site-specificity – *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* – and the other, *Specimen Box*, structured around new modes of institution critique that do not fit within existing critical models. ‘The Conceptual North Pole’, then, is an attempt to test and rethink these concerns in dialogue with artists, writers and editors who have deeply affected my thinking over the years, whose practices have often been the point of departure for the critical models developed in these books, and whose comments now contribute to what I hope can be a new kind of dialogue about the intertwined legacies of conceptualism.

Matthew Coolidge

Lytle Shaw: You describe the role of The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) as “interpreting man’s interaction with the surface of the earth.” Thus you work against the frequent tendency to see building construction, mining, infrastructure, even earth art as somehow self-evident or as basic extensions of man’s needs. The Centre insists that all such moments of interaction actually require ‘interpretation’. I couldn’t agree more. But where, exactly, do the vocabularies or critical frameworks that will enable this interpretation come from? What is their history? Or, to put it another way, the kind of interpretation the Centre engages in is also a form of writing. Who do you see as precedents in this field, who are the most significant previous land use interpreters and why?

Matthew Coolidge: Because what we do is so elemental, from the ground, up, we had to invent much of what we do, from the ground up too. But there are some people, processes, and institutions that helped us conceive and formulate our institutional structure and voice.

As an institution, since we are interested in the interconnectivity of things, classically described as ecologies, we are inspired by the thoughts of modern pioneer systemecists like Buckminster Fuller, Ian McHarg, and Stewart Brand. Since what we do is about an American culture, national landscape visionaries like Benton MacKaye and JB Jackson are important historic voices. Historic research organisations like the Society for Industrial Archeology and the Historic American Engineering Record provided precedents and models. The Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Orange Show in Houston, and other bold small museums, interpretive sites, and environments, helped provide inspiration, and structural ideas. Since our work is about reflecting the national American identity and culture, big American entities and government agencies like the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and national cultural organisations like National Geographic and the Smithsonian, also provided compelling models.

The history of the discipline of ‘interpretation’ is mostly in the realm of parks and recreation areas, and the National Park Service is especially dominant, historically, in the field. It is also especially interesting as a model because it represents a sort of official ‘national’ programme and policy on the practice and principles of interpretation, guiding a search for a ‘national’ identity. The NPS has published manuals, handbooks and studies, on interpretation, and many professionals from the park service have independently published theoretical and practical texts. They have published descriptions of the mechanics of such things as guided tours, information centres and other visitor contact stations, wayside exhibits, amphitheaters, self guiding devices, introductory films, and the like.

The most well known, influential, and inspired of the Park Service interpretive theorists was Freeman Tilden, a New England Yankee who died in 1980. The basis of his take on interpretation is that it was not about instruction, but about provocation, a notion that he cites



CLUI main office Los Angeles.
CLUI photo

as coming from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, Thoreau, and other transcendentalists of that era, loom large in the minds of the early interpretive theorists, mostly because their task chiefly was to convey an interest in and respect for the wonders of nature in the public that visited national and state parks, and the transcendentalists and naturalists of the nineteenth century were the source of this appreciation. An early park service administrative manual made their objectives clear: “Through interpretation understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.”

Tilden’s logic is similar to the common-sense notion “don’t give the hungry fish, give them fishing rods.” He understood the importance of ‘attractive knowledge’, making learning fun, thus self-sustaining, and how an audience needed to be “lifted up through wonder into joy.” He understood that interpretation was a mechanism of education, and claimed “interpretation is revelation based upon information.” Of course the application of these principles was limited by environments he worked in, like national parks and major historical locations, as the pressures of compromise, liability, and consensus are great in such official public places.

Sociologists too have weighed in on the interpretive process, and informed our approach to some degree. Dean MacCannell’s ethnography of ‘the Tourist’ was an influential book of critical theory about ‘leisure’ behavior, which, again, is generally where interpretive theory comes from, because of its relationship to parks and historic sites and such, which people tend to visit when they are on vacation. The sociological approach to interpretation can get very mechanistic though, as it’s about understanding the audience in order to better engage – and manipulate – them, that borders on the political and commercial science of social control. Though we are interested in effective communication to some degree, we are more interested in inspiring and

Following Page: Center for
Land Use Interpretation
photo archive



compelling through ambiguity, insinuation, implication, suggestion, rather than cold, didactic manipulation, since we understand that the facts we deal with are often slippery at best themselves, and the world is composed more of shades of grey than black and white.

So, what we do is take some of the principles and methods of interpretation out of the parks and museums, and apply them to the rest of the world, the space where people live and work. Not keep it confined in zoos, presidential birthplaces, nature parks and civil war battlegrounds. We feel in a sense that the whole nation (and the world) should be considered as precious and alive, like a park – a highly valued place where the heightened awareness and integrational involvement that people have in such singled-out, special places should occur everywhere else, especially everywhere else, including the places that people encounter and live in on a daily basis.

LS: I have always felt an extremely strong connection to the national parks myself, and so I like the idea that one frame for what you're doing is taking tools we associate with that kind of site (and the others you mention), and distributing them beyond the neat and safe preserves where they live. CLUI seems to have been very successful at developing both satellite bases and groups of affiliated site interpreters who work for or through CLUI. Successful in the sense that the overall orientation, mission, even the tonality of the writing remains consistent and focused, despite being undertaken by many different people. It has a degree of stylistic unity, while also being site-specific. How does this happen? And more specifically, what kinds of discussions about writing, if any, occur behind the scenes?

Center for Land Use Interpretation, Tour of the Monuments of the Great American Void
2004. Great Salt Lake Desert region. CLUI photo



MC: Different people have different tasks, but the majority of the writing is done by just a few people, whose voices have been honed by consensus and practice.

LS: I just reread *Commonwealth of Technology* and it got me thinking about your novel interpretation there of the monument, and the interpretive plaque. My idea of the monument has certainly been affected by Smithson's classic, *A Tour of the Monuments of the Passaic, New Jersey*. Not just because he 'monumentalizes' the marginal, disturbing, bizarre elements of the built world. Certainly he does. What I'm into most, though, is the temporal implications of his monuments.

Take the normative version of the monument: a figurative sculpture, of humans in combat commemorating the Civil War, WWI or WWII (that is, wars that most people understand as unambiguous moral episodes), installed in a public park (like Central Park) in a position where viewers who are enjoying their leisure suddenly 'come upon' it (usually they have to look up) and are in effect hailed. It says: "You really seem to be enjoying your freedom to stroll in this beautiful park. So let's pause for a moment and consider the material basis of that freedom. Well, it's the heroic acts of these men." The sculptures are designed to produce 'good' subjects who believe this kind of causal narrative.

Smithson, then, reversed this temporal charge: 'monuments' now seemed not to remind you of previous states but rather to promise future ones – though he was interested in the emptiness of this promise. Highway construction was a 'monument' in that one was being asked to blind oneself to the ongoing entropic pit that actually presented itself, and instead fast-forward imaginatively to the crisp clean turnpike that would surely emerge from "your dollars at work." Similarly, you could drive on this road in small fragments of the various futures offered by the 1968 cars on sale in downtown Passaic. To my way of thinking CLUI's *Commonwealth of Technology* picks up this project and spins it in a new direction. The book's page format – one photograph of a site above one descriptive paragraph – suggests a series of plaques that could sit at those sites and interpret these 'monuments.' Here, the principle of selection (and extension of the category) seems to involve neither moralized pasts nor promised (though impossible) futures, but instead concretized presents: that is, we're used to speaking of 'the military industrial complex,' the 'high-tech industry,' 'nuclear proliferation,' 'first strike capability,' or 'missile defense systems.' But where do these abstractions live? Where do they touch down in the world? Where did they come from originally? What current form do they take? If a monument is a place where, in your book's suggestion, you go to concretize the abstract, to think about how specific events, institutions, practices affect or envelope you, then why should they always be about making you feel indebted, guilty, beholden? Why can't they also focus frustration, powerlessness, violence, or borderless generalisations like 'digital technology'?

I realise that I put words into your book's mouth, and I don't expect that those are exactly your words. So anywhere you think I get it wrong, please let me know. In addition to a few questions trapped in those last paragraphs, I'd also ask more generally: what kind of a history of the monument would you see your work responding to? What do monuments normally do in your take? What can they be made to do? What do you make of Smithson's project both in Passaic and elsewhere? What's the relation between a book and an actual interpretive plaque at a site?

MC: This is an articulate musing on some of the things our work suggests to you. I may not be a good interview subject if you want me to interpret what we do – that's your (as in the consumer / viewer of our work) role, if you choose to. We interpret spaces, places, sites, processes, phenomena, and pass our interpretation on for final assembly in the eye / mind of the beholder.

But about monuments, indeed, we like them a lot. The monuments we are interested in are anything, everything, everywhere. We are interested in extracting from the interconnected continuum of matter, emblems, representative structures – monuments – that point to bigger things we think are important to consider, and to be aware of. It can be a fire hydrant, a museum, a splat of bird droppings, anything. How it is singled out, described, contextualised, represented, juxtaposed, that is what gives it meaning, and potential significance, as a 'monument.' Monuments, as you suggest, generally refer to something in the past, often some event that is being commemorated by the monument. Yes. We are merely suggesting that everything that has happened has happened in the past (including our ideas of the future), so everything in the world, pretty much, can be commemorated with a monument. Not that everything IS or SHOULD BE a monument, of course. That would merely duplicate the world. It's about selection, curation, context, description – these elements of interpretation – being applied to the spectrum of matter, to extract meaningful structures to compel thought, and move dialogue, culture, society, and 'progress' forward.

Of course, too, everyone goes through their own world punctuated by monuments. This is where that happened; this makes me think of that; *etc.* But we, the Centre for Land Use Interpretation, as an institution, provide a processed program of selections and interpretations, like a sort of 'broadcast channel,' maybe, or a brand, that people can tune into for our particular reading of the shared landscape, and be compelled to consider, if they desire. If, in so doing we are of help to them/you/the world, then we are effective, and our existence, perhaps, justified.

I agree entirely about the importance of Smithson's account of his little trip around the Passaic River. This piece of writing suggested to me, as a young college student, that there were many more ways to look at the world. One way was to see that everything was falling apart, all the time, and that we moved through this continuous ruin in our various individual pursuits. And also that everything – matter, ideas, experience, life – is constructed out of the rubble of the eroding and decomposing earth. And that this is not a depressing thought, but one that liberates you from the tyranny of the generally held conviction that decay is negative. This was a great affirmation of life, in these post-everything times, that no other writer had articulated in a way that I had understood. It was a good place to start. A grounding. A sort of post-natural reset point.

LS: How do you prepare for a CLUI bus tour? I mean, I realise that each site will have its own interpretive demands, but if you could either locate some common denominators or take one case study, I would be really interested to hear how you research, first, and then how you think about presenting, narrating, organising that research.



CLUI main office Los Angeles.
CLUI photo



Haystack Observatory, MA. From the Center
for Land Use Interpretation photo archive



Lincoln Laboratory, MA. From the Center for
Land Use Interpretation photo archive

MC: Certainly individual writers, philosophers, artists, and such were an influence on me, and others at the CLUI, but to measure or describe these influences on the formation and structure of the organisation is hard to do, and it seemed these more institutional precedents and influences I described earlier were more interesting. Personally, I read most of the usual books in my formative years and in 'liberal arts' education. Kind of stopped reading fiction after finishing up JG Ballard. In art history, I liked the Conceptualists and the Situationists more than the Impressionists and the Neoclassicists. No surprise there, I don't think. Now I like them all equally.

In terms of preparation, bus tours are some of the most time consuming things we do, especially considering the small audience, the fifty-five people you can fit on a bus. A full-on CLUI tour uses all the information we collected for the exhibit it is associated with (they usually are considered part of an exhibit), then adds all the logistics and timing, and the selection and coordinating with local briefers and video on the bus. We drive the route many times ahead of time, deciding which route is best, which turns to make, and what time to show what, and where to be when. We prepare detailed notes for the tour guide narration, usually done by me, usually thirty pages worth or so. The tour is a carefully scripted journey through space, sort of like a nonfiction theatrical production.

In general, working on an exhibit/tour, we create a mound of information on the subject, filter out all 'locatable' elements (physical places that can be identified with a lat/long) and then move them around to create a narrative structure and sequence, sometimes making 'chapters' or 'categories' too, then refine and distill, until it is ready to serve...

LS: Back to your model of interpretation – you give a very detailed and eloquent account of precedents in fields from systems theory to sociology, from nineteenth century transcendentalism to the twentieth century national park service. Through all of this the frame of the nation appears consistent – not just as a neutral geographic measure, but as a valued, core concept. If we turn the transcendentalist example, for instance, just slightly though, we get provocations of a different kind – not just spurs to fresh and original experience (they were great at that), but also counter-nationalisms: Thoreau protesting the Mexican / American war and then developing a whole account of the social symbolism of civil disobedience. Now I hear you when you say that you see the world not as comprised of black and white, and certainly the tonality of CLUI interpretation is refreshingly complex and generous. But still CLUI does seem to develop quite wonderful analytical tools that have critical implications – that cast new light on the nation as an entity, *etc.* Could you talk a little bit about that side of your practice? And here I'm not necessarily asking for a group of precedents (you've already mentioned the Situationists), but more just a sense of how you conceive of this part of what you do.

MC: We want the end to feel like it is the outcome of a considered process that is well organised and logical, even, at least within itself. Scientific. By end, I mean the programmes and resources these tools produce. But we also want to subvert the sense of conclusion. Hopefully the end feels kind of incomplete too. Not fully satisfactory. That keeps it alive, and keeps the viewer engaged. If something is too pat, too complete, then it is over. This is a reflection of the condition of life – it's over when it's done. Everything living happens before that point. So even though our public programs are clearly the final outcome of a process, presented to the public in the framed and familiar format of such displays and presentations, the outcome of many answered questions and decisions, the end is also a kind of a question. A mirror reflecting the image of the viewer, but also reflecting the events and evolutions leading up to that point. In one direction, what we do is consolidate questions. This final question, which is usually presented as some kind of answer, is at least partially answered by the questions that preceded it: the tools of interpretation, selection, and analysis. If you look at the tools used to form the project – the specific procedures of the institution, the other programmes that came before it, the language used to house it and describe it, the institutional context that contains these methods, and that sort of thing – you head upstream, towards the headwaters, the origin of the notions from which the final product sprang. Shifting metaphors, this gets you close to the root of the tree, to the trunk, where everything converges. Yet, of course the tree is just a log with roots without its branches and leaves, which are analogous to the many 'ends' we produce – the programmes and projects. So you need to look there too, at the extremities, to see the whole tree. Totality, interconnectedness and the 'broad general view' are paradigms.

Put another way, we are as interested in process as in origins and outcome. And we are as interested in resolution as in dissolution. In fact, this is what we are most interested in, procedurally: conflict, collision, contradiction, counter-culture. I don't know who said it first, but truth is found most astutely in paradox. And usually a description of the state of things is closer to the truth than an explanation of it. Research, however, is ongoing...

Kenneth Goldsmith

Lytle Shaw: Ubu has become an incredibly useful and extensive site for historical knowledge about conceptual art and related poetry. There's also quite a lot of recent work on Ubu that sees itself in some relation to this historical moment of the late 1960s. What are, to your mind, the most significant changes in the way that conceptualism operates now as opposed to then – and, beyond that, how does this relate to the histories of the disciplines? Do you agree that there is a lingering uncertainty about whether art is trespassing on language, or vice versa? If so, what sort of situation does this set up for work that takes place between the disciplines? And is this situation different now from what it was in the late 1960s? Several of your books also traffic as very short 'concepts': one or two sentence summaries of much larger works. What is the difference between these and the works themselves? Is this difference important to you? Finally, why is it important that your own work be framed as poetry and not as art? Not that I want you to defend it as poetry – I'm more than happy to read it in that category. Nor do I want to give poets a quick way out: "Don't worry about that, it's art". The question instead has to do with exactly how we read it and the extent to which some tools from art history might be useful, even necessary. For instance, modes of writing that have to do with performance documentation... Do they expand the possibilities of poetry or just register as stable conventions of art?

Kenneth Goldsmith: Back in 1959, Brion Gysin claimed that writing was fifty years behind painting. And I'd argue that it still is. Art has been so absorptive and flexible in ways that literature hasn't been able to imagine that if we enact those permissions as literary practice, we can imagine a radically expanded field for poetry. My argument is really that modernism found its ultimate manifestation in Language Poetry. Language Poetry is the period at the end of the modernist sentence where the materiality of the page, the atomization of words, and the shattering of meaning were done so thoroughly that there could be no work left to do in this vein for younger writers. In this sense, it's very much like trying to paint a more radical Abstract Expressionist painting after Jackson Pollock in the fifties. Why bother? Instead, a different – yet historically predictable – response emerges: Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Minimalism and so forth, thus paralleling our own moment. I feel that there was no postmodernism in poetry; instead, the great divide is the digital. Language Poetry held a very long note: some thirty years before the landscape forced a change. With the emergence of the digital, we see the rise of Conceptual Writing and Flarf.

That said, I'm interested in the way the historical discourse of writing can learn from that of art, yet never misrepresent itself as visual art. There are historical precedents which act as cautionary tales. Think of Concrete Poetry, which is often mistaken by the art world as weak visual art. But that is a complete misread of the project. Concrete Poetry's radicality and success lies in the fact that it be read within the historical trajectory of literature rather than art. And

taken as such, it's stunningly successful. But as visual art, they're right: it's a flop. For the same reason, Jenny Holzer and Lawrence Weiner are never considered as poets. It's clear that when placed into the discourse of poetry, they'd fail miserably, but as visual art, it's amazing. So, I feel that works must be judged by the standards of the profession. Some things just don't make sense in other contexts. My own works firmly situate themselves in the economy of poetry: they're published by poetry presses and they're studied by students of literature. I don't show them in visual art galleries and have no desire to do so. As such, I have forced these unusual texts into the discourse of literature.

LS: This is an extremely clean, clear history. It's so clear, in fact, that it's a bit like a diagram – pure 'concept' without remainder. Now I happen to be interested in diagrams and use them a lot in my work. But I just can't see art or literary history in that way; there's too much fascinating contingency. Which is not the same thing as saying that history will always be the kind of material text we associate with Language writing. I agree that new models for writing have emerged – but guess I just disagree on how they should be characterized.

KG: In order to be able to produce at all, I need to streamline a fictive history into which I can situate my practice. It's not correct, but then again artists don't need to be correct, they need to be able to work. So take it with a grain of salt.

LS: The Language writers' stance had to do with defining themselves symmetrically and totally against the simplifications of the diagram, which, in writing, is something like the work of genre: the coded signposts that allow one's frictionless passage through a piece of writing, so that every new sentence doesn't have to begin from scratch semantically, but can instead be traversed easily by keeping in play a number of frames and presuppositions that reduce the variables and point us ahead. This is another way of describing the context for their commitment to disjunction, to the 'material' text – both of these ideas depend on the function of genre as a negative datum, a false diagram. But diagrams and genres are fascinating inasmuch as they condense and regularise the work of interpretation. And so this is one of the reasons I think it's worth actually looking at them closely, rather than simply dismissing them in the name of returning, always, to the degree zero of language, verbal or visual. I've never heard you talk about the material reality or epistemological implications of diagrams or concepts. But I'd be interested to hear you on this: do concepts have a material reality? And if so, in what sense are they different from 'text'? Or, if we say that it's a matter of degree not kind, what is the concept's relation to thinking? Is it a simplification? If so, what are its benefits and its liabilities? Does it have a possible pedagogical function? A critical one? Or if it is a tool, what kind of a tool is it?

KG: I think that what myself and other writers are doing today is what I term 'realised literature'. In other words, it's not enough to merely propose a concept; you must go through the execution of it in order for the concept to bear weight and fruit. While I am inspired by pure

conceptual art – where the artwork is in the proposition – it really has been done. In literature, Oulipo – a laboratory for *potential* literature – proposed wonderful projects, most of which went sadly unrealised. But the ones that were actuated were wonderful works of literature (thinking mostly of Perec). You see, something happens to the writing in the process of actualising a proposition, in making it material, that takes it to another level. While I could've, say, proposed, "Tape everything you say for a week, from the moment you wake up on a Monday morning until the moment you go to bed the next Sunday night", the material fact of *Soliloquy* is indisputable. How much richer that book is in its realised form than in its proposed form! The materialization of the book impacts the thousands of decisions that go into writing a book: Do I use a comma or a period? Do I use capitals? Do I indent paragraphs? Do I use quotation marks? Should the text be seven day-long chapters? Or should it be one long flow? And that's just the beginning. The questions never end. And these are the decisions that ultimately result in the success or failure of the work. And it's also the decisions that make my writing different than yours. Anyone could realise *Soliloquy*. And if anyone else did, it would be a completely different book in every way.

LS: In your answer about poetry's relation to art you suggest the importance of reading certain practitioners within one, and not the other, history. Your examples are instances of work that appears weak within one context or history and stronger within another. Fair enough. I agree that there are such examples. But in a way I'm more interested in examples that either exist successfully in both contexts or that, while operating primarily in one, nonetheless mobilise structures and practices from the other – this is what I mean by the conceptual North Pole: a still generative grey area between the disciplinary histories, emerging from the moment of uncertainty in the late 1960s when art became linguistic and poetry often more art-oriented. This is how I read the work of poets associated with Fluxus (Mac Low, Knowles), where poetry and performance art, among other things, are coming together; or the work of Smithson, Bochner, Graham (and others), where 'the essay' suddenly gets recoded as an art genre, an actual piece of art. And this is what I was alluding to earlier about how performance documentation seems to be part of your work (in *Fidget* and *Soliloquy* in particular), what makes it 'realised literature'; and I would say that, among other possible examples, Rob Fitterman's, my work with Jimbo for the Chadwicks, and Lisa Robertson's work, especially under the auspices of the Office for Soft Architecture, all mobilise structures and tropes from recent art – installation, performance, site-specificity, institution critique. But am I right in taking you to see things quite a bit differently? You seem to see a firmer, more absolute line between the disciplines – so that a disciplinary grey area isn't so much generative as it is a place where two separate histories of interpretation emerge, one of which will always be clearly superior to another? Is that right?

KG: I think it's fair to say that one's history determines one's outlook. I differ from you, Lisa and Rob in that I came from the art world into poetry. I spent fifteen years there as a fairly conventional and sometimes successful artist. I went to art school and learned to play by that world's rules quite well. But in the end, it failed me. Once my works became textual, they were no longer able to be received in that context. Words in a gallery – particularly *lots* of words in a gallery – are a square peg in a round hole. The gallery is a lousy place to read. There came a

point where I wanted my words to be read rather than seen so I had to find another context. Through an odd set of circumstances I found myself in the poetry world, which was able to accept the sort of work I was doing as 'poetry'. Now, of course, I don't know a thing about poetry and have never written a poem in my life. But somehow, that world is absorptive enough to include what I do as a part of it. As a result, I feel very indebted to it and its discourses, even if they generally differ from my own.

That said, I think that bringing art world strategies into the poetry discourse is very healthy. For so long, the poetry world didn't pay much attention to the overlapping concerns of the visual art world (and vice versa). UbuWeb tries to imagine an alternate art / poetry world where all of these discourses are in dialogue with one another. For the first time, you have the likes of Bern Porter rubbing up against, say, Ryan Trecartin and the sparks fly. Where else does that happen?

LS: Given that the art world is much larger, and in a way more various, why do you think the poetry world could absorb what you do and not art?

KG: What I'm bringing to poetry is old news in the art world; Duchamp settled appropriation a century ago. But in poetry, it's never been done before. Yes, we've had collage – taking a line from here, a few lines from there – but wholesale copying of preexisting texts has never been tried! So everyone is fascinated and even a bit scandalized that I and a few others would do such a thing. You can still have a bit of controversy in the poetry world!

LS: And how does your previous claim about wanting to have your words read square with your other statements about not caring if your words are read. I'm not trying to call you out on a contradiction so much as understand why you want it both ways – *ie* in which contexts do you want to be read, which contexts not?

KG: When I was first starting out in the poetry world, I wanted nothing more than to have my works closely read. It's really what I longed for. But you must remember that early on, my works were very 'creative' (*No. 111*, *Fidget*) and highly edited. As such, I really expected a 'readership'. It wasn't until much later that I moved into 'uncreative writing' and swapped a 'readership' for a 'thinkership'.

But now I'm headed back the other way. I think that the trope of the 'thinkership' has been pretty thoroughly explored. Everyday in the mail I get new books, so many of which are appropriated and unreadable. And now it's normal to go to a reading and hear a poet recite what they haven't written for very long durations. I think that once writers were given the green light to cut-and-paste the whole internet, why not? And such projects render my practice quite quaint and old fashioned. One criticism that's often leveled at what I do is that I'm not boring enough, that I still hold on to the mantle of authorship, that my works are too crafted, that my rhetoric is more severe than my actual work, particularly in performance. And that's all very true. But the generation after us is into a whole other depth and it's that sort of extremity that I every much admire, though at this point have no interest in exploring.

LS: For an audience at the Whitney, in talking about why art was more advanced than poetry, you suggested that what counts as poetry for its most powerful institutions (*ie* outside the small experimental world) could be compared to a situation in which the academic figuration of the ads in Art in America was what we saw in museums, and artists like Kara Walker, Mike Kelley, and Matthew Barney were an underground fringe. I think you're right about the larger comparison. But what I'm interested in is the precise sense in which you understand these artists as contemporary versus how you regard poets either as retrograde or of the moment. Kara Walker, for instance, uses the visual language of nineteenth-century silhouettes; Mike Kelley explores, among other things, the history of cartoon drawing, and the ways that dolls and stuffed animals from the period of his youth in the sixties and can become manipulative objects of control; Matthew Barney's films evoke a wide range of historical associations as part of his cosmology – from Surrealism, to 1940s fashion, to the language and history of sculpture from the 1960s and 70s. That is to say that while your own examples of contemporaneity in art mobilise multiple historical languages of art making, and thereby construct the present in a wide variety of ways in relation to these previous temporalities, poetry can only establish itself as of the moment through the single technique, appropriation, you see as appropriate to what becomes now the single characteristic feature of the present, the emergence of the digital. (I realise you've begun a new trajectory – but let's talk here about the last fifteen years ... and in fact about how you frame what still counts as contemporary for the reading at the Whitney). Why was poetry's present during this period so much less complex, so much more unified, so easy to respond to with a single technique – text management? I'm not sure I think poetry is behind art, but if it were, doesn't framing things this way perpetuate a lag?

KG: The art world went through postmodernism and poetry didn't. During that period, the art world embraced pastiche, the inauthentic, consumerism, *etc* and spawned numerous 'neo' movements, all of which had big quotation marks around them; stylistic modernist and formal moves were converted into ironic tropes. After those disavowals, it was possible to re-explore and reuse the types of vocabularies that you cite without a problem. I don't see anything like that in the poetry world until recently. You had confessional poets being confessional, New York School poets being campy (yet sincerely so) and Language poets finishing up the modernist project without a hint of irony anywhere in their practice. This is why I find Flarf to be so important: they may be the first postmodern group of poets (!), proving once again that we're fifty years behind painting.

LS: Kenny – this takes us back to the first question. I don't disagree with your characterisation of Flarf and conceptualism as cornering the market on the contemporary because, from the position of a historian, I simply want to be exhaustive. I just see other kinds of temporality, closer to those of the artists you mention, as fundamental to a lot of compelling writers – Lisa Robertson, Kent Johnson, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk and many others. So the deployment of historical vocabularies is, to my way of thinking, a feature of the contemporary in poetry, and a feature I'd even describe, in many cases, as 'conceptual': works that squat in historical languages in order to deform them, make them say things they couldn't initially – similar to how the

artists you mention do this. I'm actually okay with the term conceptual being used to describe such work. But this would entail expanding its frame beyond the single procedure of appropriation, beyond the idea of text management – because what's occurring in many of the examples I'd cite in poetry does not depend on a strict quotational or documentary relation to past source texts, but rather often plays on more iterable styles of language and the authority or authenticity effects they can produce. And this, again, is more similar to how the artists you mention establish their relationships to history. It may turn out, in twenty years, that 'conceptual poetry' will have designated what you have in mind: poetry based on text management. That will be fine. In which case, another term will be needed for this other model of poetry. That is to say that what I'm interested in here – in our exchange, and in this larger issue of Printed Project – is precisely the fact that while both poetry and art share a model of blank historical quotation beyond appropriation, poetry as yet seems to have little critical description of this. And so for me it's a reason to rethink the links between their histories. No real question here – I'd just like to hear you say more about this.

KG: As compared to visual art, poetry has little critical description since there are few critics and even fewer poets willing to take a stab at it. This might account for the lack of accounting of the art form. We don't have anything near, say, an Artforum or, for the music world, The Wire. As a result, much very good and important work goes uncommented upon. Poetry, too, is still hung on the model of the local impact (eco-poetics, slow poetry) as opposed to the visual arts or experimental music worlds which have international reaches through festivals and biennials and such. But the explosion of the web has forced poetry into a cross-cultural dialogue and Chris Anderson's 'long tail' effect is very much apparent in terms of naming and canon forming with a few big sites and blogs hogging all the bandwidth. As a result, we end up again paradoxically in the same situation where many interesting moments are not getting enough air. (By the way, I am part of this problem.) But the thing that does emerge again and again is this word 'conceptualism'. It's clear that we're in a conceptual moment. Now, what that means is still very much up in the air. Your idea of it – as evidenced by the poets you name above – greatly differs from mine; Craig Dworkin and I have just finished editing a seven hundred-page anthology of conceptual writing and none of those three poets were included; Vanessa Place, Laynie Brown and Caroline Bergvall are in the process of editing a volume of women's conceptual writing; Riccardo Boglione is working on a conceptually-based writing journal focusing on South America; Simon Morris and Nick Thurston's press Information As Material is pumping out books of conceptual writing that seem to have as much to do with the art world as they do with the poetry world; Flarf is putting out their own anthology (and I include Flarf as another strategy of 'conceptual writing'); Marjorie Perloff's next book is called *Unoriginal Genius* and deals with the influences of Benjamin and Oulipo on conceptual writing. Darren Wershler in Montreal sees things yet differently again and is working on the idea of melding conceptual poetics with media studies with the focus on influencing the media field with literary theory in a way that hasn't been done since McLuhan. And so you see, it's the blind man and the elephant: nobody can agree on what it is, but we are all aware that the rubric of 'the conceptual' is the umbrella under which the most relevant current writing is labouring.

LS: Agreed that the term is important. But one of the most significant distinctions within discussions of conceptualism is whether, as you suggest, any interest in specific sites or environments is symptomatic of a refusal of the real, authentic, global reach of our moment. But this reach in the art world – to take your example – doesn't mean that attention to specific sites is understood as necessarily retrograde. Quite the opposite. I would argue that in the context of recent writing appropriation, for instance, is really only compelling when it operates as a reading of some situation or context – though what counts as context has many scales and logics. Like you, I'm interested in art and writing that transcends individual contexts. Still, what's interesting about the problem of contextualizing is not pinning down writing or art in a neat, air-tight container, not exhausting it as a 'reflection' of some singular situation, but rather opening up, and making more vivid, its multiple frames, scenes of address, points of contact with the world. Anyway, my question is just: Why do you see attention to the specificities of sites as necessarily retrograde, necessarily opposed to the demands of our historical moment?

KG: I like the word 'sites' and how it can both mean physical site and web sites. There's a great quote by Nam June Paik that goes something like "The internet is for everyone who doesn't live in New York City." Living here, it's hard to imagine why anyone would care about the web. It does seem like second-rate substitute for what's right outside your and my door. But what UbuWeb has shown me is that the web is a lifeline for people who live far from such centres of culture. If I want to see an avant-garde film any day of the week, I can jump on the subway and duck into Anthology and see something that's guaranteed not to be showing anywhere else in the world that night. And the same with Chelsea galleries. And museums. And so forth. But there's a twist: when I go to Chelsea, I feel like it's a backwater, based on systems of production and distribution that were cutting edge thirty years ago and beyond. I can't wait to get back to my computer and be plugged back into the exciting present. So, in short, it's complicated. We're a bridge generation, brought up very much in the bricks and mortar world, where reputations were made through gallery shows and by publishing paper books. I didn't touch a computer until I was thirty two years old. Now, I spend as much time and learn as much online as I do in meatspace. By even needing to make such distinctions, I'm showing my age. I don't think that, for example, my students bother. They move back and forth, online and off with ease; using a computer along with oil paints; mp3 and vinyl and so forth.

Lytle Shaw: What I particularly liked about your talk at the 'Rethinking Poetics' conference at Columbia University in June of this year (2010) was the way that it drew out parallels between the decontextualization of concrete poetry and the current attempt to package conceptual writing. It spoke to an ongoing debate I've been having, not so much with Rob Fitterman himself (although he and I are the ones who are doing the talking), as with the way 'conceptual writing' has been framed recently. One of my objections has been that the discussions of concept and procedure have been pried loose from what I see as their most generative contexts: site-specific art and institution critique, though as I tried to argue, those contexts are static and given, but constantly in need of reinterpretation, transformation. By considering concrete poetry as a central precedent in its status as a product designed for frictionless export, you put another kind of frame on this problem that I think is amazingly rich. Could you elaborate on that here (as the first question in our dialogue)?

Mónica de la Torre: During my talk I wanted to address the concrete poets' anxiety over Brazil's complete invisibility within the Western modernist canon. To me, their programme, as seductive as it is, speaks of the fantasy that they purported would relieve this anxiety more than about groundbreaking findings on the relationship between image and text. I wasn't critiquing the desire of the concretistas to reverse the direction of the trade between the so-called centre and periphery, as some people seemed to think, but, rather, I was reading their programme, openly aimed at producing 'exportable' poetry, as blind to the critique of dominant reading practices (the reader reads to recognise and validate her own preconceived ideas, only sees as legible what is already known to her) that it intrinsically articulates. Extrapolating, a Brazilian concrete poem could be seen as the very embodiment of the centre's inability to conceive of the periphery in terms other than the ones it dictates (ultimately centered on commerce and the expansion of markets), of its inability to access alterity. (Not surprisingly, at the conference, when I decided to enact this dilemma before the audience during the talk, I spoke in Spanish. Some people couldn't help but read my gesture through the clichéd discourse on authenticity and melodiousness of the Other's native language.)

Regardless, if the concrete programme did put Brazil on the map, it did so at the expense of the specificity about what the concrete poets, as Brazilians, were bringing to the discourse from their own locus of enunciation. That some of the poems are charged politically has escaped those enamored by their formalist / constructivist, allegedly post-content approach. I'm thinking of one of their most famous poems, *Beba Coca Cola*, for instance: you need a key to

Cover of *Me Segura Qu'eu Vou Dar um Troço* by Waly Salomão. Second edition.
(Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano e Biblioteca Nacional, 2003.)
(First edition. Rio de Janeiro: José Alvaro Editor, 1972.)
Waly Salomão is the man at the center holding the umbrella.



make out how the permutations of Portuguese phonemes become a spoof on the advertising motto for 'the wastewater of American imperialism'. Let's not forget that in the sixties and through the eighties, a host of US-backed dictatorships took hold of South and Central America; 'American imperialism' was much more than a tautological catchphrase.

The point is, basically, that they were victims of the very logic allowing for the frictionless export of their 'products', especially Haroldo de Campos, whose astounding everything-but-concrete neo-baroque poetry (constituting two thirds of his literary output, at least) is utterly unknown to readers outside the Portuguese and Spanish-speaking worlds. It's as if the reader posited by his neo-baroque works was, per force, at odds with the reader posited by the concrete program.

I see a connection between the conceptual poetry programme and the concrete one in that the premise for both is the exhaustion or impossibility of poetry. Their point of departure is an anxiety about poetry's diminished status versus that of the visual arts, pop culture, and technology. Both rely on a discursive apparatus assuring us that their poetry is to be looked at and not read, but beyond the catchy sound bite, this seems disingenuous. I'd argue that it's to be looked at *and* read. It's also highly contradictory when you think of the disproportionate, messy affect behind the seemingly unassuming products each movement generates and the textual apparatuses they both require to buttress their programme. I'm always interested in the messy, by the way; in the non-tautological, what resists articulation or is pushed to the limits of articulation and makes the bumping against those limits visible. It's these kinds of contradictions that most engage me when it comes to concrete and conceptual practices; in other words, what's beneath the theoretical underpinnings.

LS: This is fantastic. But before I dive into the elements with which I agree, there's one point I guess I disagree with that I want to draw you out on. The way you're posing the concretists' and the conceptualists' position about the 'exhaustion or impossibility of poetry' suggests a pretty firm line between those who believe in poetry itself, and those who would like to cash in on the cultural relevance of other disciplines or media. While I do see something like this happening with reference to the digital at times, I also see what I would present as a productive, non-symptomatic relation between disciplines that's been going on at least since Williams (and maybe sense the anthropological turn of the late eighteenth century) in which poets take on and deform ethnographic and historiographic practices. And certainly poetry has productively strayed into other disciplines as well – like art. With poets who have turned to art, it is precisely the history of site-specificity that has allowed for modes of situating, framing, contextualizing that are lacking in some of the discussions of conceptualism. So do you see the turn to neighbouring disciplines as always a falling away? Can you tell me more about how you think of this historically, and now? And another question: your mentioning the tension between Haroldo de Campos's neo-baroque work (which I admit being new to, though I did teach it this spring) and his concrete poetry makes me think of his interest in Andrade's manifesto on literary cannibalism. How would you situate his own thinking about literary cannibalism and the politics of international intellectual exchange within his reception? Do you see it as adding elements we need to consider alongside the received knowledge of concrete poetry?

MT: I do not see the turn to neighbouring disciplines as a falling away necessarily; not in the least. I'm also being hyperbolic when I bring up the debate on the exhaustion or impossibility of poetry. Your point on opportunism is fascinating to me. I'd like to draw a distinction between those poets who, in your highly revealing words, would like 'to cash in on the cultural relevance of other disciplines or media', and those who firmly and staunchly don't see any hope in the possibility of poetry's avoidance of the rhetoric's trappings through the medium's traditional vehicles.

Wouldn't the first group be constituted by practitioners characterised by an odd mixture of Machiavellism and naïveté? I mean, what would 'cashing in' be in the realm of poetry? Anyone who thinks this is possible nowadays has high hopes for poetry, it seems. Not to put poetry down, it's just that I think that part of its power resides, precisely, in its marginality.

Regarding marginality and the possibility of cashing in, an interesting Brazilian example of productive cross-disciplinary associations comes to mind. In the late sixties and seventies young countercultural poets realised that the site where the cultural exchanges that they wanted to partake in had shifted to the music sphere, so they basically took their poetry out to where rock-and-roll audiences were assembling (literally, in some cases, by reading /performing and selling self-published books at concerts, and metaphorically-speaking as well, since the content and formal approach of the poets shifted too). The loosely-formed movement, which didn't really have a programme, was called *poesia marginal*. The pioneers of this poetry were Waly Salomão and Torquato Neto, who were collaborators of Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, in the music scene, and in the visual arts scene, were close to Hélio Oiticica.

Salomão and Neto were taking some of the concrete poets' ideas – especially in regards to verbovocovisual works – but putting a de-centered, highly performative subject back into the poems. The work was marginal on many counts: during the dictatorship traditional distribution channels were taken by the government. Self-publishing or starting up independent, marginal presses became the strategy of choice for those who didn't want to adopt the party line. Marginality afforded them a bit more freedom. Their activities weren't limited to the page. Ironically, they managed to hit critical mass because they managed to infiltrate the pop scene, as manifested in Tropicália, whose subversiveness was hidden in plain view. So you could say that they 'cashed in' by making themselves appealing to music audiences, but the riches of their associations with artists in other disciplines spilled over to poetry, the work they generated reinvigorated poetry, made it new again, opened it up to practices focused on site-specificity, institutional critique, performance art – a subject free of the ideological and highly problematic baggage of the lyric tradition was brought back in to the poem; a provisional, pliant, multifaceted, plural, performative subject, that is.

To go back to your question about the Cannibal Manifesto. The concrete poets were highly drawn to the cannibal's motto (and also the ultimate appropriationist's): "I am only interested in what is not mine." For the concrete poets this Other was advertising, graphic design, at first, and then, in Haroldo de Campos's *Galáxias*, everything from other languages, allusions to pop culture, slang, advertising copy, etc. Of course this provided a template for the Tropicalistas's activities.

Just to wrap up a bit, what's also essential regarding the subsequent reclaiming of the attitude behind the phrase "I am only interested in what is not mine" is that it's being redeployed in one of Brazil's most nationalistic moments in history. Public discourse – to the left and right – was making all sorts of claims about what the genuine Brazilian identity was. Tropicalistas were thumbing their noses at patriots.

LS: How would you compare *poesia marginal's* move into the space of the counterculture, via music, to the moves of the New Left poets in the United States – Ed Sanders, Allen Ginsberg and others – and later Patti Smith and Richard Hell? Is this the same kind of process? And then with Haroldo's more baroque work, is it strictly cannibalist in the sense that his relation to the baroque is absolutely not part of his culture? Because I was thinking that this kind of work might be positioned against his concrete work in the sense that it mobilises referents that aren't as quickly digested, known, frictionlessly converted by, say, American readers, inasmuch as they don't have a tradition of baroque poetry that Portuguese and Spanish speakers do.

MT: In answer to your first question, you could definitely say that most Brazilian marginal poets, who came after Salomão and Neto, were very much into the Beat poets and their embodiment of a countercultural ethos, yet these two poets themselves, as well as the Tropicalista musicians and artists, were as suspicious of leftist rhetoric as they were of the dictatorship. They shunned the protest mode that had been so prevalent in the sixties (when leftist discourse was the hegemony); its pieties were ultimately manifested in the romantic assumption that the poet is indeed the unknown legislator of the world. The Tropicalistas were skeptical, strategic, tropical Situationists, radical in their critique of rhetoric – they spared not even themselves.

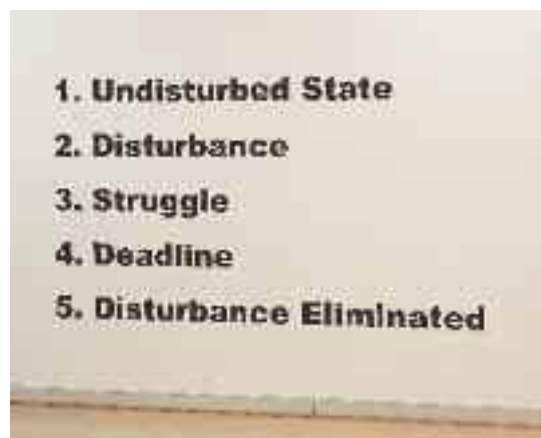
As for whether Haroldo was also redeploying the cannibal's motto when his writing shifted toward the neo-baroque, you're absolutely right. The Portuguese tradition didn't have a Luis de Góngora. Neo-baroque poetry, as you know, is a distinctly Latin American phenomenon; it's Latin American poets, beginning with Lezama Lima and Haroldo, repurposing the colonial tradition, adulterating it, muddying it (as the Argentine Néstor Perlongher would argue), and claiming it as their own. It's a first of its kind, in that it crossed national borders and spread from Argentina and Brazil to Mexico and the US, where we find, for instance, the Cuban José Kozier or the Uruguayan Eduardo Espina now laying the groundwork for neo-baroque poetry to be read in the US, and arguing that ultimately, it's not that different from Language poetry. A fascinatingly rich convergence of two very different, very historically specific poetics ... perhaps material for another conversation down the line.

Matthew Buckingham

Lytle Shaw: We have a very long tradition of art working out of the category of literature: in fact in some ways it's the norm – from Renaissance art based on biblical or classical sources, to Romantic art based on other forms of literature – that a certain version of medium-specific modernism was seeking to displace, even though the category of the literary did persist in many of the modes of modernism. Still, it seems fair to say that something changed in the late 1960s, and that this wasn't just the return of the literary after a period of its relative banishment. Instead there was a more fundamental uncertainty about whether it was art that was moving into the domain of language or vice versa. Suddenly it became unclear which term had priority. Certainly a lot of work from the 1960s staged that question in new ways. Do we still have this crisis of priority on our shoulders, or does your work that makes use of Johnson or Poe, for instance, situate itself as art that's coming out of the literary? Basically, I just want to start off by asking you to say a bit about how you understand the historical relation between art and literature, what you make of this crisis in the late 1960s (if you even see it as one), and where you would position your recent work in relation to ongoing debates about these questions.

Matthew Buckingham: Like all words, 'art' and 'literature' are defined by what they are not, and those definitions, of course, are never completely settled. In the ongoing process of deciding and re-deciding what art is, or what literature is, and what their relationship might be, we see the nuance and flux that exists at the changing parameters of these words and at the border we build between them. The purpose and meaning of this divide between language and images is a fantastic thing to try to historicise. That's partly what we find, as you suggest, when looking at Renaissance or Romantic art – a relationship between art and literature.

So-called conceptual art of the sixties (and even earlier) reorganised these borders, perhaps, in some cases, under a pretense of attempting to dissolve them altogether. Of course I don't think that happened. I think some terms were redefined, but much of the meaning in conceptual work still depended on and reinforced the differences between language and images, words and objects. For me the uncertainty you just mentioned – whether art was moving into the domain of language or the other way around – is *constitutive* of conceptual art. It's a central ambiguity. Some of the most interesting art from this time confronted its viewers with numerous questions about what they were looking at. What is the art made of and where does it exist? Spectators were not only made aware of their own received ideas about categories like writing versus art, but also saw themselves actively negotiating the meaning of the work itself. From that position they became more aware of their own agency, or lack of it, as they made decisions about what they were experiencing and what it meant to them.



Matthew Buckingham. *Narrative*. 2000
Text, vinyl lettering, dimensions variable. Installation view,
Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, 2006. Courtesy Kunstmuseum St. Gallen



Matthew Buckingham.
Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a Name.
2003. Frame enlargements from a
continuous color 16mm film projection with
sound, projection screen, seats, 40 minutes,
dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and
Murray Guy Gallery



Matthew Buckingham. *Definition*. 2000. Continuous color 35mm slide
projection with sound, angled floor, 9 minutes, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist and Murray Guy Gallery

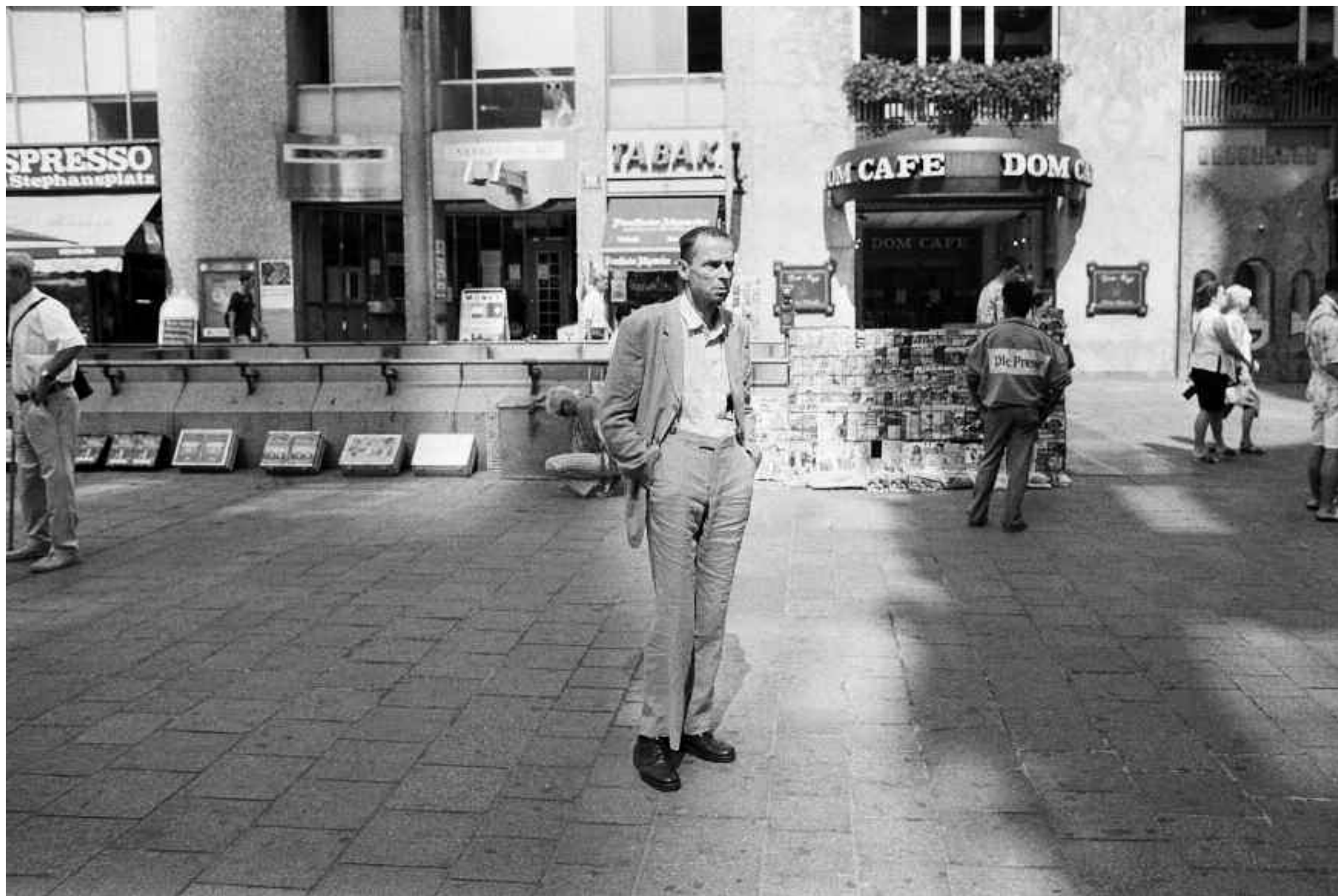
It seems to me that there is no longer any urgency to sorting out priorities between literature and art. Given the proliferation of new platforms and combined forms it may be more important to ask, what is the place of language that already exists *within* art and what is the domain of visuality *within* literature or writing? This is not to say that I think art and writing have collapsed into each other. Of course they cannot. But they may have formed new relationships and may be agitating each other in new ways.

Going back to the Renaissance and to Romanticism it's also interesting to consider how portraiture, landscape and history painting relate to the questions of literature and art you're raising. All three 'genres' carry special conceits, offering themselves as proxies of people, places and events. And this is, or was, often made more intense through their presentation at a specific time and place where they not only represented something but marked the actual space where they were seen. So-called 'history-painting' – often a combination of portraiture and landscape painting – is perhaps the most problematic of the three, and maybe because of this reveals the most. While arguing a position or interpretation of the past, history-painting also expresses an ambiguous relationship to textual- and visual-memory that must be immediately negotiated. Again what interests me are the problems these works presented to their original audience as well as to us today.

In turning to literature by Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville I wanted to extract forms of experience from within those texts, transpose them to new forms, and then give them back to the viewer to struggle with all over again. With *A Man of the Crowd* I chose to read the original Poe story, *A Man of the Crowd*, partly as a commentary on the problem of objective observation. In the Poe story, which was very influential on Baudelaire's and, in turn, Walter Benjamin's differing notions of the flaneur, one man secretly follows another through the streets of London attempting to learn something about him. After twenty-four hours he gives up, having learned nothing. I worked only with the action of the story, as Poe describes it, and left out all of the language. In adapting it to film I also inserted the camera into the narrative, creating a third subject-position. When the work is installed it is projected through a semi-reflective mirror that doubles the image in the space, amplifying the doubling and following that unfolds in the original story.

Herman Melville's tale, "Daniel Orme," is probably the last thing Melville wrote. It tells the story of an ancient sailor, alienated by the changes that he has seen in his lifetime. Unwillingly retired, he finds himself completely displaced in a nameless port city. I transposed this narrative to contemporary Liverpool (one of the first foreign ports Melville visited as a sailor himself) highlighting the changes that an octogenarian seafarer would have seen in his years, primarily the shift from merchant shipping to containerization and the British government's deliberate abandonment of the northern cities under Margaret Thatcher.

With *Definition* I tried to reflect the question of experiencing language itself through the meta-literary object of Samuel Johnson's dictionary, the first standard dictionary of the English language. In that case, the narrative that I was exploring was Johnson's own efforts as an author and the very singular relationship that he found himself in with his own language.



Matthew Buckingham. *A Man of the Crowd*. 2003. Production still from a continuous black and white 16mm film projection with sound, semi-reflective glass, 24 minutes, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Murray Guy Gallery

In all three projects I experimented to see what would happen to the textual material when it was 'spatialized'. when it was encountered at a particular time and place. I never ask viewers to forget where they are. I'm much more interested in reminding them and asking them to think about where they find themselves and how what they see relates to them.

LS: I love your account of history painting because I share your sense of its absolute strangeness – perhaps the strangest of all the genres. I'm currently working on the relationship between nineteenth-century Romantic American historians (Motley especially, but also Prescott, Parkman and Bancroft) and seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting – in part because these historians constantly described what they did through painterly metaphors – everything was a portrait, a sketch, needing a fine hand and lively coloring. But what I'm fascinated by is that they all assume history painting as the absolute standard, even when they write – like Motley – on Holland, the culture that basically invented landscape painting as a stand-alone genre. One answer is that all these historians received normative educations and just internalised the familiar hierarchy of the genres; that's certainly part of the story. But what I'm trying to figure out is what a painter-inspired history that wasn't based on 'history painting' might look like, what a landscape-inspired history might be (there are glimpses of this in Motley, and I'm trying to bring them out). Braudel and his followers gave us one picture of this later on, but I think it could go much, much further. Anyway, I tell you this just as an invitation to expand on your interests in portraiture, landscape and history painting, and to ask how these genres have been informing your working, thinking. Maybe you could use these questions of genre and historiography to elaborate on your evocative remarks about 'spatializing' literary works, opening them to particular times and places?

MB: I think the strangeness of history painting you're speaking about might be the result of the assumptions the patrons and practitioners of the genre made about their viewers. Of course we are not the intended audience for those works and the things we find curious, awkward or even uncanny signal something about their original purpose.

It's easier to feel directly addressed or 'hailed' by a portrait or landscape painting than by history painting. Conceptually, portraiture and landscape painting make assertions about the status, identity, and property of the person who commissioned them or the person portrayed. In order to do this both portraiture and landscape painting usually employ some form of realism or resemblance. They also rely on a certain construction of time to get our attention and make their case. Artists in these genres avoid confusing or transitory states. You rarely see a portrait of someone speaking. Instead of stopping time and freezing motion the picture is invested with a sense of duration, naturalising the sitter's or the landscape's stillness. The picture is an attempt to create a believable perpetual present moment that will exist as long as the painting does, though it was never experienced by anyone as a single moment. Hours, days, weeks of labour have been condensed into a single fictitious moment where the sitter looks back at the viewer or the clouds hang listlessly in the sky. The artwork becomes a proxy of time, designed to overcome time and space – an invention allowing two separate places to meet, conceptually, in two different times, synchronizing the viewer's moment with the artist's and the patron's.



Matthew Buckingham *Muhheakantuck—Everything Has a Name* 2003. Continuous color 16mm film projection with sound. Installation view, New York water Taxi passenger ferry, New York Harbor, 2008. Courtesy Creative Time.

When portraiture and landscape painting intersect or, more often, collide, in the genre of history painting, that timelessness often seems to disappear. We are clearly signaled that one particular moment or action is being depicted and that much more narrow claims on site and identity are being made.

'Spatializing' a narrative, even on its original site, is always an act of 're-staging' in my mind as opposed to being a 're-enactment.' It's the difference, for me, of expectations. Re-enactment might suggest that we could really understand how something happened, what it felt like. Re-staging implies not only that the effort will be provisional at best, but that there is something to be learned, perhaps, in the failure to create a convincing simulation.

LS: Your sketch of what happens between visibility and language in the late 1960s uses the term "so-called conceptual art." Conceptual art, without any doubting qualifers, however, is a movement about which there are now many competent, well-organised histories. One of the effects these histories have is to pull all of this messy area between disciplines into 'Art History.' You may have other very legitimate reasons for speaking of "so-called" conceptual art, but if you don't mind forgetting about them for a moment, I want to ask you what happens if we understand this qualification as having to do with the stability and centrality of the category of

art, and so instead open this moment to a new consideration of the other side of the contact that was occurring at this moment: WRITING, language. My references would include poets like Bern Porter, Bernadette Mayer, Jackson Mac Low, Alison Knowles, Aram Saroyan, Clark Coolidge, Ian Hamilton Finlay (as writer) who could easily have been more a part of the history than they so far have been. But we could also talk about fiction, theory, history, ethnography – any number of forms of writing. What, to your mind, are the generative forms of writing on the other side of the visibility / textuality encounter in the late 1960s, and how could they be brought into the history in richer ways? (I realise this would require two dissertations and a monograph, but I'd be happy with a nice paragraph or two).

MB: My only doubts about using the term *conceptual art* come from considering what the term might exclude. I can't help seeing all artworks as being 'conceptual' on some level. I read them through their widely held ideas and the assumptions they make about us, their audience, no matter where or when we look at them. For me one of the defining qualities of art is its attempt to convey concepts. Of course this conceptual level operates very differently at different times and is subordinate to specific purposes and agendas, sometimes becoming more or less visible, easier or harder to read.

And you're right, the artwork that announced itself as 'conceptual art' has now been historicised in ways that reveal its complexity and contradictions, making it necessary to reconsider the category as an international network of movements with cross-influences unfolding over time and having ongoing effects, rather than as a single movement at one specific moment. But even the best of the recent accounts of conceptualism do leave blind spots with regard to the formative relationship between language and the visual. I'm very aware of this in my own itinerary. It would be a great project to reconnect more of the practitioners who were at play, as you suggest. Many of the most interesting cultural producers positioned themselves across this visual / textual divide. In terms of both the 'marketplace of ideas' as well as monetary markets, these are the people who have not received the full attention they deserve. Obviously if more writers, curators, and institutions were interested in following ideas across artificial boundaries we would get a much more rich and satisfying account of where we are now. This would entail combining sensibilities of literary criticism, biography, art history, semiotics, *etc, etc*. Art would have to be seen as a social production. What if, just to take one example, a written history like Sally Banes' *Greenwich Village 1963*, a non-linear description of a polymorphous art scene in New York, were taken up as a structure for an exhibition and series of events? Time and money often work against such hybrids because timetables and budgets are determined by institutional mandates of narrow purview.

The information we can use to build new, more adequate, narratives for ourselves has never been more accessible than it is now. And younger generations of artists and thinkers seem to be eager to ignore older boundaries and territorial polemics. Maybe they can articulate the relationships you are talking about looking both at the past and looking forward to their own creative production. But what will institutions do? Will they re-form, and will new institutions with more complex missions appear among and between the established ones?

LS: I agree that there is no longer any urgency in taxonomically placing a language-based work in 'literature' and a visually based one in 'art' (this was a hangover of modernism's discipline essentialism, still powerful enough in the late 1960s to be a significant part of conceptualism's reception) and that some of the interpretive crises generated by, and constitutive of, conceptual art's blurring of these distinctions have migrated to a more refined level having to do with the inescapable existence of language in art and visibility in language. In that sense you immediately provide one kind of answer to the question I'm asking throughout this whole special issue: what has changed in the genealogy of conceptualism, the relationship between language and art, since the late 1960s? So given this nice sketch, a follow-up is: What are the most fruitful explorations of this new, more refined question, and what do answers (or really, explorations) look like – other than, say, visibility is everywhere and inescapable? Or, watch out art, you'll never rid yourself of language? In other words, we're familiar with one set of answers to this that were, in a sense, a quick reading of post-structuralism ... but I sense that there are also more nuanced and patient and rewarding inquiries out there.

MB: Douglas Crimp has pointed out that the 'neo-conceptual' art which began to appear in the 1980s and 90s, which I identify with very strongly, not only represented a return to earlier models of conceptualism but more importantly marked the introduction of social and political questions into conceptual art practice. This is a complex and foundational question that motivated me to work with art in the first place: what new registers of meaning can be found in between existing categories of thought and cultural production? Specifically, in my case, what might happen if I borrow methods from the disciplines of history writing and historiography and bring them into the context of art? Could a mutual-critique emerge, perhaps one that is centred around these categories' differences and commonalities? This was what I attempted to do with the screenings of my Hudson River project, 'Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name.' First I juxtaposed an aerial film-image of the river with a spoken narration of the relations between the Indigenous Lenape and the colonising Dutch West India Company in the seventeenth century. Then I placed both image and sound literally into their (non-) site of reference, the river that we know as the Hudson, playing them back on a passenger ferry circling through New York Harbor. I meant this to be a less familiar way to experience history's methods and problems and to turn these problems over to the viewer so that, if they engage with the work, they must partly become historians while at the same time see themselves as subjects of history.

LS: One last question – about Poe. As I think I told you long ago, I spent some time in graduate school researching and writing about that particular story – it's one of my all-time favorites. The first part of it, you remember, involves the protagonist sitting in a café and, in a sense, frictionlessly interpreting all of the people walking past the plate glass window – reading them in terms of social categories, a kind of natural history of urban life. And then suddenly this enigma strolls past: someone who jams all the interpretive registers. Arguably, the protagonist follows because he believes that, in tracing the character to his home, he will get enough new

information to contextualize him: but then the ‘home’ turns out to be precisely the urban context of constantly, ceaselessly strolling!!! So first, what do you make of the first part of the story? Do you just have to cut it out because it’s descriptive rather than based in action? If so, does it inform how you stage, organise the second half? Then it just occurred to me that there’s a link here between the project of social taxonomy taken on in the Poe story and your previous work on Lavater and physiognomy. Do you agree? How would you relate the two?

MB: Yes, when the story opens the protagonist is in a specific state of heightened physical and mental awareness having just recovered from an illness. He is seeing things anew; or maybe more importantly, he *thinks* he is seeing the world with new clarity. He begins to fit the passersby he sees through the cafe window into an improvised social classificatory system based on his own experience and his class- and race-based prejudices. This part of the written story is so crucial because it not only sets up our narrative expectation, but also tells us a great deal about the protagonist, who otherwise also remains something of a mystery.

I read the story symptomatically, looking at it as a tale of a diligent but thwarted amateur taxonomer with all the problems that implies. Whether Poe intended it that way or not I thought of it as a cautionary tale of misplaced faith in objective observation. The protagonist does have much in common with Johann Caspar Lavater, the Zwinglian physiognomist who briefly achieved world fame through his ‘theory’ of correspondence between physical appearance and inner character. Indeed Lavater’s thinking is one of the main direct influences on the sensibility of Poe’s protagonist.

This failed taxonomy, the inability to find, as you say, a ‘home’ for the enigmatic stranger at the story’s centre, was what suggested the idea of translating the tale to another medium. In my project the first section is more ambiguous, making up a smaller proportion of the overall narrative than in the original, but still sets up the situation and also serves, in my case, to establish the protagonist’s awareness of, and relationship with, the film camera and the camera operator. My protagonist is slightly more self-aware. He is lying in wait for a subject to follow, but his taxonomical bent and his scopophilia still drive him. As the project unwinds the film shifts from being an investigation of an anonymous stranger to an observation of the investigation itself.

The English science writer, Matt Ridley, defines science as the search for new forms of ignorance. There seems to be an endless ongoing debate in many circles about whether or not art, or history writing, might have something in common with science. I think that search for new questions and, when all is seemingly said and done, the habit of asking of asking ‘and what else?’ is something shared by all three.

Emilie Clark

Lytle Shaw: What is it about the writing done by nineteenth-century naturalists that provides a conceptual impetus for your work? Or, to put it another way: I know you don’t read this work only because you’re into it; you use it structurally, literally, as a way to make things. Could you describe how and why?

Emilie Clark: The conceptual impetus that I gain from the writing of nineteenth-century naturalists comes not from the writing alone, but from the entire world it suggests. The writing itself is often awkward and troubled – as if it wants to be a lot of things but is constrained both by the writer’s own aspirations and by her simultaneous anticipation of what is expected of her and of it. It’s what’s evoked or hinted at between the lines that interests me – because it suggests the complex world, both imaginary and real, that nineteenth-century women naturalists were forced to live inside. From the writing it is easy to imagine lives that demanded an extreme amount of self-invention, solitary pursuit, confidence and discipline. The seriousness of these naturalists and their practices is a very important part of what draws me to them. In addition, the role of a naturalist involves the investigation of many disparate parts. In order to successfully investigate, these women had to fabricate an immersive world that allowed them to dismantle and reconstruct. Their writing provides a structure that I can insert myself into and appropriate from in order to create my own practice, accommodating conflicting elements: rules and improvisation; naturalist fieldwork and historical research; installation art and drawing; abstraction and realism; observation and invention. I need to have conceptual structures in order to feel uninhibited intellectually and artistically. There is a certain kind of freedom that these lives provide me with because they are at once fairly methodical and rigid, very nineteenth-century, and at the same time incredibly abstract and evocative – less known than we think. So there is room to move.

More generally, I’m interested in the ways that things are in a constant state of flux – cycling over and reemerging, transforming. Nature is a perfect laboratory for understanding these processes. But nature alone is far too vast and abstract to hold my attention. The historical figures, my ‘characters’, allow me to zoom in and focus – to see apparently small or insignificant details in extreme focus – as large and complicated as whole worlds. One might argue that any object of focus could do this. And in a way that’s true. But it’s the fact that the women I work with were themselves observers, and that this observation took place in extreme, and to me endlessly fascinating circumstances (both socially and physically), that makes these focus points more than just arbitrary objects.

LS: Could you say more about the larger relations between reading and making in your work?



Emilie Clark. *Untitled drawing MW-12* from "Letters to Mary Ward, 2003" 22"x15" Watercolor, ink and graphite on paper. The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland, fall 2003. Courtesy of the artist.

EC: Again, the reading is about focus. But reading alone is never enough for me to retain and benefit in a larger way. That is, while I have the desire to read, I need to make it my own in order to feel I've really learned something. When I was a kid, it wasn't until I started to pretend teach, literally role play, that I was able to acquire knowledge that benefitted me as a student – that made me really interested in learning. I guess you could say that the role-playing aspect of what I do is still a significant part of the process. Reading as a way into my own activities and experiments allows me to learn much more than I would if I was just reading to acquire knowledge alone.

LS: We used to joke all the time about 'conceptual art' being used, ahistorically, by young artists in 2000 or 2005 – because the suggestion was that there was this timeless practice called 'conceptual art' and that you could do it in 1968 or you could do it now. But the thing that that kind of usage elided was the important differences between late 1960s art and the current moment. What are the most important of these differences in your mind? Also, when these people used the word conceptual what they hoped to mean was that they were rigorous and critical as opposed to expressionistic and naive. But those terms are so vague that they're almost meaningless. Is there any way in which it's useful to hold on to the term conceptual (I did after all begin by asking you about the conceptual component of your practice)? Which other phrases, terms, might help us be more specific about what's worth thinking about in recent art?

EC: I'm not sure I'm qualified to talk about conceptual art historically, but one thing that seems relevant to your question and my practice is that a certain amount of rejection of traditional art practices was necessary in the sixties in order to establish the significance of new modes of thinking. I understand this rejection to be not only of understood ideas but also of materials and media. Drawing and painting were thrown out, which allowed the entry of then-new art practices like video and installation. But there are no new materials now, and no medium has an inherently radical nature. I'm annoyed by how contemporary so-called conceptual artists can depend on their choice of medium as a justification for the works' meaning. Often today what is talked about as conceptual is more just a one liner – a caption, an ability to quickly and efficiently articulate the 'meaning' of a work of art. I'm interested in something much more complicated and challenging and I don't care what medium it is in. Artwork should be generous; it should allow for multiple ways of entering. Media like drawing and painting are slower, more abstract even when figurative, and they can provide a space of thought, a place to enter and stay for a while. If, within that space, the viewer seeks more information, more sources, layers can be peeled back and the project can gain complexity. Mary Ward (the nineteenth-century Irish naturalist who wrote a treatise on the microscope) talked about how one of her favorite things to dissect and observe under that microscope was a fishes' eyeball. This because it was a series of infinite translucent layers and every layer seemed to be the last in that it appeared to be defining the 'whole' of what was understood as the eyeball, when in fact it was just one very small part.



Emilie Clark. Installation detail from "Letters to Mary Ward, 2003" dimensions vary. Case, botanical and entomological specimens, watercolor, ink and graphite drawings. The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland, fall 2003. Courtesy of the artist.



Emilie Clark. Studio view during "Home Studies in Nature" project, 2005. Microscope, insect specimens, carnivorous plants. New York City. Courtesy of the artist.

LS: A couple of follow-ups. I appreciate what you say about moving from reading to appropriating, but could you say more about how your work does that: the concrete mechanisms by which you identify structures or properties inside the texts that allow you to do things with them – for instance, Mary Ward's descriptive vocabulary for what's under the microscope, and its relation to domesticity; Mary Treat's suggestions of conflict, world-historical struggle in the functioning of plants, *etc*? Then back to the initial formulation about the conceptual North Pole: do you see yourself working in an area between art and writing? If so, what are the features, coordinates, historical markers of this domain – who do you see as precedents? Whose work are you interested in as parallels, why?

EC: Mary Ward was a nineteenth-century Irish natural historian who wrote an epistolary text, *A World of Wonders Revealed by the Microscope*, to someone named Emily. She is extremely methodical and takes fifty four objects from nature and describes what they look like under the microscope. The choice of her objects is unexpectedly revealing of a whole life – the specimens she chooses are ordinary and domestic – the hair of a mouse, the wing of a butterfly, the eye of a fish that she has cooked. Her metaphors and her modes of description have to do especially with sewing and clothes (the bodice of dress, a detail of lace). Without any direct telling, the reader can easily discern what kind of place Mary Ward lived in, her class status, her daily life. At the same time, despite the immediate and uncomplicated simplicity of her choice of materials and references, the power of the microscope turns all that to something completely unknown and abstract. The wing of a butterfly is no longer a wing of a butterfly, it's an intricately woven world of lines and patterns that overlap and within their convergence form even more worlds. These are the places of entry for me – inserting myself into her description, to imagine her lived world, while also inserting myself into the description to create a visual world. For that project, which was shown at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 2003 as part of 'Living in a Cloud', curated by Sarah Pierce, I made fifty four drawings based on



Emilie Clark; Installation detail from "My Garden Pets, Emilie Clark at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden", dimensions vary, horticultural, herbarium and entomological specimens, watercolor, ink and graphite drawings, archival books and letters. Brooklyn Botanical Garden, Steinhardt Conservatory, March 6-May 30, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Brooklyn Botanical Garden.

her descriptions, trying to throw out anything I knew about the actual objects being described and merely responding to her language. I then, in turn, chose fifty four specimens from my collection that I made drawings of, for her. I began to write her letters when I was feeling confused and had questions – about her larger life, her work. This project came, as you know, just as we had Cosmo (our first child, born 2003) and the domestic nature of her writing brought forward many questions for me that left the place of drawing and entered into the construction of my own life, my new life as a mother. My letters, as much as the drawing, allowed me to bring together all the disparate parts of my new life as a mother, in conjunction with my life as an artist. I didn't set out with this intention; in fact it was completely unexpected. But the need for the letters and for the two different kinds of drawings emerged out of living inside Ward's world, but in my body.

The project with Treat was quite different. She was a nineteenth-century American naturalist, an expert on carnivorous plants, who corresponded extensively with Darwin and Asa Gray and others. Her writing was equally compelling but much more emotional and troubled. If you took the botanical names out of Treat's text, you would think she was writing about troubled relationships between families, spouses, friends but also between warring nations. Her writing was also more revealing of her scientific knowledge and significant research. And it was this expertise that also seemed to contribute to the intensity of her troubled tone. So here the dynamics of the carnivorous plants and their relationships to insects, alongside Treat's relationship to the study of these things, provided my point of entry. But this was intricately layered and complicated compared to the Ward project. There was no method in the sense that Treat's text was much less neat. I had to figure out a way to understand the science of carnivorous plants in order to understand her life and her dramatic narration. This required that

I grow all the same species of CPs (carnivorous plants) as she did, but in terraria in my studio. I methodically performed the same experiments she did and kept copious records of their development. I put the plants into dormancy over winter, tracked their successes and failures, their eating habits *etc.* Unexpectedly, the plants became a huge part of my daily routine when I got to my studio. And their care became almost a sort of meditation, a way to get into the zone. Once in, I began to draw. I used the plants and studied them under my microscope, took photos, worked from the photos, worked from the text. Everything was influencing everything. At a certain point fairly early on, I needed to have a structuring device because there were too many parts. I couldn't help associating Treat's text with genres of art historical painting – categories that develop similar concerns over time. The fact that these plants evolved to survive in poor conditions, that they are beautiful and exquisite and yet engage in violent acts not typically associated with plants, and that they really function like animals – all this made me think of the kind of life drama so aptly portrayed in historical art, in particular portraiture, still life and history painting. The portraiture was all the detailed explanations of a particular species. The still life was the observation under the microscope – the framed and static momentary image. And the history paintings were her macro-scale descriptions of events of capture, struggle, digestion. The last, the history paintings, contained weather patterns, drama, transitions and transformations. So these three categories ended up being how I was able to structure my own drawing and painting practice while inside the project.

The Maxwell work was yet again different. She was a nineteenth-century American naturalist and homesteader in Colorado who had an extensive collection of five hundred specimens – most of which she killed and prepared herself. She displayed her work in her own museum in Boulder and later used it to represent the state of Colorado in the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in



Emilie Clark. Untitled drawing MM-59 from "Maxwell's Lair," 2008. 15"x20" watercolor, ink and graphite on paper. Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York City, October 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.



Emilie Clark. Untitled drawing BBG-10 from "My Garden Pets, Emilie Clark at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden." 19.75"x18" watercolor, ink and graphite on paper. Brooklyn Botanical Garden, Steinhardt Conservatory, March 6-May 30, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Brooklyn Botanical Garden.



Emilie Clark. Installation view from "Maxwell's Lair," 2009. Dimensions vary. Stereoscope, paintings, cave and hanging sculptures "Predator/Prey." Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York City, October 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.



Emilie Clark. Untitled MM-p15 from "Maxwell's Lair," 2009. 48"x60" acrylic on canvas. Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York City, October 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery.

Philadelphia. In both of her 'installations' she was one of the first natural historians to exhibit specimens in naturalistic settings rather than in a taxonomic display. Her displays included local flora and landscaping (caves, waterfalls) and sculpting of the animals into action poses: eating, sleeping, hunting or capturing other beasts. In the middle of her Centennial life-size diorama was a small grotto and cave where, in Philadelphia, Maxwell lived for most of the exhibition, too poor to afford other lodgings. Her collection was even catalogued by Elliot Coues, who wrote *Key to North American Birds* (1872) and was the first ornithologist at the Smithsonian, and yet it was all eventually destroyed by the elements since she was not able to find it a permanent home. Maxwell died destitute and prematurely in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, after setting up, on the advice of P.T. Barnum, a seaside hotel resort in Far Rockaway with her collection as the attraction.

In Maxwell's case there was no single text that allowed for insertion. Instead I used various descriptions of her life (many of which were written by her sister or through Maxwell's letters) that provided access to her work and life, which seemed almost impossible in relation to established careers or identities at the time – both professional (male) naturalists and educated Victorian women who did not and were not expected to work or earn a living. Maxwell's self-constructed life required an extraordinary dedication. Not the least part of this was tracking, killing, eviscerating, and rebuilding a huge number of animals in the service of knowledge. I needed to figure out how to recreate that world for myself. Deciding that I didn't want to kill animals myself, I chose to collect toy animals and make them into new hybrid creatures (or objects) all in the process of transformation: platypus heads turned inside out, beaks pulled back as ears and sutured to bears' butts, attached to eagles' wings; lambs' ears sewn together on top of one another, red lobes of polar bear ears removed and stitched across the lamb's face, its decapitated head stuffed inside the bear. Back to the eyeball here, I was hoping to create objects and later drawings and paintings that could be peeled away, dissected, reimagining worlds and lives. For as long as I've been making work I've always felt like my childhood dog Midnight who would spend hours digging holes so that she could simply lie



comfortably in them. That is the simplest way to sum up my practice. Building this environment I can lie in is how I insert myself into the life and work of others – and then discover a way to turn it into something else. With Maxwell, the cave I built was the most emblematic of this process. My cave was made up of hundreds of dissected animals that were then put together again in a sort of quilt-like structure, at once soiled and disturbing, but still cozy and protective.

LS: Then back to the initial formulation about the conceptual North Pole: do you see yourself working in an area between art and writing? If so, what are the features, coordinates, historical markers of this domain – who do you see as precedents? Whose work are you interested as parallels, why?

EC: I do see myself as working between art and writing, but also between art and natural history: much of what interests me and many of the methods I use for research have as much to do with scientific research as they do with literature. I treat the studio like a laboratory, and work with ‘specimens’ as much as I do archival research and writing. In that sense I feel very much in between: the natural historian and the researcher, the artist and the writer, the painter and the conceptualist, the city dweller and the rural field explorer. I’m drawn to the role of the field researcher and the museum diorama builder. These roles are a kind of counter-balance to the domain of the isolated artist, working away inside her own constructed universe. It’s never been easy for me to locate artist precedents, in part because the artists whom I’ve gotten most excited about aren’t always interested in natural history *per se*. But one thing that does unify the artists I have been (and remain) excited about is that they all build compelling cosmologies: Lee Bontecou, Henry Darger, John Pylypchuk and the Royal Art Lodge, Jockum Nordström. Some cosmologies fail – including those related to science and natural history. So I can’t say that I’m led just by that thematic connection. Mark Dion’s work, though, is very important to me, as are projects like the Museum of Jurassic Technology and Cabinet Magazine.



Above: Emilie Clark. Untitled drawing MT-M5 from “Home Studies in Nature, 2005” 15”x11” Watercolor, ink and graphite on paper. New York City, October 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

Previous Page: Emilie Clark. Untitled drawing BBG-4 from “My Garden Pets, Emilie Clark at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden.” 22”x15” watercolor, ink and graphite on paper. Brooklyn Botanical Garden, Steinhardt Conservatory, March 6-May 30, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Brooklyn Botanical Garden.

Lytle Shaw: Cabinet Makers: Part of the late 1960s conceptualism was a thorough critique of the art object. As generative as this was at the time, it has perhaps become a bit of a piety. I see Cabinet adopting an interestingly different stance: epistemological and social questions come into focus through objects, not beyond or despite them. And, perhaps more importantly, fascination and curiosity drive the process, rather than familiar negations or 'critical' revelations. Could you talk a little bit about how you see the project of Cabinet in relation to the debates of conceptual art of the late 1960s including the critique of the object, the blurring of the priorities between language and art, and the analysis of the institutions of art all really coming into focus then? What has changed since the high moment of conceptualism, and what is Cabinet's, your, position in relation to these changes?

A corollary of this: the category of the literary often intrudes upon those of history, art, documentary, archaeology, history of science *etc* in the pages of Cabinet. Is that fair to say? If so, what else is literariness doing other than rendering these disciplines more playful? In what senses, how is the literary an epistemological tool?

Finally, I've been teaching a Major Texts in Literary Theory class for the last few years and I include a lot of Enlightenment science: Hooke, Diderot, Linnaeus. In teaching Hooke's writings in particular I've been trying to argue that the tendency toward math that we see in Newton wasn't inevitable, wasn't the meaning of 'empiricism', and that there are radical empiricisms that are very much worth recuperating – ones that I wasn't exposed to at all in my own theory education. I've never really talked to you about this, but I've always imagined you as a sympathetic interlocutor here. This seems related to the idea of the cabinet of curiosity. How does the project of Cabinet engage with our received notions of the Enlightenment? And in particular with dominant versions of theory's characterization of the Enlightenment or of empiricism?

Cabinet (Sina Najafi and Jeff Kastner): There's obviously a lot of very rich material to mine in the above. Since we understand this as an invitation to a dialogue in some sense, we hope you won't mind if we answer your questions, at least in this first instance, both with some general introductory observations and also with the occasional question of our own.

First of all, we think we recognise, at least in its broad outlines, the paradigmatic shift you describe in your précis. But on a more granular level of analysis, we do feel like it might be helpful to try to define some terms and general parameters. We understand your reading of this move away from 'antiquated' concepts like 'inspiration' and 'influence' as one that turns from specific objects and the people who make them to larger-scale conceptual concerns around "installation, site, document, procedure and history". Is this telescoping out, as it were, from things and people to ideas and structures, what you mean by "meta chart-making"? And is it right that there has been a 'recent' setting out by new parties for this *terra incognita*, an essay whose character is in some important way distinct from that embarked upon by the pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s? (Or, indeed, the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s?)

Maybe the best place to start is with a thought or two about the first question that follows from this observation of yours, namely that the "thorough critique of the art object ... has perhaps become a bit of a piety of late." You say that you understand Cabinet's approach as different, one that brings "epistemological and social questions ... into focus through objects, not beyond or despite them." One of the things we found most interesting about this is the way the word 'art' drops out of the equation between the first and second sentences, and this seems to us a very important distinction that's being made, whether or not it was intentional. Because it actually would not be accurate to say that these questions come into focus for Cabinet through art objects: we almost never use artistic objects, at least contemporary ones, as the jumping off point for the discursive material we publish. In fact, one probably could make the argument that the very theoretical developments you describe – the dematerializing strategies of post-war conceptualism; the theatrical turn identified in opposition to the modes of absorption structured solely by the art object – are precisely what has informed Cabinet's approach, insofar as what we take to be the result of this evolution is the emergence of disciplines around visual culture, critical studies *etc*, that recognise a far more heterogeneous class of things as fit for both spectatorship and analysis. The 1960s conceptualist critiques of the art object were not, as far as we understand them, a critique of objects in a general sense, but rather of the qualities associated with a *certain class of objects*, namely artworks, and of the idea that these sorts of objects were somehow privileged. Perhaps if Cabinet has engaged on some level with these issues, it is by taking seriously the idea that it is not necessary to designate something as *art* in order to find a kind of beauty – to take pleasure, not in the disinterested Kantian sense, but rather in the mode of Stendhal's *promesse de bonheur* – in it.

As for the function of the literary 'intrusions' into other categories in the pages of Cabinet, it is definitely true that the magazine likes to mix modes of address, and that we've been open to experimenting both with unorthodox textual devices and the ways in (and degrees to) which these devices are signaled. We're assuming you're not simply referring to a tendency toward beltrism in our approach (something to which we must probably plead guilty), but more to the fact that we employ certain literary – meaning 'fictional'?—strategies as a way to reinterpret and (hopefully) enhance the often dry, ostensibly fact-based context of history, documentary, archeology *etc*. There's no doubt that this participates to some degree in what is now understood as the parafictional turn: from the *nouveau roman* to Borges to DeLillo, the 'literary' has for a long time been receptive to intrusions from the world of data, and it's clear that this has also become something of a trope within the same contemporary art world dynamic you mentioned at the beginning of this. (We should also say that the increasing ubiquity of this move, and our utilization of it, is something that we actually have mixed feelings about – we are increasingly aware of our position on a very fine line between a kind of generative ambiguity and what ends up being simple unreliability).



Cabinet's fox and hedgehog shield.



An array of Mexican jumping beans, showing the interior hollows created by developing larvae.

Perhaps part of this is attributable to the fact that just as contemporary artists have, since the 1960s, increasingly deployed objects and rehearsed scenarios that are in some fundamental sense *extra-artistic* – without their own inherent aesthetic surplus – so too does Cabinet, in engaging with artifacts and information that originate outside the world of art, find that the most useful location for the creative gesture lies in the discursive (literary) space that surrounds them. If such moves to some extent act to distort or destabilize the conventional informational landscape one expects to find in material from history, the sciences *etc.*, they also have what seems to us enormous potential to capture certain aspects of experience – things that are happening in the texture of everyday life that don't traditionally rise to the level of the official record, and are in fact already the purview of the literary gesture. If these experiments allow for a greater degree of indeterminacy than is usually associated with such ostensibly empirical fields of endeavour, we feel that they also provide a more inviting way into the material: preparing the ground, as it were, for an ethics of curiosity and concern that encourages readers to learn more than on their own.

As for the question of Cabinet's engagement with received notions the Enlightenment tradition, we're not actually sure which set of received notions you're referring to. It is true that Cabinet has borrowed its motto 'sapere aude' (dare to know) from Kant, while also referencing in its name pre-Enlightenment practices of collecting as a way of knowing. And to make matters worse, our insignia also references Isaiah Berlin typology of two fundamentally different modes of understanding the world—which borrows from the Greek poet Archilochus the characters of the fox (who knows many small things and therefore cannot systematize) and the hedgehog (who knows only one big thing and therefore has a systematic framework for approaching the world). What we like about having both of these animals on the shield is that it dismantles the apparent distinction between the Enlightenment obsession with taxonomy and totality and the idea that it is instead through fragments that can never be assembled into a full picture that the nature of the world is actually expressed.

LS: True to form, Cabinet is the one interview that begins with queries! And this is why every piece of writing I've ever given the magazine has been improved by it in the editorial process. What I was alluding to obliquely by meta-chart making was that, while the initial language of conceptualism constantly referred to maps, we now need a better map not just of this moment in art history, but of how the problems it opened up were, and are, problems between disciplines, problems that involve disciplinary mapping too.

The paragraph on the conceptual North Pole was more of a provocation than a history – so of course I'm happy to elaborate on it too. What I meant to suggest was antiquated was a relation among the disciplines of art and writing that could be defined merely in terms of influence or inspiration – as if the structures and procedures of the other discipline were insignificant: literate artists reading poems or novels and being moved by them – referring to them obliquely in their paintings. Or poets referencing 'Pollock' or 'Picasso' in discrete poems. This seems to me old-fashioned. I'm interested in, and think I see around me, a more intense mutual involvement in which poets turn to strategies of site-specificity and institution critique – actually operating in an area that's really between the disciplines, involving procedures that each discipline can appropriate. Or artists restaging works of literature under very specific installation conditions or turning famous minimalist artists into dramatists, as Gerard Byrne does. I see this as a productive development of the disciplinary crisis that got opened up in the late 1960s when, with conceptualism, it became unclear whether art was becoming linguistic or whether writing was entering into the domain of art – strategies of seriality, performance documentation, experiments in the breakdown of any hierarchy between word and image, among other things.

So, no, I didn't see that as a pure telescoping out but rather an oscillation between scales where the macro (the historical moment, some concept of social totality, for example) and the micro (an object, a collection, a specific way of making or thinking) come into contact; the object is necessary for the 'granular' more immediate level of the micro to come into focus, and thereby to give us more specific and interesting versions of the macro. The idea of a pure telescoping out, independent of the micro scale, is, I think, bound up with a dream that art could become merely informational, that its object status would effectively disappear, either through a 'non-aesthetic' medium (as if that's what photography turned out to be!) or through objects that

were only important until they catapulted you into the larger, more significant domain of a discourse (natural history, race-relations, border politics) and then self-destructed, as in the dominant reading of Mark Dion, for instance. Also, this older view of conceptualism was often coincident with a Horkheimer and Adorno view of enlightenment in which inquiries into concrete things were dismissed as empiricism, and empiricism understood, in blanket fashion, as a form of instrumentalization.

For me, making a distinction about whether an object is an art object or a daily life object has more to do with a reading strategy, a mode of interpretation, than it does with a bedrock ontology. It's possible to interpret anything as *art*, just as one can decide to read any piece of writing as a poem. So I'm more interested in mobile frames than in claimed essences. Still, I see the question as important inasmuch as art is constantly mobilising or nominating objects that just a second ago were part of daily life, or part of some other discipline. But I think that has been established in art history – as the history of the avant-garde.

What seems less discussed, what I'm struggling to suggest that Cabinet has been an important agent in, is a larger movement demonstrating that there are several empiricisms, not all of them symptomatic. And, as much as Cabinet is a magazine for historians, philosophers, anthropologists, it's also part of a shift in artists' understanding of the object, artistic or otherwise, helping to clear the air a bit of that categorical dismissal that had happened in the late 1960s with the roughly simultaneous dematerialization of the art object and the emergence of Frankfurt School critical theory. Experimental empiricism becomes sexy, and uncoupled from positivism. I'm not talking about reconciling ourselves with the inevitability of the market, rediscovering 'beauty' – I'm still committed to most of the social / intellectual project of the critical theory moment: I'm just welcoming more complex and generous senses of the Enlightenment, inquiry, empiricism – or, as Sina, I think, puts it, curiosity.

Nor do I see the Enlightenment as the great unfinished project for rational subjects. Habermas won't even try to make the distinction between 'generative ambiguity' and 'simple unreliability'; ambiguities and fictionalizations all point toward the latter and must be banished from the public. So, as hard as making those distinctions is, and as irresponsible as some of your contributors are, I applaud you. Now that I have hopefully made a bit clearer what I'm trying to credit you with, perhaps you could tell me whether you agree, and simply how you might explain, in your own way, the magazine's relation to the history I'm trying to sketch here.

Cabinet: The model you've proposed seems a very useful one for the purposes of this discussion and for thinking about Cabinet's project. This oscillation between scales it describes points, it seems to us, toward fundamental questions about the relationship of matter and meaning, and invites a consideration of just what it is that *things might have to say* without, as Lorraine Daston puts it in the introduction to the 2008 collection of essays *Things That Talk*, "resorting to ventriloquism or projection." "Imagine a world without things," Daston writes:

It would not be so much an empty world as a blurry, frictionless one: no sharp outlines would separate one part of the uniform plenum from another; there would be no resistance against which to stub a toe or test a theory or struggle stalwartly. Nor would there be anything to describe, or to explain, remark on, interpret, or complain about – just a kind of porridgy oneness. Without things we would stop talking. We would become as mute as things are alleged to be.



Detail from door overhead by Jacques de Lajoüe. A painter of fantastic architectures, Lajoüe made four such overheads for the Cabinet Bonnier in 1734, this one being above the right-hand door of the room housing the Second Cabinet of Natural History.

Just as they do for a historian like Daston, things give Cabinet and its contributors something to talk about, but the different modes of this discourse (describing, explaining, remarking, interpreting, complaining and more) aren't intended to replace – or perhaps better put, to exhaust – the object. There is always something that remains and the degree to which this remainder or surplus is preserved and made legible is precisely a function of the way the oscillations between the micro and the macro are handled. (Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that the model of oscillation or, as you so nicely put it, of 'mobile frames', can also be usefully deployed when thinking about the relation of the magazine's programme to the sort of inter-disciplinarity – *adisciplinarity*? – that is the contemporary legacy of 1960s conceptualism). Cabinet is not wedded to one particular speed or frequency of oscillation. In fact, the central goal of the project is to experiment with the different results – the multiple empiricisms, if you will – that can be generated by different emphases along the spectrum from pure matter to pure meaning, both within individual texts and within the larger discursive landscape of a given issue. The spectrum is not, strictly speaking, symmetrical: at one end, the object is understood as utterly symptomatic – only to be used as a catapult to something else outside it – but at the other end the object can't become pure matter, it's necessarily matter and meaning together. Cabinet would certainly be situated closer to this end of the spectrum, but our ambition is to make the magazine a laboratory for experiments that produce heterogeneous answers to the question of how exactly one might go about (to borrow your metaphor) mapping it.

What all aspects of the project share is a desire to dismantle certain long-held oppositions, particularly those that propose an unbridgeable gulf between the poetic and the scientific. There's a wonderful letter written in 1934 by the French social theorist Roger Caillois to André Breton in which the former announces his break from Surrealism over this very issue, and specifically the lack of what Caillois calls an 'equilibrium' in the movement between the spheres of *research* and *poetry*. Discussing the marvels of 'modern atomic theory' in this context, Caillois observes that "here we have a form of the Marvellous that does not fear knowledge but, on the contrary, thrives on it." Caillois continues:

When I compare this great game with Gérard de Nerval's attitude, who refused to enter Palmyra so as not to spoil his preconceptions, or with your own, refusing to slice open a jumping bean that sometimes jolts about because you did not want to find an insect or a worm inside (that would have destroyed the mystery, you said) my mind is made up. Actually, it always was. As a child, I could never really have fun with toys; I was constantly ripping them open or dismantling them to find out "what they were like inside, how they worked.

In some important sense, the debate being staged in this passage – and in the pages of Cabinet – is about whether wonder is located in the mind (Breton) or in the world (Caillois and us). Breton is worried that the world will be exhausted once he knows about it, but if one believes, as Cabinet does, that the world is inexhaustible, then knowledge – empirical or otherwise – poses no threat to *jouissance*, but instead becomes its crucial ally.

Jeff Derksen

Lytle Shaw: What was the nature of exchange between the art and poetry scenes when you were starting out in Vancouver? Who was involved and why do you think these two disciplines were coming into contact here a bit more than they have in other places?

Jeff Derksen: There are a number of entry points and intersections between art and poetry in Vancouver, both in the practices of particular artists, but also in shifts in artistic production. Perhaps an exemplar figure could be Roy Kiyooka who moved from being a hard-edged painter in the 1960s, to a photographer (after visiting Japan and Osaka's Expo 70) and a poet who was influential in both fields. There are other cross-over writers / artists like this as well (bill bissett, Judith Copthorne, for example), so it is not the case of a singular figure and, in reality, there was an enormous amount of cross-practice and dialogue.

One area in which you can see a productive intersection is in textuality as an aesthetic and the book as form. An early example of this is concrete poetry and practices that used language as visual material (which gained influence and internationalism through the 'Concrete Poetry Exhibition' at the UBC Fine Arts gallery in 1969). Just in terms of poetry and literature as an influence on artists, the photographer Ian Wallace (also one of the great teachers that have shaped Vancouver art) has drawn from Baudelaire in work over the last 30 years. Some of the first conversations I recall with artists of the generation ahead of us, such as Rodney Graham and Jeff Wall, were about the crossover in themes between visual art and writing, particularly with Baudelaire and Raymond Roussel. With artists closer to my own position emergent at the time, let's say, there was a strong and informed curiosity and knowledge about poetry and its influence in Vancouver, so when I arrived in Vancouver in 1984 (after the liberal arts / art college I was going to was shut down), there was a tradition of poetry readings in the alternative spaces and artist-run galleries – and legendary readings, such as Kevin Davies at the Western Front or Peter Culley at Pumps were already part of a localised history. So energy in the poetry field was met with enthusiasm and curiosity – checking out what the poets were doing.

Another important intersection was the book as form and its extension to the artist's book. Here Dan Graham and Ed Ruscha's work was influential in making the book a form for artistic production (and not just negatively as a break out of the gallery space): so Jeff Wall's 1969 bookwork, *Landscape Manual*, can be seen as a shift toward both the book and an approach toward textuality that could be in a deeper dialogue with poetry. In this sense, I never had the impression that poetry was supplemental. Later, Nancy Shaw and Lisa Robertson collaborated on a sort of reply to Wall's book (which investigated the suburban edges of the city) with *A Sunday Drive*, which was a catalogue to an exhibition. So there was a dialogue and a history through the book as object and as project and, importantly, a consideration of the exhibition catalogue as a form in itself. Curators such as Cate Rimmer, Nancy Shaw, and Reid Shier opened catalogues up to poets who were eager to write about art using a critical vocabulary that would not have been accepted at more conservative literary journals. But the essay as poetic



Stan Douglas, *Abott & Cordova, 7 August 1971*.
Digital photograph. Permanent installation at Woodward's building, Vancouver, BC, 2010. Courtesy the artist.



Rodney Graham, *Locarno Beach Tree*, Winter 2007
228.6 x 185.4 x 5 cm / 90 x 73 x 2, courtesy the artist

form was also a very strong impulse and each catalogue was a major publishing event. Peter Culley, Lisa Robertson, Michael Turner and I continue to write about art, and certainly Peter and Lisa have written some catalogue essays that merge poetics and art writing in beautiful ways. This work continues today with younger writers like Lee Henderson, Aaron Peck, and Jacqueline Turner.

And, through the extensive network of artist-run centres and unofficial spaces and practices (from radio shows, cable TV shows, and one-off projects), the kind of collectivity that was structured into the cultural field in Vancouver made it easier for cross-practices to develop – from Intermedia, Pumps, The Western Front, Artspeak Gallery, The Or Gallery, The Pitt Gallery, The Kootenay School of Writing, and others.

As you can tell from my answer, I do feel the burden or responsibility of history here, as it was a dynamic scene with so many participants that no one, really, should be left out. Least of all the bars that were our places to meet and talk. Before the neoliberalization of Vancouver (beginning with Expo 86), the great hotel bars, and working-class bars and clubs provided a cheap place to gather, drink, and argue – The Marine Club, The Waldorf, The Princeton, The Archimedes Club: these are all places that were as important, and as discursive, as any gallery. In terms of your work on Frank O'Hara and coterie, you relate an account between O'Hara and Amiri Baraka around O'Hara's notion of 'Personism' that opened a space for discussion / argument, and from there you propose, "By dramatising both characters and cultural references operating, frequently, below 'public' radar, O'Hara could enter into a paradoxically public social discourse from a position often misunderstood as private."¹ This shifting between, or overlapping of the public and the private, in the case of the artists and writers scene we were developing, came just at the moment when the public sphere was being privatized, or the city itself being neoliberalized. As many artists and writers were dealing with a 'poetics of place' or a form of site-specificity (whether through visual representation or through a semiotic form),

there was a great publicness to these group formations. But the publicness I am thinking about is closer to Sven Lutticken's 'secret publicity': here is how he describes it in a recent reconsideration: "*Secret Publicity* is, after all, concerned with marginal forms of publicness, including that of secret societies such as Georges Bataille's *Acéphale*. While such initiatives are often highly problematic manifestations of political and cultural deadlocks, the imperative of maximum visibility, either for a 'general' audience or among a more narrowly defined group of peers and bureaucrats, is at least as problematic."² Given that to seek 'maximum visibility' meant to produce a certain kind of text or art, the publicness we were able to make or engage with was at the other pole: the publicness of alternative space, free readings, community cross-overs, and the publicness of bars, studios, and galleries and publications.

LS: Specifically, what did the artists get out of the dialogue with poets? Because it's more common to have poets a bit involved with art than it is for the reverse, as you seem to have had in Vancouver. Also, I wasn't trying to suggest that O'Hara's practice retained the categories of public and private and just mobilized the latter in the former. More that his writing explored the construction of the categories, and put pressure on the normative notions that underlie so many versions of publicness. So in that sense I'm in agreement with Lutticken – and happy to be alerted to his work.

JD: It was a particular time in the moment of critical theory and its relationship to cultural production, and aside from our energetic and non-academic readings of it, I think what both the writers and artists who were emerging at that time got out of it was an approach to theory that is productive rather than reductive. The emphasis on textuality (the influence of the textual turn) and the way that structuralism and post-structuralism were moving into poetry and conceptual art practices gave a bridge to the dialogue, and larger categorical shifts, such as post-modernism, opened up critical theory in a manner that was exhilarating – not just as a form of knowledge but as a discourse or even a practice. Perhaps a productive post-conceptual dialogue had opened up where our artistic works (and I mean both textual and visual) were discursive and, on the other side of it, we approached critical discourse with an artistic sensibility (even tending to read those dense texts as artistic production in their own right).

Last night, at the opening of Mina Totino's new show (great spatial paintings), I asked Stan Douglas what the artists got out of it – he simply said "people to talk about our work with." And this led not only to the shared reading, studio visits, or the reading of a draft version of a poem as a test run, but also to collaborations.

I do think what this mutual reading and thinking and hanging out did for both the artists and the writers was to give us an expanded sense of our practices and the knowledges that they are situated in: for instance, to think modernism/postmodernism through its conceptualizations in art *and* in literature (and recall the burning debate from Habermas to Jameson!). I think it created a sense that aesthetic and formal possibilities were available, even if it required a 'translation' from art to poetry, or vice versa.



Bik Van der Pol, *1440 minutes towards the development of a site*, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009, courtesy the artists.

LS: I've always understood you to have a commitment to the project as opposed to the poem – site-specific works, works that have long, serial structures, works that operate primarily at the scale of the book. How does your version of the 'project' relate to your interest in, involvement with, art and how does it relate to current debates about conceptualism in poetry?

JD: The scale of the book and seriality come from the influence of Jack Spicer (and ironically I'm now employed at the university he was to work for just before his death) and his subsequent influence on several generations of Canadian poets. So that influence is not from art, *per se*, although the idea of *project* is an interesting one to think as a replacement for *book* – in the sense that it can be seen as a project that takes the form of a book. Now that I collaborate with artists (in Urban Subjects), the book is no longer a given outcome. The show that we did with Bik Van der Pol at the Western Front last January, 'Learning From Vancouver', was, in some ways, an exhibition structured by a conjunctive poetics (and perhaps a weakness of the show was that it asked for a *reading*).

LS: Let me ask you a little more about the specific forms of exchange between artists and poets in Vancouver: you mention textuality. Do you think that the modular, experimental narratives in Stan Douglas' video work, for instance, have a significant relationship to the meta-narrative elements of recent poetry?

JD: I have spoken with Stan about this and, certainly, his approach to narrative was informed by the meta-narrative, and non-narrative impulses in people associated with KSW (as well as the Language poets) and other writers that he collaborated with (like Michael Turner). But I think it is also part of a tendency, in Stan's work, to treat language as a material aspect of the work: there is an equality of the pictorial and the linguistic.

LS: How would you contextualize conceptualism? What do we need to know from art history to have a better sense of which options, histories, critical modes might be in play in anything we want to call conceptual poetry?

JD: There are a lot of trajectories, impulses, and phases to pick out of conceptual art and conceptualism, and its history is still being written, in a sense. The recent shows of former East Block conceptual works I think have opened a kind of socially bound work that bounced off of the real social limitations set by the state and then later, the dissolution of the state. This is seen, for instance, in the work of IRWIN with its 'NSK State in Time' post-socialist works, or Sonja Ivekovic's *The Black File* from the 1970s, or Ion Grigorescu's series *Electoral Meeting, March 6, 1975*. Edit Andras has put it this way, in terms of institutional critique: "concerning Conceptual Art of the 1970s, the institutional critique, so inherent in the movement in its Western formations, was flexible enough to be converted into the critique of a Socialist regime in its Eastern variant, and to convey a coded political message, so it obviously became the most conscious device of the underground, countercultural force"³. I'm interested in this work because it did not see the gallery, the museum or the art object itself as the dominant field of intervention.

But, I would grasp four impulses within conceptual art as a way to lay a groundwork that a poetic conceptualism could be contextualized through: place-based; institutional critique; research/knowledge production; and affective structures. This selective list leaves out post-conceptual forms of new genre public art that works with community groups (such as Bik Van der Pol, Kobberling and Kaltwasser, *etc*), but that impulse to publicness is more difficult to attach to conceptualism as such. And I realise my own categorisations are idiosyncratic as well!

I realise you and I may approach place-based work in a different manner, and I've chosen this more geographical term than 'site-specific', but I do like the dialectical determinism (or mutually constitutiveness) that the term *place-based* implies, particularly from a Lefebvrian perception. So a work like Bik Van der Pol's *1440 minutes towards the development of a site* is a work that is place-based (despite its temporal title). In a park in Auckland, NZ, the Dutch collaborators Bik Van der Pol set up the conditions for a situation: in the 1970s, the park had been declared a 'free zone' by students at nearby Auckland University, and the artists sought to make a link between the 2007 electoral Finance Bill that restricted forms of speech in relation to political parties. The 'site' is the tension between the 2007 restrictions and the 1970s gesture of an open or free space. So I would see this as a place-based work as it is contingent on the politics of a particular place – at a number of scales.

More in line with photo-conceptualism, I have always found Rodney Graham's inverted tree works to be very effective images that draw attention to the material construction of an image (through a camera obscura) and the mechanics of vision, as well as works that point to how mechanical reproduction produces nature. In this sense, there's an interesting intertwining of the ideological discourse of nature, a conceptual framework of production, and the aesthetics of nature photos.

Secondly, institutional critique has been through many phases, and has generally been met by acceptance from institutions of all forms (and the forming of parodic institutions by artists). So the impulse of critique has to include the dialectic of absorption. Sven Lutticken has recently drawn out a harsh critique of New Institutionalism ("New Institutionalism was/is both an institutional practice and a form of discourse produced on, and often by, the institutions in question"). Lutticken writes:

New Institutions are seemingly places of great hybridity, which they are indeed as far as different academic and artistic disciplines are concerned; however, ultimately they represent a cheaper, more flexible, post-Fordist way of doing things.... Associated with notions such as knowledge production and artistic research, these New Institutions often end up producing a simulation of discourse and a parody of intellectual exchange.⁴

This represents the absorption or accommodation side of the dialectic very clearly (and within a specific political economy). Marina Grzinic has an even stronger critique of institutions since the 1970s (that is, after institutional critique): she sees the museum as continuously reflective of the relationship of power and capital, that it is not just a site of 'spectral power' as it was in the 1970s, but, "...the museum of 2000 is, in its constant assertion of its real power, definitively vulgar, cold, manipulative and almost deprived of any aura"⁵

But what of the other side – of the forming of counter institutions that are not reproductions of existing relations (and that do not necessarily aim at longevity)? There are many historical models to draw from, but I want to make a link with the Copenhagen Free University, which ran

from 2001 to 2007. On their website they announce: "We Have Won! The Copenhagen Free University has ceased its activities by the end of 2007" and I really like their enthusiasm for contingency. Like the original avant-garde impulse to move art into life, the CFU began with the transformation of domestic and collective space:

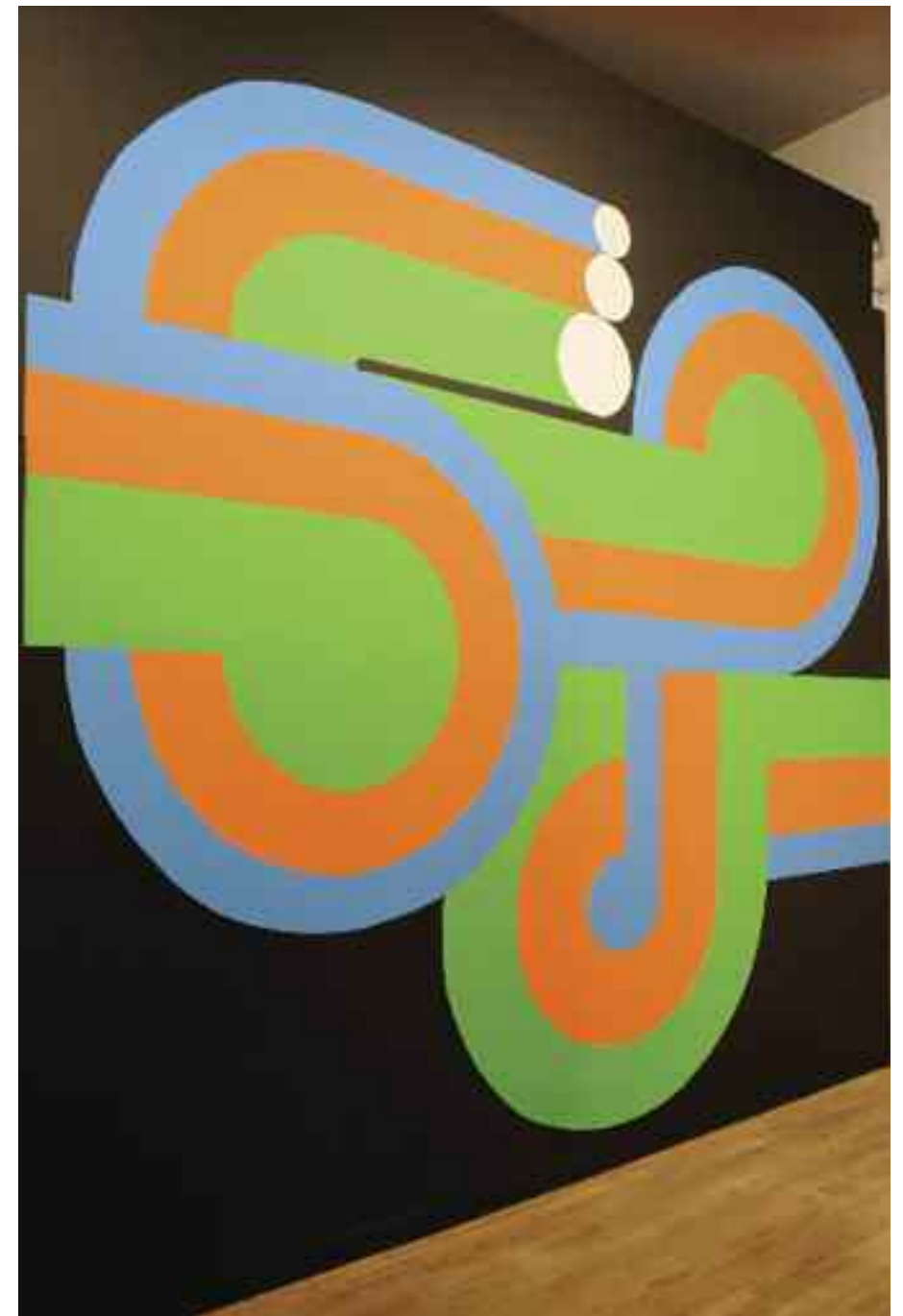
The Copenhagen Free University opened in May 2001 in our flat. The Free University is an artist run institution dedicated to the production of critical consciousness and poetic language. We do not accept the so-called new knowledge economy as the framing understanding of knowledge. We work with forms of knowledge that are fleeting, fluid, schizophrenic, uncompromising, subjective, uneconomic, acapitalist, produced in the kitchen, produced when asleep or arisen on a social excursion – collectively.⁶

The collective at CFU are aware of the traps that Lutticken lays out, and they are also critical of forms of post-Fordist knowledge production.

So, thirdly, the recent turn to research and knowledge production in visual art. In the description and context of a program of study initiated through the Vienna Academy of Art, "Art in the knowledge-based Polis," Tom Holert writes: "However useless the deployment of terms such as 'research' and 'knowledge' may seem, such uselessness is bound to a reading and deployment of the terms in a way that remains detached from the particular modes of discourse formation in art discourse itself. The moment one enters the archives of writing, criticism, interviews, syllabi, and other discursive articulations produced and distributed within the artistic field, the use of terms such as 'research' and discussion about the politics and production of 'knowledge' are revealed as fundamental to twentieth-century art – particularly since the inception of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s. After all, the modernists, neo- and post-avant-gardists aimed repeatedly at forms and protocols relating to academic and intellectual work – of research and publication, the iconography of the laboratory, scientific research, or think tanks."⁷

Tom Holert is describing the turn to research and 'education' within critical art and curatorial practices, but I think it accurately describes a method for grasping a present critical-conceptual tendency in North American poetry. Poetry as research is found, for instance, in Rachel Zolf's *Human Resources* which investigates the production of post-Fordist subjects and subjectivities by the language of management (taking the homology of language and social order beyond its structuralist impulse and into post-Fordist space); in a parallel text that builds upon research, Kevin Davies' *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia* enters the intensified media driven information sphere that is also productive of post-Fordist knowledges as they bore into and marinate our souls; and Donato Mancini's statistic-based texts freak out freakonomics by actually linking cause and effect within neoliberalism and its consumption patterns and excesses (as they try to erase the relations of production from view).

Whereas, 15 years ago I would say that avant-gardist texts were investigating the possibilities of language within a late-capitalist moment (pushed to the limit by Steve McCaffery), these texts I mention here are not about the possibilities of language as such, but are nonconformist productions of knowledge based on research methods drawn from scholarship and contemporary art. Or perhaps they are productions of knowledge equally as rigorous as any other form, but with a more parallax methodology, or a methodology that is more process-



Kinetic Emblem, wall painting, installation view, Urban Subjects, 'Learning from Vancouver', Western Front, Vancouver, 2010. Courtesy the artists.

based than generative of given and quantifiable 'outcomes'. In this sense there is also a troubling of use value. (Although, in an epilogue of a text on Dan Graham's work, Benjamin Buchloh cautions, "On the other hand, if artistic production gives up altogether the idea of use value, it abolishes its own inherent potential to cause dialectics within the reality of cultural history".⁸

This turn to research also has attachment to the type of documentary work that Allan Sekula has done (for instance in 'Fish Story').

The fourth impulse is less determinate (determined). But I am thinking of the seriality of Conceptual Art as the emphasis of the relationship of the structured and the lived, and of the determined and the affective. I'm thinking of the intense seriality in Hanne Darboven's work ("I build something up by disturbing something (destruction – structure-construction") or Christian Boltanski's seriality. Although there are many points of intersection between various moments of Conceptual Art and the poetic avant-garde since the late seventies, one instance where a productive tension arises is in the Conceptual premise of the dematerialization of the art object and the poetic avant-garde's materialization of language (from 'the word as such' to defamiliarization as a more political factor aiming to break the transparency of language). In 1995, art & language, in a small struggle over the historical reading of conceptual art, wrote:

Conceptual Art does not correspond *tout court* to some sort of linguistic practice. It does represent an appropriation of certain dialogic and discursive mechanisms by artists who sought thereby critically to empower themselves and others, and to that limited extent it represents a linguistic turn. But Conceptual Art did not reduce (or attempt to reduce) the pictorial to the linguistic (or textual). The point is, rather, that the gaps and connections, the dilemmas and absurdities between the pictorial and the textual, are spaces in which much cultural aggravation was and is possible. The eruption of the text into the cultural and historical space of the picture or the painting is an exemplary moment.⁹

The concept of a non-reductive textual turn, from a poetics point of view, and a view of 'the gaps and connections' between the textual and the pictorial is interesting. What is compelling is a dialogue, with 'cultural aggravation', between the textual and Conceptual Art. This would locate Conceptual Poetry as a tendency within the history of Conceptualism, rather than a new turn or a rupture with a poetics. Productively, if part of the project was to open the category of art, now we can approach poetry as an equally open category (with the advantages and pit-falls).

And for conceptual poetry I am interested in the possibilities of textual work rather than the limitations of poetry as a practice or as a cultural construct: that is, I would not want to substitute 'poetry' for 'the gallery' and then turn to Conceptual Art as a way to address the limitations of poetry. To do this would be to follow what Jeff Wall argues Dan Graham critiqued in his *Alteration to a Suburban Home*: "In developing the *Alteration* project, Graham begins from a distressed recognition of conceptualism's failure of its own aim, which was to rebuild art from its core onward".¹⁰ Wall essentially gives a strong materialist reading of conceptual art in which its utopian impulse to transcend the commodity form does not react to the intensification of art world speculation driven by the inflation of the 1970s, hence its utopianism (which Wall says carries some value) led to 'disillusionment' and to a sort of mirror of production where the



Herbert Marcuse at Simon Fraser University, 1968, Urban Subjects, 'Learning from Vancouver', Western Front, Vancouver, 2010. Photograph on silver paper, Courtesy the artists.

art is “involuntarily expressive of its own self-conscious immobilization before the forms of power it is compelled to confront”¹¹ which holds, in the negative, “certain significant preconditions for the development of revolutionary ideas in society.”¹² For Wall (at that time), the project of conceptualism is incomplete.

If that project of conceptualism does remain incomplete, how can it be engaged with (under different yet similar social-economic conditions) by poetry today?

LS: I’m in agreement with your four categories, which seem to me to overlap often (not in an incoherent way, but in important ways), since, for instance, most powerful research-based, site-specific or institution critique projects also explore affect, and vice versa. And there are, of course, other overlaps. I wonder what you think of this as a possible common denominator among several of the strands you articulate: that conceptual art (like conceptual poetry) anatomizes the social, epistemological and aesthetic presuppositions of its context, with context understood not in some self-evidently empirical way, but rather as open to debate/discussion. You suggest that we have, in a sense, naturalised this inquiry at the three primary scales of art object, gallery and museum; so that what Eastern Block conceptualism does is extend the scale of this to the state in a productive way. What about the scales at which poetics engage these contexts? Does it happen solely within the knowledge production/research model, or within the other three as well? I would say, for instance, that one of the major ‘contexts’ a poetics of research can investigate is an historiographic one that isn’t just about place or site, but also about the history/social implications of one’s own discipline. Where would you situate that kind of practice?

JD: That use of an historiographical investigation or research on a genre is also at work in the current rewriting of conceptualism – to the point where Conceptualism is a more floating form. For instance, the anthology *Art After Conceptual Art* that the Generali Foundation here in Vienna did is precisely research into the limitations and possibilities of situated conceptual practices. This involves the particular project of opening the history of conceptualism to practices from Eastern Europe that Vienna has been the site of, to bringing the history of other disciplines/aesthetics and how they intersect within conceptualism (for instance Helmut Draxler, in that volume, that the history of institutional critique has to be thought of alongside the history of design). Maybe then we can think of that impulse (to rethink one’s own discipline and practice) as a meta-historical project as well. Or, within an avant-garde frame, every avant-gardist gesture implies some rethinking/reconfiguration of the discipline or field.

But your question also proposes an interesting rethinking in itself. First, could conceptual poetry be used as a *research* project that could double-back and rewrite/open up the history of conceptualism? In the same way that Draxler proposes that design needs to be looked at to understand the trajectory of institutional critique, can conceptualism be rethought more thoroughly in terms of its relation to poetics: at the moment (this moment of the opening/refiguring of the history of conceptualism), conceptualism tends to be tied to the philosophy of language (particularly Wittgenstein), but in a more dialogic relationship of conceptual art and conceptual poetry, the poetry from today can start a rethinking of the historical relationship of conceptual art (from the sixties forward).



Installation view, mediated photograph wallpaper, Urban Subjects, _Learning from Vancouver_, Western Front, Vancouver, 2010. Courtesy the artists

But perhaps where the relationship of conceptual art and conceptual poetry starts to get murkier is around on the key aspect of conceptual art – institutional critique. I am aware of conceptual poetry turning its discursive and formal critique toward the *institution of poetry* (often addressing the limitations of poetry as a field), but I do not know of much conceptual poetry that takes on institutions at another scale – or at least does so as a declared project. The conceptual poetry that I find most compelling is work that, through a compositional/ conceptual device, allows a social logic to come into view. So, as you suggest, context is not self-evident empirically, rather context is a historical texture as well as a set of relations in the present; but this is a set of relations that does not end with a given determination but takes shape in more unpredictable and nongiven ways. In some sense, then, some of the strongest conceptual poetry makes the construction of social logics and the social production of knowledge come to light (let’s say) through its intervention – an intervention at the level of conceptualization.

1 Lytle Shaw Frank O'Hara: *The Poetics of Coterie* University of Iowa Press. 2006

2 <http://fillip.ca/content/once-more-on-publicness-a-postscript-to-secret-publicity>

3 Edit Andres, “Transgressing boundaries (even those marked out by the predecessors). New genre contemporary art” in Alexander Alberro, Sabath Buchmann, *Art After Conceptual Art*, Cambridge: The MIT Press: 2006, 165

4 <http://fillip.ca/content/once-more-on-publicness-a-postscript-to-secret-publicity>

5 Marina Grzinic, “Does contemporary art need museums anymore?” *Situated Contemporary Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe*, Frankfurt / Ljubljana: Revolver / Zalozba ZRC: 2004, 112

6 <http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/infouk.html>

7 www.e-flux.com/journal/view/40

8 Benjamin Buchloh, “Moments in History in the Work of Dan Graham” in Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge MAS / London: The MIT Press: 2000, 376 - 381

9 art & language, “We aimed to be amateurs,” in Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 442 - 448

10 Jeff Wall, “Dan Graham’s *Kammerspiel*,” in Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 504 - 513

11 Ibid, 511

12 Ibid, 512

Lytle Shaw: When we first talked about *Notes on Conceptualism* I told you I had some reservations about your account of appropriation. It was as if what you and Vanessa Place were taking as the cutting edge of contemporary practice was not distinguishable, for me anyway, from the central ideas of appropriation art of the Pictures Generation of the late 1970s, and the media arts more generally. My take on this was not that appropriation shouldn't be part of contemporary practice, but that (a) it had been diffused enough into culture, in both cliché and interesting versions, that it couldn't be taken any longer as an *a priori* value, and (b) this meant that we had to be willing to address the more complex questions of exactly where and how a poetics of appropriation worked within a larger project – what it did, what it allowed us to think, to see. And this goes to one of the points that came up in our discussions at the Columbia Rethinking Poetics Conference. I was arguing that 'concepts' and 'procedures' (and here we could include appropriation under this banner) became valuable not as transportable things in themselves, but as tools for reading situations or contexts – both in the more immediate social world, and in the recent past of the arts. These are two inescapable components, to my mind, of the frame that a conceptual practice sets up for itself. You didn't have a chance to respond to that then, so I wanted to start this discussion by asking you to respond to this string of critiques and propositions.

Then, partly to substantiate the first part of the last question, the terms of the discussion of appropriation in the 1970s, I wanted to ask you to respond to a quote from Susan Sontag from her 1973–1977 *On Photography*. Basically I just want you to, based on what I've said above, differentiate your own position from the one she identifies with the media arts back then. Here's the quote:

Superseding the issue of whether photography is or is not an art is the fact that photography heralds (and creates) new ambitions for the arts. It is the prototype of the characteristic direction taken in our time [1973-1977] by both the modernist high arts and the commercial arts: the transformation of arts into meta-arts or media. (Such developments as film, TV, video, the tape-based music of Cage, Stockhausen, and Steve Reich are logical extensions of the model established by photography.) The traditional fine arts are elitist: their characteristic form is a single work, produced by an individual; they imply a hierarchy of subject matter in which some subjects are considered important, profound, noble, and others unimportant, trivial, base. The media are democratic: they weaken the role of the specialised producer or *auteur* (by using procedures based on chance, or mechanical techniques which anyone can learn; and by being corporate or collaborative efforts); they regard the whole world as material. The traditional fine arts rely on the distinction between authentic and fake, between original and copy, between good taste and bad taste; the media blur, if they do not abolish outright, these distinctions. The fine arts assume that certain experiences of subjects have a meaning. The media are essentially contentless ... their characteristic tone is ironic, or dead-pan, or parodistic. It is inevitable that more and more art will be designed to end as photographs. A modernist would have to rewrite Pater's dictum that all art aspires to the condition of music. Now all art aspires to the condition of photography.

Rob Fitterman: Historically, poetry has not had a parallel moment to Appropriation Art / Pictures Generation of the seventies. We have had moments of appropriation (collage or sampling) that may aim to disrupt or complicate the authority of the author, but very little that we might identify as a poetic equivalent to the ready-made, where large chunks of texts are taken whole and poured into new contexts in order to generate meaning. This tendency or trend of working with large chunks of unmodified found texts might not be 'new' but it is a current conversation in innovative poetry both here and abroad. One of the most common critiques of Conceptual Poetry is that this conversation already took place some fifty years ago and that poetry's late response is typical of its slow-footedness. I would argue that this new versus old critique is irrelevant. In one way, the strategies of Conceptual Art become useful as poets combine cut 'n' paste technology with a response to the informational morass of the web, but in another way, the synchronicity around these conversations and the enthusiasm that might gather steam is less than scientific or predictable.

This takes us to your Sontag quote, also nearly forty years old. But I think the quote is as relevant today (for our discussion about Conceptual Poetry) as it was when it was written. A simple exchange of the word 'Internet' for the word 'photography' would go a long way. In fact, I had that experience when reading Flusser's *Towards A Philosophy of Photography*. He writes: "[Technical images] cannot reduce culture, as was intended, to the lowest common denominator but, on the contrary, they grind it up into amorphous masses. Mass culture is the result." Flusser – like Sontag, Berger, Buchloh, and Benjamin before them – points to this same 'media is democratic' assertion where the concept of 'original' art works is challenged. For sure, that's a dialogue that both of our works contribute to. But in experimental poetry in the US, the conversation that Sontag is pointing to never gained much footing. It might come closest in early Ashbery (eg *The Skaters*) where the poet overlaps the original with the found in order to engage with this dialectic of the original versus the found or fake, but L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writing takes up other worthy and complex arguments that are relevant to the seventies and eighties. What I'm getting at is that it isn't until the new technologies of network culture that poets revisit, as a larger conversation, these issues of originality, appropriation and conceptualism.

LS: My point about the Pictures Generation is not that because this happened artistically appropriation will never again be relevant, effective, compelling. No, not at all. I see the process of circling back (with a difference) on previous cultural, artistic movements as often producing extremely interesting results: Koolhaas had to reengage modernism from a new angle to find a way for himself out of bland eclectic post-modernism; artists do this all the time when they immerse themselves in historical languages of image-making, and bring them back into play in the present, with a difference (Karen Kilimnik, Komar and Melamid, Yinka Shonibare are just a few of many examples) – and I think Lisa Robertson's work could at times be described in similar terms via poetry history. One distinction between those instances and what you're talking about is that appropriation is much closer to us historically. Another is that in all my examples there's a crucial difference between the first and later iterations: Koolhaas, for instance, couldn't just state in 1995: "I believe in modernism." He had to reengage it from a new angle. That's what I mean about *a priori* value; sure there's lots of potential value in appropriation, but how will it be drawn out, how will it be activated? What frames, terms, claims, spins need to be in play to allow appropriation to have traction now?

RF: These are all great questions and, to be somewhat reductive, they all point to a similar question for me: why conceptualism, why now? As I have argued elsewhere, the new technological advances in micro-media and the web of the last two decades are largely language-based and the response to these technologies through cut 'n' paste and appropriation strategies is obvious – not only as a response, but also as an expanded tool set. We see a similar development in Pop Art where the visual vocabularies from TV, advertising, and Hollywood films encouraged artists to respond. For poets, we have perhaps another dimension to our response because our tool set is directly influenced by these new technologies (is there a parallel to Judd, Smithson, plastics?). Pre-1980s appropriation often meant collage – using bits of found language in one's composition. I remember doing this myself and even though the new technology of word processing allowed for cut 'n' paste, it was still a slow process of reading and re-working found materials. With the Internet all of this changes, of course. Now poets and writers can lift large chunks of language without retyping *and* without even reading the lifted material closely. Suddenly, moving around large chunks of language becomes a way to work and the shift from content is obvious. Content (or even prosody?) becomes something else, something that has to negotiate the containers and the re-filling of texts. Conceptual art practices, as such, become not only useful to this process, but also organic. In other words, once the poet starts to shift her attention to this kind of culling and orchestrating process, there is a significant shift from materiality to conceptualism. Of course, this is the same in Duchamp – since the ready-made, appropriation and conceptualism have been compatible bedfellows. The brand name, *Conceptual Poetry* (and I prefer Conceptual Poetry to Conceptual Writing because of its insistence on this work being 'poetry' and not being dismissed as some other medium so as to dodge potential destabilising) has flaws of course, but it also is general enough to encompass several strategies far afield both here and abroad (this has been the case so far). I've grown to appreciate that it is a label and that I like labels. Having come of age as a poet in the eighties and nineties, there was a long stretch of time when L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing was the primary movement of the avant-garde and an equally long time when there was no collectivity around a younger movement to replace it. At first I thought this was good – "hurrah, no labels, man!" As if there was some virtue in being a free-agent artist. But now I believe that these movements (and whatever labels they carry) are crucial to both dialogue and intervention. The conversations are larger than the individual works and I think this is good. Other self-named movements with their brands will either create a context for a dialogue themselves or they will seem eccentric and insular... what kind of conversations are we having today around The Unbearables or the Brooklyn Brutalists or Analytic Lyric? The term Conceptual Poetry casts a wide net to include practices that invite radical texts and radical reading strategies by using appropriated language in normative syntactical structures. That's a dramatic shift from Modernism and deconstruction. As you and I have discussed for many years, your own writing not only fits under this rubric, but it is far closer to the centre than to the fringes. You're working with appropriation on the level of identity, documentation, archiving, *etc.*, with a radical artifice that highlights the historical 'drama' of the borrowing. Of course, I understand how one might say that the way in which this branding has come about is not the only conversation and that there are other ways to think about or take ownership of these new tendencies in poetry. Fair enough, but the Conceptual Poetry terms and framing have already set in motion a conversation – or so I have argued elsewhere – and I think that there is a lot of space to expand the conversation. That's my interest and endorsement for the branding. There are several poets whose work, indeed, could

be included in this 'branding' but they wish not to. I respect that entirely. The question, I think, is whether or not a poet feels that her work will be benefitted by being read in conjunction with a particular group, as part of a larger dialogue. That sort of context-building isn't for everyone. I'm interested in expanding how the term Conceptual Poetry is used to define new writing practices, but the politics of inclusion and exclusion are a whole other chapter. Where does this lead to, where is this momentum taking us? I can't tell, but I think that your Sontag quote is as good a guess as any.

LS: Okay, my objection is neither generally to naming a movement as a form of branding nor specifically to the term conceptual poetry. While there are problems with it as a term (how will it distinguish itself from conceptual art of forty years earlier *etc.*?), just about any term that catches on for a movement has some kind of problem like that. But such designations do serve a focusing function, or what you're calling the function of conversation. And so I agree – both based on looking out at the present, and in thinking historically – that those people who are associated with movements but deny group affiliations and labels (based on ideas about their absolute individuality) are misunderstanding something fundamental about how poetry history and art history work. The question, rather, is what conceptual poetry will have designated beyond a group of writers. That's precisely the question I'm trying to pose in this series of conversations for Printed Project. I definitely see my own work as enabled, propelled by that generative moment of confusion in the late 1960s in which it became unclear whether language was moving into the domain of art or vice versa; and in that sense I feel affinity to the name conceptual poetry. But I would also like the term to be associated both with the actual range of practices that emerges out of that moment and with the politics those practices enable. And I don't see that so far in how you're framing it. So here's the core of it. You write: "The term Conceptual Poetry casts a wide net to include practices that invite radical texts and radical reading strategies by using appropriated language in normative syntactical structures". What counts as 'radical' in this formulation is solely a function of a procedure, independent of context. But procedures aren't radical in themselves. They only become so when effectively framed or sited. Here I mean by each individual work in its choice of raw materials and understanding of how they might be processed or re-situated. So this is why I think appropriation only becomes meaningfully 'conceptual' (and ultimately valuable) when it helps one analyse or read actual sites – from the empirical to the discursive, including (but certainly not limited to) the history and institution of poetry itself. (You do this yourself frequently in your work, as in your poem that anatomizes the things poets say in their performances, and therefore the institution of the poetry reading).

My other concern is that appropriation itself isn't actually that wide a net. It doesn't even include works ostensibly at the core of the conceptual canon, like *Fidget*, *Soliloquy*, *Eunoia* or *The Tapeworm Foundry*. And while the work we do for The Chadwicks does involve borrowed identities and histories, it also exceeds pure appropriation (for reasons I'd be happy to describe). And so does the work of many, many other writers I would argue are fundamental to any current moment we could designate as 'conceptual', including Lisa Robertson, Kasey Mohammad, Kent Johnson, Jeff Derksen and Heriberto Yepez – to name a few. In the past when I've argued a writer like one of those above who isn't using pure appropriation should be considered 'conceptual'; you've said that he or she "isn't really part of the conversation". But which conversation? Is a movement that accepts appropriation as a given actually a 'conversation', or is it a practice?

RF: I don't think there's any 'given' about appropriation or conceptual writing moves. On the contrary, I feel like there's a battle being waged every step of the way. There's resistance from mainstream poetry, of course, but also from many experimental poets who find the 'unoriginal' or 'conceptual' positioning deeply disenfranchising. Where I think we have a misunderstanding is in the poet's choice of whether or not to be involved. I would not make a claim that if someone is not doing 'pure appropriation' that she is not in the conversation. In fact, in *Notes On Conceptualisms*, Vanessa and I organise our ideas around a spectrum of conceptual writing practices that range from the ready-made to sampling in appropriation, and also constraint-based works, documentation, procedural, etc. And there is no hierarchy of 'better' conceptual writing inherent in these strategies. For me, all of the poets you mention above (with the exception of Kent Johnson who is actively oppositional to my community) could certainly be included in this conversation, but would they want to be? This is the point that needs clarification on both of our ends: there can be several conversations about relevant poetics today, and Conceptual Poetry is just one of those conversations. Not everyone is interested in being included. When you say "which conversation" I'm not sure what you're getting at. There's certainly a healthy and rigorous dialogue going on about Conceptual Poetry as evidence by anthologies, publications, conferences and dialogues here and abroad.

This leads to your important and pressing question about the *framing* of these conversations and the politics implications therein. Yes, I agree, it is the frame or the context that is built around these ideas that gives these works their political reach. To overstate my case, I would argue that these 'frames' place this conversation squarely in the centre of many other conversations happening in an intellectual arena about appropriation, plagiarism, copyleft, identity theft, etc. And that involvement or contribution, for my money, is a political act. In terms of the art of poetry more specifically, I hope that these works and the frames that support these works can push poets to rethink their relationship to materiality or at least to expand the poet's toolset to include a non-hierarchical relationship to using both original and found texts.

LS: First, let me say that I can see the importance of overstatements – they focus and clear the field: they provide a situation or frame. And so I can hear what you're saying about materiality of language now in relation to what you said earlier about appropriation (though I have really no objection to the materiality claim). And the objection that I have to the appropriation claim is not that we all need to be perfect, infinitely patient historians (as if that were productive or possible!) and understand the totality of the past in all of its complexity. No way: we have to squint and focus in order to act. My point is only that if we're going to organise contemporary poetry around one term, let's get a more capacious one – or rather, let's just define conceptual poetry or conceptual writing around a slightly broader platform without a single procedural term at its centre. Also, as you know from my writing about your work, I actually see it as in fact providing quite a bit of contextualization for its appropriations – a kind of 'architecture' that's like an installation. And this seems very different from many versions of Flarf. So what's interesting about our previous exchange is that the platform you're developing seems to be in tension at least with my take on what's particularly important about the architecture of a book like *Metropolis XXX*. And of course I could be wrong. So I guess one question would be to just ask you to elaborate on the extent to which you see the architecture or installation-like quality of a book like *Metropolis XXX* as a kind of frame or context for appropriation. Maybe we just

backed into the topic from the wrong direction? Still, it would be helpful to me if you could elaborate on the contours of what you see as the conversation around Conceptual poetry – how/where do disagreement and dialogue occur? Is this interview part of it? Or does it only happen elsewhere?

RF: I imagine that texts like the one we're making here DO, in fact, contribute to a larger conversation about Conceptual Poetry. The term and the conversations surrounding it are still in infancy, so I don't really imagine a conversation happening 'elsewhere'. I don't think there are many poets who would identify themselves with this term but feel alienated by the conversations swelling up around it. Still, when the term comes up at conferences, etc – championed or trashed – one usually knows who is being referred to – it isn't, say, Lisa Robertson or Rodrigo Toscano – and that's not because they don't have works with a 'conceptual' flavour, they do. It's because, again, they might not wish to identify themselves with the group of poets who are defining, promoting, furthering this term. For myself, I'm interested in larger conversations as a context for my own work. I tend to gravitate towards compelling conversations. This is the historically consistent for poetry – these conversations are generated by groups of individuals who strive to find common ground even when the common ground is not so common. The 'contours' of this conversation are broad both geographically (especially in Scandinavia) and generationally (especially poets in their late twenties).

I've been thinking over the last few weeks about how Installation Art and other conversations in visual art have influenced my work in the last twenty years and I find I have very little to say about this critically, it seems more personal, and by personal I mean personal growth as a thinker and culture-maker. The conversations happening in visual art in the 1990s uprooted my own ideas that were borrowed from experimental modernism. I became interested in renegotiating my relationship to objects via language (both found and 'authentic') as a way of seeing the world around me. I was in the middle of my *Metropolis* project, so this challenge was especially compelling. Installation, dejecta, debris... I was interested in ideas about inundation and overload and how that would play out in a text-based work. The connective tissue from Language Writing was important here (especially in Andrews) but I was interested in how to translate the use of everyday objects / language from the world as *representation*; ie if I wanted to get at this kind of dejecta, I would need to 'borrow' this language directly. So my cut 'n' paste, appropriation practice was pre-internet in those earlier pieces. In *Metropolis XXX*, I was interested in constructing a frame that might challenge the book of poetry context. In other words, I borrowed some ideas from installation art about building a context for the objects, so as not to rely on a predetermined context (ie 'poetry'). The mapping of objects/language as commodities gets replayed for me in borrowed online consumer and corporate texts. This appropriation points to a range of conversations, for me, about compromise, failure, bankruptcy, etc. A lot of this is in the framing itself, and that might be one way to talk about 'installation' in conceptual poetry.

Lytle Shaw: I want to ask you, first, an impossibly broad question which I will then narrow down into excruciating specificity: how does your work relate to language? Language has obviously made massive and various inroads into art since the 1960s (or maybe it didn't make new inroads exactly, so much as it revealed the already existent but unacknowledged ways that the would-be discrete, autonomous category of visual experience was already bound up in language?). In any case, what has changed since the eruption of language into the field of the visual arts 'with the high moment of conceptual art in the late 1960s and early 1970s? What's different about what's erupting where now?

Gerard Byrne: My mind has gone blank. Eh. The historical and foundationalist bent to the question leads me back to my formative encounters with artistic practice as a student in the late eighties and nineties. At that point Post-Structuralism was still new and very sexy in Anglophone universities. The art schools I attended seemed to divide habitually between those like me who were drawn towards these new ideas, and those conservatives who reactively formulated ideas of art as the other of the linguistic, *ie* expressive, but not in terms of language. I can only approximate their position, which I guess hinged around ideas of an artistic sublime; a state of grace that could not be described in language. At that point I was bullishly adamant that those people had to either be naifs or old farts. In hindsight I see that the totalising character of Post-Structuralism, at least in the still rather fresh and semi-digested form in which I absorbed it, may have led me to prematurely dismiss studio practices which I felt were based on bogus ideas of pre-linguistic self-expression. Ultimately, the point is that students in many art schools around that time were presented with a choice to either reconcile the implications of Post-Structuralism in their formulation of artistic practice, or to feign obliviousness. A coherent non-reactionary critique of Post-Structuralism didn't appear to be readily available. Whilst my own work is indelibly marked by that previous partisan commitment to the linguistic turn via Post-Structuralism, for quite a while now I've been very interested in those 'backwards' and debased practices I kicked against in art school. I guess I now recognise that art schools are basically about validating as cultural signifiers those states of being; crudeness, indeterminacy, and illegibility.

But in trying to actually address your follow-up questions about what has changed since Conceptualism, I would have to say the making over of culture in the image of the Media Industry has been the single most significant shift and has profoundly changed the idea of what constitutes the cultural field for artists. In the context of your question, which at least holds out a possibility of art without language, I would say that the increasingly pervasive instrumentalisation of representation as a tool of the commodification of all facets of life has increased exponentially in a very consequential way over the past forty – fifty years via electronic media. The de-skilling strategies which were so central to the aesthetic ploys of Conceptualism highlight precisely how assimilated we are now to the means of production of media. If Conceptualism can be characterised as both a disavowal of the conventions of the



Gerard Byrne. *Route à la Campagne. Un Arbre. Soir. Au virage de la départementale qui relie Roussillon à Gargas, entre les Clos de l'Urbane et Les Bourgues.* 2006-ongoing, C-type Print

artists' means of production – dispensing with studios, skills, the production of art objects *etc*, and simultaneously an appeal to the singularity of communication in the face of an burgeoning Media Industry (*eg* postcards, telegrams, spoken word forms), that contrasts starkly with contemporary laptop-porting artists who benefit from the *democratization* of said means of production, as trumpeted by digital proselytizers. The consequence is a regime of (re-) production, and with it a certain pressure towards legibility in a pervasive mediascape, which affects how audiences understand art, and weighs on all of us practitioners, not least the abstract painters amongst us. Even their works are characterizable in sound-bites by gallerists at art fairs, and as such often appeal far more efficiently to a register of market legibility than supposed media-reflexive practices like mine.

LS: Then I want to ask you about the more specific subset of language that's within the category of the literary. Now we have infinite numbers of works that are 'inspired' by literature. This can be banal; it can be interesting – it can be any number of things. But there's a bit less work (though still a lot) that actually works in close, somewhat systematic relation to literature.

And so I'm thinking here of your photographs based on Beckett's description of the set for *Waiting for Godot*; about your restaging of plays by Pinter in your work in Leeds – and there are other examples. What's your relation to literature in these works? How do you recode it? How does it help you get involved with specific places or sites? What kind of a 'site' is literature itself?

GB: Well as you perceptively identify, in certain works of mine I've tried to address Literature as a quantifiable, distinct field, a paradigm. My interest in Literature is as a historically determined cultural form. My approach as such is quite distinct from many of my artistic peers who have a predilection towards obscurantist interests within the literary. Instead I've routinely worked with the obvious, canonical reference points, perhaps counter-intuitively, as a means of evading *being* literary; a non-identification, if you will. I am interested in working with Literature without becoming subject to the condition of 'Literariness' – I think we've known since Barthes that the camera is illiterate, and that makes its gaze compelling in relation to Literature.

The best examples of this might be the photographs you reference in your question, each of which shares a title format beginning *A country road. A tree. Evening...* followed by a rambling prose approximation of the exact physical site of each photograph. Each photograph is a reiteration of the archetypal site invoked in *Godot*. I have located and photographically staged each iteration of that archetypal scene in concrete locations biographically connected to Beckett. In using very synthetic, theatrical lighting in an attempt to de-naturalise the otherwise untouched rural space, I'm trying to alienate the camera's anthropomorphising viewpoint from a default naturalisation of its subject. The Brechtian terminology is handy here. For me the project is all about enacting the 'promise' of Literature – by which I mean the promise of an actuality beyond the text. Photographs are set up as a site of both fulfillment and dissolution of the promise, with the *evidentiary* authority of the photographic image countering the authority of Literary *significance*. By couching the project in reference to Beckett, I am siting the project in relation to the least singular, most paradigmatic of Literary works – I'm interested in invoking the generalized condition as opposed to the singular treasure. The fact that drama specifically requires a form of actualisation beyond the text which always nonetheless remains subsidiary to the text is of course very important too within this project. Suffice to say, the other works you cite share something of an affinity with the method I've just outlined.

LS: Can you say something about the special variety of only moderately 'literary' language one finds in Playboy interviews, for which you seem to have a particular fondness. And you've turned me onto it too! You've talked about those articles in terms of how they were widely disseminated – seemingly 'timely' at the time – but then always just a little bit off the radar, slightly forgotten, at the moment you reengage with them. Why is drama the appropriate way of interfacing with this language, this temporality?

GB: My arrival at those only moderately 'literary' texts – particular genres of journalism and copy-writing, came about back in grad school by a combination of accident and design. I wanted to work with actors, because I was interested in acting as a particularly idiosyncratic medium of reproduction, but I did not want to work with drama. Being a post-structuralist (as I



Gerard Byrne. *A country road. A tree. Evening. The road to Glencullen between Glendoo and Tibbradden Mountain, Dublin Mountains.* 2006-ongoing, C-type Print

was at the time) I couldn't countenance all those associations with 'the human condition' that seemed to be what drama was all about. I was on Cape Cod, staying in a summer rental, and it was raining that day. Bored, I stumbled upon a three-page 'infomercial' for the Chrysler Imperial, in an old issue of National Geographic from November 1980. Working with the text opened up meaningful ways of tracking the values and ideals of mainstream identification from the recent past, which seemed deeply uncanny at just a modest temporal remove. Actualising the text (a synthetic 'conversation' between Frank Sinatra and Lee Iacocca about the car America needs) in a very rough way that fluctuated between naturalism and Brechtian alienation sometimes within the same frame, produced a resonant return of the repressed – of consumptive desires and identifications past. The subsequent magazine works, including those which reference Playboy magazine, have each been attempts to further test and extend the relationship generated between the mainstream that magazines construct, recent history, shoddy dramatic realisation and collective memory. A hope of mine is that the exhibited works manage to confront their viewers within the present, with a dissonant recent present, countering prevailing narratives of contemporaneity. Finally, to more directly address the last part of your question –

I've gravitated towards using drama to address the contexts you raise, because of the palpable sense of contingency that pervades drama. For my ideal viewer, drama is never quite convincing, it raises doubts. That irresolvable character always feels appropriate for my purposes.

LS: Can you talk about the status of 'drama' in your reading of minimalism. What happens when you take that charge, Fried's charge, literally? What is it about literalization that fascinates you?

GB: I think the last part of your question produces the answer to the previous parts. For one thing, literalization – taking a text at its word, is a recourse on my part to a critical – methodical approach to the text which is clearly distinct from, for example, 'interpretive' or 'associative' readings. As outlined above, the work of mine we have been discussing here often uses the photographic image as a



Gerard Byrne. *A thing is a hole in a thing it is not*
2010, Multiple Films. Duration Variable.

means of 'testing' a text. Given my interest in dramatization as a type of critical tool, as well as an interest in the discursive character of Minimalism, the debate around Fried's critique of Minimalism and theatricality has never been far from my concerns. I suppose my recent project, 'A thing is a hole in a thing it is not', could be characterised as an attempt to test the experiential hypothesis of Minimalism at the core of Fried's argument, using a film camera as the universal embodied 'subject'. Rather than join the back of a long line of commentators and arbitrators who have weighed into the debate Fried's text established over forty years ago, the project involves using the syntax of filmic depiction to re-engage the debate outside the long-established Art historical terms of the debate.

LS: You mention the production of contemporaneity: we were just talking about this when we spoke in New Hampshire. One of the received forms of the contemporary is a thematic topicality: war, violence, oppression. As terrible as these realities are, much art feels satisfied with its own contemporaneity by just referencing these, rather than, say, producing new thinking around or in relation to them. Another form is what we might call technological: art or writing that believes that the essence of our own moment is its relation to technology and in particular the digital – so that referencing this is similarly seen as providing not just access to, but the ultimate horizon of, the now. Why (if you agree that these are) do we believe that these are some of the privileged signifiers of the contemporary? What is a better way to understand how a work might be of its moment?

GB: Terrible times indeed, Lytle. Terrible times indeed. I think as we stood chatting, semi-naked, in that lake in New Hampshire, we concurred that there is a trope in contemporary art practice that claims some hierarchy of currency, some privileged access to contemporaneity, by referencing the political, or current affairs, or whatever term you want to use to characterise what the Media industry peddle as a McGuffin while selling advertising. And one could be equally jaundiced about the implications of new technology – of course the most essential relation there is one of consumption rather than contemporaneity. Simply mirroring the image of 'contemporaneity' manufactured by business interests for consumption via the usual means (exchange value) is not a particularly critically productive position. Temporal discordance – ie being at odds with the prevailing image of contemporaneity, is more interesting to me.

The real dilemma for me is to delineate what is possible and what is desirable within the means of contemporary art structures. What's clear to me at least is that to choose to picture the political, or to have some form of political intentionality guarantees nothing in terms of political efficacy, because political efficacy is, by definition, formed between people, situations, communities etc etc. It's not contrived in a test tube, a studio or on a Macbook Pro. With some very notable exceptions, very few of the artistic practices that pass for 'politically engaged' within the art system have any political legibility beyond the closed loop of the art system. As such, we can acknowledge a sort of micro-politics at work, but really, how important can that be? Much of the time I feel that curators and institutions make grandiose claims for the societal – political import of specific contemporary practices, because it reads well for their funders who like the sense that their investment has immediately worthy and tangible effect. After a while, people start to buy their own rhetoric, of course. Of course, in the generalised sense, art

and politics and the technological are deeply entwined to the point where they may be one and the same thing, but the ubiquitous strain of rhetoric your question touches on is fundamentally deceptive.

Returning to the question – given my tone of circumspection above, I feel much more liberated artistically by courting the life-sciences perspective on art – that art is necessarily subject to historical conditions, whatever its sense of reflectivity of those conditions. As such, I'm currently musing on the idea that each artwork is both subject to the regimes of temporality within which it persists, and an exception to any definition of temporality that might be applied to it. 'Contemporaneity', proposed as some sort of positive attribute of an artwork, seems to presume a deeply uncritical idea of currency – one that wholeheartedly identifies with the hegemonic order of temporality.

And finally, an addendum – I recently saw the Henri Cartier-Bresson show at MOMA, in the context of seeing the Abramovich retrospective, the Whitney Biennale, and Greater New York at PS1. In that context of institutions aggressively defining contemporaneity within art, the Cartier-Bresson show should have yielded the very widely-held perception of him as an archetypal Modernist, willfully detached from, or ahead of, his time – perennially chasing decisive moments. Well, I once heard William Klein observe, the decisive moment in Cartier-Bresson is a critical fiction, a technical impossibility given the Leica camera Cartier-Bresson famously used does not use a mirror – the photographer does not actually see what the camera lens sees – hence a case of parallax indecision. Debunking that scopic regime of decisiveness, I could now see that amongst all the artists I'd seen across all these shows, quite what a proto-type Cartier-Bresson is for the contemporary engaged artist – a committed leftist, working with 'new' media, peripatetically traveling the world, working with topical political issues of his time, using art to 'intervene' directly with mass media such as Life magazine, highly legible work, and a minor celebrity too. Re-thinking Cartier-Bresson was a revelation, even as I realise in spite of all these attributes, Cartier-Bresson's posthumous legacy nonetheless feels profoundly conservative.

LS: You've made several mentions of a first conversion to Post-structuralism and a later rethinking of it. Could you say a bit more about how you understand this process, how it's affected your work, and how it might be characteristic of broader shifts in attitude over the last decade or so? How can one use what's so compelling about Post-structuralism without becoming one of those pious Derrida or Deleuze cover-bands?

GB: Can we not go back to being by the lake now? Succinctly, since the initial flurry of excitement about Post-structuralist ideas of my art school days, I think I've accumulated a sense of circumspection about what is possible through art. Like every other artist, I'm limited in my ability to realise the possibilities – I hope I can do justice to one or two. As such, the totalizing character of Post-structuralism discussed earlier feels incongruous, albeit useful. Rather the prevailing model for artistic practice seems now to be close to the idea of the micro-politics of Foucault, or the discordant temporality of Deleuze, in other words, more

circumspect. I would proffer that the implications of Post-structuralist thought are only now slowly becoming fully digested within artistic spheres – the insights remain compelling, and I've noticed over the twenty year span we are discussing, that the initial ubiquity of Foucault in the parlance of the art world had ebbed away, and has recently returned in a more considered way. As was indicative from the last Documenta, Foucault's writings again seem very prescient to the broad discussion, while Deleuzian self-claimants, a later generation, it should be noted, seem to be currently on the wane. From a serious academic perspective this might all sound very fickle, but I'm not sure things are that cut and dry around hierarchies of earnestness. I guess what I'm pointing to is the time needed for a maturation of relations developed around the applicability of those texts to artistic practices, as opposed to the academic study of Post-structuralism, which remains precisely that – academic. It's about usability.

LS: Could you say something about how your research into and restaging of the Pinter play is related to the site of Leeds? How does such a turn to literary work relate to, intervene in, the history of site-specific art?

GB: The Pinter play (*Dialogue for Three*) was used as part of an anthology of texts I worked with in Leeds. The project was commissioned by the Henry Moore Institute in 2009, as part of a larger project they were doing with artists around the architectural legacy of Leeds University Campus, a Brutalist structure designed in the late fifties by Chamberlin Powell & Bon, who were subsequently architects of the Barbican Centre in London. Whilst the Henry Moore Institute had an interest in arguing the merit of listing the many poorly maintained modernist structures of the campus, I realised that the only way I could begin to grasp the legacy of the space was through an appraisal of its original aspirations against their current state of legibility. Eschewing as ever the quasi-scientific methodologies of the conventional historian, I choose a more serendipitous magpie approach to delving into the archives of the university from the given period (approx. 1965–1975) – in an attempt to come to terms with 'life' on campus around the time the architecture and its rhetoric were reaching initial, and presumably ideal, fruition. My archival research recovered a range of material from Student Union newspaper features on the campus zeitgeist to linguistic surveys of regional English accents, to a number of literary and student poetry journals published on campus at the time. As such, I was interested in balancing something of the properly literary reflections on subjecthood which were being generated in and published on the campus site at that moment, alongside academic work generated therein engaged specifically in the particularity of language use regionally, and finally via publications like the Union newspaper, something of how the contemporaneity of the space was construed and mediated at the moment. Invariably, the accumulated material amounted to a somewhat disjunctive, even dystopian reality, particularly in contrast with the architect's idealisation of campus life as modular, seamless, and hermetic. The Pinter play had originally been written for radio and was first published in 1963 in the literary journal associated with Leeds University, *The Stand*. In the work I made, entitled *subject*, the play is performed in a period campus TV studio, as if it were a student arts programme



Gerard Byrne. *Subject*
2009, Three Channel Video Installation. Duration Variable.



production. It's very stylized. As such, there is a conflation of ideas – from the architectural, and its mediatory arm (the TV studio itself), the idea of contemporary self-hood (Pinter's literary legacy) and how it is performed and consensually identified with by an audience (of readers / viewers), to the contingencies of both the archival and the dramatic. The finished work holds these associations together a little like a sodden sponge, retaining water, but somehow also leaking it from all corners. In conclusion, the work's relation to the site is characterised by a sense of the profound inaccessibility of the site as some essential truth or *Ur* ground. Paradoxically, given the linguistic bent of the project, the campus is rendered as inscrutable in my work. That feels very different from my sense of the canonical site-specific works from the sixties and seventies, where the site was used as a sort of critical 'reality principle', a specific point of fact to breach the perceived hermeticism of Modernism. If we understand Modernism's relationship with Space and its history as quintessentially idealised, then we can see in contrast that early post-modern site specific works – Smithson being paradigmatic – engaged history and site in a very critically open way, absorbing as they did influences from science and the social sciences. My Leeds work, and I think it's pretty representative of much contemporary thinking, seems different again in that the site as a primary fact is inevitably mediated and somehow inaccessible again.

Lytle Shaw: You've been involved in a number of site-specific works, some involving border politics. How would you situate these projects in relation to the categories of art and poetry? What kinds of histories of poetry, art are in play here? What do you make of Miwon Kwon's model of 'discursive site-specificity'?

Heriberto Yopez: I began my writing career, so to speak, doing graffiti, early nineties. I wasn't thinking of 'poetry' – though 'art' made more sense. There was a big graffiti movement in Tijuana, and doing that in the context of something more than 'graffiti' was part of the game. I did some verbal work in public spaces. Nothing I could now feel was interesting in aesthetic terms. But some years after, I began using signs in public spaces, mostly downtown Tijuana and sites close to the border-crossing point. Those signs had a lot to do with other types of signs and the media, but also installation art. The second series of signs I did were done with a visual artist (Jaime Ruiz Otis, who works with recycling material from the maquila factories) and we put those signs up the same day InSite, a binational art festival, opened. We call it a 'date specific' work. It was a kind of off-site of this InSite festival, which has been the main site-specific festival in the California-Tijuana region since the nineties. I guess Kwon's model is part of the game here (I'm an art theory professor and *One place after another* was for a time a book we discussed a lot in classes) but I guess I respond more to context, and not only space but time, site + date.

LS: I've been told that you've been writing recently about Charles Olson's *Mayan Letters*. I have been too. Could you characterise what you've been doing – particularly in relation to the idea of the poet as ethnographer (or also in relation to Hal Foster's model of the artist as ethnographer), which (the former) I know is a concept you've been interested in for a while?

HY: Olson in Mexico interests me in the context of how postmodernism was created. As Perry Anderson pointed out, Olson developed his 'post-modern' concept in relation with the Mayas and his journey to Mexico in 1951. And I was interested in how his ethnographic work had a lot to do with imperial fantasies, something that American scholars haven't touched. One of the points in my book in Spanish is that Olson's space, as he himself declares, is imperialistic – so to say it briefly, I think that once you turn 'time' into 'space', empire begins. I define 'empire' as a collection, a reordering, a decontextualization. I'm not condemning 'empire' so quickly. I think all our practices in contemporary art and writing are imperialistic in that sense. I also develop the notion of 'pantopia', a place where one can put everything. Baudelaire's 'dandy', Pound's 'vortex', Lezama's 'gnostic space', Borges' 'aleph' and 'library' and Olson's 'Space' are avatars of pantopia, according to what I've been thinking. And postmodernity has a lot to do with the imagination of a pantopia, a place where everything can be imagined, located, reordered – so I see the ethnographic turn as part of this bigger pantopic epoch.



Heriberto Yopez. *Untitled (Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point)*. Digital photograph. Courtesy of the author

LS: Could you elaborate on what you mean when you say that you "respond more to context"? Isn't that what Kwon is proposing in presenting a history of site-specificity organised around three understandings of context – the empirically immediate (or what she calls the 'phenomenological'), the institutional and the discursive? (I'm not saying that phenomenology and empiricism should be conflated – just the opposite: kind of bemoaning the fact that 'phenomenology' usually just means immersive empiricism). And please say more about temporal specificity – that's great.

HY: I'm not sure what I mean by context, maybe that's why I try to respond to it. What I think is that we have put too much emphasis on 'space' and less on 'time' in the last century. Even things like Bergson warning about turning time into space can be useful right now. Site specificity rings to me as still contemplative driven, still in the chapel tradition in which modern painting began to arise. That's why I have been thinking more and more about date-specific or temporal specificity. Obsolescence is something I'm interested in, and how to respond to a time related context and how that work stops responding because of time, either by short attention span or because the work was structured in the form of 'news' and information gets lost and the work simply dissolves, fails, dies.



Heriberto Yepez. *Untitled (Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point)*. Digital photograph. Courtesy of the author

LS: So is your version of empire in part an epistemological term? Are pantopias ways of ordering that also encode micropolitical fantasies? If so, at what points, how, do they map onto macro-politics? If some version of decontextualization is necessary in order to get these pantopias rolling, and you say you don't want to condemn this process too quickly (which I applaud), then are there other modes of decontextualization that you see as more starkly or unequivocally symptomatic? And if so, how do you differentiate?

HY: Pantopias are micropolitical fantasies. I'm not sure what kind of relationship they have with macro-politics. One could say, poetic pantopias appeared as forerunners of globalisation, but saying that we're assuming that a pantopia does exist, and it determines the succession of micro-pantopics, which we can observe in different works or authors. But I have also been thinking that poetry and art are intrinsically imperialistic. We have been trained to think of writing and art as alternatives and anti-ideology, revolutionary, but maybe that's a Judeo-Christian way of thinking. Maybe art and writing are as much part of government as universities and churches. When decontextualization happens there's a level of colonization taking place. I cannot think of one single poet who pioneered the use of ethnography who didn't end up building an imperialistic model. I think the relation between poetry and pantopia, or technically speaking between fragmentation and globalisation in art and writing, is key right now, though I'm not sure we're ready for it.

There's a piece by Jerome Rothenberg originally published in *Sulfur* magazine in 1985, where he criticises James Clifford's treatment of disparate Indian and non-Indian objects and images as an example of a multicultural setting where values and systems break up, hide the fact that some of those entities subjugate others. This is a brief fight against the implications of pantopia, wherein every gathering tends to attribute equal value to every member of the collection, in a kind of democracy of anti-teleology, which is what Cioran liked about Borges (where metaphysics and tango have equal value) and that's also what moves Rothenberg to write against Clifford – though Robert Duncan's 'symposium of the whole' and Rothenberg 'ethnopoetics' are also avatars of the pantopic logic, which seems unavoidable now.

LS: Bergson's argument in *Time and Free Will* is interesting to me because it's split between a descriptive discourse about the nature of consciousness and temporal experience on the one hand, and a nascent life-philosophy, almost prescriptive, on the other: an invitation to greater, richer temporal being. His actual 'aesthetics' are quite conservative – about continuity, regularity, elegance of rhythm. But his implicit aesthetics about this latter temporal domain have been obviously extremely generative far beyond his actual view of what art might be. It's as if one has had to go off screen to see how his suggestions were developed – and the examples have always been stream of consciousness projects like those of Woolf and Joyce. But maybe there are other less familiar domains of temporality lurking in projects like Bergson's – or at least this is what I like about your suggestion about temporal specificity. Still, one thing a new model of time coming out of Bergson would have to confront is that for him the authentic temporal self was always *a priori* atomistic. The demands of social life seemed to require the spatialization of time; people needed an efficient shorthand for communication – while 'real' experience was always chaotic, largely outside description and linked to the depths of the individual subject. But when Hardt and Negri say that with empire, finally we can have a *shared* time that is literally beyond measure, they suggest a new social, external (non-atomistic) version of what was best in Bergson. What they lack, though, is a specific aesthetic language, or even a specific political language, for suggesting what shared temporal experiences beyond measure might be. Do you see your concept of temporal specificity having something to offer here? Could you elaborate?

HY: As you know, the Mayas have been recognised as a culture obsessed with time, almost in a Borges kind of way. Thompson even said they were the most preoccupied culture on Earth about time, though that may be an exaggeration (ancient Egypt revolved around a notion of time), it gives us an idea about their relation to the notion of time. I became interested in them because they had a strong tension between an imperialistic notion of time, which we can basically define as that of a 'macro-space of one shared time'. But what I have found out is that the Mayas didn't always have an imperialistic notion of time. What I've been discussing is that

Heriberto Yepez. *Untitled (Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point)*. Digital photograph. Courtesy of the author





their imperialism could only begin once they extended their domination to towns and cultures that had an atomistic-monadic notion of time, that is, they spread their domination, erasing the plurality of times (a multi-verse paradigm) in other cultures and imposed a one-shared-time model, what they called 'kinh', which is an imaginary machine that puts the separate times into a unique structure and function. This change made Mayan science and politics possible, of course, but it also killed the possibility of a pluralities of times developing. I'm sure most Mayan researchers would get angry at me saying this, but that's my hypothesis and that's also why I was interested in Olson's version of the Maya, which he became attracted to because of their mutual imperialistic model of Space (Time), like Splenger's, or Khlebnikov's, Pound's, Stein's, etc. We are a pantopic epoch. I don't think the American poetic circles have realised how imperialistic Olson is, and I don't mean it in a traditional blame-shame-on-you Latin American Marxist kind of way, even a Jamesonian reproach, but there's something which the Experimental Language and post-language groups have missed altogether, the relation of their own poetics to the pantopic paradigm that we are following, inside and outside the US. But let's return to what we are concerned with in our daily basis as language or art workers. If the problem right now is that pantopia is growing, something which I call the 'United-States', which was what the Mayas made in their world – uniting different time-states into a single one – and we think that the growth of one Large Space (to use Olson's words) is something we need to fight, and we think that we can use languages and arts to fight it – something which is mostly known as globalisation of mundialization – then we can try to use our techniques and develop new ones to construct other-times, which can escape the pantopia. For example, I write in English because doing it constructs a small space-time that doesn't integrate into American poetics; nor is it part of Mexican literature. My writings in English remain in a kind of small space-time mostly of its own. That's also what made Ulises Carrion, who I think you should be really interested in, move to the Netherlands and abandon Spanish. But that's very specific, because Mexican readers can also understand my writings in Spanish as merging with pantopic English, because my works tend to gravitate outside the mainstream Mexican tradition and because I have translated and touched North-American writing, which constitutes a kind of treason to the national, which is strictly obeyed by many Mexican circles; so the idea is: how to act inside an empire in a way that you don't increase pantopia? For example, how to make art-language pieces that don't unite with other pieces or states and then become a single zone, a single space-time, a new United States?

LS: I'm in agreement, but I'd like to zoom in more. Or, damn you spatial metaphors!, maybe you could just say a bit more about how heterotopias get built by writing in Spanish in an American context, or Dutch in Spanish one. Is it primarily an intertextual question? That is, that your work (or the writing of others who do this) mobilises not just American avant-garde precedents, but also a series of Mexican, Latin American ones ... making it less easy to swallow, assimilate, 'know'. Or are these effects occurring in the prose itself independent of its pretexts or referents? Or both? The Chadwicks, for instance, are currently engaging with Dutch seventeenth-century aesthetics – with a kind of non-instrumental temporality that gets invented then (so I'd claim) – and contemporary poetry seems not to know what to do with this at all. So while the Dutch painters are 'the old masters' and especially canonical (though we're looking at landscape and genre not portraiture or history painting), the temporal and disciplinary displacements might be producing a kind of time that's difficult to cram into the pantopia you mention.



This image and previous page: Heriberto Yepez. Untitled (Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point). Digital photograph. Courtesy of the author

Heriberto Yepez. Untitled (Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point). Digital photograph. Courtesy of the author



HY: But not only writing in another tongue but also writing in the dominant tongue of a context (writing in English in the USA) in a way that doesn't get absorbed into the pantopia, at least for a period of time (a heterocronos) that does that make sense in English. The idea is just the opposite of Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame. The idea is that getting famous is so easy now that we need to find ways to have, at least, fifteen minutes of anonymity. In the future, not just anybody will be able to be nobody. I know this can sound like a joke, but as the control in society grows, we're going to have less and less time of our own, private time is going to disappear and having fifteen minutes of anonymity is going to be a big privilege. One temporal strategy is to intervene in scenes where you don't belong or aren't attractive. And disappear periodically. To not have a lasting effect. The Chadwicks are a good example of being successfully out of joint and out of touch with Reality, but it can be done in multiple ways: to not belong at all; to have a disjunction between your poetics and your work that results in incoherence or lack of seriousness; to remain in anonymity as long as you can; to not perform; to write in a non-mother tongue and not inform others; to persist making works of art or language that don't last.

LS: Could you say a little bit more about where you see these kinds of things happening – whose work is doing this, how you're engaging with it?

HY: Recently there was an interesting move by Mario Bellatin. He's probably the best known experimental writer in his generation (born in the sixties) not only in Mexico but in Latin America. A decade ago his work reached the main publishers in Spanish (Alfaguara, Tusquets, Anagrama) but in the last few years he returned, unexpectedly, first to little publishers and then to self-publishing, and few copies for each 'edition'. In my case, for example, some time ago I renounced 'Mexican Literature' in a kind of small manifesto, and have been pushing (half jokingly) in the media for the independence of Baja California (the peninsula I live in), its separation from the rest of Mexico, in order to create a separate context. But I think blogs can also do that. You participate but then erase your blogs. Marius de Zayas and Ulises Carrion both separated from Mexican writing but at the same time did not adhere to other national-literatures. Both succeeded in leaving almost no trace or legacy behind. But, again, it involves leaving your own mother tongue completely and finding at most a small circle of colleagues. This is my aim in writing in English and also trying to leave, more and more, Mexican literature (I, for example, don't accept being included in any Mexican-national poetry or fiction anthologies anymore). If you remain isolated, out of touch, you have a better chance of disappearing into language instead of remaining stuck in literature or art. In general, any strategy that takes place in a context out of art and literature's reach (public space, for example) and doesn't last long (literally because it self-destructs or is destroyed by others). But, most importantly, though time-specificity may sound like a joke right now, I believe this will be a category that we will have to face in the coming future – that is, if 'coming future' is not a category that has already expired. Google will know everything about us. Art will become an experiment in becoming invisible.

Lytle Shaw: If contemporary poetry and art share concerns, what and where are these? What kinds of histories and frames do we need to understand them? Whose work do you see as manifesting them interestingly right now? Finally, does the term conceptual writing as currently understood cover or focus what's going on in this area? And if the answer to that is not entirely, what kind of other descriptions or terms would you offer to give a better picture?

Lisa Robertson: I have difficulty thinking in categories as broad as contemporary poetry and contemporary art. That's like saying the contemporary world when what is meant is a certain privileged class of consumers. I'd like to think in terms of specific studies and studios, the parties and trysts going on in them, where the windows point, the sounds filtering in from the street. Would it be the sounds of car-bombs, insurgent protest, playgrounds? In what languages, shaped by what micro-histories? Or in whose 'America'? As I write this in late June the police in Toronto have just arrested and detained in holding pens more than seven hundred protesters and journalists at the G20 summit meeting. These protestors refuse the enforced 'vision' of New World Balance, a global banking and economic system functioning beyond any of the traditional limits of governmentality. This is a very interesting manifestation. The refusal of global markets, categories and terms has got to be part of the poetics of aesthetic research and critique. Let's not gentrify or globalise the poem or the artwork. Yet there will be many forms that such a refusal could take. I agree very much with the critique of the habitual micro-macro dualities you developed in your talk at the Columbia-Penn conference. It could be that the now traditional forms of protest, the schematic refusal of macro systems in favour of the local, may help to further inscribe the structure of power, which after all depends on binary identities and reactive protocols to further entrench itself. I feel that this is the moment to make work that opens and extends a varied readerly engagement with the world. What I mean by readerly is an interpretive relationship that is critical at the same time that it is pleasurable, that is, identificatory – where identification is a means for varying, changing and inflecting subjectivity as a political intensity. I'm for a poem that wants specific readers, because those readers have troublesome, hot, mad or tired-out bodies, bodies whose conflicting temporalities and subjectivities bring the mess of history from the bed to the street to the page to other readers. I'm for the intensities of a reading that thinks through the political flesh. The conceptual poets' binarism of 'thinking' vs. 'reading' just seems lame and sad. Show me a thinking that is autonomous, not invested in interpretive relationships, and I'd say that's an absence of thought. For me, this insistence on the complicated heat of the reader is a concern shared by poems and artworks I love. Reading is a supple matrix of receptive and interpretive cognitions, of co-imagined forays, not limited to words on a page. Renée Green is an artist who interests me hugely now because her work traces the micro-engagements of a subjective research in situated languages. Poems, films, interviews, maps, banners,

Ken Lum, *Monument for East Vancouver*, 58'H, concrete, steel, aluminum, acrylic, LED, 2010 permanent installation, Clark Drive and East 6th Avenue, Vancouver, Image courtesy of artist



bibliographies, resting places distribute a disquiet that demands a slowed-down viewing, a conversation, a nap, a re-reading. What I do admire and emulate in the conceptual poets' projects are their resourceful, audacious and clever modes of looting. What I refuse is the erasure of subjectivity and therefore history. There are people who write dangerously towards hot, historically roaming readers from the specificity of what I might call the trans-political: Jalal Toufic. Erin Moure. Chus Pato. Etel Adnan. Stacy Doris. Historically, John Clare, Shelley. Lucy Hutchinson. Violette Leduc. What they have in common – the urgently committed embrace of any voice or stance that contingently situates thinking in the historical body. Not a body that identifies itself exclusively with a single site, but a body that is problematically constituted by its necessary movement across and among a density of cultural times and spaces. Living as research. Subjectivity as experiment. I don't want to departmentalise artworks and poems when it is my experience and belief that all the aesthetic forms work in a living, immaterial continuity, equally from the perspectives of either maker or receiver. In this sense the works of Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa or Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman are perhaps the most important poetry I know. Stan Douglas is my favourite painter. There are plenty of taxonomers, and we do hear their cool plenary speeches at our gatherings. I'll leave the grammar of disciplinarity for them to police. Critique is a different work from theirs, and does not reproduce the regulatory bordering of forms of life. Critique carries on a necessarily incommensurate and flooding interior life which vaingloriously needs others, and never for purposes as reduced as an instrumental communication.

LS: The blast at the beginning of your answer must be directed at a position other than mine. I mention the shorthand of 'contemporary poetry' only to see its outside, its limits through contact with another discipline – art – not to project an impossible unity onto poetry. No, I just want to talk about a series of projects that are situated (variously, but not so variously that one conversation about them wouldn't be meaningful) in an area that both poets and artists have had a hard time describing – where terms and procedures from installation art, site specific sculpture and institution critique, for instance, affect poetry. Or, vice versa, where serial, modular, ambiguous narratives become not just references or sources of 'literary' inspiration for artists, but tools for destabilising the world as it is seen on television, to take the work of your 'favourite painter'.

Since some of your work seems to borrow and redeploy techniques associated with site-specificity and institution critique, I thought you might want to talk about its relation to art history – that is, if you see these histories as relevant to your writing. But I'd also be interested in hearing how you'd draw a larger frame around your own interaction with art by comparing it to some of your peers.

I don't see discussion of this interplay as a prescriptive enterprise; it seems more basically to be a necessary project of description for charting where I'm working, and where much of the work I'm most drawn to is happening – an area that, to my mind, hasn't been well sketched at all. So, no, I don't see this as gentrifying or globalising (in the bad sense). My argument at the Columbia conference, you remember, was about situating or grounding the kinds of analysis made possible through poetry rather than abstracting its significance into frictionless products like 'procedure' or 'concept'. And by this I don't mean that poems don't have multiple scales and contexts, but just that one of these is usually very concrete.

So I guess another question is about how you see the relationship of these kinds of frames in your own work – for instance, *Occasional Works* can obviously be framed or sited in relation to the gentrification of Vancouver; but it is equally, arguably, as much an intervention in non-localisable debates about pleasure, surfaces, affects, description (and through this last term I read a whole rethinking of the enlightenment with which I think I'm in sympathy) and the power of poetry to make claims in these areas. How do you understand the relation between these frames or scales?

LR: I hope I can clear up the obviously very bad impression left on you by my too crabby response – which was not at all pointed against you and your projects and thinking, which I think you know delight me very much, but I think just the damn terribleness of much of what I heard at the rethinking poetics event, still looming very large in my mind, and which I do feel more or less represents what's dominantly going on in our sorry experimental poetry field as it defines itself in the USA at least.

Another awkwardness is the very different history of inter-relation between poetry and conceptual art in Vancouver. It's been going on for a good twenty years, maybe more. Methodologically, critically, socially. Totally different institutional formations than in the USA. I do sometimes, and I apologise for my snippy tone, get irritated by the generalisation of specific histories. As a Canadian I don't really feel very implicated, say, in much of what I heard at the Columbia /Penn event. It's not my context, not politically, institutionally or culturally. Not economically either, except for this three-year foray into American academic life, which I am choosing to abandon. I also don't feel very connected to conceptual writing as it now canonises itself. It overly simplifies methodological problems to make its discourse exchangeable.

I can see what you're calling frames in terms of differing modes of historicity. One of these is, of course, the geographically specific locale, with its various intersecting vectors of economics, social movements, and events. What you're referring to as non-localisable events or scales, I would simply see as other tracings and experiences and descriptions of history as lived and written. Pleasure, surface, affect etc are modes that have been gendered in the feminine and accordingly historiographically suppressed. Part of my interest in stylistically situating my discourse at this matrix has to do with the necessity of asserting the critical values of gendered embodiment. The interesting thing about bodies too is that they move around, both physically and cognitively! So the sensing, thinking, remembering, desiring body becomes a way to specifically situate what you are calling larger scales, where scale pertains also to discursive fields. *Occasional Works* plays with this discovery. I am not 'from' Vancouver. I've moved widely within Canada and outside very often since I was a teenager. The critique and perception I can bring to Vancouver, as a site, comes by way of Toronto, Quebec, Alberta, Nova Scotia, Cambridge, Paris, Oakland, to be literal and name places I've lived for extended periods, but more interestingly from the complex subjectivity coded via my body, my friends' bodies, through family, emigrations, national politics, friendships, all the books I've ever read, buildings we've walked through and absorbed in some measure, all the media consumed. Maybe this is simply to say that aesthetic experience is political, collective and social experience. Same for practice. The political history of the body and its delimitations, suppressions, and joys opens up the scale of the city. 'Soft Architecture' has to do with the overlay of site specificity with feminism and philosophy, as felt and distributed by and through the body.

LS: Let me throw out a position with which I think you'll strongly disagree, but it still might worth drawing out exactly how you differ: some modes of documentary site-based poetry, like say, Mark Nowak's, seem to suggest that these larger debates (a) aren't immediately grounded in sites; aren't, he implies, direct reflections of the constituencies of those sites, and therefore (b) are distractions from the real work of making a local, non-gentrified poetry. Again, I think I know you enough to anticipate your disagreement, but I'd be interested in hearing you discuss this.

LR: I don't know Mark Nowak's work. But clearly you see that I'm not for a reduced literalism of site. In terms of the local, I'm most interested in what remains invisible, unspoken. There is nothing 'direct' about any site, and that is the most interesting thing about choosing site as a constraint. Far from being a ground, it destabilises any assumptions I've set out with, simply because I come to understand parts of its dense interleaving of human representations. There is no identity for me between a text and a site, only a history of mis- and dis-identification revealed in digital glimmers. Thankfully real work won't ever be my work.

LS: So much political thought within anti-globalisation begins with the fatal mistake of assigning all authenticity to the local, as a negation of the always symptomatic global. But the fact that writing will usually have one more concrete situation or frame (certainly worth articulating, cultivating) doesn't mean that the gestures it makes in larger, not-always as geographical locatable areas, aren't equally important. These also constitute its politics, as a matter of stylistic, methodological and philosophical inventions, positions. I'd even suggest that there's some necessary relationship (in your work, for instance) between this macro level and its commitment to specific audiences and places – what you do with/around specific 'sites' couldn't really ever come into focus or attain power if not for methodological and philosophical attitudes toward affect, surface, style more generally.

LR: Yes, of course. You're making a really important distinction – the gestural, the rhetorical, the stylistic – the figural in short – disturb the over-simplified and essentializing conception of the local as resistant in and of itself. We both distrust such claims for authenticity. I would add the imperative I feel to address this problematic in terms of particularity. This isn't meant as a boosterism of the micro, but to say that globalising politics erase – violently or more insidiously – the particularity of bodies, and thus histories, replacing these with the theology of the market. East Van does rule of course, as Ken Lum brilliantly reminds us in *neon now*, but only as a shifting collective embodiment of appetites, horrors, needs, which are not so much localised spatially, as they are released historically as forces. I want to be part of anti-globalisation not to essentialize my home town, but in part to let its lingo and drives drift out and infect the monotheism of a New World Balance. For me it's not about scale in the geographic sense, nor a local/global binary, but about the completely non-determinant potential of embodied discourse as historical agency. Language swerves, becomes political newness – this is how it is historical, and this is what globalised power is now trying to eradicate. Why style is dangerous. We could talk about site in a figural register, and that might open up a spectrum of migrant agencies that overplay the conventional evaluations of scale.



Liz Magor, *Lightshed*, 18' L x 11' H x 8' W, cast aluminum, electric light
Coal Harbour, Vancouver, 2004 (permanent installation), Courtesy of the artist

And yes, I did strongly feel that your work and my work have in differing ways been marginalised in this branding of the concept. The Chadwicks certainly have a heyday in the fields of the authentic. The very word conceptual seems to have been trademarked. Is it even available for thinking now? Remember the talk I gave in Tübingen a few years ago, on conceptual objects, the sculptor Liz Magor, and indexicality? I think the branding process had not yet become institutionalised then. But apart from my snits, really isn't it better to be 'outside', roaming?

LS: I understand your frustration. I didn't feel at all represented in that conference either – and it was partly because a movement called conceptualism would seem to evoke that generative area between the disciplines of poetry and art over the last forty years but actually excludes most of what I'm interested in. This is one reason why I wanted to have a conversation with you about our projects, and their relations to disciplinary histories, models of site-specificity etc. So let's talk about the history of poets and artists interacting in Vancouver over the last twenty

years. If a Language poet (or before that an Abstract Expressionist painter and a New York School poet) had been involved in this, there'd have been seven-dozen memoirs already. I know something about it from knowing you and Jeff, but this is definitely one of the things that I'd like you to elaborate: what were the terms of the interaction, what did people from the two disciplines get out of it, how did artists read your work, and you theirs? And so that this isn't just retrospective, perhaps you could say something about any sense in which having artists as part of your immediate audience continues to affect your work.

My idea for this issue of Printed Project isn't exactly to 'introduce' new readers to poetry as a discrete discourse (that would be fine), but to argue, in a way, that poetry has already been very closely and innovatively involved with art for the last fifteen or twenty years (and that to some extent the relationship is mutual). But there are complex power dynamics here: art historians seem to own the discourse of site-specificity and institution critique even though, arguably, they both emerge in close proximity to writing generally and poetry specifically, and come into focus at a time when a new area emerges between the two disciplines in which neither one has priority. Now this gets naturalised by the art historians and all of the innovations get dragged back into the cultural domain of art history, but it didn't have to turn out that way – doesn't have to in the long run. And I think in fact my own work (both the Chadwicks and my criticism) is directed toward it NOT turning out that way – toward appropriating and recoding these histories to my own ends, and the ends of the poets, artists I'm most interested in who are not well represented in Kwon, Meyer, Foster on the one side, and recent poetry history on the other.

The other main strand I see as latent in what we began is the particular nature of your frustration at the Columbia /Penn conference – as far as I can tell it's similar to mine in that the discussion around conceptualism seemed misguided ...but what should we have been talking about in your mind, what was the particular opportunity that was missed? Finally, I've just read *R's Boat* this morning – some of the poems I'd heard you read. It strikes me right away that my questions about your relations to site-specific art and institution critique have much more to do with the 'Soft Architecture' project, and a bit maybe with *The Weather*; the terms in *R's Boat* are quite a bit different, and make me want to ask you about your ongoing conversation with Enlightenment thinkers: could you describe and contextualise it a little? How might this dialogue with the Enlightenment be related to the line following line: "I'm using the words of humans to say what I want to know"?

LR: First a little background on the poets and artists in Vancouver question. I entered the 'scene' in Vancouver in 1989, when I became a bookseller, and met most of the serious artists, writers, and academics concerned with the contemporary humanities in the city. I was their supplier, and my shop was in the same low-rent neighbourhood as most of the artist run galleries, the other bookshops, and Kootenay School of Writing. Previously I had studied at Simon Fraser University, in the English, and Fine and Performing Arts departments, as well as at KSW, who sponsored workshops and seminars by visiting writers. Lyn Hejinian's was the first I went to, in 1988. By the late eighties most of the artist-run centres were well established, KSW among them. From the beginning I saw that writers and artists shared a social network, and were interlocutors for one another's work. The local talk series, held by Artspeak Gallery, was for both artists and writers. That's where I first spoke on my work, and it's where I heard artists like Stan

Douglas and Judy Radul speak on their work too. Writers were often asked to write catalogue texts for the galleries, and still are. Artspeak was started as an offshoot of KSW in the early eighties, with a mandate that it still observes, to foster work that occupies and explores the interstices of the visual and the linguistic. Theoretical and critical concerns and readings were, and are, shared; the discourses were not separate. There were no MFA programs, so the path to writing was within the city, participating in the city's various discourses, and often working at jobs that related to several communities – curating, bookselling, publishing, including art magazine publishing, and freelance art writing were all marginally viable. I think part of what made this scene so intense and generative was the relative isolation of Vancouver as a city. It's nothing like the eastern seaboard, where you're half an hour from any number of cities, nor like the Bay Area for that matter. Vancouver was small and self-contained, and had no serious profile in the eastern Canadian culture centres, so really we had to invent culture for ourselves. The stakes did not have to do with jobs, or cultural authority particularly – the stakes were discursive. We read, we argued, we collaborated, we partied, we made things, for one another, not for a superstructure. There was no defended idea of separate practices, and collaboration and cross-media work was the norm. Again, that this was happening in the context of small artist-run centres, not particularly academic departments, made it vital and tangible.

Given my long involvement in this hybrid context, I don't really work with the sense that artists are my audience – it's been the case that I work directly with artists, in collaboration, since I began to publish and work in Vancouver, where reception and making have been much more complex and integrated than the writer-audience model would suggest. My first ever publication was a voice-over for a video by Kathy Slade, in 1990 I think. My work has been shown in gallery settings also since the early nineties when I began to publish. Right now I'm working with Allyson Clay on a proposal for a text for an inlaid granite floor design for the new Canadian Embassy in Moscow. Opportunities to collaborate arise from my friendships and conversations. This gives me the chance to make sharp turns in direction in my research, to learn about new media, to continuously reopen whatever stances or habits that may be establishing themselves, and throw myself into risk. I'll be thinking about an embassy floor, I'll be making a video, I'll be composing recorded sound, without previous plans or intentions – just because the opportunity arises and it's interesting. The givens of material, form, context, are always being thrown into question. My explorations have been informed by the writers and artists who have surrounded me. Jeff Derksen, the late Nancy Shaw, and Catriona Strang are other Vancouver colleagues whose work has taken them into visual practices, architecture, and music. Judy Radul began as a performance poet, then developed as an installation and video artist. Cross-genre work has simply been part of the Vancouver milieu. And curators here have actively instigated these relationships and lateral practices. Lorna Brown, Melanie O'Brien, Reid Shier and Cate Rimmer would be important examples.

I think that the containment of experimental writing in the USA within MFA programmes, has given a very limited readership to work that would naturally travel much further, form very different threads of continuity, if given a chance to circulate. We can see this a little more with the work of the New Narrative writers, who have been more active in various cultural scenes, as writers and collaborators – Kevin Killian, Dodie Bellamy, Matthew Stadler, Eileen Myles, Bob Gluck, have all been art writers and collaborators, quite consistently. Maybe this is part of the reason for the very strong links between Vancouver and the US New Narrative scene.

About the Columbia Penn Conference – I do think that taxonomic concerns don't open conversations and thoughts. I'd like to find a way to discuss the ways in which language is politics, how globalisation is the violent abolishment of language. What will be left for us? The problem eclipses the pettiness of the local versus the global dynamic; what's at stake is the historical agency inherent in language. And I'd have been interested to hear much more about ways of talking about conceptualism as precisely a mode of working that dispenses with canonical boundaries and generic defenses. Who cares if it's poetry or not? Let's see what it's acting, what it's performing across or in spite of these crumbling departmentalisms. Conceptual writing is fabulously and aggressively hybrid. We can't even necessarily say it's writing – maybe it's social sculpture. Its pointed challenge (if not total rejection) to the now almost ecclesiastical claims made by experimental verse culture – language as material medium, disjunction and participatory readership, parallelisms of syntax and politics – has barely been discussed, as far as I know. What about immateriality? Transposition, not disjunction? How can we talk about what these things may mean culturally, politically? I'm not so interested in which department gets to teach it as what genre. Generally I'm not very invested in disciplinary meta-discourses, whether literary or art historical. Mostly I don't pay attention. I go to artists' own discourses, projects, and writings for ideas. Maybe this is another brand of essentialization – but I truly enjoy the humour, the play, the feinting I find there. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* would be my exemplary meta-discursive text. In a slightly more contemporary vein, I went to visit Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden Little Sparta in the nineties, and that afternoon of strolling in the garden and talking with Finlay continues to inform my thinking. Interestingly he insisted to me that he made his garden and objects and inscriptions as a poet, not as an artist. He referred with a cutting twinkle to 'the curators'. And his understanding of site-specificity could include the pre-Socratic philosophers, neo-classical theory of warfare, and goofy punning. His outrageous sense of historical self-permission was itself a kind of institution critique. Are the Chadwicks in cahoots with the late Scottish curmudgeon?

R's Boat takes on the problem of site via the archive – in that sense it's very similar to *The Weather*. It's a project that approaches subjectivity as an archive, composing autobiography according to a synchronic, rather than a diachronic axis. It was strongly inflected by re-readings of Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, after twenty years. Because I chose not to frame its methodology with a note, as I did in *The Weather*, that methodology is happily a little more resistant for a reader, especially given the strong presence of the first person in the text, which is maybe a bit of a decoy. The endnote to *The Weather* is cited consistently in almost all the critical work about that book – so the text seems to be read more as an allegory of its method. I wanted potential readings to be left much more open in this new work. I hadn't anticipated how the situatedness of *The Weather* and 'Soft Architecture' can be read as rather unproblematically geographical or regional, when that hasn't been my intention. This weather, that city. What if subjectivity were a site, but a dislocated, immaterial site? I could think of subjectivity as that 'other', unfounded or decentred critical monumentality you referred to in your talk. For me, subjectivity is like an archive. When I go to the archive, what intensities and dispersions and breaches reveal themselves? How do they inflect this 'here'? How do relationships become form?



Allyson Clay, Nathalie Stephens
and Lisa Robertson
In Painting: A Work of Film Criticism
Video, 2009
Production still: Henri Robideau
Courtesy of the artists



Judy Radul
World Rehearsal Court
Video, mixed media installation
Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, Vancouver
(9 October – 6 December 2009)
Courtesy Belkin Gallery



Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*
66 cm x 426.9 cm, 2001, colour photograph, image courtesy of the artist

The work was informed too by Rousseau and his radical autobiography. The enlightenment project of an inclusive worldly description was outrageously misappropriated in his work. He flipped the descriptive mirror to represent his own life, his own inconsistent subjectivity as a surface. I got interested in historical readings of autobiographical genre in the late 90s, when I was quite invested in exploring histories of genre – and this led pretty predictably to Rousseau and Montaigne. It was interesting to think of these projects in relation to Lyn's *My Life*... a kind of submerged continuity. The place of subjectivity in the poem has been conventionally fixed as expressive, in the Romantic vein, or it has been reactively rejected, in contemporary avant-gardes. I thought, as maybe Lyn did, that there could be more than two choices! How could a descriptive rather than an expressive subjectivity be composed? Without recourse to narratives of origin, development, or causation, how could a textual subjectivity appear? My constraint was the sixty-odd notebooks in the archive.

LS: What do you make of the dismissive attitude about the enlightenment inherited by so many poets and artists that seems to come mostly from Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the entire project (also expanded temporally from Homer to Hitler) is seen as a form of instrumentalization? What happens to your interest in description in this context? In any case, the H & A position is, even sixty years later, often what counts as 'criticality' and it leads to many projects being dismissed as 'empiricist'. But things are changing.

LR: Like you, I'm so far from such a knee-jerk rejection of description that I could say that everything I've written is part of an ongoing descriptive project. Again, my 1980s and 90s education in feminism gave me an enormous permission. The texts we read moved across disciplines – film, psychoanalysis, philosophy, visual art, literature, anthropology. (so – de Lauretis, Penley, Spivak, Haraway, Brown, Grosz, Kelly, Pollack, Butler, Min-Ha, Riley, Irigaray...) There was an imperative to systematically disturb and dismantle the institutionally sanctioned point of view and its gendered solipsism. Part of the critical technique was simply proliferative: to make more and more descriptions that undid the historical and institutional assumptions and naturalised biases. If a certain vein of the Frankfurt school saw enlightenment description as instrumentalizing, serving dominant class and political values and points of view, then a certain feminism turned this instrument against the centre, by misappropriating, proliferating, transforming the encyclopedic to the carnivalesque. The 'wrong' bodies inhabited the descriptions. There could be joy and humour and bawdy gorgeousness and anger in the descriptive project. Such a feminism could claim Rousseau as an unwilling accomplice. But I'm less interested in the enlightenment *per se* than I am in the shady, unruly dissolution of the enlightenment into early political or radical Romanticism. This unraveling of the conventionally delimited point of view was the revolutionary trope, the one so quickly squelched. Where a method attacks its own foundations, there is a model! Where description is politically limited, language and representation are instrumentalized. This is the work of neo-liberal capital. The gridded delimitation of representation and the transformation of language into money. The abolishment of history. Against this violence, I think art and poetry have the imperative to disobediently describe, in order to keep and guard and even contaminate language as the slippery site of transformative, unpredictable, historical subjectivity. The twentieth century avant-garde's rejection of the enlightenment is a re-enactment of the later Romantics' rejection of the enlightenment. Both are ahistorical. There can be a critique which is more nuanced and less reactive. That's where I want to head.

Contributors

Matthew Buckingham was born in Nevada, Iowa, and now lives in New York City. He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, received a BA from the University of Iowa, an MFA from Bard College and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program. Utilising photography, film, video, audio, writing and drawing, he questions the role that social memory plays in contemporary life. His projects create physical and social contexts that encourage viewers to question what is most familiar to them. Recent works have investigated the Indigenous past and present in the Hudson River Valley; the 'creative destruction' of the city of St. Louis; and the inception of the first English dictionary. His work has been seen at Camden Arts Centre, London; Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Hamburger Bahnhof National Gallery, Berlin; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York; the Whitechapel Gallery, London, and The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. Residencies, fellowships and awards include Art Matters, New York; ArtPace, San Antonio; DAAD Artist-in-Berlin Studio Program; The Freund Teaching Fellowship, Washington University, St. Louis; IASPIS, Stockholm; New York Foundation for the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts; Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, New York; and The Arts Institute at the University of Wisconsin Madison. From 2003 until this year he taught at the Malmö Art Academy in Sweden.

Gerard Byrne (b.1969) is an artist working with photography, video, and film. His work has been shown at international biennials including the Glasgow International (2010), Sydney Biennale, Gwangju Biennale (2008), Lyon Biennale (2007), 3rd Tate Triennial (2006), and the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003) as well as in major museums in Europe and the US. Solo exhibitions of his work include the Lisson Gallery, London (2009, 2007), ICA Boston (2008), Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (2008), Dusseldorf Kunstverein (2007), the Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver (2007), Frankfurter Kunstverein (2003), the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2002). In 2007 he represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale. In 2006 he was a recipient of the Paul Hamlyn award. His most recent publication entitled *Tuxedo Junction, 1960* has recently been published by Lismore Castle Arts concurrent with his solo exhibition there. He is represented by the Lisson Gallery in London, Green on Red Gallery in Dublin, and Nordenhake Gallery, Stockholm. He has been Professor of Time Based Media at the Royal Danish Academy for Fine Art since 2007.

Cabinet. Founded in 1999, Cabinet is a non-profit based in Brooklyn, New York. In addition to producing a quarterly magazine with readers in over thirty countries around the world, Cabinet has published a number of books, including *Letters from Mayhem* (2004), *Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip: The 1935 Travelogue of Two Soviet Writers* (co-published with Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), and *The Book of Stamps* (2008). In addition to its publishing activities, Cabinet has also curated numerous exhibitions, including 'The Paper Sculpture Show' (multiple venues, 2003-2007) and 'Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates*' (White Columns & Queens Museum of Art, 2005), and

participated in a number of group exhibitions including Documenta XII (Kassel, 2007), Manifesta 7 (Trento, 2008), Performa 09 (2009), and the Sharjah Biennial 10 (Sharjah, 2011). Since 2008, Cabinet has also operated its own exhibition and event space in Brooklyn, hosting talks, readings, panels, workshops, screenings, conferences, and exhibitions, including 'Zeno Reminder' by Uqbar Foundation (Mariana Castillo Deball and Irene Kopelman) and 'The Live! Show' by Jaime Davidovich.

Emilie Clark. Born in San Francisco, Clark received her BFA from Cornell University in 1991, and moved to New York City from the Bay Area in 1998. She received her MFA from Bard College in 2001. Clark has exhibited widely in the United States and Europe, including solo shows at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (2010), Morgan Lehman Gallery in New York City, a survey show at the MUSARC in Ferrara, Italy (2000), and a three person show at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, Ireland (2003). She has been included in several group exhibitions in New York, including 'Race Specimen' at the Arsenal, 'Pondering the Marvelous' at Wave Hill, and 'Poetry Plastique' at Marianne Boesky gallery. This fall, Clark will have work in The Westerspoon Art Museum's Biannual, 'Art on Paper 2010', in Greensborough, NC, and a group show at the Miami Art Museum. In New York City she is represented by Morgan Lehman Gallery and on the West Coast, by Elizabeth Leech Gallery in Portland, Oregon. In addition to her solo projects, Clark has published a number of collaborative works with author Lyn Hejinian, and most recently a folio project from the Hui Press, *Over Cook*, with poet (and husband) Lytle Shaw. Her medical drawings have appeared on numerous medical journals and textbook covers, including Journal of Experimental

Medicine and the History of Endocrine Surgery. Clark's work has been reviewed and written about in several publications including in The New Yorker, The New York Times, Art in America. Clark was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio residency in 2001 as well as a Pollock Krasner Foundation grant in 2002 – 2003.

Matthew Coolidge is the founder and director of the Centre for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), an educational nonprofit organisation focused on increasing the collective understanding of the built American landscape. The work of the Centre has been presented in museums and exhibit spaces across the United States, as well as in the Centre's network of exhibit and production facilities, located in places such as Wendover, Utah; Houston, Texas; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Troy, New York. The Centre's programmes and exhibitions employ photography, text, video, bus tours, publications, and other media. Programmes are thematic and / or regionally-based, exploring various types of land uses as they occur nationally, or are characterisations of selected areas. All of the programmes seek to tell stories about American culture, as expressed through the medium of the ground we inhabit.

Jeff Derksen is a poet and cultural critic and who works at Simon Fraser University. His books of poetry include *Down Time*, *Dwell*, and *Transnational Muscle Cars* as well as a book of essays *Annihilated Time: poetry and other politics* (all from Talonbooks). His essays on art and urbanism in the long neoliberal moment, *After Euphoria* (ECUP/JRP Ringier) is forthcoming. His poetry has been anthologised in *The Gertrude Stein Anthology of Innovative North American Poetry*, *Writing Class*, *The Canadian Long Poem Anthology* and *Half in the*

Sun: an anthology of Mennonite Writing, and in the Portuguese anthology of Canadian poetry, *Pulllllllllllll*. His work been translated into French, Icelandic, Portuguese, and Italian. A former editor of Writing magazine, he also edited *Poetry and the Long Neoliberal Moment* for West Coast Line and *Disgust and Overdetermination: a poetics issue* for Open Letter. His writing on art and culture has appeared in Springerin, Camera Austria, Fillip, Hunch, The Happy Hypocrite, Open Letter, XCP, amongst others. Derksen was a research fellow at the Centre for Place, Culture, and Politics (CUNY Graduate Center) and is a founding collective member of the Kootenay School of Writing. He collaborates with Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber in the collective Urban Subjects: they recently edited *Autogestion, or Henri Lefebvre in New Belgrade* (Fillip / Sternberg).

Mónica de la Torre is the author of two poetry books published in the US, *Talk Shows* (Switchback, 2007) and *Public Domain* (Roof Books, 2008), and two poetry books published in Mexico City, *Acúfenos* (Taller Ditoria, 2006) and *Sociedad Anónima* (Bonobos, 2010). She is translator of a volume of selected poems by neo-Baroque Mexican poet Gerardo Deniz (Lost Roads, 2000) and co-editor of the anthology of post-Latino poetry *Malditos latinos, malditos sudacas: Poesía hispanoamericana Made in USA* (El billar de Lucrecia, 2009). Recently she has participated in the collaborative book projects *Collective Task* and *Taller de Taquimecanografía*. She is a 2009 NYFA fellow in poetry and senior editor at BOMB Magazine. She is completing a doctoral dissertation on Latin-American avant-garde poetry movements of the sixties and seventies.

Robert Fitterman is the author of ten books of poetry, including four installments of his ongoing poem *Metropolis: Metropolis 1-15* (Sun & Moon Press, 2000), *Metropolis 16-29* (Coach House Books, 2002), and *Metropolis XXX: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Edge Books, 2004) and, forthcoming, *Sprawl: Metropolis 30A* (Make Now Books). Other recent titles include: *Rob the Plagiarist* (Roof Books) and *Notes On Conceptualisms* co-authored with Vanessa Place (Ugly Duckling Presse). Several of his books are collaborations with visual artists, including *war, the musical* with Dirk Rowntree (Subpress Books) and *The Sun Also Also Rises* with Nayland Blake (No Press). He teaches writing and poetry at New York University and in the Bard College, Milton Avery School of Graduate Studies.

Kenneth Goldsmith's writing has been called "some of the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry" by Publishers Weekly. Goldsmith is the author of ten books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb (ubu.com), and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which was the basis for an opera, *Trans-Warhol*, that premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. An hour-long documentary on his work, *Sucking on Words* premiered at the British Library in 2007. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. He held the The Anschutz Distinguished Fellow Professorship in American Studies at Princeton University for 2009-10 and received the Quartz Electronic Music Award in Paris in 2009. A book of critical essays, *Uncreative Writing*, is forthcoming from Columbia University Press, as is an anthology from Northwestern University Press co-edited with Craig Dworkin, *Against Expression:*

An Anthology of Conceptual Writing. More about Goldsmith can be found at: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Goldsmith

Lisa Robertson was born in Toronto and lived for many years in Vancouver, where she worked with several artist-run organisations, including Kootenay School of Writing and Artspeak Gallery. Her first book, *XEclogue*, was published in 1993 by Tsunami Editions; *Debbie: An Epic*, and *The Weather* followed, from New Star (both co-published by Reality Street in the UK); then *The Men* (Bookthug, 2006) and *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip* (Coach House 2009). *R's Boat* was published by University of California Press in Spring 2010. A book of essays, *Occasional Works and Seven Walks* from the Office for Soft Architecture, was published by Clearcut (USA, 2003) and Coach House (2006, 2010). She has been the recipient of the Relit Award and the bpnichol Chapbook Award, and was nominated for a Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1998. She has worked as an editor of poetry, a freelance arts and architectural critic, and a teacher, since leaving the bookselling business in 1995, and has taught and held residencies at California College of the Arts, University of Cambridge, Capilano College, University of California Berkeley, University of California San Diego, American University of Paris and the Naropa Institute. During Fall 2010, she is writer-in-residence at Simon Fraser University. She is currently working collaboratively on translation, sound and video-based projects.

Lytle Shaw lives and works in New York. His poetry books include *Principles of the Emeryville Shellmound*, *Low-Level Bureaucratic Structures: A Novel*, *Cable Factory 20*, *The Lobe*, and *19 Lines: A Drawing Centre Writing Anthology*. Among his critical writings are *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, two forthcoming books (*Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics* and *Specimen Box*), and catalogue essays on Robert Smithson for DIA Center, Gerard Byrne for Koenig Books, and The Royal Art Lodge for The Drawing Center. Exhibitions of Shaw's collaborative work with Jimbo Blachly (thechadwickfamilypapers.blogspot.com) have included EV+A 2010, PS1/MoMA, Tate Modern, ICA Philadelphia/Bartram's Garden, Wave Hill, David Nolan Gallery and Winkelman Gallery in New York, where their next solo exhibition will be in February 2011. The catalog, *The Chadwick Family Papers: A Brief Public Glimpse*, collects the first five years of their work together. A contributing editor for Cabinet magazine, Shaw teaches theory in the School of Architecture at the University of Limerick and American literature at New York University.

Heriberto Yopez is a Mexican writer, journalist and psychotherapist, and a full time professor at the Art School at the Autonomous University of Baja California, in Tijuana. He's the author of more than a dozen books of poetry, experimental fiction, novels, theory and literary criticism in Spanish, including *Tijuanologías* (Umbral-UABC, 2006); A.B.U.R.T.O (*Sudamericana*, 2005); *El órgano de la risa*; *El Imperio de la Neomemoria* (Almadía, 2007); *Contra la Televisión* (Tumbona, 2008) and *Al otro lado* (Planeta, 2008). His work in translation include a selection of William Blake's fragments/aphorisms; José Vasconcelos work in English; a poetry anthology and a forthcoming lengthy prose and poetics anthology of Jerome Rothenberg, and currently works editing the first Charles Bernstein's prose anthology in Spanish. His English work has appeared in journals such as Chain, Tripwire, Shark, and XCP. In *Here is Tijuana!*, Black Dog Publishing (2006), Yopez collaborated with anthropologist Fiamma Montezemolo and architect Rene Peralta to explore and document the socio-cultural forms of the city. His *Babellebab: Non-Poetry on the End of Translation* was published in the US by Duration Press in 2003, and *Wars*. *Threesomes. Drafts. & Mothers* by Factory School in 2008. He currently lives in Tijuana, México. He defines himself as a post-Mexican writer.

printed project



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