

Louise Hanson
Brasenose College

Conceptual Art: What is it?

D. Phil. Thesis
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Oxford

Trinity Term 2011

Abstract

Conceptual Art (henceforth CA) has the peculiar status of being at once a neglected topic in philosophical aesthetics, and one on which a degree of philosophical weight disproportionate to the attention it has received is placed. On the one hand it is frequently mentioned by philosophers as a problematic case, one that general theories of art have difficulty dealing with, but on the other, there is a notable lack of philosophical research taking CA as its focus. It is largely taken as a given that CA is radically different from other art in various ways and thus poses problems for some of the general statements about art that philosophers tend to make. But it is striking that these claims are not, for the most part, grounded in a thorough investigation into the nature of CA. The purpose of my research is to conduct such an investigation; to address the question of what CA is, and what makes it different from other art, in order to come to a clearer view of what particular philosophical issues or difficulties CA raises for the philosophy of art.

In existing literature on CA, it is standard to take CA's distinctiveness to have something to do with the importance of 'ideas'. I investigate what could be meant here by 'idea', and identify two broad schools of thought as to what form this emphasis on ideas in CA takes: Priority Accounts, which claim that in CA ideas are the most important aspect of the work and Constitution Accounts, which claim that works of CA *are* ideas. I identify serious problems for Constitution Accounts, in general, and for some kinds of Priority Account. I then put forward a new kind of Priority account which I think overcomes the problems faced by its rivals.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Kathleen Stock, who very kindly agreed to supervise me during the last months of writing the thesis, despite her many other academic commitments. I will never forget her kindness and support, and her intellectual rigor, clarity of thought, and philosophical integrity have been an inspiration.

Many thanks also to Michael Inwood, Matthew Kieran, John Hawthorne, and Sabina Lovibond for their support, guidance, friendly advice, and, above all, hugely fulfilling philosophical discussions.

I am extremely grateful to Robert Hopkins and Jason Gaiger for very helpful and thorough comments and discussion in the viva voce examination.

I would also like to thank the British Society of Aesthetics and Brasenose College, whose Doctoral Studentship and Michael Woods Scholarship, respectively, helped to finance this DPhil project. I'd also like to thank everyone at Shoreditch Town Hall Trust, who I had the pleasure of working with during the first year.

It is also a pleasure to thank my friends: Zoe Sutherland for great conversations about philosophy and even greater conversations about everything *other* than philosophy, Anna Johnson for heart to hearts and amazing nights out, and Daan Evers, Angela Matthies, Jemma Cullen, Gareth Goddard, Josie Smith, Richard Walsh

and Barry Smith, all of whom helped to make the experience so much more enjoyable just by being there and being wonderful.

Finally, I have the pleasure of thanking my parents, who have been so incredibly supportive in innumerable different ways, for which I am profoundly grateful.

Contents

INTRODUCTION. p. 1

Section 1 - Two Uses of 'Conceptual Art'
Section 2 - What Kind of Definition I am Seeking
Section 3 - Methodology

CHAPTER 1. Making sense of the Literature on Conceptual Art. p. 27

Introduction
Section 1 - Common Threads in the Literature
Section 2 - Constitution and Priority accounts
Section 3 - Ideas: Two views
Section 4 - Summary

CHAPTER 2. Constitution Accounts. p. 64

Introduction
Section 1 - The Constitution Account and the Art Object
Section 2 - Documentation: some potential Difficulties
Section 3 - A Philosophical Constitution Account
Section 4 - Some Problems
Section 5 - Summary

CHAPTER 3. Priority Accounts and Perceptual Properties. p. 122

Introduction
Section 1 - A Stark Priority Account
Section 2 - Reasons to think Perceptual Properties are not Entirely Irrelevant
Section 3 - A Further Role for Perceptual Properties
Section 4 - Direct and Indirect Relevance to Artistic Value
Section 5 - Summary

CHAPTER 4. Perception and The Aesthetic.

p. 178

Introduction

Section 1 - Perceptual Properties and Perception

Section 2 - CA and Perception

Section 3 - Objection from Copies

Section 4 - Does CA need to be Perceived After All?

Section 5 - Summary

Section 6 - CA and the Aesthetic: The Objection

Section 7 - Ways of Understanding the Aesthetic

Section 8 - Summary

CHAPTER 5. Priority Accounts and the Conception-Execution Distinction.

p. 226

Introduction

Section 1 - The view Hopkins is opposing

Section 2 - Hopkins and Literature

Section 3 - Conceptual Art and the Conception-Execution Distinction: a First Attempt

Section 4 - Conceptual Art and the Conception-Execution Distinction: a Second Attempt

Section 5 - Summary

CONCLUSION.

p. 267

1. Summary

2. Directions for Further Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY

p. 285

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. *Inert Gas Series*. Robert Barry. (1969).

Figure 2. *Guernica*. Pablo Picasso. (1937).

Figure 3. *L. H. O. O. Q.* Marcel Duchamp. (1919).

Figure 4. *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Robert Rauschenberg. (1953).

Figure 5. *Untitled 1992*. Maurizio Cattelan. (1992).

Figure 6. *All Things I Know But of Which I am not at the Moment Thinking*. Robert Barry. (1969).

Figure 7. *One Hundred Live and Die*. Bruce Nauman. (1984).

Figure 8. *One And Three Chairs*. Joseph Kosuth. (1965).

Figure 9. *Measurement Room* Mel Bochner. (1969). Figure 10. *Index 01*. Art & Language. (1972).

Figure 11. *Date Painting*. On Kawara. (1978). Figure 12. John Baldessari *Solving Each Problem as it Arises*. (1967).

Figure 13. *Truisms*. Jenny Holzer. (1977). Figure 14. *Location Piece No. 7*. Douglas Huebler. (1971). Figure 15. *New York Beautification Project*. Ellen Harvey. (1999-2001).

Introduction

Conceptual art (henceforth 'CA') has a peculiar status within analytic aesthetics. On the one hand it is frequently cited as a counterexample to this or that theory, or explicitly identified as raising particular philosophical problems, but on the other, very little has been written on what exactly CA is.

CA is often cited as having implications for the question of defining art: focusing attention on the question itself (Robert Stecker lists CA as one of the developments in art that has 'forced the issue' of the definition of art¹), or demonstrating the untenability of certain received ways of defining art. Most commonly, against theories that seek to define art in terms of aesthetic experience, it is claimed that CA deliberately calls the assumed link between the artistic and the aesthetic into

¹ Stecker, R. (1997), p. 15.

question by issuing in works that are not designed to elicit any kind of aesthetic experience or reward (See Stecker,² Levinson,³ Dziemidok⁴).

Appeals to CA on the issue of defining art are not limited to the aesthetic definition of art. CA appears to be used as a test of the adequacy of definitions of art across the board. Stephen Davies takes CA to put pressure on Morris Weitz's treatment of art as a concept whose instances are held together by family resemblance, since works of CA very often (at least outwardly) resemble non-artworks more than they resemble other artworks.⁵ Berys Gaut,⁶ Jerome Stolnitz,⁷ and Larry Shiner⁸ take conceptual art to demonstrate the falsity of the assumption that artworks must 'be the product of skill by the artist'.⁹

David Novitz takes CA to be a counterexample to Jerrold Levinson's criterion for arthood, that something be intended to be regarded in ways appropriate to earlier artworks,¹⁰ while Levinson's theory itself was - by all accounts - developed precisely out of a concern to accommodate cases like CA, out of a perception that previous attempts to define art were inadequate in this regard.

² Stecker, R. (2010), p. 104; and (1997), pp. 39-42.

³ Levinson, J. (1990), p. 41.

⁴ Dziemidok, B. (1988), pp. 2, 5.

⁵ Davies, S. (2004), p. 65.

⁶ Gaut, B. (2005), p. 283.

⁷ Stolnitz, J. (1979), p. 402.

⁸ Shiner, L. (2009), p. 168, n. 28.

⁹ Gaut, B. (2005), p. 283.

¹⁰ Novitz, D. (1996), p. 157.

Nor is the philosophical import of CA limited to the question of definition. Philosophers have tended to think of CA as raising difficult issues for the ontology of art. (See Boden,¹¹ Goldie & Schellekens,¹² Goldie,¹³ and Levinson.¹⁴)

Having presented his own theory of the ontology of artworks, Jerrold Levinson acknowledges that the theory would need more work if it is to be adequate to deal with conceptual art. But there is an underlying assumption that CA presents such a difficulty here that this shortcoming is an understandable one.

The nature of the work of art in the spheres of conceptual art and performance art is obviously - and purposely - rather problematic, and what has been said here about the ontology of objects in the ordinary fine arts would not apply without some modification.¹⁵

CA has also been claimed to present a challenge to the widely held belief about appreciation that is known as the Acquaintance Principle,¹⁶ that proper appreciation and/or critical judgements of an artwork should be grounded in a first-hand encounter with the work, and crucially cannot be based on a description of the work. Noel Carroll argues:

Evidence for the claim that one can have normatively appropriate, aesthetic experiences of objects such as artworks without directly encountering the works in question abound in the arena of artmaking often referred to as conceptual art. One of the most famous examples of this kind of art is Fountain by Marcel Duchamp. This work, in its various manifestations, has been widely discussed by artists,

¹¹ Boden, M (2011), p. 12.

¹² Goldie, P. & Schellekens, E. (2009), pp. 51-60.

¹³ Goldie, P. (2009), pp. 203-4.

¹⁴ Levinson, J. (2006), p. 29, and (1996), p. 137.

¹⁵ Levinson, J. (1996), p. 137.

¹⁶ Advocates of this principle include: Wollheim, R (1980), p. 233; Sibley, F. (1974); Scruton, R. (1974) Pettit, P. (1983); Tormey, A. (1973); Lopes, D. (2009); Eaton, M. (2001).

philosophers, critics, art historians, and innumerable members of the lay audience who follow the art world. But one wonders whether all those who speak of it have seen it or even a photograph of it. Of course, that they speak of it shows nothing. Yet I conjecture that quite often commentators who have not directly encountered Fountain have nevertheless made insightful remarks about it or, at least, have thought them to themselves when they have heard or read about Fountain second hand - that is, they have, so to say "gotten it", but without eyeballing it.¹⁷

CA has also been thought to reveal important truths about the nature of artistic value. Most commonly, CA is taken to show that the concept of artistic value is not exhausted by aesthetic value. Theodore Gracyk puts it rather succinctly here:

Aesthetic value will not explicate the value of every work of art as art; conceptual art makes it very clear that we are not going to get very far if we insist that all art is interesting for its aesthetic value.¹⁸

Some have gone further, arguing that CA refutes even the weaker claim that the value of a work of art is a matter of the experiences, not necessarily aesthetic, that it affords us. This view, championed by Malcolm Budd,¹⁹ Monroe Beardsley,²⁰ Robert Stecker,²¹ among others, is claimed to be inadequate since 'the point of conceptual art lies not in any experience afforded but - in the recognition of a given idea.'²²

¹⁷ Carroll, N. (2006), p. 78.

¹⁸ Gracyk, T. (1999), p. 219. See also Kieran, M. (1997c), p. 386. Kieran, M. (1997b), who argues that CA 'may have little aesthetic value but possess artistic value due to its cognitive and art historical aspects.' (p. 292), and Kaufman, D. (2002), who wonders at the persistence of this view 'in the wake of the conceptual revolution in art'. (pp. 152-153).

¹⁹ Budd, M. (1995).

²⁰ Beardsley, M. (1962), p. 620.

²¹ Stecker, R. (1997), pp. 251-8.

²² Kieran, M. (1997a), p. 246. See also Davies, D. (2006).

CA has also been claimed as a direct counterexample to the assumption that all art is embodied in a medium (see Matthews ²³ and Carroll ²⁴) and that skill and expertise are conditions of creativity (see Boden ²⁵).

The philosophical uses to which CA has been put, then, are diverse, and its import potentially both deep and far-reaching. But the amount of philosophical work that CA has been thought to do is vastly out of proportion to the philosophical attention it has received in its own right. The points made about CA, listed above, are, for the most part, made in passing, rather than being the conclusions of thorough investigations into its nature. It is odd for a type of art which apparently holds such sway philosophically to have received so little detailed philosophical attention.

Perhaps relevant here is that there is a hint of a prejudice that to seriously engage with conceptual art, to do anything other than dismiss it out of hand, is to be philosophically soft, to compromise one's commitment to logic and rigour. But this doesn't do either side any favours - as well as being unfair to CA, it is arguably equally unfair to analytic philosophy - it plays into the hands of those who criticise analytic aesthetics for being out of touch with developments in art. It should be possible to treat conceptual art as a subject matter to be held up to serious philosophical scrutiny.

As another possible explanation, one might wonder if the reason is a perceived lack of the need for philosophical work to be done in this area. Do philosophers, perhaps,

²³ Matthews, (1979), p. 48.

²⁴ Carroll, N. (1999), p. 77.

²⁵ Boden, M. (2007b), p. 321.

think that the question of what CA is and how it differs from other art is settled already and so focus their efforts on its implications for other theories? This cannot be right. On the contrary, one doesn't have to look particularly closely to discover that what is said about CA by philosophers hardly forms a consensus. There is disagreement about whether it can have aesthetic value (James Shelley,²⁶ Noel Carroll,²⁷ Elisabeth Schellekens²⁸), whether it can have cognitive value (Matthew Kieran,²⁹ Elisabeth Schellekens,³⁰ and Peter Goldie³¹ cite it as obviously or even paradigmatically an art of cognitive value, but James O. Young makes the lack of cognitive value his main objection to CA³²), whether it's art at all (Marcia Eaton,³³ Monroe Beardsley³⁴). Some philosophers have argued that it cannot be evaluated (see Diffey,³⁵ Etlin³⁶), others say it can have high artistic value (Matthew Kieran,³⁷ Noel Carroll,³⁸ Elisabeth Schellekens³⁹), others say it has low artistic value (Young,⁴⁰ Zangwill⁴¹). Some say it poses problems for a unified ontology of art because in CA

²⁶ Shelley, J. (2003).

²⁷ Carroll, N. (2004), p. 417.

²⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007).

²⁹ Kieran, M. (1997b), p. 292.

³⁰ Schellekens, E. (2007), pp. 73-74 and 83.

³¹ Goldie, P. (2007).

³² Young, J. (2003). p. 135.

³³ Eaton, M. (2004), p. 70.

³⁴ Beardsley, M. (1983), pp. 22-25.

³⁵ Diffey, T. (1991), p. 203.

³⁶ Beardsley, M. (1982), p. 154.

³⁷ Kieran, M. (1997b), p. 292.

³⁸ Carroll, N. (2004).

³⁹ Schellekens, E. (2007).

⁴⁰ Young, J. (2003), p. 135.

⁴¹ Zangwill, N. (2002), p. 117, n. 7.

all sorts of things are art,⁴² while others say all works of CA are ideas. Some have argued that it blurs the line between art and art-criticism (Philip Meeson⁴³).

Looking at how much disagreement there is on the nature of CA, and the extent to which deep philosophical points are claimed to rest on it, it seems pretty clear that this is an area that is in urgent need of serious philosophical attention. If the example of CA is to be wielded as a weapon with which to instantly demolish certain approaches (the aesthetic definition of art, for example), and bolster others (the theory Danto puts forward in 'The Artworld', for example⁴⁴), then we ought to have a clear idea of what it is.

In recent years, with the publication in 2007 of Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens's edited anthology *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, there has been a little more material explicitly taking CA as its focus, and within this a small number of papers addressing the question of what CA's distinctive nature consists in (plus a few more implicitly putting forward a view on this issue, as a premise in a further argument).⁴⁵ But as we shall see these papers all present different views as to what is distinctive about CA. And far from solving the problem entirely, they actually serve to highlight how much work there is to be done in this area, and how complicated the question of CA's distinctiveness is.

The question of what is distinctive about CA, then, is not one to which there is an obvious answer (cf. lots of people putting forward differing accounts), but is one

⁴² Boden, M. (2011), p. 12.

⁴³ Meeson, P. (1981).

⁴⁴ Danto, A. (1964).

⁴⁵ See Lamarque, P. (2007) Currie, G. (2007) Hopkins, R. (2007) and Schellekens, E. (2007).

which has potentially far-reaching implications for art in general. The legitimacy of various uses of CA to make and disprove philosophical claims about art in general, depends on whether the conception of CA upon which those claims rest is correct, and yet, given its unsettled but potentially far-reaching nature, it is a question that has not been given very much attention. This thesis aims to address that question.

Art that has had so much claimed for it philosophically by both philosophers and, as we will shortly see, artists, critics and historians, is surely an interesting enough topic in its own right, but in addition, with a clearer understanding of CA we will be in a good position to weigh up the claims that have been made about its implications for the philosophy of art.

The paucity of writing on CA in philosophy is in stark contrast to the attention it has received from art historians, theorists and critics. And here, too, just as in philosophy, grandiose claims are frequently made about CA's philosophical implications. CA is - ironically, perhaps - treated as a peculiarly *philosophical* art.

And looking at the works of CA themselves, it is easy to see why people have thought of this as the kind of thing that would be of interest to philosophers.

Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*

In the late 1960s Robert Barry produced a series of works using inert gases. For each work he released a specified quantity of a particular inert gas (the series included helium, neon, argon, krypton, xenon) into the atmosphere. What was

presented in the gallery, in each case, was a photograph of the place where this was done (see figure 1). This work might be thought to raise certain questions that are not raised by more traditional artworks.

There is, for example, a question about whether it matters if Barry actually did the activity specified or not. If it turned out that Barry had *not* in fact released 2 cubic feet of helium into the atmosphere on March 5 1969, as he had claimed, but still produced the photographs and so on, would that mean that Barry had not produced a work after all but merely deceived his audience into thinking he had produced a work?



Figure 1. *Inert Gas Series*. Robert Barry. (1969).

It seems there is room for debate and/or puzzlement on this issue, with *Inert Gas Series*, and with some other conceptual works, in a way that there is not for more traditional art.

While we can ask ‘would *Inert Gas Series* exist if no one had released the specified gases into the atmosphere in the way described?’, what would be the analogous question with more traditional art? The question ‘would Guernica exist if no one had

painted it?’ looks odd, since it is surely to be answered in the negative. It doesn’t seem there is any room for debate here.

One reason to suspect it might not matter in the case of *Inert Gas Series* whether the specified activity had or hadn’t happened, is that it wouldn’t make a difference to what the audience was presented with. In the Guernica case, this thing:



Figure 2. *Guernica*. Pablo Picasso. (1937).

wouldn’t exist, and it’s hard to imagine a more compelling case for Guernica’s not existing than that not existing. In the case of *Inert Gas Series*, however, everything the audience is presented with could still exist even if no one released the said quantities of gas into the atmosphere as described.

This question links up with the question of what, in all this, constitutes the work. Is the work the photographs presented in the gallery? The activity of releasing the gases? The gases themselves? The artist’s idea to release the gases as art?

If we are tempted to say that the work would still exist in the scenario described above, then it looks like we are thinking of the work as being something other than the *activity*.

Michael Asher - *Untitled* 1974

Much of the work of Michael Asher reverses the traditional model whereby artists put works in galleries by instead producing various works in which something was removed from the gallery. In 1974 for his untitled exhibit at Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles he removed the partition wall separating the main gallery space from the offices, thereby exposing to view aspects of the art gallery that were usually hidden.

The work is taken to be making a comment on the mysterious, secretive nature of the artworld, by directing attention for once to the workings of the gallery. But what is interesting about this work is how hard it is to pin down what the work is. Is the work visible? Since, in a sense, Asher hasn't added anything at all to the gallery, it's not immediately obvious what we should take the work to be. And yet there is something that those entering the gallery during the exhibition of Asher's work can see that they can't normally see (viz. the gallery's offices). Although perhaps there's something odd, too, about saying that *this* is the work.

Duchamp's *L. H. O. O. Q* and *L. H. O. O. Q Shaved*

L. H. O. O. Q. is a work that Marcel Duchamp made by drawing a moustache and goatee on a copy of the Mona Lisa, and writing 'L. H. O. O. Q.' below it. *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* is a work he made as a successor to this, which is an unaltered copy of the Mona Lisa with "L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved" written below it.



Figure 3. *L. H. O. O. Q.* Marcel Duchamp. (1919).

If *Fountain* and other readymades raised issues about art, as many have thought, because of its resemblance to a non-artwork, *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* seems to take matters further, with *its* resemblance to *an existing artwork*.

There are issues here about the degree of resemblance between *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* and the Mona Lisa. *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* is listed by the MOMA as being 21 by 13.8 centimetres in size, and the materials are given as 'playing card with colored ink on printed invitation', while the Mona Lisa is listed by the Louvre as being 77cm by 53 centimetres in size, and the materials are given as 'oil on poplar wood'.

Should we take *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* to be the item in the MOMA or should we think of the item in the MOMA as one of many possible *instances* of *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*? Should we take Duchamp to have nominated the Mona Lisa itself as a new artwork, or should we take him to have nominated, rather, a particular *copy* of the Mona Lisa? Would it even be *possible* for someone to nominate an existing artwork as a new artwork (without doing anything to it), i.e. is it possible for a single entity to simultaneously be two different artworks?

If we opt for the view that *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* should be identified not with the Mona Lisa itself but with the particular copy of the Mona Lisa, then what, if anything, should we make of the fact that as time passes the playing card at the MOMA and the painted poplar wood at the Louvre start to look more and more different? Being made of different materials they will age differently. If the resemblance to the Mona Lisa is artistically significant in the case of *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*, and if we should identify this work with the particular copy of the Mona Lisa, does this mean that its nature changes over time?

Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*

Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is another example of a conceptual work that uses an existing artwork. In 1953 Rauschenberg obtained a drawing by the respected and successful artist Willhelm de Kooning, and erased it. He then exhibited the resulting worn and nearly blank piece of paper as his own artwork, titling it *Erased de Kooning Drawing*.



Figure 4. *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. Robert Rauschenberg (1953).

This work appears to be in some sense parasitic on an earlier artwork. But what aspects of the earlier work, if any, matter? Does it matter what the original drawing was like? De Kooning himself said that he thought it was important that the drawing he was to give to Rauschenberg should be something he would miss, not just any old

drawing.⁴⁶ Could that be right? Does it matter who the drawing was by? Is it important that the drawing was by de Kooning and not Frank Auerbach, for example? Rauschenberg himself said that he had initially considered erasing one of his own drawings, but decided that it had to be a work by someone else:

Using my own work wasn't satisfactory . . . I realized that it had to be something by someone who everybody agreed was great, and the most logical person for that was de Kooning.⁴⁷

Is he right that that would make a difference?

Does it even matter whether there *was* an original drawing? Analogously with the Robert Barry work discussed above, suppose Rauschenberg started to have second thoughts about going through with erasing de Kooning's drawing, and so instead just drew something himself and erased it, but still called it *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, and didn't tell anyone that the de Kooning hadn't really been erased. Would that make a difference to the work?

Addressing the question of what CA's distinctive nature consists in should help us to get clearer about what could be going on in these kinds of cases, as well as clarifying what, if anything, CA tells us about art in general.

The purpose of this thesis is to get clear on what exactly conceptual art is. Before we embark on this task, though, it is necessary to go through some clarificatory matters about what exactly I take the project to be, and some methodological matters about how it will be carried out. The former involves distinguishing between two uses of

⁴⁶ Quoted in Betti, C. (2008), p. 163.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Adler, A. (2009), p. 283.

'conceptual art' both of which are fairly common, and stating what kind of answer to the question 'What is conceptual art?' I am looking for. These will be the tasks of Sections 1 and 2 respectively. The latter involves specifying what the method of answering this question will be, and will be dealt with in Section 3.

Section 1. Two Uses of 'Conceptual Art'

It will be useful to distinguish between two uses of the term 'conceptual art'. One very common usage, which I will refer to as the historical use, refers to an art movement which began in the late 1960s, and lasted till the early 1970s, whose proponents included Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, the group Art & Language, Adrian Piper, Henry Flynt, Douglas Huebler, On Kawara, Dan Graham, John Baldessari; and which was exemplified in the exhibitions, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper, Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* (1966); *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* (1970) New York Cultural Centre; *When Attitudes Become Form* 1969 ICA; and first written about in Sol LeWitt's 1967 manifesto 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', swiftly followed by the publication in 1969 of Kosuth's 'Art after Philosophy', LeWitt's 'Sentences on CA', and the first issue of *Art-Language Journal* (subtitled 'The Journal of Conceptual Art') which was produced by the members of the group Art & Language; championed by unconventional art dealer Seth Siegelaub, and by critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, who documented it in their famous 1968 article 'The Dematerialization of

Art', in the journal *Art International*, and Donald Karshan who coined the term 'Post-Object Art' in his 1970 article of that name in *Studio International*.

Now, there is an important sense in which this captures just the subject-matter I am interested in here, and indeed, the subject that anyone who purports to be talking about CA must in some sense have in mind. However, there is another important sense in which this historical use of 'conceptual art' is too narrow to capture everything which someone concerned with CA's relevance to philosophical aesthetics ought to take into account.

In the historical sense of 'CA', a work that was made a long time before, or after, the 1960s heyday of CA, or outside of any contact with any of its key players, does not qualify as CA. So, for example, Duchamp's readymades, such as *Fountain*, often heralded as the first conceptual art, would not qualify as CA on the historical use, since they were made several decades too early; likewise contemporary works in the conceptual tradition, such as Angus Fairhurst's 1995 work *Gallery Connections* would not qualify either, as they were made far too late.

However, insofar as CA is philosophically interesting, it is going to be because of the *kind of art it is*, not because of the period in which it was made or the artists by whom, or artistic community within which, it was made. If CA really does raise questions for the ontology or definition of art, or call into question the close relationship that has long been thought to exist between the artistic and the aesthetic, it will surely be because it is art whose ontological status is at odds with the claims of major theories on the subject, or because it is art whose value as art is not aesthetic, or because it is art that fails to exhibit those properties thought to have been

necessary for art-status, and *not* because of when, where or by whom it was made. Putting aside for the moment the question of whether any of these claims are true, it should be plain to see that these are claims about the nature of works of CA, and this nature in some sense jarring with received orthodoxy on the nature of art in general. They are not claims which in any sense depend on the work's having been made at a particular time, in a particular place, or by a particular artist. It will certainly be true that a great deal of CA was made during the mid-to-late 1960s, in New York and London, but this shouldn't be so by definitional fiat, but by historical fact. It shouldn't be part of what it takes to qualify as CA.

The sense of 'CA' that will be our focus here, then, is ahistorical. Call it the *categorical* use of the term. What links works together as being CA in this categorical sense, is their having certain characteristics, rather than being part of any historical movement. My project is to identify what these characteristics are that all works of CA (in the categorical sense) have in common, and which distinguish it from other art. Henceforth I will use 'CA' only in the categorical sense.

Section 2. What Kind of Definition I am Seeking

Some writers, particularly in the domains of art-history and art-theory, have characterised CA in terms of a set of 'tendencies' no combination of which is to be taken as necessary or sufficient for being CA.⁴⁸

I take my project here to be somewhat stricter than this. Rather than just identifying tendencies and leaving alone the question of which, if any, are criterial, I want to pinpoint exactly what qualities make an artwork a conceptual one.

We noted in the Introduction some of the ways in which the example of CA is used to make philosophical points, and to disqualify certain theories and suggest others. If this tendency to use CA as an example by which general theories about art stand or fall, is well-founded (even, perhaps, if it is not), important philosophical issues depend on how this question of CA's nature is answered. The precise ways in which CA is different from other art are of crucial importance in determining the truth of these claims about its philosophical import. In order to be able to fairly assess the claims about what CA in particular reveals about art in general, we need a clear grasp of the precise ways in which CA differs from other art. For this reason we need to know the precise conditions under which an artwork qualifies as conceptual.

My question, then, can be answered only by providing conditions that are necessary and sufficient for an artwork to be conceptual.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Osborne, P. (2002), p. 18.

Among the few papers that have been written addressing the question of what exactly CA is, the general understanding seems to be that the question calls for identifying necessary and sufficient conditions. Rival theories are rejected on the grounds that they don't distinguish CA from *all* other art - i.e. that the conditions they offer are not sufficient - or that they do not apply to all conceptual art - i.e. that the conditions offered are not necessary.⁴⁹

I should also clarify that although I have identified my project to be that of defining CA, I am not here interested in defining *art*. Nor do I need to define art in order to define CA. Conceptual art is a kind of art; a subset of the broader category, art. And in general, when P is a subset of Q, one does not need to know how to define Q in order to be able to say what makes a Q a P. One can say what it is about the Qs that are Ps that makes them Ps, without taking any particular view on what it is that makes something a Q. So, for example, knowledge by acquaintance is a particular kind of knowledge. But a philosophical investigation into what is distinctive about knowledge by acquaintance needn't solve the issue first of defining knowledge. Even if the question of what defines knowledge has not been settled, one can still sensibly ask what differentiates knowledge by acquaintance from other knowledge - what work the '*by acquaintance*' is doing. Similarly, we don't need to say what makes something art in order to be able to say what criteria an artwork has to meet to be a conceptual artwork.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Lamarque, P. (2007); Currie, G. (2007); Hopkins, R. (2007).

Section 3. Methodology

In seeking an account of what distinguishes CA from other art, I will take as a prephilosophical starting point claims made about CA by those involved in it. This, of course, calls for a certain amount of clarification and justification. It needs to be clarified what it is to be 'involved' in CA in the relevant way, and it needs to be justified why the claims made by people involved, in the relevant way, with CA should have any kind of priority.

I will deal with the question of justification first, as the answer to it will provide the beginnings of an answer to the clarificatory question. Two points are relevant here:

Firstly, in philosophical projects where a definition is sought of some concept/term or other, there will always be a certain amount of appealing to prephilosophical data - uses of that term, how people (preferably untainted by allegiances to particular philosophical theories) would use the term. Think of attempts to define knowledge. Standardly, philosophers test proposed accounts of what it is to know that P against prephilosophical intuitions about whether one would count as knowing that P in certain situations. The famous Gettier cases are prime examples of that strategy. Gettier cases are devised as counterexamples to the definition of knowledge as justified true belief.⁵⁰ They are thought experiments in which imaginary situations are stipulated to meet all the conditions that the proposed theory claims to be sufficient for knowledge and yet of which we are inclined to say are not cases of genuine knowledge. It is an appeal to prephilosophical data about how we apply the concept *knowledge*. And the fact that philosophers across the board tend to take these cases

⁵⁰ Gettier, E. (1963).

seriously suggests that the requirement that a proposed theory fit well with the prephilosophical data is one that is recognised pretty universally.

In aesthetics matters are no different. When philosophers address the question of how to define art, they appeal to existing prephilosophical intuitions about what the term does and does not apply to.

The second point is that aesthetics is plausibly a second-order discipline. What this means is that it is the philosophy of another, existing discipline, with its own areas of expertise, and its own experts etc. In this respect it is like, say, the philosophy of science, and unlike, say, metaphysics or epistemology.

Philosophy of science is the philosophy of an existing discipline, and that discipline is one that has its own pool of knowledge, and its own experts, etc. For this reason, the philosopher of science must in many cases take more seriously the claims made by practitioners in that discipline, scientists, than claims made by the layperson, since the scientist has a better understanding and is better informed about scientific issues and concepts than the layperson.

Similarly, aesthetics is the philosophy of existing disciplines, art and art criticism. And since these are disciplines in which people can be more or less well informed, the aesthetician must in many cases give precedence to claims made about art, and in this case conceptual art, by those who are well-informed about it, rather than treating all prephilosophical claims about art as being on a par.⁵¹

⁵¹ This same point is made by Kaufman, D. (2002), p. 152; and Crawford, D. (1991), p. 20.

Thus questions such as ‘what is art?’ and ‘what is conceptual art?’ are different from the question ‘what is knowledge?’ in the sense that there is such a thing as being well-informed about art versus being a layperson about art, but there is no corresponding sense of being well-informed or a layperson about knowledge. For the latter, all prephilosophical intuitions are pretty much on a par, whereas for the former they are not.

Of course, that is not to say that artists, critics and historians can’t be wrong. Most philosophers want to allow, for example, that artists can in principle be mistaken about their own work, and I agree that this is right, but it is important to note that the strategy I am proposing does not foreclose that possibility. Rather, the claim is just that our starting point should be to work out how, if at all, these claims can be right. We should reject the claims made by those within the first order discipline only if there are compelling reasons to do so.

Of course, where there is significant disagreement within the first order discipline, this strategy won’t be available. But when there is a consensus, or even something approximating to a consensus, or certain identifiable lines of thought, these provide a useful starting point for philosophical enquiry, and it seems perfectly sensible to investigate these claims, and what it would take for them to be true.

So if what we have argued in response to the first question is correct, there will be people who are well-informed - albeit not necessarily *philosophically* - about conceptual art. And as my task here is to give a philosophical account of CA, I should begin by taking their pronouncements on CA seriously. Who, then, belongs to this group?

The group includes the artists who produce works that get categorised as CA, the people who wrote founding manifestos of CA, the critics who championed and arguably helped to shape CA from the beginning of the historical movement, art dealers like Seth Siegelaub who were also instrumental in the development of CA, and also art-historians and theorists who have taken a sustained scholarly interest in CA (Peter Osborne, Gregory Battcock, Ursula Meyer, Robert C Morgan).

These are all important figures in the community around CA. They are all linked by their proximity in some sense to CA.

Once again, this might be thought to beg the question; why assume that people who make a particular kind of art are authorities on the nature of that kind of art? Doesn't this assume artists can't be wrong about what they produce?

I think there are two points to make here. Firstly, to reiterate, no such assumption is being made - the methodology I describe leaves room for an artist to be wrong about his work, but it just recommends exploring the possibility that the artist is right about his work first, and rejecting it only if compelling philosophical reason for doing so emerges from this process. Secondly, CA is plausibly a rather unusual kind of art in that its artists tended to be far more reflective about what they were doing than is perhaps generally the case. Indeed it is often cited as one of the defining traits of the CA movement that its artists rejected what was then the dominant model, encapsulated in the Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman's quip that 'aesthetics is for artists what ornithology is for birds'. Conceptual artists, in other words, saw themselves as rebelling against the idea that the artist's activity is limited

to the production of works, and the activity of theorising about them and making sense of them is not part of their remit. These artists took an unprecedented interest in the activity of theorising about art, and especially about their own art. So given this there is perhaps more *prima facie* reason to take seriously the pronouncements of conceptual artists about their works than there might be to take artists' pronouncements seriously in general.

In pursuing the question of what is distinctive about CA, this thesis will engage closely with both the large body of literature on the subject in art-history, art criticism etc., and the small amount that has been produced on the subject in analytic philosophy.

Chapter 1 will be concerned with identifying the different positions on the nature of CA that are occupied in the literature. It will turn out that there are important parallels between the philosophical and non-philosophical writings on CA.

I begin by identifying common lines of thought in the literature on CA. I identify two dimensions in which the field may be divided and two possible positions someone could take with respect to each. And looking at the philosophers who have taken any kind of stand on the issue of what distinguishes CA from other art, I show where each would be located on this schema.

Chapters 2-5 are concerned with discussing each of these positions in detail, engaging with actual and possible arguments for and against the position in each case. And within this framework I put forward a new position on what CA's distinctive nature consists in.

Chapter 1.

Making Sense of the Literature on Conceptual Art

Introduction

We argued in the introduction that any attempt to say what is distinctive about CA ought to take as a starting point (though not necessarily an infeasible constraint) the claims made by those involved in it. That includes manifestos and more general writings and statements by conceptual artists, as well as writings by a core group of critics and curators associated with the movement. So in this chapter I will identify the main ways of characterising CA that are implicitly or explicitly held in this literature.

I will begin by noting some common threads running through the vast majority of what is written about CA. In Sections 2 and 3 I will identify some issues on which there is disagreement, and will identify two very common schools of thought on each. By the end of this chapter we should have a kind of conceptual map of the different kinds of position that is common to take on CA and how they relate to each other. Finally I will show where the main philosophical accounts of CA are situated on this map.

Section 1. Common Threads in the Literature

Trying to extract a definition of CA from the writings of those involved in it is not easy. Not only are these writings often lacking in clarity, as we shall see, but also there is a fair amount of disagreement as to what conceptual art is. Indeed it has been remarked that there are as many accounts of CA as there are conceptual artists.¹ But one tendency that has been remarkably prevalent in the literature on CA is to characterise it in terms of its emphasis of ‘ideas’. Whatever the differences between competing accounts of CA, it is striking how much the thought that CA is distinctive in the centrality of its employment of ideas seems to be a, perhaps *the*, point on which almost all of these disparate accounts agree.

¹ Lucy Lippard, quoted in Tate Modern handbook, 2006.

Moreover, this is true both of the writings of people involved with CA, and also in the literature on CA more widely, including work by art- and cultural historians, art critics, and analytic philosophers.

Sol LeWitt, an artist who is classed both as a minimal and a conceptual artist, wrote two of the first statements on CA, both of which are now fairly unanimously treated as authoritative statements on the nature of CA. In these writings, LeWitt makes numerous references to ideas:

In conceptual art the **idea** or concept is the most important aspect of the work... the execution is a perfunctory affair. ²

The **idea** becomes a machine that makes the art. ³

the **idea** itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. ⁴

CA is only good when the **idea** is good. ⁵

Joseph Kosuth, another figure central to the movement, also makes a striking number of references to ideas in his essay 'Art After Philosophy':

The art exists only as an invisible, ethereal **idea**. ⁶

The forms were only a device in the service of an **idea**. ⁷

² LeWitt, S (1967) , p. 12.

³ LeWitt, S (1967), p. 12.

⁴ LeWitt, S (1967), p. 14.

⁵ LeWitt, S (1967), p. 16.

⁶ Joseph Kosuth, as cited in Shirey, D. (1969), p. 41.

⁷ Kosuth, J. (1993) p. 50.

and, when talking about his own work, often makes statements such as:

I didn't consider the photostat a work of art; only the **idea** was art.⁸

Art & Language, an art group strongly associated with CA, still use the term 'idea' to characterise CA, they assume that unlike other art, CA 'produce[s] a material entity only as a necessary by-product of the need to record the **idea**'⁹ Charles Harrison, who was a member of Art & Language, describes their work as an art 'made *of ideas*'¹⁰

Adrian Piper, another early conceptual artist, writes that 'good **ideas** are necessary and sufficient for good art',¹¹ and that 'the existence of an **idea** is necessary and sufficient for the existence of art; **idea** is equivalent to art'.¹²

The universality of this use of the term 'idea' to characterise CA is also evidenced in the prevalence of phrases like 'Idea Art' and 'art as idea'.¹³

⁸ Rose, A. (1969) p. 145.

⁹ Atkinson, T. (2000), p. 54.

¹⁰ Harrison, C. (2003a), p. 70.

¹¹ Piper, A. (1969), p. 5.

¹² Piper, A. (1969), p. 8.

¹³ Gregory Batcock's 1973 anthology of CA was entitled 'Idea Art'; Lippard, L. (1997) uses the term throughout as interchangeable with 'conceptual art'. The conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth frequently used the term 'art-as-idea' interchangeably with 'conceptual art', even naming a series of his works 'Art as Idea as Idea'. See also Kozloff, M. (1972) , pp. 33-7.

Seth Siegelaub, a curator and art dealer who championed CA and embraced unconventional practices for its display, stated: 'the type of art that I'm involved with and concerned about has to do less with materiality than **ideas** and intangible considerations'.¹⁴

Lucy Lippard, an art critic who famously coined the phrase 'dematerialization of the art object' to describe conceptual art, says:

Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the **idea** is paramount and the material is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, and/or dematerialized¹⁵

at one point claiming that 'the actual works of art are **ideas**,'¹⁶ and talks of a new function for the gallery, 'not as exhibition hall but as bank of **ideas**'.¹⁷

Other art critics at the time similarly describe CA in terms of ideas. John Gruen writes, in the New York Magazine in 1970:

Just what is Conceptual Art? It is possibly the ultimate of art movements in that there are no art objects involved. Its artists deal only in ideas. The movement talks about art, but does not create it. It is all on the drawing board of the mind, so to speak, and none of it must be executed. The artist's idea *is* the work of art.¹⁸

¹⁴ Seth Siegelaub, April 17 1969, quoted in P. Norvell & A. Alberro (Eds.) *Recoding Conceptual Art*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Lippard, L (1995), p. 17

¹⁶ Lippard, L. (1997), p. 25.

¹⁷ Lippard, L. (1997), p. 159.

¹⁸ Gruen, J. (1970), p. 65.

This way of characterising CA still looks to be the orthodoxy among art-historians and others writing about art now. Roberta Smith, whose paper on conceptual art is taken as an authority on the subject, identifies the mark of CA as “an unprecedented emphasis on **ideas**: **ideas** in, around and about art and everything else”.¹⁹ Others are broadly in agreement:

[In conceptual art] the **idea** is king²⁰

[Conceptual art] communicated **ideas** rather than producing objects. ²¹

Conceptual artists asserted that the ‘artfulness’ of art lay in the artist’s **idea** rather than in its final expression. These artists regarded the **idea**, or concept, as the defining component of the artwork. Indeed, some conceptual artists eliminated the object altogether. ²²

Conceptual art is not about forms or materials, but about **ideas** and meanings. ²³

The far-reaching impact of conceptual art is now well understood as a self-conscious recognition of the relation of **ideas** and materials in art. ²⁴

Conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s were more concerned with the formation of artistic **ideas** than with the formal craft of their implementation. ²⁵

Conceptual art in general refers to an art of **ideas** and concepts combining image with text so as to modify meaning, or it can refer to a whole installation whose components combine to convey an idea. ²⁶

Modernist theory has focused on the medium. By contrast, Conceptual Art stressed **ideas**. ... Indeed, in a number of instances artists placed a statement about an art object in the gallery, thereby focusing attention on the **idea** rather than the object (which might never have been actually made). ²⁷

¹⁹ Smith, R. (1994), p. 256.

²⁰ Wood, P. (2002), p. 33.

²¹ Campany, D. (1999), p. 133.

²² Kleiner, F. (2009), p. 1020.

²³ Godfrey, T. (1998), p. 4.

²⁴ Chandler, A., Neumark, N. (2005), p. 49.

²⁵ Cloninger, C. (2009), p. 23.

²⁶ Barnitz, J., p. 262, f/n 3

²⁷ Wells, L. (2000), p. 278.

In conceptual art of the mainstream, works avoided physicality (on which all previous artistic production allegedly depended) as much as possible, striving instead for the "higher" plane of **ideas**.²⁸

It is important to stress that Conceptual Art includes a range of diverse artistic practices unified in an identification of the work of art with concepts or **ideas** rather than material objects.²⁹

Conceptual Art frustrate[d] the gallery system, since **ideas** could not easily be bought, carried home, and placed over someone's couch.³⁰

The use of the term 'idea' in encyclopedia entries on CA further adds to the impression that this is the default way of characterising CA:

Conceptual art. A type of art in which the **idea or ideas** that a work represents are considered its essential component and the finished 'product'.³¹

Conceptual art is the name given to a type of art in which the "**ideas**" or concepts that a work represents are the essential things.³²

Conceptual Art. A broad term covering a variety of artistic activities that emerged in the mid to late 1960s, **conceptual art** was based on the premise that an artist's **ideas** are the defining feature of a work of art.³³

Conceptual art is about an **idea**, and the materials used to articulate or explore that idea could either be purely conceptual (so that verbal instructions or a description replace an artefact) or be destroyed in their use. The only record of a conceptual art work might then be photographic or other documentation of its design and construction (Claes Oldenburg's Placid City Monument entailed gravediggers excavating and then filling a large hole in Central Park).³⁴

²⁸ Higgins, H. (2002), p. 115.

²⁹ Taylor, M. (1999), p. 13.

³⁰ Fahlman, B. (1996), p. 155.

³¹ Chilvers, I. (2004), Entry on Conceptual Art.

³² Vaughan, W. H. T. (2000), p. 17.

³³ Rood, K. (1994), p. 80.

³⁴ Edgar, A. and Sedgwick, P. R. (Eds.), p. 51.

Finally, and perhaps unsurprisingly by this stage, analytic philosophers tend to characterise CA in these terms as well:

In conceptual art what is good to look at is demoted in favour of almost exclusive attention to **ideas**.³⁵

The point of conceptual art lies not in any experience afforded but in the recognition of a given **idea**.³⁶

In its purest form CA abolishes the art object altogether... as something to be contemplated and appreciated for itself, reducing it to a mere instrument for communicating an idea.³⁷

[In Conceptual Art] the role of the object is reduced to that of communicating **ideas**.³⁸

[Works of conceptual art] replace art for art's sake with art as **idea**.³⁹

What was important was artistic inspiration, an **idea**. Everything may be art, even a thought of an artist, which does not have to be materialized in any way.⁴⁰

As its name suggests, CA is important for its **ideas**. Often these ideas are about the nature of art.⁴¹

Conceptual Art aims to remove the traditional emphasis on sensory pleasure and beauty, replacing it with an emphasis on **ideas** and the view that the art object is to be 'dematerialized'.⁴²

³⁵ Slater, H. (1997), p. 229.

³⁶ Kieran, M. (1997a), p. 246.

³⁷ Osborne, H. (1980), p. 15.

³⁸ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 161.

³⁹ Carney, J. (1994), p. 122.

⁴⁰ Dziemidok, B (1988), p. 6.

⁴¹ Carroll, N. (1999), p. 77.

⁴² Goldie, P. & Schellekens, E. (Eds.) (2007) p. xii.

The quoted passages above should give some impression of the prevalence of characterising CA in terms of the emphasis of the 'idea'. Equally prevalent, however, is the failure to say anything informative about what 'idea' is supposed to mean in this context. Thus caution ought to be exercised at this stage, lest the agreement turn out to be superficial. If there are different construals of 'idea', the claims that look superficially to agree might be saying quite different things. This issue will be the subject of Section 3, where I will identify the most plausible candidates for how 'idea' should be understood.

A second, related, point of similarity between accounts of CA is the tendency to characterise it in terms of a contrast of some kind, between aspects that are emphasised in CA and aspects that are de-emphasised. Overwhelmingly often, the claims about the prominence CA gives to ideas are accompanied by claims about the lack of prominence of certain other aspects: materials, perceptual properties, objects, technical skill, to name a few of the most common. Most often there is some suggestion that the emphasis and de-emphasis are linked; that, for example, the lack of emphasis on materials, perceptual properties and the rest serves to accentuate the fact that it is ideas that are important here.

The tendency to characterise CA in terms of an emphasis on ideas, then, should be understood as part of an even more general tendency in which CA is characterised in terms of a positive claim about what it emphasises, and a negative claim about what it de-emphasises. The positive claim is overwhelmingly often couched in terms of 'ideas', as we have seen, (although sometimes it is the concept, the intellectual, etc.); while the negative claim takes

the form, variously, of a de-emphasis of materials, physical properties, form, objects, visual properties, and perceptual properties.

Now of course the claims that CA de-emphasises the perceptual, the physical, objects and materials, and form are far from incompatible. Many commentators have run them together. There are clearly, at the very least, strong links between all of these concepts.

Some might argue that they all amount to the same thing, and that all commentators that talk of the de-emphasis of any of these are essentially making the same point. But to a significant extent, different commentators have tended to favour different terms; whether this amounts to any important difference is a matter that will become clearer in Section 3.

Examples where the negative claim takes as its particular focus the diminished role of *objects* can be seen in Harold Osborne's claim that 'in its purest form conceptual art **abolishes the art object altogether**... as something to be contemplated and appreciated for itself, reducing it to a mere instrument for communicating an idea',⁴³ Roberta Smith's claim that CA marks the '**abandonment of that unique, permanent yet portable (and thus infinitely saleable) luxury item, the traditional art object**. In its place there arose an unprecedented emphasis on ideas',⁴⁴ Dziemidok's claim that CA demonstrates 'that in fact **the object is not at all necessary**', and that 'what was important

⁴³ Osborne, H. (1980), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Smith, R. (1994), p. 256.

was artistic inspiration, an idea',⁴⁵ Savedoff's suggestion that CA presents **an exception to the general rule that 'the object is ... central** to the interpretation of works in traditional art, since [in CA] the role of the object is reduced to that of communicating ideas',⁴⁶ Alexander Alberro's claim that in CA 'there was no longer an art object in the conventional sense'⁴⁷, Ursula Meyer's claim that 'Conceptual art emphasizes the elimination of the art object',⁴⁸ and in Donald Karshan's alternative name for conceptual art, 'Post-Object Art'.^{49, 50}

Others take as their focus a de-emphasis of the visual, or the perceptual more generally: see Gregory Currie's claim that it is 'a form of art which radically and self-consciously **rejects the priority of visual experience in art**',⁵¹ Roger

⁴⁵ Dziemidok, B. (1988), p. 6.

⁴⁶ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 161.

⁴⁷ Alberro, A. (2004), p. 4.

⁴⁸ Meyer, Ursula (1972), p. viii.

⁴⁹ See Karshan, D. (1970) who links the downgrading of the object with more intellectual, 'serious' art: "In this end of the Twentieth Century we now know that art does indeed exist as an idea. And we know that quality exists in the thinking of the artist, not in the objects he employs - if he employs an object at all ... Post-object art is based on the premise that the idea of art has expanded beyond the object of visual experience to an area of serious art 'investigations'. That is, to a philosophical-like inquiry into the nature of the concept 'art'"(p. 69).

⁵⁰ For more examples of CA being characterised in terms of a downgrading of the object, see Corris, M. (2004) who identifies as one of 'the most striking features of CA' its 'de-emphasis on the importance of the art object' (preface); Wollen, P. (2004) who argues that 'Conceptual art problematized and decentred - even, at times, erased - the traditional art object' (p. 27); Goldstein, A. & Rorimer, A. (1995) who acknowledge that 'The association of Conceptual art with the primacy of the idea, in some cases to the point of the elimination of a physical art object, does represent a key strategy' ('Introduction', p. 13); Kieran, M. (2005b) who identifies 'the main motivation behind people's suspicion of conceptual art' as 'the recognition that, at least in some such art, the material object is dispensable' (p. 135); Rosenberg, H. (1972), 'Ultimately, the repudiation of the aesthetic suggests the total elimination of the art object and its replacement by an idea for a work or by the rumour that one has been consummated—as in conceptual art.' (p. 29.); and Strickland, C. & Boswell, J. (1992) who describe CA as a kind of art in which 'idea rather than art object dominates' (contents page).

⁵¹ Currie, G. (2007), p. 49.

Seamon's claim that CA '**eliminated**' the '**necessity of the perceptual**',⁵² Douglas Huebler's envisaging of the conceptual project as entailing 'the work having its **visual aspects removed**',⁵³ John Albert Walker's claim that conceptual artists 'appeared to have **abandoned visual imagery and optical pleasure**',⁵⁴ and Margaret Boden's association of CA with an 'emphasis on ideas **rather than sensory perception**'.⁵⁵

Still others couch the negative claim in terms of materials. This is most famously exemplified by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler in their article 'The Dematerialisation of Art',⁵⁶ and other instances of this view include Carolyn Wilde's claim that 'CA wants to elevate the motivating idea or intellectual content of the work **over any value which its material presence might offer**'.⁵⁷

The claim that CA de-emphasises the physical can be seen in Robert Smithson's thought that CA 'seems to **avoid physical mass**. You're left mainly with an idea'.⁵⁸

⁵² Seamon, R. (2001), p. 139.

⁵³ Huebler, D. (1969) Interview with Patricia Norvell, quoted in *Recording Conceptual Art*, p. 136.

⁵⁴ Walker, J. A. (2001), p. 32.

⁵⁵ Boden, M. (2007), p. 225.

⁵⁶ Lippard L. & Chandler, J. (1968).

⁵⁷ Wilde, C. (2007), p. 120.

⁵⁸ Smithson, R. & Flam, J. (1996), p. 298.

Joseph Kosuth's contrasting of CA with formalist art in his 'Art after Philosophy'⁵⁹, and Kristine Stiles' claim that conceptual works 'stressed the conceptual idea communicated by the art **rather than its formal aspects**',⁶⁰ are examples of characterising CA as de-emphasising form.

Three things should be striking here: firstly, the prevalence of the tendency to characterise CA in terms of a negative claim about what it de-emphasises as well as a positive claim about what it emphasises; secondly, the different forms which the negative claim takes (downgrading objects, perceptual properties, form, etc.); and thirdly the tendency to think of this negative claim as quite closely linked to the positive claim. Often the emphasised aspect is represented as 'taking the place of' the de-emphasised aspect, as though the de-emphasis somehow makes room for the emphasis.

In the remainder of this chapter we will address two questions. First, there is the question of what the de-emphasised properties should be taken to be. We noted above that the properties that CA is variously characterised as de-emphasising all appear to be linked, and so the different claims about what CA de-emphasised may turn out to be compatible. We will see in Section 3 that there are indeed close links between them, and that, underlying these various claims, there are really just two main types of contrast that are being drawn; or rather two main lines of thought as to what the contrasted properties are.

⁵⁹ Kosuth, J. (1969a), pp. 13-32.

⁶⁰ Stiles, K. (1996), p. 806.

But in addition to the question of what the contrasted properties should be taken to be, there is also a question of what exactly the contrast between them amounts to. We can see from the quotations just discussed above that the claims range from the extreme 'elimination', 'abandonment', 'removal', 'abolishment' of the de-emphasised aspects, to the milder claims that CA merely fails to stress or emphasise them, or 'rejects' their 'priority'. In the next section I will look more closely at what is being claimed here. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of what we should take the emphasised and de-emphasised properties to be, I want to address the issue of what form the emphasis and de-emphasis are supposed to take.

Section 2. Constitution and Priority Accounts

It is possible to discern, in the literature on CA, two broad ways in which the positive and negative claim - the emphasis on ideas and the corresponding de-emphasis on materials, perceptual properties and the rest - are supposed to be taken.

The first has it that in CA, unlike in other art, the idea *is* the work. What is de-emphasised - materials, objects, visual or perceptual properties - is so because it is not in fact part of the work at all. This identification of the work with the idea is

exemplified in John Gruen's unambiguous comment that in CA 'the artist's idea *is* the work of art', ⁶¹ Lucy Lippard's, that 'the actual works of art are ideas', ⁶² and in LeWitt's claim that 'the idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product', ⁶³ as well as Kosuth's avowal about his work *One and Three Chairs* that 'I didn't consider the photostat a work of art; only the idea was art'. ⁶⁴ The statement that the unifying factor in all CA is 'an identification of the work of art with concepts or ideas rather than material objects' ⁶⁵ also exemplifies this approach. The claim that Conceptual Art 'frustrate[d] the gallery system, since ideas could not easily be bought, carried home, and placed over someone's couch', ⁶⁶ also looks to belong to this school of thought, since it makes sense only if you take it to be saying that the works are the ideas. Otherwise how would the fact that 'ideas could not easily be bought, carried home, and placed over someone's couch' be relevant? The implicit assumption here seems to be that the works are ideas, and so the fact that ideas can't easily be bought etc., means that in CA the *works* can't easily be bought.

A second line of thought has it that in CA the idea is not itself the work, but is the *most important aspect* of the work. The de-emphasis of materials, perceptual properties etc., is a matter of their being in some sense less important aspects of the work. This approach is exemplified by claims like LeWitt's, that 'In conceptual

⁶¹ Gruen, J. (1970), p. 65.

⁶² Lippard, L. (1997), p. 25.

⁶³ LeWitt, S. (1967) (in Alberro & Stimson), p. 14.

⁶⁴ Rose, A. (Joseph Kosuth) (1989), p. 145.

⁶⁵ Taylor, M. (1999), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Fahlman, B. (1996), p. 155.

art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work... the execution is a perfunctory affair'⁶⁷, and Wood's, that '[In conceptual art] the idea is king'.⁶⁸ Lucy Lippard's claim that 'Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, and/or dematerialized'⁶⁹ seems also to belong to this school of thought, since she appears to be treating the idea and the materials both as parts of the work, but contrasting, in some sense, their importance - the former is 'paramount', while the latter is 'secondary' - and taking that to be the defining feature of conceptual art.

I will call accounts of CA that claim that the idea is the work *Constitution Accounts*, since they claim that the relation of the idea to the work is one of constitution. On the other hand, I will call accounts that claim only that the idea is an important *aspect* of the work, rather than entirely constituting the work, *Priority Accounts*, since they claim that in CA the idea in some sense takes priority.

Constitution Accounts distinguish CA from other art in terms of its ontology. In CA, unlike other art, the work is always an 'idea'. Of course, the precise claim that is made about CA's ontology depends on what is meant by 'idea' here.

With Priority Accounts, on the other hand, it's not entirely clear what kind of distinction is being drawn between CA and other art. We noted that Priority

⁶⁷ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 12.

⁶⁸ Wood, P. (2002), p. 33.

⁶⁹ Lippard, L. (1995), p. 17.

Accounts distinguish CA from other art in terms of the importance of the 'idea', often coupled with the relative unimportance of some other aspect. But the nature of the distinction with other art depends on what is meant here by 'importance'. What is it for the idea to be important and some other aspect to be less important? Two possibilities suggest themselves:

(i) it is about the work's axiology. When it is claimed that the idea is important and some other aspect unimportant in CA, what is being claimed is that the idea is more important to the overall value of the work as art. The LeWitt quote above 'the work is only good if the idea is good' seems to suggest this.

(ii) it is about the work's ontology - specifically its identity conditions. When it is claimed that the idea is important and some other aspect unimportant in CA, what is being claimed is that the idea is an essential property of the work whereas the contrasted properties are only contingently properties of the work. The idea is something that the work couldn't lack and still be that same work, but the contrasted properties are not crucial to the identity of the work - if the work lacked these properties it would still be the work. This is suggested by claims which say that in CA the idea is regarded as 'the defining component of the artwork', ⁷⁰ or its 'essential component'. ⁷¹

⁷⁰ Kleiner, F. (2009), p. 1020; Rood (1994) also characterises CA as art in which 'ideas are the defining feature' (p. 80).

⁷¹ Chilvers, I. (2004), Entry on Conceptual Art. The Encyclopedia of Artists defines CA in the same way, as 'a type of art in which the "ideas" or concepts that a work represents are the essential things' (Vaughan, W. H. T. (2000), p. 17).

Now, of course, these two strategies are compatible, and what's more, they could complement each other. One question that the axiological strategy gives rise to is: what makes it the case that *these* properties are more important to artistic value than *those*? And one possible answer is that *these* properties are essential properties of the work, while *those* are only contingently properties of the work (it would still be the same work if it lacked those properties).

But this isn't the *only* possible answer. It is possible to hold that the idea is important and some other aspect unimportant in CA, without holding that the former is an essential property while the latter is a contingent property of the work. The converse, though, doesn't appear to be true. So while it is possible to make the axiological claim without the ontological claim, it looks like you can't hold the ontological claim without the axiological claim. That is, you can't say, for example, that the idea but not the materials are essential to the work's identity, without there being a corresponding difference in the level of importance to artistic value.

The key point here is that it is possible to hold one view without holding the other. i.e. it is possible to hold that CA's distinctiveness is a matter of the importance to artistic value of the 'idea', and the relative unimportance to artistic value of some other properties, without holding that the 'idea' is an essential aspect of the work while these other properties are merely contingent properties of the work. It is, however, hard to see how anyone could hold that the idea is essential to the work while some other properties are contingent, without thinking of this as entailing a corresponding difference in their relevance to artistic value.

If this is right, both types of Priority Account entail a difference in relevance to artistic value between the contrasted aspects of the work.

The Constitution Account and the Priority Account are mutually exclusive. Both kinds of account claim some kind of prominence for ideas in CA, but Constitution Accounts do this by claiming that the idea *entirely constitutes* the work, while Priority Accounts claim just that the idea is an important *aspect* of the work. Of course, it is true that one way in which something can be an important aspect of a work is if it is the *only* aspect; however, on my schema this does not count as a limiting case of the Priority Account, since Priority Accounts are characterised here as accounts that claim *only* that the idea is an important part of the work, with ‘only’ here serving to rule out cases in which the idea is also the sole aspect of the work. So construed, the Priority Account is incompatible with the Constitution Account, since one cannot hold both that the idea is *only* an important aspect of the work, among others, *and* that the idea entirely constitutes the work.

Of course, a lot of the claims we’ve seen here are unclear on whether the prominence they are claiming for ideas in CA is a matter of their entirely constituting the work or just taking priority within the work. Kosuth’s claim that ‘the forms were only a device in the service of an idea’⁷² could be read either as an articulation of the Priority Account or of the Constitutive Account. Similarly, Siegelau’s statement that ‘the type of art that I’m involved with and concerned

⁷² Kosuth, J. (1993), p. 50.

about has to do less with materiality than ideas and intangible considerations'⁷³ leaves it unclear as to whether this 'having more to do with ideas' and 'less to do with materiality' is a matter of the works being immaterial ideas, or a matter of the ideas being more important aspects of the works than their materiality. Similarly, the claim that 'Conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s were more concerned with the formation of artistic ideas than with the formal craft of their implementation.'⁷⁴ Is this because the ideas are the works, or because the ideas are the most important part of the work and the implementation of them is less important?

The entry on CA from the *Encyclopedia of Artists*, which states that 'Conceptual art is the name given to a type of art in which the "ideas" or concepts that a work represents are the essential things',⁷⁵ looks to be an example of the Priority Account, as long as ideas being 'the essential things' is understood to imply that they are not the *only* component of the work. Similarly this definition: 'Conceptual art was based on the premise that an artist's ideas are the defining feature of a work of art',⁷⁶ looks like a Priority Account, as long as being the 'defining feature' is understood to imply that ideas are not the *only* feature of a work of CA. Even statements like LeWitt's, that 'the idea is the most important aspect of the work', which I've identified as an articulation of the Priority Account, *could* be taken as a roundabout way of saying that the idea is the *only* aspect of the work, and hence a statement of the Constitution Account. However, I think the Priority Account

⁷³ Seth Siegelaub, April 17 1969. Quoted in Alberro, A. (2001), p. 1.

⁷⁴ Cloninger, C.(2009), p. 23.

⁷⁵ Vaughan, W. H. T. (2000), p. 17.

⁷⁶ Rood, K. (1994), p. 80.

here offers the more natural reading, since it would be odd to say that something is the most important aspect of the work when what one means is that it *is* the work. But anyway, not much turns on this, for what matters for now is just that the Priority Account is a possible way of reading some of the claims made about CA.

So although a lot of the statements in the literature about CA could be read as articulations of either the Priority or the Constitution Account, the two are mutually exclusive. The two accounts are not, however, logically exhaustive, although the vast majority of literature on CA that attempts some kind of characterisation of it falls into one of these two broad camps. I will argue ultimately that the Constitution Account is doomed to failure, since it cannot respect some of our most basic intuitions about artworks in general and conceptual artworks in particular. I will try to show that the Priority Account fits much better, and will argue for a particular version of it.

The rest of this chapter will be concerned with identifying some possible answers to the question of how the term 'idea' should be understood.

Section 3. Ideas: Two Views

We noted in Section 1 that CA tends to be characterised in terms of a positive claim, usually a matter of its giving some kind of prominence to what tends to be called 'ideas', and a negative claim, taking the form, variously, of a de-emphasis of materials, objects, the physical, the perceptual, and the formal. We noted that there is some question as to what is meant by 'ideas' here, and depending on how this is answered, different characterisations of CA will result. It seems also that unless the physical, the perceptual, materials, objects and the formal turn out to all be exactly the same thing, different views will result depending on what the de-emphasised properties are supposed to be in CA. Here I want to address both questions.

There are certain contrasts that are very commonly made in discussion of the different aspects of artworks: one is the contrast between form and content; another is the contrast between conception and execution. Both are made, implicitly and explicitly, fairly often in talk of CA, and I want to argue that it is always one or other of these two contrasts that underlies the contrasts we have been discussing - of the 'idea' on the one hand with materials, the perceptual, the physical, the formal and so on, on the other. If I am right, then the question of how 'idea' should be understood in talk of CA, and the question of what the de-emphasised properties should be taken to be, can be answered in one move.

Meaning and Perceptual Properties

In discussions of CA, meanings are very often opposed to the perceptual aspect of artworks. CA is often characterised as art in which the message or meaning is emphasised and the visual or more broadly perceptual aspect is de-emphasised. When people characterise CA in this way, they often tend to use the term 'idea' to mean the work's meaning.

The art critic Roberta Smith, for example, having attributed to CA 'an unprecedented emphasis on ideas', goes on to elaborate what she means by ideas: 'ideas in, around and about art and everything else, a vast and unruly range of information, subjects and concerns not easily contained within a single object, but more appropriately conveyed by written proposals, photographs, documents, charts, maps, film and video, by the artists' use of their own bodies, and, above all, by language itself.'⁷⁷

In a similar spirit, Elisabeth Schellekens divides the ideas represented by conceptual works into three different kinds, 'art-reflexive ideas', 'socio-political ideas', and 'philosophical ideas'.⁷⁸

It might be thought that the pairing of, and contrast between, perceptual properties and meaning is a natural one. After all, there is a history of distinguishing between form and content in art, and this might be thought to be

⁷⁷ Smith, R. (1994), p. 256.

⁷⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 76.

an instance of that.⁷⁹ Some critics even describe CA in these terms, as in David Shirey's statement that, at least in Kosuth's works, 'What counts is not the form but the content'.⁸⁰

Some art movements have been premised on emphasising the perceptual aspect of works over their meaning - known as formalism. That CA is rightly characterised as prioritising meanings over perceptual properties fits well with the fact that CA is very often thought to be in direct opposition to formalism.⁸¹

Perhaps the most well-known example of CA being characterised as a rival to and reaction against formalism is Kosuth's famous article 'Art After Philosophy'. The same thought is echoed in the following passages from Frances Colpitt's 'The Formalist Connection and Originary Myths of Conceptual Art', Kempton Mooney's *The Evolution of Conceptual Art in America*, and Robert C. Morgan's 'The Situation of Conceptual Art'.

A primary impetus of Conceptual art in the 1960s was the often-stated intention to overcome the tyranny of formalism. With the premise "that the concept or idea was more important than the visual results," Sol LeWitt "undermined formalism by insisting on a return to content" according to Lucy Lippard.⁸²

⁷⁹ For recent discussions of art in terms of form and content see Kieran (2005b), who devotes a significant amount of space to discussing the contribution of both form and content, and the interaction between the two, to artistic value (pp. 55, and 89-98); Beardsley (1981), pp. 165-219; and Levinson (2009), who states that 'aesthetic *attention* to music is non-pragmatically driven attention to music focused on its form, content, and the relationship between the two.' (p. 418).

⁸⁰ Shirey, D. (1969), p. 39.

⁸¹ For a detailed discussion of CA's opposition to formalism, see Colpitt, F. (2004), and Harrison, C. (2003a); and Piper (1993) esp. p. 549, where she talks about 'the erasure of content'. See also Burn, I. (1975).

⁸² Colpitt, F. (2004), p. 28. Lippard quote from Lippard, L. (1997), p. 5.

One last defining characteristic of conceptualism is its reaction to formalism with a return to focussing on content and meaning. By the 1960s, the dominant strain of modernism was formalism, which focussed solely on the use of new and more appropriate styles developed to represent the new world of industrialization and mass media. Modernism concerned itself with the visual elements that give a work its form: shape, structure, size, scale, composition, etc.⁸³

From the outset [conceptual art] was an attack on the visual Formalism of the fifties and sixties.⁸⁴

The thought, in a nutshell, is that while formalist art stressed form at the expense of content, conceptual art stressed content at the expense of form. As Diarmuid Costello puts it, conceptual art 'broadly speaking, foregrounds the work's intellectual content, and the thought processes associated with that content, over its form'.⁸⁵

CA, on this view, represents an attempt to 'reinvigorate the flagging intellectual bases of the visual arts',⁸⁶ by stressing 'information content' over 'visual appearance';⁸⁷ a recognition that 'information could be interesting in its own right and need not be visual as in Cubist, etc. art'.⁸⁸

One popular line of thought as to CA's distinctiveness, then, is that it emphasises meaning, and de-emphasises perceptual properties. How does this translate to the two kinds of account we identified in the previous section, the Constitution and Priority Accounts? Understood in terms of the emphasis of meaning and de-

⁸³ Mooney, K. (2005), p. 8.

⁸⁴ Morgan, R. (1989), p. 40.

⁸⁵ Costello, D. (2007), p. 93.

⁸⁶ Collins, J. (1973), p. 32.

⁸⁷ Alberro, A. (2003) (paraphrasing Kosuth), p. 49.

⁸⁸ Baldessari, J. (1969), quoted in Lippard 'Escape Attempts', p. 27.

emphasis of perceptual properties, the Constitution Account would hold that works of CA *are* meanings. If the meanings are conveyed via something having perceptual properties, that thing is not, strictly speaking, any part of the work. This view is taken by Elisabeth Schellekens in her 2007 'The Aesthetic Value of Ideas', which we will discuss in detail in Chapter 2.

The Priority Account, on the other hand, would say that works of CA are works which potentially have both aspects, but the meaning plays a greater role than the perceptual properties in terms of the work's artistic value. Alexander Alberro's claim that in CA 'the work's importance is located exclusively in its meaning'⁸⁹ looks to be a Priority Account on which the meaning is emphasised and everything else de-emphasised.

Both Priority and Constitution Accounts that take CA to emphasise meaning and de-emphasise perceptual properties, appear to provide a plausible contrast between CA and other art. If 'idea' is understood as meaning, and works of CA emphasise meaning and de-emphasise the perceptual aspects, this seems to provide a contrast with other art. Since standard views on the ontology of art take artworks to be not disembodied meanings but rather entities that are capable of having both meaning and perceptual properties, and since standard views on artistic value take both of these aspects of artworks to be relevant to their value as art, both the more extreme Constitution Account, and the more moderate Priority Account would characterise CA in a way that contrasts with other art.

⁸⁹ Alberro, A. (2000), p. xviii.

Conception and Execution

Another dichotomy which often makes an appearance in discussions of CA is that between the conception of a work and its execution. Like the form-content distinction, the conception-execution distinction has a long history of being used in philosophical aesthetics. It tends to be understood as the distinction between the artist's plan or guiding intention for the work versus the carrying out of that plan. But it is also very commonly used by philosophers to distinguish between different aspects of the work to which skill or value can be attributed. In a discussion of the high artistic value of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Alfred Lessing talks of 'the scope, profundity, daring, and novelty of the conception', and praises 'the excellence of its execution',⁹⁰ and Jack Glickman talks in the abstract of 'skill in execution' which he takes to include things like 'ability or cleverness of the hand' and 'ingenuity, wit, and insight of conception' as two distinct dimensions of artistic value.⁹¹ Graham Oppy and Jerrold Levinson argue over a thought experiment in which it is stipulated that an artist is 'a marvel at execution but not very good at composition'⁹² Michael Levey makes use of the conception-execution distinction in a discussion of the problem of forgeries, suggesting that 'the discrepancy between superb composition and inadequate execution is exactly what alerts one to a picture's being a copy'.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lessing, A. (1965), p. 465.

⁹¹ Glickman, J. (1987), (1987), p. 183.

⁹² Oppy, G. (1992), and Levinson, J. (1993), pp. 384-5.

⁹³ Levey, M. (1968), p. 11.

The conception-execution distinction, then, is a familiar one in discussion about art in general. I want to argue that it is put to a very specific use in discussions of CA. Many commentators have indicated that they are thinking of CA as an art which in some sense prioritises the conception of the work over its execution. This too - like the form-content distinction - would be a general framework under which materials, perceptual properties, and the rest could be opposed to 'ideas'. The 'idea' is understood as the idea the artist had for the work, and the perceptual properties, materials etc. are all just particularities of how the idea as conception is executed.

The thought that CA's distinctiveness is a matter of its prioritisation of conception over execution is put more or less explicitly in the following characterisations of it:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work... the execution is a perfunctory affair.⁹⁴

The category "Conceptual art" is an imprecise term for the multitude of works which claim to elevate concept over material realization.⁹⁵

Conceptual art came into use as a term defining art with primary importance placed on the artists' propositional concept, de-emphasizing the manner of execution.⁹⁶

[CA] subordinates execution to conception⁹⁷

[CA is] an art in which the execution of the work was devalued to the point where it was discrete from the work's artistic value.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Borden, L. (1972).

⁹⁶ Mooney, K. (2005), p. 2.

⁹⁷ Stewart, G (2011), p. 73.

⁹⁸ Alberro, A. (2004), p. 40.

But there are also cases where, while the conception-execution distinction is not mentioned explicitly, there are reasons to think that CA is being characterised in terms of a prioritisation of conception over execution. See for example the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*'s entry on CA, which defines it as 'any of various art forms in which the idea for a work of art is considered more important than the finished product',⁹⁹ Harold Rosenberg's linking of CA with the 'total elimination of the art object and its replacement by an idea for a work'¹⁰⁰, and David Carrier's thought that in conceptual art 'presenting the idea for an artwork suffices to get credit for making that work'.¹⁰¹ In all three of these cases, the use of the phrase 'idea for the work' indicates that 'idea' is being understood here as the artist's plan or conception. Benjamin Tilghman discusses in some detail (albeit not sympathetically) the claim that in conceptual art what is important is the intention or plan for the work, and not the execution of that intention.¹⁰² Finally, consider Jack Glickman's argument that 'skill in execution cannot be considered necessary for artistic creation' because 'just as some artworks of great technical skill embody the most banal conceptions and others, brilliant conceptions, is there not a range of conceptual skill exhibited in readymades, *objets trouvés*, and works of conceptual art? Such art does exclude 'ability or cleverness of the hand,' but it does not on that account preclude artistic creation.'¹⁰³ The assumption operative here seems to be that the value and skill in works of conceptual art does not lie in their execution but in their conception.

⁹⁹ Merriam Webster Dictionary online

¹⁰⁰ Rosenberg, H. (1972), p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Carrier, D. (1980), p. 192.

¹⁰² Tilghman, B. (1984), pp. 85-87.

¹⁰³ Glickman, J. (1987), p. 183.

How does this translate to the two kinds of account, Constitution and Priority Accounts? Understood in terms of the conception-execution distinction, a Priority Account would hold that CA is art in which the conception is more important to the work's artistic value than the execution. This view is exemplified in Alexander Alberro's characterisation of CA as 'an art in which the execution of the work was devalued to the point where it was discrete from the work's artistic value',¹⁰⁴ and Jack Glickman's argument above that CA stands as a counterexample to the view that skill and value in execution is necessary in art, since in CA what matters is 'brilliant conceptions' and 'ingenuity, wit, and insight of conception'.¹⁰⁵ Kempton Mooney's claim that the term 'Conceptual Art' refers to 'art with primary importance placed on the artists' propositional concept, de-emphasizing the manner of execution'¹⁰⁶ also looks to be an example of a Priority Account of CA based on the conception-execution distinction.

Some works of CA might be thought particularly to lend themselves to being characterised in these terms. Consider, for example, the *Art by Telephone* exhibition of 1969 at the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco, as described here by Susan Jenkins:

Thirty-seven artists from the US and Europe who were asked to relay instructions by phone to the staff of the museum for an idea to be executed by an intermediary. The results of these interchanges, which favored intellectual premise over visual result and were sometimes accessible only through verbal description, were then exhibited in the museum. The catalog, which was released as a record album, includes the recordings of the telephone conversations

¹⁰⁴ Alberro, A. (2004), p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Glickman, J. (1987), p. 183.

¹⁰⁶ Mooney, K. (2005), p. 2.

between the curator and the artists in which instructions for the works were given.¹⁰⁷

Here, it might be thought that the art invites being characterised in terms of a prioritisation of conception over execution. The artist's role is clearly delineated here as involving just conception, while execution is delegated to someone anonymous. In addition the catalogue of the exhibition presents the conversations in which the conception is described, and not, as one might expect, photographic reproductions of the finished pieces. The view that this characterises not only the works in the *Art by Telephone* exhibition, but conceptual art in general, in terms of the prioritisation of conception over execution, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

On the other hand, a Constitution Account couched in terms of the conception-execution distinction would hold that works of CA don't just prioritise conceptions, they *are* conceptions. In other words, in CA the artist's plan for the work does not need to be executed in order for the work to exist. Works are ideas in the sense that in CA the *idea for a work* is already a work. This view is exemplified in Kosuth's claim that 'All my art exists when it is conceived because the execution is irrelevant to art'.¹⁰⁸ The view that works of conceptual art are conceptions, which do not need to be executed, will be discussed in Chapter 2.

We have argued that there are two ways in which one could understand the emphasis and de-emphasis claim that figures so often in characterisations of CA:

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins, S. (1995), p. 272.

¹⁰⁸ Kosuth, J. (1969b), p. 27.

an emphasis of meaning over perceptual properties, or an emphasis of conception over execution.

How do these two distinctions differ? Couldn't it be argued that they map on to each other? If they did, it would certainly help to make sense of the conspicuous fact that a significant number of writers seem to fall into both camps, with Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Kempton Mooney, Alexander Alberro all making some statements about CA in terms of conception and execution and others in terms of meaning and perceptual properties.

It could be argued that they do map on to each other. Someone who takes the view that the meaning of a work is determined by what the artist intended would hold that the meaning of a work and its conception are the same, and that the way in which the meaning is communicated and the way in which the intentions are realised are therefore the same thing too.

However, it might not be as straightforward as this. Consider Monroe Beardsley's famous objection to actual intentionalism:

if a sculptor tells us that his statue was intended to be smooth and blue, but our senses tell us it is rough and pink, we go by our senses.¹⁰⁹

An obvious way for an intentionalist to deal with this is to say that it misses the point. An intentionalist might, then, respond by clarifying the domain that his claims are supposed to cover. There are some aspects of artworks (namely

¹⁰⁹ Beardsley, M. (1981), p. 20.

meaning) for which it is quite plausible that the artist has control over simply by virtue of his intentions about them. But there are others (such as size and shape) for which a parallel thesis would be deeply implausible. And what Bearsdsley's example shows is that colour and texture belong to the latter kind.

So we should interpret the intentionalist thesis as a claim about a certain subset of the artist's intentions with respect to his work, and their effect on a certain subset of the work's properties, namely, a claim about the artist's *communicative* intentions, and their effect on the work's meaning.

But if Actual Intentionalism concerns only *a subset* of the artist's intentions regarding his work, then even for actual intentionalists, an artist's conception of a work will not necessarily be the same as the work's meaning, since as long as the artist had some intentions regarding his work that are not classed as communicative, then there will be intentions which figure in the work's conception but not its meaning. For example, if the artist intended his work to be made of marble, this will figure in the work's conception, but not in its meaning, *even for the actual intentionalist*.

So even if you are an actual intentionalist it is not clear that you should equate the artist's conception of the work - which will include intentions besides those that are concerned with what the work communicates - and the work's meaning. And if this is right, the form-content distinction doesn't map on to the conception-execution distinction, even for intentionalists.

Both types of account of CA - that on which meaning is emphasised over perceptual aspects, and that on which conception is emphasised over execution - will be discussed in detail. And although the above reflections are designed to throw some doubt on the idea that the two distinctions plausibly map on to each other, the reader should bear in mind that even if the two distinctions do turn out to be the same, all this means is that what I say about one will apply to the other. So in any case we will not be begging any philosophical questions in discussing them separately.

Section 4. Summary

In this chapter we have tried to impose some structure on the various things that are said about CA in the literature on the subject, by identifying common threads which link the different claims, and different schools of thought across which the literature can be divided.

What we've identified as common to the vast majority of this literature is the use of the term 'idea' as something that has an important role in CA, and the tendency to pair this claim about what is emphasised in CA with a negative claim about what is de-emphasised (which tends to be either materials, physical properties, perceptual properties, form, or objects).

We then traced this contrast to two possible sources, both of which have a long history in discussions about art, the distinction between form and content, and the distinction between conception and execution. In the first case the emphasised 'idea' would be understood as the work's content, and the perceptual properties/physical properties/materials/objects would be de-emphasised only insofar as they count as belonging to the work's form. In the second case the emphasised 'idea' would be understood as the conception for the work, while the perceptual properties/physical properties/materials/objects would be de-emphasised only insofar as they count as belonging to the work's execution.

We then identified two possible views as to what the contrast in emphasis (between either form and content or conception and execution) amounts to: the Constitution Account and the Priority Account. The more extreme Constitution Account holds that the work is the idea; everything else is not part of the work at all. The emphasis and de-emphasis here amounts to constitution of the work versus not being part of the work at all. The more moderate Priority Account holds that the idea is just one part of the work but it is one which is more important to the overall artistic value of the work, while the de-emphasised aspects are just less important to the work's artistic value. Here, then, the emphasis and de-emphasis amounts to greater vs lesser relevance to artistic value.

In the rest of this thesis these ways of carving up the views represented in the literature play a large structuring role. We will discuss Constitution Accounts in

Chapter 2, followed by Priority Accounts in Chapters 3-5, and within these we will look at versions of each which pair an emphasis on meaning with a de-emphasis on perceptual properties and those which pair an emphasis on conception with a de-emphasis on execution.

Here is where various philosophical discussions of CA fit on this schema:

Constitution Accounts that use the form-content distinction:

Elisabeth Schellekens in 'The Aesthetic Value of Ideas'

Constitution Accounts that use the conception-execution distinction:

Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens in *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?*

Priority Accounts that use the form-content distinction:

Gregory Currie in 'Visual Conceptual Art', Peter Lamarque in 'On Perceiving Conceptual Art', Barbara Savedoff 'The Art Object'.

Priority Accounts that use the conception-execution distinction:

Robert Hopkins in 'Speaking through Silence'

Chapter 2.

Constitution Accounts

Introduction

We've seen in Chapter 1 that CA tends to get characterised in terms of a negative claim and a positive claim: a de-emphasis of the physical, the sensory, the perceptual, coupled with an emphasis of 'ideas'. Within this, we distinguished two shapes that this emphasis and de-emphasis can take: Priority Accounts, which say that in CA the idea is the most important part of the work, and Constitution Accounts, which say that the idea *is* the work.

The focus of this chapter is Constitution Accounts. Constitution Accounts distinguish CA from other art in terms of the ontology of conceptual works. All conceptual works, according to the Constitution Account, are ideas. Now, we've seen already that most people who make this kind of claim fail to say very much about what they mean

by 'ideas', and, to that extent, it is unclear what precise ontological claim is being made. We've also seen, though, that there are two main ways of using the term 'idea' in the context of CA.

As discussed in Chapter 1 some commentators seem to have in mind something like *meanings* - as when Roberta Smith, having identified CA with 'an unprecedented emphasis on ideas' goes on to elaborate: 'ideas in, around and about art and everything else, a vast and unruly range of information, subjects and concerns not easily contained within a single object, but more appropriately conveyed by written proposals, photographs, documents, charts, maps, film and video, by the artists' use of their own bodies, and, above all, by language itself'.¹ On this construal of 'idea', the Constitution Account's claim is that the works are not, as is plausibly the case with other art, things that *have* meanings, but they *are* the meanings themselves.

But in other cases people seem to have in mind something more like the *conception* of the work, the idea the artist had for the work, as in the Merriam Webster Dictionary's entry on CA, which defines it as 'any of various art forms in which the idea for a work of art is considered more important than the finished product'.² On this construal of 'idea', the Constitution Approach says that in CA, execution of a given conception is not necessary for a work; the conception alone is sufficient. It interprets the 'conceptual' in 'conceptual art' to mean art which exists as conception. This kind of view is most clearly articulated in Kosuth's claim that 'all my art exists when it is conceived because the execution is irrelevant to art',³ and Harold Rosenberg's equating of CA

¹ Smith, R. (1994), p. 256.

² Merriam Webster Dictionary online

³ Kosuth, J. (1969b), p. 27.

with the 'total elimination of the art object and its replacement by an idea for a work'⁴. This kind of view of CA - a Constitution Account which identifies the work with a conception, and treats execution as unnecessary - figures fairly often as a background assumption in philosophical discussions of art. Consider the following excerpt from a philosophical paper entitled 'Legal Aesthetics':

Certainly no copyright, customs duty exemption or other legal benefit will be allowed based on the mere formulation in the artist's mind of a plan or design for a work, thus by implication ruling out conceptual art as a legally recognized art form. ... Copyright only concerns copying of material things and not ideas.⁵

Consider also this interview in *Artforum* in which its editor John Coplans speaks to the conceptual artist Mel Bochner about the Russian painter Kasimir Malevich. One assumption - at least on the part of the interviewer - seems to be that a mark of CA is that there is no need to actually make the thing - the idea for making it is enough:

MB: what is radical is that Malevich found the exact way to express his meaning.

JC: Which makes him in a funny kind of way - this is what I'm trying to press you on - it makes him a very - and I use the word understanding its implications - Conceptual artist.

MB: Well you'll have to explain

JC: Well, it's almost as if ... he never really had to paint the works.⁶

And Arthur Danto's reflections on Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawings*:

⁴ Rosenberg, H. (1972), p. 29.

⁵ Karlen, P. (1979), pp. 196-7.

⁶ Coplans, J. (1974), p. 62.

It need never have existed in the form of a drawing. It would have been enough for it to be a plan, scribbled down as an instruction to the draftsman or communicated by phone or on a tape.⁷

Finally, consider Ursula Meyer's observation that 'conventional gallery space is better suited for exhibiting object art than for showing conceptions', as an explanation of the trend towards using books instead of gallery exhibitions as a format for display of CA.⁸ The assumption here is clearly that works of CA are just conceptions.

So it seems that there are two fairly widely held kinds of Constitution Account of CA (although both may be framed in terms of the conceptual work being an idea). One which identifies the work with the artist's conception or plan for the work, and treats the actual carrying out of that plan, the execution, as unnecessary for the work; and one which identifies the work with what we might call the content or meaning, thus distinguishing CA from other art on the grounds that here - unlike in other art - the work is not something that *has* a meaning, but rather it *is* the meaning.

In this chapter I will argue that Constitution Accounts of both kinds face serious problems since both fail to respect deeply held intuitions about artworks in general and conceptual artworks in particular. I will begin by discussing, in Section 1, three conceptual works for which the Constitution Account might look *prima facie* to be especially plausible. I will argue that even for these works the Constitution Account, on closer inspection, does not apply as straightforwardly as might be hoped by its proponents. And on the basis of this I identify a refinement that makes the Constitution Account a little more palatable. In Section 2 I highlight some issues which Constitution Accounts, even with this refinement face. In Sections 3-4 I discuss an existing

⁷ Danto, A. (2007), p. 95.

⁸ Meyer, U. (1972), p. xiv.

philosophical articulation of a Constitution Account, and address whether it deals adequately with these issues. I argue that it does not, and that in fact the particular details of this account serve to intensify the problems. And I raise some doubts about the possibility of any Constitution Account being able to deal with them. These are all, I will argue, problems that Priority Accounts don't have; so by the end of this chapter we should have a case for finding Priority Accounts a more promising approach, and this will pave the way for the in-depth focus on Priority Accounts in Chapters 3-5.

Section 1. The Constitution Account and the Art Object

We will look in more detail later at the two versions of the Constitution Account just rehearsed. But whichever of these two construals of 'idea' is favoured, one thing Constitution Accounts have in common is that - in claiming that the work is the idea - the work is identified with something non-physical. Constitution Accounts of both types, then, give quite an extreme form to the de-emphasis of materials, physical properties and perceptual properties, that has variously been claimed to be characteristic of CA: they do not even count as part of the work. If the work is an idea, it does not *have* a material aspect, and so it lacks both physical and perceptual properties.

That the de-emphasis takes this strong form has some backing from the prevalence of certain terms in talk of CA. Firstly the term 'dematerialisation' which figures promi-

nently in discussion of CA. The term has become something of a buzzword, since Lucy Lippard and John Chandler wrote what has become one of the key early texts on CA, entitled 'The Dematerialisation of Art', in 1968. 'Dematerialisation', which literally means the process of depriving something of material qualities, was introduced by Lippard and Chandler to refer to a trend whose end point is the art object's 'becoming wholly obsolete'.⁹

The tendency to see CA as minimising, challenging or eliminating the role of physical objects¹⁰ can be seen in Donald Brook's thesis that CA represented a 'flight from the object',¹¹ Arthur Danto's claim that 'with the advent of Conceptual Art it was no longer required that there be a material object',¹² Ursula Meyer's claim that CA 'emphasized the elimination of the art object',¹³ Jon Bird and Michael Newman's claim that in CA 'the materiality of the art object is systematically reduced or redefined',¹⁴ Harold Osborne's association of CA with the 'abolition of the art object',¹⁵ Gregory

⁹ Lippard & Chandler (1968), p. 46.

¹⁰ Although these claims are often put in terms of minimising or eliminating 'objects' from art, this should be understood as the claim that it diminishes the role of *physical* objects. There is a usage in philosophy on which 'object' refers to any kind of entity. In this spirit, philosophers have variously talked about abstract objects and mental objects, but presumably neither of these are what is meant here. When Carrier paraphrases the conceptual agenda by saying 'the concept is all we need and the day of the object is over', 'object' must be understood as in the restricted sense, of applying only to physical objects, in order for the implied contrast between 'object' and 'concept' to work, since a concept is going to be either a mental or an abstract object. (Carrier (1979), p. 53.) Similarly with Greg Battcock's claim that works of CA 'frequently did not exist as objects' (Battcock, G. (1973), p. 1.), objects must be understood in the restricted, physical, sense, since otherwise the claim is nonsensical - something's existing but not as an object only makes sense in a restricted sense of 'object', and looks self-contradictory when 'object' is taken in the broader sense of 'entity'. So in what follows I will use 'object' in the sense which I think these people intend it - to mean a physical object.

¹¹ Brook, D. (1986).

¹² Danto, A. (2003), p. 25.

¹³ Meyer, U. (1972), p. viii.

¹⁴ Newman & Bird (1999), p. 4.

¹⁵ Osborne, H. (1979), p. 3.

Battcock's claim that conceptual works frequently did not exist as objects,¹⁶ and Alexander Alberro's claim that CA 'abandon[ed] the art object altogether',¹⁷ David Carrier's identification of CA with the thesis that 'the concept is all we need and the day of the object is over',¹⁸ Philip Meeson's claim that in CA 'there [is] no work of art, in the objective sense, to appreciate',¹⁹ and finally David Shirey's observation, in 1969, that 'now, for many artists, "object" is nothing more than a dirty word'.^{20, 21}

Further evidence of this tendency can be seen in the proliferation of essays during the late 60s and early 70s alluding to the reduced role of objects in art: Ian Jeffery's 'Art Theory and the Decline of the Object', Ursula Meyer's 'De-Objectification of the Object',²² Max Kozloff's '9 in a Warehouse: An Attack on the Status of the Object'.²³ And the frequency with which phrases such as 'art-as-idea'²⁴, 'post-object art' and occasionally 'non-object art' are used as synonyms for CA.²⁵

¹⁶ Battcock, G. (1973), p. 1.

¹⁷ Alberro (2003), p. 201, footnote 44.

¹⁸ Carrier, D. (1979) p. 53.

¹⁹ Meeson, P. (1981), p. 22.

²⁰ Shirey, D. (1969), p. 39.

²¹ For more examples of people claiming that conceptual works don't involve objects, see Morgan, R. (1996) p. 1: 'Michael Baldwin and Terry Atkinson, two of the leading members of the group [Art & Language] began publishing essays on art in lieu of making 'objects''. Rorimer, A. (2004) says 'conceptual artists 'have endeavoured to undermine the art object *qua* object' (p. 35). Wollen, P. (2004) says 'Conceptual art problematized and decentred - even, at times, erased - the traditional art object, the painting or the sculpture' (p. 27).

²² Meyer, U. (1969).

²³ Kozloff, M. (1969).

²⁴ Joseph Kosuth coined the phrase 'Art-as-Idea' as a rejoinder to Ad Reinhardt's catchphrase 'Art-As-Art', and others have to a large extent followed suit in using this as a synonym for CA. See Newman & Bird (1999), p. 3; Kozloff, M. (1972); also Wood, P. (2002); and Alberro, A. (2003), both of which have chapters entitled 'Art As Idea' (Wood, P. (2002), pp. 28-53; Alberro, A. (2003), pp. 26-54); Harrison, C. (2003b), pp. 97-98. Davies, P. et al (2007) entry on CA has 'art as idea' as its subtitle. Willis, G. (2004) says that CA marks a 'shift from 'art as appearance' to 'art as idea' (p. 198).

²⁵ See Karshan, D. (1970); also Newman & Bird (1999), p. 3; Lee, P. (2001); Walker, J. (2001), p. 33.

The account of CA as an art which lacks physical objects also seems to be the basis for the popular claim that it is radically anti-commercial. Works of CA cannot be bought or sold because they are ideas, and have no physical form.²⁶

Finally, conceptual artists themselves often characterise their practice as not essentially (physical) object-involving. Douglas Huebler famously said of his own artistic practice: 'I've stopped making objects',²⁷ 'the world is full of objects .. I do not wish to add any more',²⁸ Lawrence Weiner says 'I do not mind objects, but I do not care to make them. The object - by virtue of being a unique commodity - becomes something that might make it impossible for people to see the art for the forest',²⁹ and Joseph Kosuth claims: 'it is impossible to see my work'; 'what is seen is the presentation of the information. The art exists only as an invisible, ethereal idea',³⁰ and Ian Wilson says: 'I'm diametrically opposed to the precious object.'³¹

²⁶ Jamieson, D. (1986) says of Kosuth and Art & Language: 'because their pieces were concepts rather than perceptible objects, they could not be bought or sold.' (p. 121). Claure, M. & Siegelau, S. (1973) say that 'the economic aspect of conceptual art is perhaps the most interesting. From the moment when ownership of the work did not give its owner the great advantage of control of the work acquired, this art was implicated in turning back on the question of the value of its private appropriation. How can a collector possess an idea?', (p. 289). Shirey, D. (1969) talks of art that is 'impossible because in its "finished form" it exists only as an idea and not as an object and therefore cannot be bought and sold' (p. 32). Lippard & Chandler (1968) claim that 'since dealers cannot sell art-as-idea, economic materialism is denied along with physical materialism' (p. 270). Graw, I. (2006) says that 'following the logic of modernism, the conceptual approach was claimed to be superior, casting doubt, it is claimed to this day, on the traditional status of the artwork as commodity. (p. 119). Gaiger, J. (2004), says that 'although even the most radical art movements of the 1960s ultimately proved assimilable to both the market and the museum, the intention at least was to disrupt the commodification of art' (p. 92). See also Lippard, L. (1995). pp. 28 and 37-8; Reilly *The 1960s*, p. 224; Carroll, N. (2004), p. 417; Godfrey, T. (1998), pp. 4-16.

²⁷ Douglas Huebler, quoted in Danto (2003), p. 25, as being from a 1969 interview.

²⁸ Douglas Huebler, in Siegelau, S. (1969) (Exh. Cat.).

²⁹ Weiner, L. (1969), p. 217.

³⁰ Joseph Kosuth, as cited in Shirey, D. (1969), p. 41. See also Rose, A. (1989), p. 145.

³¹ Ian Wilson, as cited in Shirey, D. (1979), p. 41.

All this suggests a considerable amount of support from within both artistic and philosophical communities for the view that works of CA are ideas and do not involve physical objects in any fundamental sense. But how plausible is the view when applied to actual conceptual works? Do works of CA really eliminate the role of physical objects? Are there any works of CA that do this?

Now, one might think that the existence of performance-based conceptual works, such as Piper's *Catharsis* series, and Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* show that the answer is yes. These works, it seems, do not give an essential role to physical objects. However, it would be a mistake to think that this phenomenon lends any support particularly to the Constitution Account of CA. The Constitution Account claims that works of CA are ideas, and the claim that they are not physical objects falls out of this. But for the same reason, they cannot be physical events either. On both the conception view and the meaning view of ideas, they are non-physical, and thus cannot be physical events any more than they can be physical objects.

One might think that there are some works of CA that are particularly suited to being thought of as non-physical. Some works of CA appear to represent attempts on the part of artists to minimise or eliminate the role of physical objects and of the physical more generally. There is a great deal of CA in which what the viewer is given is something which apparently refers to an absent, often non-existent or somehow otherwise intangible, object, and hints that *that* object, and not the object at which the viewer is looking, is *really* the art. The artist tells you about an object, rather than actually making it or presenting it, thereby apparently evading the need to actually produce objects at all. This kind of work might be thought to exemplify the Constitution Account, particularly the version on which the work is identified with the artist's con-

ception. This sort of strategy, of telling the audience about an object rather than actually producing it, looks like a way of getting across to the audience what the conception for the work is *by means other than execution of that conception* - a way of eliminating the role of execution by finding alternative means of making it known to the audience what the conception is.

In what follows I will discuss three examples of this kind of work. The moral to be drawn in each case, I will suggest, is that the Constitution Account doesn't apply *straightforwardly* even to the kinds of works which look most like illustrations of this view.

Lawrence Weiner's instructions

Since 1968, Lawrence Weiner has produced various works in which what is displayed in the gallery is a written set of instructions for building a specified artwork.

For example:

A STAKE SET IN THE GROUND IN DIRECT LINE WITH A STAKE SET IN THE GROUND OF AN ADJACENT COUNTRY 1969

ONE QUART EXTERIOR INDUSTRIAL ENAMEL THROWN ON A BRICK WALL
1968

GLOSS WHITE LACQUER SPRAYED FOR 2 MINUTES AT FORTY POUND PRESSURE DIRECTLY UPON THE FLOOR 1968

ONE HOLE IN THE GROUND APPROXIMATELY 1' x 1' x 1' / ONE GALLON WATER BASED PAINT POURED INTO THIS HOLE 1968

The suggestion here is that an artwork doesn't need to have physical form in order to exist. Someone who advocated a Constitution Account of CA and took 'idea' to mean the artist's conception for the work might take these works to be a prime example of what they are talking about. The work, they would argue, is the artist's conception; the realisation isn't necessary. In many cases, Weiner didn't actually follow the instructions and make the object in question, but he didn't need to, because by having the 'idea' for the work, he had already made the work. Weiner himself seems to endorse this view, when he says that these pieces can 'be made or not made. I don't care about the physical character'.³²

Moreover, one might be tempted to think that this work goes further than just exemplifying the Constitution Account. This work makes vivid the point that the conception alone is sufficient for the work; it's not just that it *is* this kind of work, it also 'wears on its sleeve' the fact that it is such a work.

Interestingly, though, if we take the work to make this point, it seems that we should not identify the work as the item specified by the instructions, or even the conception of such an item, but rather with the making of instructions in lieu of the specified item, or the idea to do so. For it is surely not the white paint sprayed on the floor, or even the idea to spray white paint on the floor, that communicates the point about execution being unnecessary; rather, what communicates this point is the fact that the spraying hasn't actually taken place. Thus if we are to think of the work as making this point, it is surely better to take the work to be *the idea to present instructions for making an item instead of the specified item*. If we are to identify the work with an

³² Quoted in Shirey (1969), p. 41.

idea, it should be the idea to present instructions to spray white paint instead of actually spraying it, *rather* than the idea to spray white paint *simpliciter*.

But then if we take *that* to be the work, it looks to be false that it is unrealised. It looks to be false, that is, that the work exists solely as a conception. Presenting the instructions, as Weiner did, is sufficient to realise it.

So, it seems if we identify the work as an *unexecuted* conception, it is not the kind of thing that can communicate the message we take it to communicate, but if we identify it as something that does communicate that message, it is no longer plausible that it is unexecuted. In other words, if it instantiates the point, it is not the kind of thing that is capable of *making* that point; but if it makes the point, it fails to instantiate it. We will return to this thought later, as analogous issues occur for other examples too.

Weiner's instruction pieces might also appeal to Constitution Theorists who take ideas to be meanings or messages. If we understand by 'idea' the message, then a Constitution Account would treat the message as the work. Suppose the message here is that conception without execution is sufficient for art. A Constitution Theorist who thought this might argue that Weiner here has managed to circumvent the need to actually produce the thing that conveys the message, and has made a work which consists of just the message itself.

However, this cannot be straightforwardly true. It should be pointed out that this message does not exist in isolation, nor could it. It is presented to the audience by means

of the written instructions. So Weiner's instruction works are certainly not uncomplicated examples of works that are messages.

Weiner's instruction works in fact present a further problem for Constitution Accounts that identify the work with a message: They all presumably make the same point. Presenting instructions to spray white paint on the floor instead of actually doing it, and presenting instructions to throw enamel paint at a wall instead of actually doing it, don't seem that different in terms of the point they make. What is important in each case is most plausibly *that instructions are presented to do a particular thing instead of actually doing it*. Whether the thing in question is spraying paint on the floor or throwing paint at a wall, for example, doesn't seem to add anything of much significance.

But if this is right, then a Constitution Theorist who identifies works with meanings would have to say these are all one work. This might not at first blush sound all that bad - the works in this series do all look quite same-y, monotonous, even. But there is a world of difference between characterising it as a series of quite same-y works that all make the same point, or variations on a theme, on one hand, and claiming that actually it's all just one work, on the other.

The moral here is that, this work is neither a straightforward illustration of the Constitution Account on which works are conceptions, nor of that on which works are meanings - it is neither a straightforward case of an unexecuted conception *nor* a meaning without perceptual properties.

- (1) If the work is the conception, the most plausible candidate is not one that is unexecuted; if the things we tend to say about the work can be true, the work cannot be the thing that is unexecuted - *that* couldn't have the properties we want to attribute to it.
- (2) If the work is the message, there is still something by means of which that message is conveyed.

Maurizio Cattelan's *Untitled* 1992

For the 2005 exhibition 'A Brief History of Invisible Art' the sculptor Maurizio Cattelan was asked to contribute a work. But faced with the brief of making something invisible he couldn't very well submit an ordinary sculpture. So instead, he went to the police and reported the theft of a sculpture whose existence he by all accounts fabricated, and then submitted for display in the exhibition the official report on the 'theft' produced by the police.

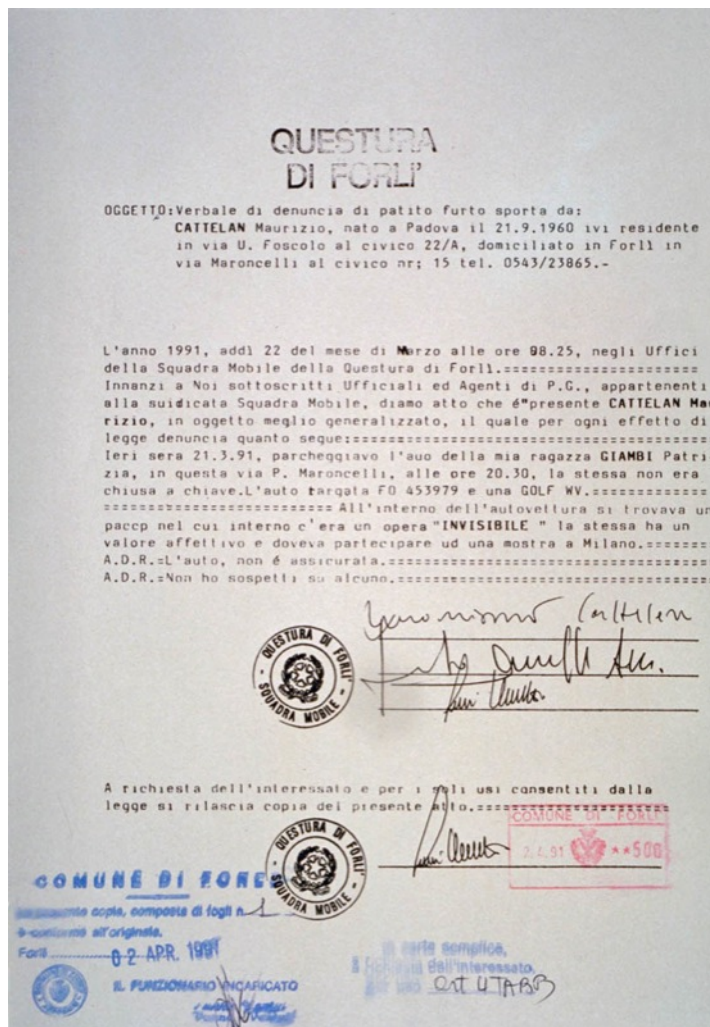


Figure 5. *Untitled 1992*. Maurizio Cattelan. (1992).

This might, again, look like a rather clever strategy to avoid physical objects. The report, like Weiner's instructions, signals to the audience that the work is not the thing they are looking at. In this case, the suggestion appears to be that the work is the (apparently non-existent) sculpture which was stolen.

But this surely cannot be right, firstly because if the sculpture has never existed it is absurd to identify it as the work, and secondly even if it did exist, how would anyone be in a position to appreciate the work, since one is not given any information about it? It is implausible that what one should appreciate in this case is a sculpture that never existed, and it is equally implausible that one should appreciate the conception

of such a sculpture, when nothing is revealed to the audience of what that conception is.

The Constitution Theorist might take from this that we ought to identify the work with Cattelan's idea for the work - the idea to not make an object but to obtain a police report for a made up stolen object instead. Perhaps what we are supposed to appreciate with this work is Cattelan's idea for doing this. Faced with the task/problem of creating a work which is invisible, Cattelan's idea of fabricating a sculpture and reporting its theft may be appreciated as a rather elegant solution to that problem.

Again, though, (to echo the problem we discussed in the case of Weiner's instructions) if we take *this* to be the idea, it seems that it counts as having been realised after all. The conception of a work in which the artist reports the theft of a non-existent sculpture and displays the report in a gallery is one that very clearly has been executed.

How would the other kind of Constitution Account, which takes ideas to be meanings, fare here? What could the message be in Cattelan's case? It seems that whatever is identified as the message, a similar problem is faced here as with Weiner's instruction pieces. Cattelan's work is not unproblematically identifiable as a message, since the message is accompanied by a whole set-up which serves to convey that message. The police report, perhaps even Cattelan's action of reporting the imaginary theft, seem to be important.

Again, we have the same two lessons:

- (1) the conception with which it is most plausible to identify the work is in fact one that *has* been realised.
- (2) the message is conveyed by means of something physical.

Robert Barry *All the Things I Know but of Which I am Not at the Moment Thinking*

What the viewer is given to look at here is the sentence of the work's title, painted on to the wall of the gallery. This visual item might look to be doing the same kind of thing as Weiner's instructions and Cattelan's police report - what the viewer is given is something written, which identifies something else as the artwork. In this case, not something non-existent like a sculpture that was never made, but rather something which exists but is intangible and immaterial: things that Robert Barry knows but is not currently thinking of.



ALL THE THINGS I KNOW
BUT OF WHICH I AM NOT
AT THE MOMENT THINKING—
1:36 PM. JUNE 15, 1969

Figure 6. *All Things I Know But of Which I am not at the Moment Thinking*. Robert Barry. (1969).

However, the same problem is faced here as with Cattelan's non-existent sculpture: the audience is not given any information about the thing that is supposedly the artwork, and so if this really is the artwork, its audience is not in a position to know anything about it, let alone appreciate it in any way. Moreover, here there is the added issue, that even if access to the work - understood as Barry's unconscious knowledge - was not a problem, it is not clear how this kind of thing is capable of being appreciated anyway. Is there any sense to be made of the notion of items of knowledge being a candidate for appreciation, even if the audience *were* able to access them? That is, if we could in some way find out which things Barry knows but isn't currently thinking of at some specified time, what would it be for them to turn out to be good or

bad art? If these things are the art, what possible basis could one have - even in principle - for a judgement as to this work's artistic value?³³

Again, the Constitution Theorist has a more sensible option. She can say that what we are being asked to appreciate is *not* some items of the artist's knowledge which are in practice inaccessible and in principle unrateable, but rather Barry's idea to nominate such a thing as art.

As Nicholas Wolterstorff says of Duchamp's *Fountain*:

What is interesting [in the case of *Fountain*] is not primarily the object but rather the fact that Duchamp presented this object'; the object is 'presented to us not that we should find it satisfying to contemplate but rather that we should find it interesting *that it is presented* as if for contemplation'³⁴

It might be tempting to see *All the Things I Know but of which I am Not at the Moment Thinking* as a 'next step' from Duchamp's appropriation of mass-produced objects as art. Works like *Fountain* and *Bottle Rack* flout the requirement that artworks must be physically the products of the artist's hand and demonstrate the artist's skill with the manipulation of materials. Barry's *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking* might be thought to also flout the requirement that artworks must be items that their audiences can perceive. But it might be better to think that in both cases it's the fact that such as thing 'is presented as if for contemplation' that is really supposed to be our focus, not the thing itself.

³³ The view that the work *is* the items of Barry's unconscious knowledge also faces problems in that this would seem to entail that the work's makeup is subject to constant change. The work would be such that what it is made of changes all the time, as new thoughts flit into the artists mind, items pass from counting as things he knows but isn't thinking, to things he knows and is thinking, whence they cease to be part of the work. Similarly as he learns new facts or forgets things he once knew, items can become part of the work or cease to be part of the work.

³⁴ Wolterstorff, N. (1980), p. 62.

A Constitution Theorist who takes conceptual works to be conceptions, might use this same kind of argument to support her view that *All the Things I Know but of which I am Not at the Moment Thinking* is Robert Barry's idea to nominate his unconscious knowledge as art.

What's odd, though, is that if we identify the work with Barry's idea to nominate his unconscious knowledge as art, then we thereby treat this nomination as unsuccessful, since this means *not* identifying the work with the thing nominated. (The same is true of *Fountain*). Furthermore, as with the other works discussed, this position is complicated by the fact that this conception is one that has been executed. Barry's idea to nominate his unconscious knowledge as art is an idea he actually carried out. And this looks to count against the view that the work is just the conception, and not the execution.

If, in accordance with the other version of the Constitution Account, Barry's work is taken to be the meaning, this is complicated by the fact that there is something by means of which the work communicates its meaning. And so the Constitution theorist need to tell some kind of story about why this should not be taken to be part of the work.

What has emerged from the preceding discussion of what might be thought to be pet examples of the Constitution Account is that, despite perhaps initial appearances - or wishful thinking - to the contrary, all of these works in some sense involve material objects. What's more, it is hard to see how such works could do without their respective objects. How would we be in a position to know anything about Cattelan's idea to obtain a police report for a 'missing' sculpture if we are not presented either with the

report itself or something indicating to us that this is what has happened? Similarly, unless we are told in some way that Robert Barry has nominated his unconscious knowledge as an artwork, we are in no position to appreciate the work that is *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking*.³⁵

So it seems that even works that are most often cited as examples of non-object-involving conceptual art *par excellence* have some sort of involvement with physical objects (or events) which looks far from accidental.

Indeed these examples, far from unproblematically illustrating the Constitution Account of CA, highlight some important issues that must be dealt with by anyone who advocates such an account. The crucial central point that the discussion of these examples reveals is that both the claim that works of CA can exist as conceptions without being executed, and the claim that they can exist as meanings without there being something that conveys them are more problematic than might at first be thought.

Weiner's instructions might be thought to be a good example of a work that exists merely as conception, and doesn't actually need to be made. But we've seen that there is much reason to doubt this analysis. Indeed, in all the cases discussed above, if we are to identify the artwork with a conception for a work, the most plausible candidate turns out to be one that has been executed. For Constitution Accounts that identify the work with a meaning, too, there are similar difficulties. Where there is a meaning, there must be something that *conveys* the meaning.

³⁵ Even if the viewer were presented with an audio of someone reading out Barry's sentence or Weiner's instructions, rather than an inscription of them, it would still be the case that something physical was being presented - an event, perhaps, rather than an object, but physical nonetheless, and no less devoid of perceptual properties: just as there is a way the words look when written down, and a particular font and colour that they are in, there is a way the words sound when spoken, and a particular sound to the way they are spoken, an accent, and a timbre.

So even in the case of works that might be thought to be the best kinds of examples to motivate the Constitution Account, objects still seem in some sense to be involved, ideas understood as conceptions seem to be executed, and ideas understood as meanings seem to be meanings *of* something. Thus the claim that ‘ideas alone can be artworks’, whether ‘ideas’ here is understood as conceptions or meanings, if true, is not *obviously* true, since ideas understood as conceptions seem to require some kind of execution, and ideas understood as meanings seem to require some form of communication.³⁶

This is perhaps what the Art & Language group had in mind when they took issue with Lucy Lippard’s claim about dematerialization, arguing that ‘there is no dematerialized art, only art that is directly material, and art that ‘produce[s] a material entity only as a necessary by-product of the need to record the idea’,³⁷ and what Mel Bochner meant by his claim that ‘no thought can exist without sustaining support’.³⁸

Of course, a Constitution Theorist could respond to this by arguing that these objects are not themselves the work or any part of the work, and that to treat them as such would be to miss the point. Those who identify the work with a conception could insist that the execution is strictly speaking external to the work; while those who identify the work with a message could say the same about the means of communicating the message. But the point here is that arguments for the Constitution Account cannot take the form of simply pointing to works for which there is no material object, since

³⁶ Furthermore, even if it is possible to find the odd example of a work where the artist has succeeded in not using any kind of material entity, the Constitution Account is supposed to characterise *all* conceptual art, not just some of it; so given that there are so many conceptual works which involve physical objects and events, the arguments for it are not going to come from an observation that there is a lack of objects in CA. Lacking objects, it seems, is far from typical in CA.

³⁷ Atkinson (1968), p. 44; as paraphrased in Jamieson, D. (1986), p. 120.

³⁸ Bochner, M. (1970), p. 50.

such works appear to be rather thin on the ground. What is needed is rather an argument for why we should not see any of this material stuff as part of the work. Given that so many conceptual works involve physical objects in some sense, Constitution Accounts need to tell some kind of story about what the link is between these objects and the respective works, and one, moreover, that makes sense of their seemingly indispensable role in the appreciation of the works.

The strategy that adherents of the Constitution Account tend to take is to say that the object we are presented with is not itself the work but a documentation of the work, a record of the work, which serves as a means for the audience to access it. This would explain the close link between the object and the work without identifying the object with the work. So Weiner's instructions are not the work itself, but a means of access to it. This has the benefit of explaining why they have an important role to play, since without them the audience cannot access the work.

One of the clearest statements of this strategy of relegating material objects to documentations of works rather than works, comes from Patricia Norvell in her introductory essay to her edited volume of interviews with conceptual artists *Recording Conceptual Art*:

Where the art object is eliminated, some documentation of the art idea is usually substituted. Thus what is presented to the viewer may be photographs, written documentation and descriptions, or spoken information.³⁹

Other articulations of this view include the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler's statement that 'because the work is beyond perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation ... photographs, drawings and descriptive

³⁹ Norvell, P. (2001), p. 17.

language',⁴⁰ the philosopher Harold Osborne's observation that in CA 'a documentary record or a set of instructions takes the place of the traditional physical or quasi-physical art object',⁴¹ and his later elaboration of this, that 'the documentation is not presented as something to be visually enjoyed for its own sake; its purpose is simply to communicate the idea',⁴² Dale Jamieson's analysis of what artists such as Kosuth were up to: 'Kosuth and the Art-Language group responded by distinguishing artworks from their documentations. Because their pieces were concepts rather than perceptible objects, they could not be bought and sold. And what could be exhibited in a gallery or museum was only the documentation of a piece, and not the piece itself',⁴³ and Gwen Allen's observation that 'the dematerialization of art did not, as the critics predicted, result in the evaporation of art into thin air, but produced, in lieu of traditional art objects, a strange subset of documents - texts, photographs, maps, lists and diagrams - which served as evidence, as stand-in, a trace of the artistic act.'⁴⁴

In all these cases a link is made from the claim that in CA the work is really something imperceptible, to the claim that such works therefore require some sort of perceptible documentation to be appreciated, and that what we are presented with in galleries are precisely these documentations. In other words, there appears to be a recognition that the identification of work with idea necessitates:

⁴⁰ quoted in Alberro & Stimson (Eds.) (2000), p. 182.

⁴¹ Osborne, H. (1979), p. 176.

⁴² Osborne, H. (1980), p. 14.

⁴³ Jamieson, D. (1986), p. 121.

⁴⁴ Allen, G. (2011) p. 15; Noel Carroll echoes this when he observes that 'often all that remains to be seen of Conceptual Art is its documentation.' Carroll (1999), p. 77.

- (i) explaining what these objects are if they are not the works, and
- (ii) explaining how we can have access to, and be able to appreciate, works that have no material or perceptible form,

and the claim that the objects are documentations of the work is proposed as a way of dealing with these two issues. If the objects are documentations they play an important role in our access to the works, without themselves *being* the works.

That there is scope for confusion over what is the documentation and what is the work, is widely acknowledged. According to Robert C Morgan 'The question of what is a document and what is not a document in artworks related to Conceptual Art has been one of the major theoretical points of contention in the thinking of both artists and critics',⁴⁵ Alexander Alberro comments on the artist Robert Morris's 'worry that the public may unwittingly mistake the record for the art and in so doing miss the artwork',⁴⁶ and the art dealer Seth Siegelaub offers the thought that prior to CA 'art and the presentation of the art were identical ... But here [with CA] you're in a situation where the presentation of the art and the art are not the same thing'.⁴⁷

It should be uncontroversial that the view that the thing you see in the gallery is not the work but the documentation is very common.⁴⁸ What I am suggesting is that the

⁴⁵ Morgan, R. (1978), p. 74.

⁴⁶ Alberro, A. (2001), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Interview with Patricia Norvell in Alberro & Norvell (Eds.) (2001), pp. 33-4. More examples of this line of thought can be seen in Kempton Mooney's claim that 'all that was left was the documentation' (Mooney K (2005), p. 68), Edward Reilly's claim that 'much conceptual art ... relied on documentation rather than the work of art itself for permanence' (Reilly, E. *The 1960s*, p. 224) For detailed discussions of the putative distinction between documentation and work in CA, see Alberro (2001), pp. 5-13; Battcock, G. (1970); Morgan, R. (1978).

⁴⁸ For more examples of people taking this view, see Shirey (1969), who claims that 'Huebler documents through photographs and maps what he considers to be art and then provides information about it.' (p. 41).

philosophical motivation for adopting this view is that the Constitution Account's identification of work with idea (coupled with the fact that in the vast majority of cases, there is something material associated with the work) necessitates saying *something* about what this material thing is, if it's not the work. And moreover, saying something that explains the close link that seems to exist between object and work. That the object is a documentation of the work is a common response to this demand.

The question we now face is whether, even supplemented with the documentation claim, this view has much to recommend it over more conventional rival views. In the next section I will identify some potential areas of difficulty with the view that the object is a documentation. In Sections 3-4 we will look in detail at a Constitution Account articulated by a philosopher, Elisabeth Schellekens, and discuss how well this account deals with the issues identified.

Section 2. Documentation: Some Potential Difficulties

If something is a documentation of a work, then its function *qua* documentation is merely to record, and provide a means of access to, that work. If that is the case, then there are various ways in which the object fails to be as closely connected to the work as we might expect. I will discuss six related features of the work-documentation relation that may give us pause for thought about the plausibility of Constitution Accounts.

- (i) The existence of the work is independent of the existence of any particular documentation of it.**

If the Constitution Account of CA is true, we should expect the work itself to be unaffected by whether a given documentation is destroyed. If some documentation is destroyed, that doesn't amount to the destruction of the work.

There are definitely works of CA for which a case could be made for this being true.

All that is there physically, when Robert Barry's *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking* is exhibited, is the sentence of its title rendered in paint on the wall of the gallery. At the end of the exhibition, the wall goes back to being a plain white wall, and each time the work is exhibited somewhere new, this sentence is painted onto a new wall. We don't at all think that Barry's work has been destroyed each time an exhibition of it comes to an end and the wall is returned to its prior state.

Similarly for Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawings* on which LeWitt is clear that to exhibit them, one simply needs to follow a set of instructions, resulting in a visual design drawn straight on to the wall wherever the work is exhibited. Just as with Barry's *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking*, *Wall Drawings* does not go out of existence each time one of these designs is destroyed, or come into existence when a new one is produced.

But equally there are conceptual works where this *doesn't* appear to be the case. With *Erased De Kooning Drawing*, for example, or Cattelan's police report, it seems that destroying the object *would* amount to destroying the work here.

But the Constitution Account commits us to not treating this as a case of the work's being destroyed. Perhaps the Constitution Theorist could argue that in this case the object is the *only* possible means of access to the work. This would explain why we would feel, in such a case, as though the work has been destroyed, since the one possible means by which we can access the work has been destroyed. But then the burden of proof would be on the Constitution Theorist to say why we should think that this is the only possible documentation of the work, especially since it seems *prima facie* that there are other possible ways of documenting it.

(ii) If the object is just a documentation there is no important distinction between the object and copies of it

We tend to make a distinction between copies of works such as *Erased De Kooning Drawing*, photographic reproductions of it in books, and the object that we are presented with if we go to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art to look at the work. Standardly we'd think this distinction is a matter of the latter being the work (or at least part of the work), and the former being copies of the work.

The Constitution Account, however, in treating the object as a documentation of the work, threatens to erase any meaningful distinction between the object and its copies - the copies look to be in principle just as good candidates for documentations of the work. For both the version of the Constitution Account on which idea = conception and that on which it is understood as meaning, it is hard to see how a good copy could fail to count as a documentation of the work. A copy could in principle be just as good a record of and means of access to the artist's conception. And equally it could be just as good a conveyor of meanings.

(iii) The work can in principle exist undocumented

If the work can exist undocumented, then it seems that there are possibly many more conceptual works than there are standardly thought to be. On the view that idea = conception, there is no difference between artworks and plans for artworks - no difference between thinking about making a work and actually making it. Which has

the odd consequence that, for example, the question of how many conceptual works Joseph Kosuth has made, is a matter of how many ideas he had.

(iv) The identity of the work is independent of how it has been documented - it's not the case that differences in object entail differences in work.

But in many cases we might argue that this does not hold. Consider the Brazilian conceptual artist Cildo Meireles's *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*. Meireles took advantage of a recycling system in place in Brazil in the 70s whereby Coca-Cola collected empty bottles to refill and redistribute, as a means for circulating political, anti-capitalist messages. He silk-screened the messages in white ink on the bottles before returning them so that they would become visible when refilled with Coca-Cola.

One philosophical Constitution Account, of which we will hear more later in this chapter, takes the idea here to be the messages printed onto the bottles.⁴⁹ This kind of Constitution Account faces problems in that it appears to be committed to the view that if this message had been communicated in some other way, it would still be the same work, i.e. this account has the consequence that the whole mechanism of distributing these messages via Coca-cola bottles, which we would intuitively think is an important part of *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, is not in fact part of this work at all.

⁴⁹ Schellekens, E. (2007).

Of course, much depends on what exactly is identified as the idea. Constitution Accounts that construe 'idea' as the conception of the work do better in this respect than those that understand 'idea' as meaning. The conception of *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, for example, can include all the details about putting the messages on Coca-cola bottles etc., in which case Constitution Accounts that take 'idea' to mean conception can treat all of this as part of the work.

But even on this kind of Constitution Account, it seems there are possible documentations of *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* that do not involve putting messages onto Coca-cola bottles. The idea to do so can be documented by executing it, but it could also be documented by means of a description. But we might well think that if it had been documented only in the latter way and not in the former, it would be a different work. Perhaps a less bold and daring one. But this Constitution Account can make room for this only if it can argue that descriptions would in principle fail to document it. Intuitively, however, what the actual thing does that a description can't do has nothing to do with documenting the idea.

(v) The *value* of the work is not affected by the way it has been documented.

This again is more of a problem for Constitution Accounts that take the 'idea' to be the work's message or meaning. For many works of CA the way in which the message is conveyed is plausibly important to its value as art. *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, for example, would be less good art if the same messages were distributed in a less imaginative way. But if the work is the message, it follows that however the messages are distributed the value remains the same.

Even Constitution Accounts on which the idea is the conception of the work potentially have a problem here. As we noted above, a conception can be documented by means of a description of it, as well as by means of an execution of it. However, if the idea had not been executed but just described, the result would be something inferior in artistic value.

If we agree with Robert Hopkins that part of what we value about Duchamp's *Fountain* is its audacity, then we are in part valuing the fact that it was actually done:

Ideas can be audacious, but thinking of something audacious is not itself necessarily to think audaciously. And this is true even if one had conceived of every aspect of the thing on which its audacity turns. The boldness of the gesture in *Fountain* required that Duchamp really put an ordinary urinal into a space devoted to art; merely thinking of doing so was, in contrast, timid.⁵⁰

(vi) There is no *in-principle* limit to how many documentations a single work may have. And there are no grounds for privileging one object over others, if all are documentations of the same work.

Even if a defender of the Constitution Account can show that descriptions and copies do not count as documentations of conceptual works, she is still faced with the fact that there can always in principle be more documentations of a given work, and that these would be equal in status to the objects we in fact visit in galleries etc.

⁵⁰ Hopkins 2007, pp. 58-9. For more discussion of this point see Chapter 5.

This seems to be the case for both meaning and conception versions of the Constitution Account. If the object we associate with the work is just its documentation, then were more objects made that meet the criteria to be documentations, they would stand in just the same relation to the work as the original object.

This might seem acceptable enough in cases like LeWitt's wall drawings, where he specified the criteria for making them and encouraged others to make them. But the idea that another object could be made which stands in just as close a relation to, say, *Erased De Kooning Drawing* as the drawing that Rauschenberg actually erased, is something that most people would find hard to accept. Similarly for Cattelan's police report.

The one rational reason for privileging one documentation over another, it seems, is in terms of its capacity to give you information about the idea/work. But since it looks in principle possible that, for some conceptual works, a documentation could be made that is just as good in this respect as the object that already exists, Constitution Accounts do face the problem of explaining why for most conceptual works there are objects that we treat as having a kind of special status.

Now, all these are just potential areas of difficulty for accounts that treat the object or event as the work's documentation rather than the work. All, I believe, serve to highlight our commitment to the view that these objects are connected more intimately to the artwork than a documentation is standardly thought to be. None of these concerns has been presented as insurmountable, but rather they should be regarded as giving rise to challenges that Constitution Accounts must either meet or explain away. In the next two sections I will look at the most detailed articulation of a Constitution

Account in the philosophical literature on CA, and see how it deals with the challenges we've highlighted here.

Section 3. A Philosophical Constitution Account

There are a few philosophers who have expressed in passing a kind of Constitution Account of CA,⁵¹ but the most detailed articulation of a Constitution Account in the philosophical literature on CA is by Elisabeth Schellekens in her 2007 paper 'The Aesthetic Value of Ideas'. Schellekens takes the view that in CA 'the idea is the material of art and thereby the artwork itself',⁵² and so 'the artwork is not, strictly speaking, the thing or event we may be able to perceive, touch, and position ourselves in relation to in space'.⁵³

I will argue that the account developed by Schellekens here has problems of the type listed above, as well as problems specific to the details of the account. I will then try to show that Priority Accounts face none of these problems.

Schellekens doesn't provide much by way of argument for this view. All that is given to persuade the reader of this characterisation of CA is a few quotations from key fig-

⁵¹ See Carroll (1999), p. 77, who, in the context of a separate argument, characterises conceptual works as 'artworks that are ideas, rather than saleable objects'. See also Matravers (2007), p. 27 who assumes that with CA 'the work of art is identified with an idea, rather than an object'.

⁵² Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 75.

⁵³ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 75.

ures such as Kosuth and LeWitt, which appear to be advocating this kind of account: ‘the “art idea” and the art are the same’ (Kosuth),⁵⁴ and ‘ideas alone can be works of art’ (LeWitt).⁵⁵ Since there are also lots of examples of people, including Kosuth and LeWitt, advocating the rival Priority Account of CA, these are not really enough to decide in favour of the Constitution Account. However, to be fair, establishing the truth of the Constitution Account is not Schellekens’s focus here. This account of CA largely functions as a background assumption that motivates a particular question which itself constitutes the main focus of the paper. In Schellekens’s case the question is whether CA can have aesthetic value relevant to its value as art. And it is the assumption that CA is to be defined on a Constitution Account that makes this question look to be particularly interesting in the case of CA. How can works of art which are literally just ideas have aesthetic value?

Schellekens understands ‘ideas’ as meanings rather than conceptions. Her categorisation of ideas into three kinds, ideas about art, socio-political ideas, and philosophical ideas, and the examples she gives of ideas in CA leave the reader in no doubt that she is understanding ‘ideas’ as meanings or messages rather than plans or conceptions.

Schellekens discusses six conceptual works, two for each kind of idea, and identifies what she takes the idea to be in each case. Mel Bochner’s *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* and Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* are given as examples of works that are ideas about art. For the former, Bochner displayed in the gallery four identical black ring-binders contain-

⁵⁴ Kosuth, J. (1969a).

⁵⁵ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 107.

ing photocopies of working drawings made by various artists. Schellekens takes the idea here to be that 'art need not be something unique, something that can only be reproduced at the price of losing its status as art. Rather, art's manifestation allows for multiplication'.⁵⁶ *Inert Gas Series* is a series of works by Robert Barry; for each one he obtained a certain quantity of a different inert gas and released it into the atmosphere. Much has been written about this work, with commentators claiming, variously, that the work is the gas itself, the action of releasing the gas, and the idea to do so. But Schellekens identifies the work as the message that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event - art as process can be present yet thoroughly imperceptible'.⁵⁷

The Art Workers' Coalition's *Q. And Babies? A. And Babies*, and Meireles's *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* are identified as examples of works that are socio-political ideas: In the former a colour photograph of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968, with the text 'Q. And Babies? A. And Babies' superimposed on it. The text comes from an interview conducted by a news reporter with one of the US soldiers who had been involved in the massacre. Schellekens claims that here the idea as 'a very specific political message, namely that the United States's Vietnam policy was indefensible and that gross injustices were being carried out in the name of democracy'.⁵⁸ For *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* Meireles took advantage of a recycling system in place in Brazil in the 70s whereby Coca-Cola collected empty bottles to refill and redistribute, as a means for circulating political, anti-capitalist messages. He silk-screened the messages in white ink on the bottles before returning them so that they

⁵⁶ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 77.

⁵⁷ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 78.

⁵⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 78.

would become visible when refilled with Coca-Cola. This work Schellekens identifies as ‘a specific anti-capitalist message’⁵⁹

Finally, Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* and Michael Craig Martin’s *An Oak Tree* are identified as examples of works that are philosophical ideas. *One and Three Chairs* in which a real chair, a photograph of a chair, and a blown up dictionary definition of the word ‘chair’ are presented together, is taken to be ‘the metaphysical question: ‘Which is the ‘real’ chair?’ - ‘What is mere appearance and what is reality?’”⁶⁰ And *An Oak Tree* is taken to be ‘the notion of transubstantiation’.⁶¹

I will discuss four potential problems with the view that emerges from all this. We will see that Schellekens’s view faces all of the problems that we raised here for Constitution Accounts in general, and that the specific details of her view bring problems of their own, as well as serving to intensify some of the issues that it faces by virtue of being a Constitution Account.

⁵⁹ Schellekens (2007), p. 78.

⁶⁰ Schellekens (2007), p. 79.

⁶¹ Schellekens (2007), p. 79.

Section 4. Some Problems

Problem 1: Overly Simplistic

Firstly, one might find the identified messages uncomfortably specific and to that extent arbitrary. While it is surely right that Q. *And Babies?* A. *And Babies* puts across the message that 'the United States's Vietnam policy was indefensible and that gross injustices were being carried out in the name of democracy', the work surely communicates more besides that. One might argue, for example, that the soldier's matter-of-fact response to the question, juxtaposed with the horrific reality to which his response refers, highlights a disturbing aspect of human nature: the ability to be so matter of fact about such awful things.

Indeed, much has been made, by art critics and philosophers alike, of the way in which art tends not to function as an efficient conveyer of a single message, but as a complex means of communicating a whole range of messages. This is not to say that there are no limits on what meanings can sensibly be ascribed to a given work - the point is just that works tend to convey a range of, often related, messages, rather than a single one, and that to that extent, identifying one message as the sole meaning of a work can look arbitrary.

To make this point is not necessarily to advocate what is known as critical pluralism. The debate between pluralists and monists tends to get couched in terms of the acceptability or correctness of *incompatible* interpretations, the assumption being that both parties will surely want to acknowledge that artworks can and overwhelmingly

often *do* ‘say more than one thing’. Indeed, those who identify themselves as monists tend to be at pains to demonstrate how their position can accommodate the insight that works tend to communicate a range of messages, and that they are not committed to the view that artworks convey a single, simple message.⁶²

Something we should keep in mind here, though, and which perhaps makes this problem particularly acute for Schellekens’s theory, is that Schellekens is committed to the view that these works aren’t the things that convey the ideas, they *are* the ideas.

This is, on occasion, obscured by turns of phrase like ‘the idea at the heart of the piece is...’,⁶³ and ‘clearly, the intention was for the piece to carry a very specific message’.⁶⁴ The claim that the idea is ‘at the heart of’ the piece seems much weaker than the claim that it entirely constitutes the piece, and similarly, the claim that the work ‘carries’ a message is nowhere near as strong as the claim that it *is* the message. But Schellekens makes it abundantly clear throughout the paper that her thesis is that conceptual works are the ideas themselves, not the things that convey the ideas. She spends some time clarifying that ‘the claim is that the artwork actually is the idea’, (quoting Kosuth: ‘the “art idea” and art are the same’); and that therefore ‘the artwork is not, strictly speaking, the thing or event we may be able to perceive, touch, and position ourselves in relation to in space’.⁶⁵ For this reason she takes the task of investigating whether conceptual works can have aesthetic value relevant to

⁶² See Stecker, R. (1994) ‘Art Interpretation’ *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), pp. 193-206.

⁶³ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 79.

⁶⁴ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 78.

⁶⁵ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 75.

their value as art, to amount to the question ‘can the ideas constitutive of conceptual artworks have aesthetic value?’⁶⁶ with the understanding that ‘if we grant that the ideas represented in conceptual art can have aesthetic qualities, the dematerialization of art need no longer imply any incommensurable philosophical divide [stemming from the relevance of the aesthetic in one case but not the other] between conceptual art and other forms of art.’⁶⁷ It seems right, then, to discount those misleading turns of phrase. After all, the Constitution Account can be awkward to articulate, and it is easy to find oneself slipping into the more conventional turns of phrase, about works conveying messages, and so on. Given Schellekens’s repeated statements to the effect that her view equates the work with the idea and her explicit attempts to distinguish this from other, weaker claims, I think it is right to take seriously her own claims about what she is saying, and discount the odd turn of phrase that might suggest the opposite. One should, in other words, take Schellekens at her word that she is putting forward a Constitution Account of CA.

But if we do take seriously Schellekens’s avowed commitment to the view that the conceptual works are ideas, understood as messages, then The Art Workers’ Coalition’s *Q. And Babies? A. And Babies*, on the view that Schellekens has outlined, isn’t something that *conveys* the message that the United States’s Vietnam policy was indefensible and that gross injustices were being carried out in the name of democracy; it *is* that message. Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* doesn’t convey the message that ‘art ... does not require a perceivable object or event’, it *is* that claim.

⁶⁶ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 75.

⁶⁷ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 86.

Given this, it might look as though the problem is not easy to fix. While it is not all that difficult for someone who takes *Q. And Babies? A. And Babies* to convey the message that ‘the United States’s Vietnam policy was indefensible and that gross injustices were being carried out in the name of democracy’, to modify their view and allow that it conveys various other messages too, someone who *identifies* the work with the message, as Schellekens does, might have a harder time accommodating this insight. If the most plausible interpretation of a given work is to attribute to it more than one message, the Constitution Theorist faces a potential difficulty in saying what makes it the case that there is one work here and not several.

Problem 2: Too many documentations of the work

But putting that issue to one side, the view faces a more serious problem. Schellekens’s identification of work with message seems to have an odd consequence for work-identity. If, for example *Inert Gas Series* is the idea that ‘art ... does not require a perceivable object or event’, then presumably this means that every time anyone utters the phrase that art does not require a perceivable object or event’, or communicates in any way the view that artworks can be imperceptible, they have produced a documentation of *Inert Gas Series*. And perhaps odder still, if Michael Craig Martin’s *An Oak Tree* just is the notion of transubstantiation (as Schellekens’s two claims that the work is the idea and the idea here is the notion of transubstantiation jointly entail) then it follows that any time anyone contemplates the notion of transubstantiation

they are contemplating Michael Craig Martin's work *An Oak Tree*, even if they do not realise they are doing so. This is strange.

Schellekens seems to acknowledge this problem when she says the following:

What, if anything, is there to secure a significant distinction between art on the one hand, and the ordinary proposition or statement expressing that same idea in a non-artistic context on the other hand? Is it not the case, in other words, that my explanation of Bochner's, Meireles's, or Kosuth's idea covers everything that the artwork it self may convey about it? If the question is to be answered affirmatively, we gain an explanation of why the appreciation of conceptual artworks does not seem to call for first-hand experience in the manner of the appreciation of more traditional artworks. After all, many people wary of CA cite precisely this reason in defence of their position, namely that nothing is to be gained from standing face to face with a conceptual artwork over and above what I can read about it in a newspaper article or a guide book. The reason why the appropriate artistic appreciation of a work such as *The Execution of Emperor Maximillian* requires a first-hand experience which *Inert Gas: Helium* does not seem to demand is that the former involves the perception and experience of an artwork's distinctively aesthetic features, qualities that are by nature perceptual (broadly conceived). After all, in the aesthetic case, we cannot merely base our judgements on someone else's perception or assessment - we need to see or hear aesthetic qualities for ourselves.⁶⁸

But here she seems to be missing the point. The problem her particular version of the Constitution Account faces is that it seems to entail that 'an ordinary statement expressing that same idea in a non-artistic context' would count just as much as a documentation of the work as the thing presented to the audience does. But Schellekens seems to be confusing this problem, variously, with (i) the objection that her account threatens to dissolve the distinction between art and non-art, and with (ii) the objection that we don't need to have first-hand experiences of conceptual works to appreciate them, or to form verdicts as to their merit. In fact, though, neither of these objections is relevant to Schellekens's account of CA.

⁶⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 80.

Firstly, the distinction between art and 'an ordinary statement expressing that idea in a non-artistic context' is not under threat. But this is because on Schellekens's view *no* expression of this idea counts as art, not even the one that people go and see in galleries. (On her view it's only the idea itself, not any expression of it, that constitutes the art.) What is threatened is *rather* the distinction between the particular expression of the idea that we go and see in galleries, and *any other* expression of the idea; if all of these are means of access to the idea, then there's no reason to think of the thing in the gallery as having any different status from other means of access to the idea.

If the idea is the work, there are potentially all sorts of ways of documenting it, and the work is not tied to the particular documentation that we in fact associate with it - Meireles's Coca-cola bottles, Kosuth's photo-text-object combinations and Bochner's books of photocopies are each just one possible way of documenting the idea that constitutes, respectively, *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, *One and Three Chairs*, and *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*.

If *One and Three Chairs*, for example, really is, as Schellekens claims, the message that 'there is a metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality', then since the photo-object-text combination that Kosuth presented is really just one possible way of conveying the message, it is just one way of conveying *the work*, and so that same work may be documented just as well by all sorts of other means - including just an utterance of the sentence 'there is a metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality'.

Secondly, if Schellekens is right that conceptual works are ideas, understood as messages, then it is not at all true that works of CA don't need to be experienced first-hand. We perhaps don't need to experience any given *documentation* first-hand, but this is a different matter.

The principle that judgements and/or appreciation of a work must be based on first-hand experience of the object judged is one that has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in philosophical aesthetics.⁶⁹ I will for ease of reference henceforth call this the Acquaintance Principle, following Richard Wollheim,⁷⁰ although it might be argued that strictly it should be used to refer only to the judgements version and not the appreciation version. I will argue that the implications for CA as defined by Schellekens for this principle are more complex than Schellekens seems to realise.

The Acquaintance Principle is standardly thought to preclude both testimony *and* descriptions as adequate bases for judgements/appreciation. I will argue that if CA as defined by Schellekens shows us anything about the Acquaintance Principle, it's that the question about the efficacy of descriptions is not as closely related to the Acquaintance Principle as has been thought, for it can be answered in the affirmative (for both judgements and appreciation) without rejecting the Acquaintance Principle. CA, as defined by Schellekens, would show, in other words, that the inefficacy of descriptions is *not* a corollary of the Acquaintance Principle.

But what it *doesn't* show - contrary to what Schellekens claims - is that the Acquaintance Principle doesn't hold. I will argue that for the testimony point, CA is in much

⁶⁹ For arguments for this principle, see Wollheim, R. (1980), p. 233, Sibley, F. (1974); Scruton, R. (1974); Pettit, P. (1983); Tormey, A. (1973), Lopes, D. (2009). For arguments against it see Budd, M. (2003); Livingston, P. (2003), Meskin, A. (2004).

⁷⁰ Wollheim, R. (1980).

the same position as other art - and there's no sense in which CA poses a particular problem for it. As for the descriptions point, there is in fact less scope for counterexamples to the requirement in CA than in other art.

When conceptual artworks are taken to be messages rather than objects, the distinction between 'standing face to face with a conceptual artwork' and 'reading about it in a book' disappears. Provided that the book tells you what the message is, the book has given just as direct an access to the work as it is possible to have. If conceptual works are messages it's hard to see what could count as a non-first-hand experience of a such a work. Either you are told what the message is, or you are not; either you experience the work or you don't.

Of course, there is a distinction between being told something explicitly and being told implicitly (cf. Gricean implicatures etc.). However, this is a distinction concerning how a message is conveyed to someone. And however the message is conveyed, it will be true that once you've *got* the message, there is no real distinction between engaging with that message directly or indirectly. The direct/indirect engagement distinction concerns whether one's attention to the work is via some kind of proxy. There is no corresponding distinction when the work is a message.

Understood either as a condition on appreciation or on knowledge of verdicts, then, the requirement that one experience artworks 'first-hand' does not look to be threatened in the slightest by CA as defined by Schellekens's Constitution Account. That one doesn't need to encounter the *object* to appreciate the work or form verdicts as to its merit, on the other hand, is a separate point, that just falls out of the claim that the object is not the work.

Schellekens thinks CA, as she defines it, is a counterexample to the direct experience requirement because you can appreciate a conceptual work by being told about it - but this doesn't make it a counterexample. The reason you can appreciate a conceptual work by being told about it is precisely that being told about it enables you to directly experience it.

It would, however, be a counterexample to the claim that you can't *directly experience* a work by being told about it. And for this reason, it would demonstrate that the received assumption that the Acquaintance Principle precludes description as an adequate basis for appreciation and judgement, is false.

Conceptual works - as defined by Schellekens's view - are not on this count an exception to the Acquaintance Principle. Rather, they just demonstrate that one way you can become acquainted with a work is by a description - thus refuting the assumed opposition between descriptions and direct experience.

As for the question of whether critical verdicts are transmissible by testimony, CA - as defined by Schellekens - is no different from other art with respect to this question. It is beyond the scope of the present argument to address whether the claim about the inefficacy of testimony with respect to art is true. The view has both supporters and detractors.⁷¹ What I want to emphasise here is that, regardless of what we ought to say about testimony with respect to art in general, CA as defined here does not give us any *particular* reason to doubt the requirement that judgements and appreciation must not be based on testimony.

⁷¹ For arguments that testimony is not a legitimate basis for judgements of art, see Sibley, F. (1965); Tormey, A. (1973):. For arguments that it can be, see Budd (2003), Laetz, B. (2008); Meskin, A. (2004).

Any illusion of support for the claim that conceptual works show the testimony requirement to be false, comes from the fact that it shows the description requirement to be false. And we've seen that the Acquaintance Principle doesn't require the truth of the description requirement anyway. What is perhaps the source of the confusion is that if the work is the message, then, in contrast with the vast majority of other art, it is possible that in simply telling someone about a work, one can thereby give that person access to the work. And that person can thereby come to appreciate the work, and judge (for themselves) that it has certain artistic properties. But this is a separate point.

One can come to access a conceptual work (and thus be in a position to see for oneself whether it is good, bad, mediocre) on the basis of being told about it by someone. So if Schellekens is right that Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series* is the idea that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event', then we can access this work and be in a position to judge for ourselves how good it is etc., simply by being told that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event'. This is a point about access to conceptual works. But none of this touches on the issue of whether one can come to a judgement as to the work's artistic properties or value without knowing the work (which is what the Acquaintance Principle states).

Thus CA, as defined by Schellekens, is not at all problematic for the Acquaintance Principle, but does drive a wedge between the Acquaintance Principle and the associated claim about the illegitimacy of descriptions as a basis for artistic appreciation and/or judgements.

Problem 3: The way the message is conveyed

We noted above that Schellekens's main concern in the paper is to address the question of how conceptual works can have aesthetic value relevant to their value as art. In her discussion of this issue she engages with some of the issues we identified in Section 2 as potential problems for Constitution Accounts. I will argue that her attempt to address one of these in particular amounts to inconsistency.

Schellekens's main focus in this paper is to investigate whether works of CA, characterised as ideas, can have aesthetic value. Her answer to this question is to identify two different ways in which such works can have aesthetic value:

- (1) ideas themselves can have aesthetic value,
- (2) the way the ideas are conveyed has aesthetic value

My interest here is not in whether Schellekens is right that the way the message is communicated, or the message itself, can have aesthetic value (these kinds of issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). For the moment what I'm interested in is Schellekens's claims that (i) the way the message is communicated can affect the work - i.e. that *if* it can have aesthetic value, that this will accrue to the aesthetic value of the work, and (ii) to the extent that the message itself has aesthetic value this will accrue to the aesthetic value of the work.

In other words, I'm interested in the claims about *transfer* of aesthetic value from (i) the way the message is conveyed and (ii) the message itself, to the work. I will argue

that both of these claims about transfer of aesthetic value are problematic. In what follows I will discuss each in turn.

The way the message is conveyed

The claim that artworks sometimes have messages is pretty uncontroversial, and the claim that artworks can sometimes be valuable as art in part for the way they convey these messages is one to which most would assent. However, I will argue that - uncontroversial as it might be - this latter claim is not one that can be made about CA if one subscribes to the particular account that Schellekens endorses.

We discussed in the previous section a number of potential problems faced by accounts of CA that identify the work with the idea and take the object or event to be the work's documentation. One potential problem was that such accounts appear to be committed to the view that the way the idea is communicated, being a feature of the documentation rather than the work, cannot affect the work's value.

Constitution Accounts on which 'idea' is construed as a message essentially relegate all facts about how the message is conveyed to the documentation of the work rather than the work proper. Schellekens clearly acknowledges that on her view any value ascribable to the object or event that conveys the idea is not thereby ascribable to the work, since this object is not part of the work as the work is just the idea:

Since the artwork is not, strictly speaking, the thing or event we may be able to perceive, touch, and position ourselves in relation to in space, any aesthetic value that such a thing or event may have is of no significance to the art as such. ... whatever aesthetic pleasure they may yield, it will only pertain to the perceivable thing or event that is contingent to the artwork itself, and thus, will not really be ascribable to the art as such.⁷²

⁷² Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 75.

Any feature of the way the idea is conveyed essentially belongs to the documentation and not the work, and therefore can affect the value of the former but not the latter. So Schellekens's claim that the way the message is conveyed affects the value of the work, is incompatible with her commitment to the view that the work is the message.

Nonetheless Schellekens spends a fair amount of time discussing the six examples of conceptual works listed above to try to show in each case that the way the idea is communicated is of some importance. But if her arguments are successful, then they count as reasons to *reject* Constitution Accounts on which works are equated with messages. If, that is, we are persuaded that the way the message is communicated in a work of CA is important to its nature and/or value as art, then we ought to reject the view that the work is the message.

Schellekens presents parallel arguments for this claim for all six works that she discusses. Here is what she says about Bochner's *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* and Barry's *Inert Gas Series*:

What is so astute about Bochner's and Barry's pieces is that by choosing to represent the ideas in such a way as not only to make their point but also instantiate it, so to speak, they manage to turn what in the form of a proposition seems to be a rather prosaic comment into something more experiential - not experiencing the act of releasing gas but experiencing the idea. This generates a different kind of understanding of the idea, one that might be portrayed as inviting increased sensitivity towards or engendering a more profound comprehension of the idea and its ramifications.⁷³

⁷³ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 81.

There are a number of problems here. Firstly, the claim that these works 'manage to turn what in the form of a proposition seems to be a rather prosaic comment into something more experiential' seems to imply that the ideas in these two cases are not propositions. But what she identifies as the ideas in these cases are that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event - art as process can be present yet thoroughly imperceptible' and that 'art need not be something unique, something that can only be reproduced at the price of losing its status as art. Rather, art's manifestation allows for multiplication'. Both of these are clearly propositions. Indeed, with the exception of the notion of transubstantiation in the case of *An Oak Tree*, the things she identifies as the ideas in all the cases she discusses, are propositions.

And if she's right that Robert Barry's releasing various inert gases into the atmosphere conveys the proposition that that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event - art as process can be present yet thoroughly imperceptible', and Bochner's collection of photocopies conveys the proposition that 'art need not be something unique, something that can only be reproduced at the price of losing its status as art. Rather, art's manifestation allows for multiplication', then it is hard to see how conveying them in these particular ways would mean that they are no longer 'in the form of a proposition'.

She may of course be right that releasing various inert gases into the atmosphere is one of the more interesting ways of communicating the proposition that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event', and that displaying cheaply compiled photocopies in a gallery is one of the more interesting ways of communicating the proposition that 'art need not be something unique, something that can only be reproduced at the price of losing its status as art'.

Perhaps the contrast she means to draw is not between their being in the form of a proposition or not, but rather between their being conveyed linguistically or not. And she may of course be right that were these propositions conveyed linguistically the result would be less interesting than what Barry and Bochner produced. But it cannot be right to say that through being conveyed in the particular ways Barry and Bochner conveyed them, they somehow cease to be propositions.

Secondly, even if we interpret 'in the form of a proposition' here as 'conveyed by linguistic means', Schellekens's claim that '[Bochner's and Barry's works] manage to turn what in the form of a proposition seems to be a rather prosaic comment into something more experiential - not experiencing the act of releasing gas but experiencing the idea' is odd. What does she mean by 'more experiential'? What is it to experience the idea here, and why is this not possible when the idea is presented in written form?

Thirdly, it is not entirely clear *why* the particular way in which the proposition that, say 'art need not be something unique, something that can only be reproduced at the price of losing its status as art. Rather, art's manifestation allows for multiplication'.⁷⁴ is conveyed in *Working Drawings*, or the particular way in which the claim that 'art ... does not require a perceivable object or event - art as process can be present yet thoroughly imperceptible' is conveyed in Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, should be regarded as 'inviting increased sensitivity towards or engendering a more profound comprehension of the idea and its ramifications'.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 77.

⁷⁵ Schellekens, E. (2007) p. 81.

Finally, and most importantly here: although we might in general be sympathetic to the view that the way these works convey their points (and the way artworks convey their points, more generally) is highly relevant to their artistic value, this is a view that Schellekens's identification of work with message entirely precludes.

If the messages are themselves the works, (as they must be if the work is the idea and the idea is the message) then there is no room for the way the message is conveyed to affect the value of the work - since the way the message is conveyed is not a feature of the work at all - but just a fact about documentations of the work. It's exactly the problem we identified in Section 2.

Schellekens goes on to make the same kind of move for the other conceptual works she discusses. In the case of *One and Three Chairs* and *An Oak Tree*, her arguments for the way the message is conveyed mattering don't look particularly convincing.

What *An Oak Tree* and *One and Three Chairs* encourage us to do is not simply to rehearse the relevant metaphysical thoughts as we might find them in philosophical textbooks, namely '*that* there is such a thing as the metaphysical difference between appearance and reality, and '*that* it is unclear whether we can always distinguish between them'. Rather, in the context of conceptual art, the philosophical idea is brought home to us by means of the relative simplicity of the play between three manifestations of 'chairhood', or of a transparent glass of water on a completely see-through shelf.⁷⁶

How does presenting the idea to us this way (assuming for argument's sake that Schellekens is right that the glass of water ensemble does present the idea of transubstantiation, and Kosuth's chair, picture, text combination does present the idea that there is a metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality) 'bring them

⁷⁶ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 81.

home to us' more effectively or encourage us to do more than 'simply rehearse' them?

In the case of the *And Babies?* and *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, however, she makes a good case for the way the message is communicated being of paramount importance:

The contextualised photographs of human corpses strewn over a small road in South- East Asia brings the idea of injustice to us in a way that a mere statement of the event cannot. The power of the artwork, its artistic value, cannot be reduced to the proposition 'Innocent people have suffered tremendously as a result of US foreign policy.' The image of the massacred women and children, together with the burning question and shocking answer painted over it enables us to appreciate the situation's true callousness and horror. And likewise with the slogans silk-screened onto the Coca-Cola bottles. The combination of short but concise messages about imperialism in its new guise has a force that is somehow dependent upon the fact that it is to be seen where we least expect it, namely on the very symbols of that imperialism. The boldness of metaphorically infiltrating the enemy camp, so to speak, puts across the socio-political idea in a particularly compelling and memorable way.⁷⁷

I think she might be right that in the case of *And Babies* seeing a photo can get us to see and feel more acutely the injustices, more than just being told that it was unjust. And I think she's absolutely right that it matters that the messages are on Coca-cola bottles and are distributed using an existing system etc. But if the work - in the case of *And Babies* - is the message that 'the United States's Vietnam policy was indefensible and that gross injustices were being carried out in the name of democracy' then her observation that the way this message is presented to us has some power, does not entail anything for the work. And if the work - in the case of *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* - is simply the anti-capitalist messages that were printed on the Coca-cola bottles, then, again, any power attributed to the way the messages were distributed, does not accrue to the work.

⁷⁷ Schellekens, E. (2007), pp. 81-82.

The view that *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* - is simply the anti-capitalist messages that were printed on the Coca-cola bottles, might be unappealing precisely for the reasons that Schellekens identifies - we do appreciate 'the fact that it is to be seen where we least expect it, namely on the very symbols of that imperialism'. But in that case we ought to reject the view that the work is the message.⁷⁸

Also problematic is Schellekens's claim that the aesthetic value of the ideas affects the aesthetic value of the work.

There is one sense in which this claim should be unsurprising and uncontroversial. If the work is the idea, then surely it follows trivially that the aesthetic value of the idea affects the aesthetic value of the work. However, this truism, while not itself open to doubt, does throw some light on a slightly problematic feature of the particular Constitution Account that Schellekens has sketched. Suppose Schellekens is right that propositions like 'art need not be perceptible', or even concepts like that of transubstantiation, can have aesthetic value. It should strike one as rather odd that an artist can nominate an aesthetically valuable proposition or notion as a work and thereby have an aesthetically valuable work.

⁷⁸ I take it that this criticism is conclusive. However, Schellekens goes on to say something that looks like an attempt to reconcile the claim that the way the message is conveyed matters, with her view that the works are just the messages:

'they do so **not in virtue of the perceivable thing or event that illustrates the idea, but by transforming the idea itself** into something with a firm grounding in our ordinary lives (such as a glass of water on a bathroom shelf or a foldable chair). This, in turn, gives us insight and understanding that may well help to unlock a thorough knowledge of the idea of transubstantiation and the metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality'. (Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 82).

If the message is transformed by the way it is conveyed, then perhaps this can allow us to have our cake and eat it - to adhere to a Constitution Account on which the work is the message, while still allowing that the way the message is conveyed is relevant. Unfortunately this is not particularly convincing. Firstly if the idea is indeed transformed, what is it transformed into? And why identify the work with what it was prior to this transformation, rather than what it becomes once it is transformed? If the idea is identified with what it was prior to the transformation, then this makes it hard to see how it can be said to have transformed at all. And if it's identified with what it is after the transformation, then it's not clear it is still even a message.

Perhaps this oddness comes from the fact that it is odd that such a thing could even count as the work of an artist anyway. It is odd that a claim like ‘art need not be perceptible’, which has no doubt been uttered and entertained on many an occasion prior to 1969, (indeed, Sol Le Witt articulates that thought in his 1967 ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’) the date on which *Inert Gas Series* is officially recognised to have been made, could constitute that work. It is also odd that any value that the claim has then becomes value of that work. And it is perhaps odder still that any aesthetic value that the notion of transubstantiation has accrues to the value of *An Oak Tree*. But maybe this is an oddness that comes from the oddness of the view that that preexisting concept is the work.

Section 5. Summary

To sum up, we’ve see that the one developed philosophical Constitution Account not only has all the problems identified for Constitution Accounts in the abstract, but also, because of the particular details of the theory, actually intensifies some of these problems.

We’ve argued that, looking at actual works of CA, the Constitution Account is not the most obvious view, since it entails that the things that people go to see in galleries, and whose images are reproduced in books etc., are not in fact the artworks. Constitution Accounts have a significant explanatory burden in saying what the thing you go to see in a gallery is if it’s not the work, and explaining the close relation it appears to

have with the work. We noted that the popular strategy is to say that this is the *documentation* of the work. We then identified some problems with that in general, that appear to solidify the intuition that this stuff is closer to the work than documentations seem to be. Discussion of the most detailed philosophical articulation of a Constitution Account, that put forward by Elisabeth Schellekens, also serves to highlight how the challenges faced by Constitution Accounts are not easily met.

Having identified some serious problems for Constitution Accounts, the focus for the remainder of this thesis will be Priority Accounts. Priority Accounts do much better in the respects we argued to be problematic for Constitution Accounts. A Priority Account can allow that the stuff we think is the work really is the work, so they don't face any of the problems we listed for the view that the stuff in the galleries are just documentations of works. Furthermore, they don't face the difficulties that are particularly problematic for Schellekens's view - on the Priority Account, one can emphasise the message, as Schellekens does, but since this emphasis doesn't take the form of saying the message exhausts the work, one can also allow that the way the message is communicated is important to both the work's identity and its value.

Chapter 3.

Conceptual Art and Perceptual Properties

Introduction

We saw in the previous chapter that Constitution Accounts of CA fail to do justice to some deeply held intuitions about artworks and their identity conditions. In the next three chapters we will discuss Priority Accounts.

Priority Accounts, to recap, are accounts that seek to distinguish CA from other art in terms of the relative importance of different aspects of the work for the work's artistic value. Specifically, they tend to emphasise the importance of the 'idea', and the relative unimportance of some other aspect of the work. The following - while it may

be a stretch to call all of these *accounts* of CA - are all explicit articulations of this kind of strategy for distinguishing it from other art:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work... the execution is a perfunctory affair.¹

[In conceptual art] the idea is king.²

Conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, and/or dematerialized.³

The object, or even the material, was secondary to the stated concept.⁴

In Conceptual Art the idea is paramount and the materials are immaterial.⁵

[In Conceptual Art] the perceptual is far less important than the conceptual.⁶

Recent years have seen the rise ... of a "conceptual art", many of whose works were nothing other than "things to think about" and owed nothing to any mode of perception ... [whereas] other aesthetic objects do depend on sensory order.⁷

[In Conceptual Art] prominence is given to the presentation of an idea rather than the production of a perduring art work for sensuous appreciation.⁸

[Conceptual Art is characterised by] a complete lack of concern with appearances.⁹

In conceptual art what is good to look at is demoted in favour of almost exclusive attention to ideas.¹⁰

There is scope, of course, for significant differences between Priority Accounts. Firstly accounts can differ in terms of what the emphasised and de-emphasised

¹ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 12.

² Wood, P. (2002) p. 33.

³ Lippard, L. (1995), p. 17.

⁴ Morgan, R. (1996), p. 5.

⁵ Perreault, J. (1973), p. 135.

⁶ Eaton, M. (2004), p. 70.

⁷ Sparshott, F. (1982), p. 199.

⁸ Osborne, H. (1980), pp. 13-14.

⁹ Sclafani, R. (1975), p. 456.

¹⁰ Slater, H. (1997), p. 229.

properties are taken to be. We've seen in Chapter 1 that although most accounts of CA stress its prioritisation of 'ideas', the notion of an 'idea' is all too often left rather unclear, and to that extent it can be unclear which properties are being identified as the important ones to artistic value in CA. Furthermore, the properties identified as the less important ones in CA vary too. But we also argued that the contrast being drawn tends to be either that between ideas, understood as meanings communicated in the work, with the work's perceptual properties; *or* that between ideas understood as the artist's conception of the work, contrasted with the particularities of its execution. Two types of Priority Accounts thus emerge:

- (1) One which characterises CA in terms of the emphasis of the work's meaning and de-emphasis of its perceptual properties - typified by Sol LeWitt's claim that CA is 'made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye',¹¹ the art historian Benjamin Buchloh's characterisation of CA as 'the most rigorous elimination of visibility',¹² and, art collective Art & Language's claim that CA 'question[s] the condition that seems to rigidly govern the form of visual art - that visual art remains visual'¹³ - and
- (2) One which characterises CA in terms of the emphasis of conception and de-emphasis of execution - exemplified by LeWitt's claim that 'in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work ... [while] the execution is a perfunctory affair',¹⁴ and Joanna Drucker's claim that 'Conceptual art shifted the foundation of the value of an art object from *production* to *conception*.'¹⁵

¹¹ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 15.

¹² Buchloh, B. (1990), p. 107.

¹³ Art & Language (1969).

¹⁴ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 12

¹⁵ Drucker (2004), p. 251.

Within the small amount that has been written on CA in philosophy, Priority Accounts can be divided into the same two schools of thought on this question. Peter Lamarque and Gregory Currie - as we will shortly see - both develop accounts according to which what's distinctive about CA compared with other art is in some sense the diminished role of perceptual properties. And Eaton, Sparshott, Osborne, Sclafani and Slater (quoted above), although not in the business of developing accounts of CA, allude to its distinctive character as being a matter of the diminished role of the perceptual. Robert Hopkins, by contrast, argues for the distinction between CA and other art being drawn in terms of its prioritising of conception over execution.

The purpose of the next three chapters is to identify the main kinds of Priority Account that are, implicitly or explicitly, held in the literature on CA, and hold them up to philosophical scrutiny. The meaning vs perceptual properties version of the Priority Account will be the subject of this chapter and the next, while the conception-execution version will be the subject of Chapter 5.

A second dimension along which Priority Accounts can differ is in the nature of the contrasts they draw - what they take the emphasis and de-emphasis to amount to. Different types of Priority Account assert different levels of contrast between the emphasised and de-emphasised properties in CA. So even Priority Accounts that agree with each other as to what the contrasted aspects are, can differ in terms of how severe a contrast they envisage between these aspects.

Call a contrast in relevance to artistic value *stark* when what is asserted is that one property is relevant to artistic value while another is completely irrelevant; and call a contrast *subtle* when the difference is a difference in degree that doesn't amount to one of the properties being completely irrelevant to artistic value.

Take, for example, John Perrault's claim that 'in Conceptual Art the idea is paramount and the materials are immaterial'¹⁶. It looks like Perrault here is seeing the contrast in quite stark terms - if he is asserting here (as he appears to be) that in CA the materials are not relevant at all to artistic value, then this is an example of a Stark Priority account. The contrast drawn between the roles of the 'idea' (whatever he means by 'idea') and the materials in CA is a stark one; the former is relevant to artistic value and the latter is completely irrelevant.

On the other hand, Peter Lamarque's claim that in CA the perceptual aspects of the work are 'subservient to the conceptual',¹⁷ and Robert Morgan's claim that the materials are 'secondary to the stated concept',¹⁸ look to be making a more subtle contrast between the role of materials and that of the idea, envisaging a role of sorts, albeit a reduced one, for the perceptual aspect of CA.

What's the difference between a Stark Priority Account and a Constitution Account? Stark Priority Accounts don't go as far as Constitution Accounts. Constitution Accounts say that works of CA *are* ideas. A Stark Priority Account according to which the idea is important and the work's perceptual properties are entirely irrelevant to

¹⁶ Perreault, J. (1973), p. 135.

¹⁷ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 9.

¹⁸ Morgan, R. (1996), p. 5.

appreciation differs from a Constitution Account in that the perceptual properties, though irrelevant to appreciation, are still part of the work. Constitution Accounts, as we have seen in Chapter 2, deny this. And as we have seen, the most plausible articulations of Constitution Accounts tell some kind of story about why our engagement with conceptual works so often involves contemplating a material object with perceptual properties and so forth, even though such an object forms no part of the work proper. Constitution Theorists often claim, for example, that the material object, with its perceptual properties, is the documentation of the work. Constitution Accounts of all varieties say that the work doesn't have perceptual properties - although the most plausible versions will say that something closely linked to the work - such as its documentation - has them.¹⁹

One might wonder how plausible it is to say that a work has properties that are not relevant at all to its artistic value. Surely, one might think, if something is a property of a work it must be relevant to its value? This, however, is not right. There are plenty of examples of properties that works have but which are not relevant to their value as art. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* contains a certain number of instances of the letter 'e'. And yet this property is not relevant to its value as art. Most people think that paintings are physical objects. But if they are then it will be true to say that Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* has a determinate mass, even though this is not relevant to its value as art.

So it seems that there are cases all the time of artworks having properties that are not relevant to their value as art. Whether the perceptual properties of a work of CA are an example of such a case, is another question, and one which I will ultimately

¹⁹ See the discussion in Chapter 2.

answer in the negative. But it is important to see that the reason for this negative answer is going to have to concern certain particular facts about conceptual art, and not the general (and false) claim that anything that is a property of a work must be relevant to its artistic value.

As noted above, it is rare that there is any engagement, in the non-philosophical literature on CA, with the issue of whether we should understand the contrasts to be stark or subtle. In philosophical work on CA, by contrast, there *does* appear to be an awareness of the issue: James Shelley puts forward an account on which the contrast is stark, while Peter Lamarque,²⁰ Gregory Currie,²¹ and Barbara Savedoff²² as we will shortly see, urge more subtle Priority Accounts, precisely in response to what they see as the problems with stark approaches.

The discussion of different types of Priority Account over the next two chapters will reflect the taxonomy introduced here. The two schools of thought about what the emphasised and de-emphasised aspects are will correspond to the division between chapters. That is, in this chapter and the next I will discuss, and get clear on, the suggestion that CA is distinguished from other art in terms of the unimportance of perceptual properties; while in Chapter 5 I will discuss the view that CA differs from other art in the importance of the work's conception to its artistic value, and the unimportance of execution. And the question of what the emphasis and de-emphasis amount to will be raised with respect to each of these approaches. That is, for both

²⁰ Lamarque, P. (2007).

²¹ Currie, G. (2007).

²² Savedoff, B. (1989).

the content vs perceptual approach, and the conception vs execution approach I will raise the question of the nature of the contrasts being drawn.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to get clear on what sort of answer to this second question we should give if we take the operative contrast to be between the work's meaning and its perceptual properties. I will argue that insofar as an account of this kind is appealing, we ought to go for one that doesn't completely eliminate the role of the perceptual. By the end of Section 3 we will have a case for rejecting *Stark* Priority Accounts that eliminate the role of perceptual properties entirely. In Section 4 I develop and defend a Subtle Priority Account on which perceptual properties are accorded a diminished role.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows: Section 1 will elucidate the account on which CA is art whose perceptual properties are irrelevant to its value, and get clear on what is appealing about it. In Section 2 I consider some possible objections, and will focus in particular on arguments for according perceptual properties *some* role in CA. In Section 3 I sum up what our discussion of these arguments entail in terms of the kind of role we should ascribe to perceptual properties in CA, and identify a further role that they can have. Finally, in Section 4 I develop a Subtle Priority Account on which perceptual properties have a diminished role in CA.

First, however, it's necessary to make some terminological clarifications.

Value and Appreciation

I've introduced the next three chapters as being about Priority Accounts of CA - that is, accounts which identify the contrast between CA and other art in terms of the relevance of different types of property to its value as art. CA differs from other art in the relevance of certain kinds of property to its artistic value. But as will become apparent in what follows, some of the existing philosophical accounts that I identify as Priority Accounts of CA are not in fact couched in terms of artistic value, but rather artistic *appreciation*.

For the purposes of the present argument, I will use both terms - relevance to artistic value and relevance to appreciation - with the understanding that they are linked in such a way that the properties relevant to appreciation are exactly those properties relevant to artistic value. When I discuss philosophers who talk in terms of appreciation, I will use their terminology, but it should be borne in mind that when I talk of the relevance of some property to appreciation, I am also thereby talking of its relevance to value, and vice versa.²³

²³ Some philosophers have expressed scepticism about the notion of artistic value. Dominic Lopes has argued in a recent paper that there is no available notion of artistic value as distinct from aesthetic value, for example. A defense of the notion of artistic value as conceptually distinct from aesthetic value is beyond the scope of this thesis, and I think it is sufficient here to point out that the notion of artistic value in use here is one to which philosophers tend to help themselves, without feeling the need for much, if any, preamble to justify or explain their use of it. See, for example, Stecker (2010), pp. 221-246; Davies, D. (2004), pp. 6-8 and throughout; Kieran (1997c), p. 386; and Davies, S. (2006), p. 227.

Perceptual, Sensory, and Appearance

A second terminological clarification: some philosophers, such as Robert Hopkins in 'Speaking Through Silence: Conceptual Art and Conversational Implicature', use the term 'sensory properties', while others, such as James Shelley in his 'The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art', use the term 'perceptual properties', and Gregory Currie in his 'Visual Conceptual Art' uses the term 'appearance'. I take these three terms to also be equivalent for our purposes. The perceptual properties of an artwork and its sensory properties are exactly the same set of properties, and talking about the appearance of an artwork is the same as talking about its sensory or perceptual properties. Again, I will, to a certain extent, use Hopkins's terminology when discussing Hopkins, Shelley's terminology when discussing Shelley, and Currie's when discussing Currie. so I will be using all three terms, but they should be understood as exactly synonymous.

Section 1. A Stark Priority Account

Characterising CA as art whose perceptual properties are irrelevant to its value, looks initially rather promising. Roger Seamon claims that CA 'eliminates' the necessity of the perceptual' and thereby constitutes a challenge to its centrality in art in general,²⁴ while Richard Sclafani takes the defining feature of CA to be 'a complete lack of

²⁴ Seamon, R. (2001), p. 139.

concern with appearances'²⁵ Marcia Eaton says that in CA the perceptual is far less important than the conceptual²⁶ and Hartley Slater says that 'in conceptual art what is good to look at is demoted in favour of almost exclusive attention to ideas.'²⁷ Kendall Walton reveals that he is thinking of CA as non-perceptual when he draws the following contrast, 'music and painting are usually thought of as perceptual arts, one aural and the other visual, in contrast to literature (and, for that matter, to the "conceptual" art of the 1960s and 1970s).'²⁸ In other philosophical works, the irrelevance of the perceptual in CA is taken as a basic background assumption.²⁹

Moreover, the claim seems to translate well to actual conceptual works. Consider Duchamp's *Fountain*, for example. It seems that the particularities of its appearance are neither here nor there. Most people take George Dickie's suggestion:

Why cannot the ordinary qualities of *Fountain*—its gleaming white surface, the depth revealed when it reflects images or surrounding objects, its pleasing oval shape—be appreciated?³⁰

to be wildly missing the point.

Consider also Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing* (Figure 4), which came into being when Rauschenberg erased a drawing by the successful and highly regarded artist Wilhelm de Kooning. Perceptual properties look to be irrelevant here

²⁵ Sclafani, R. (1975), p. 456.

²⁶ Eaton, M. (2004), p. 70.

²⁷ Slater, H. (1997), p. 229.

²⁸ Walton, K. (1988), p. 358.

²⁹ See especially Binkley, T. (1977). Also Nathan, D. (2006), p. 316.

³⁰ Dickie, G. (1974), p. 42.

too, since this work was made by erasing all the perceptually interesting features of another work. What, then, could be left that is of perceptual interest?

Furthermore, there is good reason to think that characterising CA in this way can give us just the contrast we need with other art. The view that our appreciation of other art essentially involves attending to perceptual properties, has the status almost of orthodoxy.³¹ Indeed, some philosophers, notably Marcia Eaton,³² are so committed to the centrality of the perceptual in art that they are thus motivated to deny that CA is art at all. This kind of argument will be discussed in Chapter 4, and what we argue there will serve to dispel it as a serious worry. But insofar as we're justified in thinking of CA as art, the fact that its non-perceptual nature is invoked as grounds for denying it art-status, should count as support of sorts for the view that what's distinctive about it is that it's non-perceptual. In other words, people who think that CA is not art because it is non-perceptual, are implicitly saying (a) that CA is not perceptual, and (b) that this is a point of contrast with everything else that gets called art. Of course they are also claiming that *because* of (a) and (b), CA is not art, since they are also implicitly assuming that (c) being perceptual is a necessary condition of being art. But insofar as they are saying (a) and (b) they count as people who think that CA differs from other art (or as they would have it, art) in being non-perceptual.

To clarify, the claim is not that perceptual properties are the *sole* dimension of value in non-conceptual art. The claim is just that attending to such properties is a

³¹ See Eaton, M. (2004).

³² See Eaton, M. (2004), pp. 70-71. Eaton argues that CA is not art, on the grounds that 'if a thing has no perceptual dimension and generates exclusively political or philosophic (or some other non-aesthetic) discussion then there is no basis for calling it art rather than politics or philosophy. ... What makes art art and not something else, such as a philosophical or political treatise, is not the fact that people think as well as look or listen. What makes art special is the fact that the conception is directly tied to or dependent on the perception.' (p. 71).

necessary part of appreciation; not that it is also sufficient. On the contrary, what we appreciate in art is by no means limited to its perceptual qualities. Even Eaton, who we've just noted as a committed advocate of the central role of the perceptual in art-appreciation, is keen to acknowledge that 'libraries, and now the internet, are full of discussions of artworks that include references to much more than perceptual properties - to moral, political, or philosophical aspects, for instance - created long before the so-called conceptual art movement. It was only the narrowest, strictest formalists who insisted that all such artistic discussion is irrelevant to genuine or pure aesthetic experiences.'³³

So characterising CA as art whose perceptual properties are irrelevant to its value would provide a contrast with other art, and seems to chime with what people tend to say about CA. However, there are reasons to think that the claim that perceptual properties are completely irrelevant in CA is too strong. In the next three sections I will discuss and evaluate arguments from three philosophers for why perceptual properties should be recognised as having *some* role in CA.

³³ Eaton, M. (2004), p. 70.

Section 2. Reasons to think Perceptual Properties are not Entirely Irrelevant

Lamarque's Argument from Literature

In his 2007 paper, 'On Perceiving Conceptual Art' Lamarque gives an argument for why he thinks perceptual properties must have some role in the appreciation of CA. According to Lamarque, characterising CA as non-perceptual 'encourages wrong - and misleading - analogies' with artforms that really are non-perceptual - i.e. literature,³⁴ and that if we are to do justice to what is 'unusual and of interest in CA',³⁵ we need to 'recover at least some role for the visual aspects of conceptual art'.³⁶

Now, one point that it has become common to make is that care should be taken to ensure CA is distinguished adequately from literature: particularly in the context of taking CA to be art that diminishes the role of the perceptual. The point is made, with striking frequency, that literature too accords no role to perceptual properties and so even if this is a feature common to all CA, it cannot be what distinguishes CA from other art, since it is a point of similarity - not contrast - with literature. This argument will be the subject of detailed discussion in Chapter 5 but for now it is important to note that Lamarque's argument from literature is not the same as the argument described above that characterising CA as non-perceptual art fails to distinguish it

³⁴ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8.

³⁵ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8.

³⁶ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8.

from literature. Lamarque's worry is not about classification, but about value. His argument is not that this definition fails to distinguish the two artforms, but that defining CA this way leaves it with a single dimension of value, and, more importantly, one in which another artform, literature, is much better equipped to excel.

This immediately raises a whole host of questions: Why would defining CA this way leave it with a single dimension of value? Why should we agree that literature does better in this dimension? And even if we were to accept all this, how much of a reason would this constitute for thinking that CA should not be defined in this way? In what follows I will discuss Lamarque's argument in detail, and see how well it can deal with the questions it raises.

Why would defining CA this way leave it with a single dimension of value, that literature is better equipped to excel in?

Well, as we saw in Chapter 1, those who claim that CA differs from other art in its de-emphasis of the perceptual, typically pair this with a claim that what *is* important in CA is the 'ideas' it presents, and that, although they tend not to say too much about what is meant by ideas, it seems right to take them to be talking about the work's meaning – that their emphasis and de-emphasis claims are best understood as claims about the emphasis of meaning over perceptual properties. Lamarque is aligned with this trend, both in assuming that if the perceptual properties are not relevant in CA, what is left as a potential avenue of value is 'ideas' *and* in failing to say very much about what he means by 'ideas' here.

From the small amount he does say on what he means by 'idea', though, it looks like he is thinking of ideas as meanings:

wherever there are meanings there are ideas and wherever there is language there is meaning.³⁷

But his argument seems to turn upon a much narrower conception of 'idea'. He begins by giving two examples of ideas in art -- both literary -- that of a theme, and that of a poetic conceit, and argues, unsurprisingly perhaps, that literature does these things better than CA does. But then rather than addressing other examples of ideas to see whether the point holds more generally, he then concludes solely on the basis of the foregoing that literature is an artform much better suited to doing interesting things with ideas than CA is. 'Ideas are only of interest', he says, 'when they are articulated, worked out, when something is done with them' and 'CA has the resources only to suggest rather than develop ideas'³⁸ and for this reason CA 'comes to seem impoverished next to literature and philosophy'³⁹

It's worth stressing how far short of the conclusion this argument falls. Lamarque has given some arguments for why CA cannot do as well with ideas as literature can, but given that he hasn't said what ideas are, but only identified two examples of 'ideas', both understood to belong to the literary realm, and has only run his arguments with respect to those particular examples, his arguments fail to establish their conclusion.

³⁷ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 6.

³⁸ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8.

³⁹ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 13.

For his argument to be convincing, he'd need to either demonstrate that these two phenomena exhaust the category of idea, *or* he'd need to show that CA is inferior to literature with regard to other kinds of ideas too. But he doesn't do either of these.

So Lamarque has not succeeded in demonstrating that literature is better with ideas than CA is. At most what he's done is to have shown that two *types* of ideas (themes and conceits) are better dealt with by literature, but given that both of these are widely recognised to be literary phenomena, this is hardly surprising.

This, however, is not the only problem with Lamarque's argument from literature. For Lamarque then goes on to use this conclusion - that CA is less good with ideas than literature is - to argue that perceptual properties must have an important role in the appreciation of works of CA. And when we consider this argument as a whole, there are problems with it that are independent of those that we've just discussed. Lamarque's overall conclusion here is that there must be a role for perceptual properties in CA. And he thinks that his claim that CA is less good with ideas than literature, constitutes some kind of support for this conclusion.

His rationale appears to be that if CA is less good with ideas than literature, then this would be a problem. He claims that literature's greater capacity for doing interesting things with ideas is 'a site of potentially serious weakness in conceptual art'⁴⁰

His suggestion, then, of characterising CA in a way that allows a role for perceptual properties, is presented as a solution to this problem:

⁴⁰ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8

To stress the dominance of ideas is to encourage wrong - and misleading - analogies. To understand what is unusual and of interest in CA it is best to hang onto something like the notion of appreciative experience, and to recover at least some role for the visual aspects of conceptual art, thus returning us inevitably to perception.⁴¹

But this is all a bit strange. As far as I can see, what Lamarque is identifying as the problem to which giving perceptual properties a greater role would be a solution, is that CA would be 'impoverished next to literature and philosophy'; presumably because the dimension along which CA's value as art is measured, is one in which other disciplines can score much more highly. Literature and philosophy are better equipped to do well in the exact thing that is being claimed as the sole (or at least main) dimension of CA's value as art.

But arguing that a view must be true because it solves *that* problem, is a bit unconvincing, since whatever the sense is in which this is a problem, it's not that it can't be true. Why couldn't it be *true* that CA is impoverished next to literature and philosophy? I'm not here claiming that it is true, but if Lamarque is going to use the denial of this as a premise, he ought to say something about why we should agree.

Secondly, and more importantly, suppose we had good reason to agree with Lamarque's assumptions that

- (i) CA is not impoverished next to literature and philosophy in the way he describes, and
- (ii) CA *would be* impoverished next to literature and philosophy in the way he describes if its sole dimension of artistic value were 'ideas'

⁴¹ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 8

Does it follow from this that CA does, after all, allow a role for perceptual properties?

I would argue that it does not. Lamarque's general strategy here is to find something that CA does better than literature (and philosophy), and his proposal is that one such thing concerns its perceptual properties. However, he has not said anything to convince the reader that this is the *only* thing CA can do better than literature. Hence, even if his general strategy, and his starting assumptions (i) and (ii) were correct (and in the case especially of (ii) we've seen reason to doubt this), there would still be scope to deny Lamarque's conclusion that perceptual properties have a role in CA; all we would need to do is find something *else* CA can do better than literature.

We've seen that Lamarque's argument from literature fails to establish that perceptual properties are relevant to the value of CA. He has not provided sufficient argument for the claim that literature is better at doing things with ideas, and, moreover, his argument relies on the assumption - among others - that the only thing CA is left with that it can do better than literature is something that involves perceptual properties.

Currie on the Role of Appearance

Gregory Currie, in his paper 'Visual Conceptual Art' offers a different kind of argument for why we should recognise a perceptual component in CA. Currie discusses a particular example that he takes to be representative of a fairly general phenomenon within CA: Bruce Nauman's *One Hundred Live and Die*. The work has a rather striking and elaborate appearance. Different sentences, made by pairing a

variety of different words with either 'and live' or 'and die' are rendered in different coloured neon. (See Figure 7).



Figure 7. *One Hundred Live and Die*. Bruce Nauman. (1984).

Although he doesn't explicitly make the distinction, it is clear that Currie thinks that examples like this one count against both Constitution Accounts that identify the work with the idea *and* stark Priority Accounts which treat the visual, and the perceptual more generally, as irrelevant to the appreciation of the work. For not only does he think that it is 'difficult to see how a work like *One Hundred Live and Die* could really be said to consist merely of 'words' - abstract or conceptual entities - when the words Nauman gives us are colourfully instanced in a complex structure of neon and glass

tubing’;⁴² he also makes the point that it is hard to argue that this complex and colourful appearance is entirely irrelevant to its appreciation.

It is this second point, that appreciation of conceptual works might involve attending to perceptual properties after all, that is of interest here. But it is not entirely clear what argument Currie is making for this. On first blush, it looks like Currie’s point is that Nauman’s work is representative of a tendency in CA which seems to belie its aspirations to non-visibility, and non-perceptuality more generally. Many conceptual works, of which Nauman’s is a prime example, are rather visually arresting. And this is hard to square with the claim that we are not supposed to pay any heed to the perceptual aspects of conceptual works. If in CA the appearance doesn’t matter, why go to the trouble of making the sentences out of neon? Why bother putting them in different colours? Why even put any thought whatsoever into the visual design?

This observation, and the accompanying suggestion that it somehow compromises the conceptualist’s claim to non-perceptuality, has made before. Nick Zangwill, in his ‘Feasible Aesthetic Formalism’, remarks that ‘it is a curious irony that so many of those who see themselves as conceptual artists persist in making objects, not only with aesthetic properties, but with formal aesthetic properties, even though they say that this is not their intention. Despite the official pledge of aesthetic celibacy they fail to resist the temptation to indulge in formal aesthetic sin.’⁴³ And in his ‘Are There Counterexamples to Aesthetic Theories of Art?’ he takes the burden of proof to be on those who want to show that ‘there are some purely conceptual works ... that make

⁴² Currie, G. (2007), p. 35.

⁴³ Zangwill, N. (1999), p. 627, n. 30.

no attempt to have an aesthetically interesting visual or aural aspect'⁴⁴ Since Zangwill understands 'aesthetic' as essentially perceptual, I take him to be making essentially the same point, that conceptual artists often make works which reward visual attention, and that this detracts somewhat from the plausibility of the claim that the perceptual aspect of such works is irrelevant.

But closer examination of this argument, I believe, reveals it to be flawed. In particular, the move from the observation that a given work's appearance is elaborate or striking, or took a certain amount of effort, to the claim that that appearance must therefore be relevant to appreciation, requires some explanation.

Two possible arguments suggest themselves here: (1) from the fact that the appearance took time, effort, and so on, to the conclusion that it must be relevant to artistic value; (2) from the fact that the appearance is of interest, of value in some sense, that this value must contribute to the work's overall artistic value. But I don't think either of these arguments succeeds. To see why, let's look at both more closely.

(1) looks like it is about what it is rational for the artist to do - why would an artist bother going to that much effort with the work's appearance if it doesn't make any difference to how good the work is as art? (1), if it works, would be an argument against Constitution Accounts of CA as well as stark Priority Accounts. That is, (1) would be an argument both against accounts which would treat the materials as strictly speaking not part of the work *and* accounts on which the materials are parts of the work which are irrelevant to its value. But in both cases the claim it makes is too

⁴⁴ Zangwill, N. (2002), p. 114.

strong to be plausible. We've argued already, of course, that the Constitution Account is false; my point here is just that whatever problems it has, (1) is not one of them.

It looks true that effort has been put into *One Hundred Live And Die*, both in terms of the thought that must have gone into how it is presented, and in terms of the effort in constructing it. It is substantially easier, and less time consuming, to print all these words out onto paper than it is to have them rendered in different coloured neon. However, recognition of this fact does not compel us to think that its appearance is relevant to its value as art, or even that this appearance is part of the work at all.

It is fairly easy to think of examples of artists putting considerable effort into an aspect of their work which is not relevant to its artistic value, without being guilty of any kind of irrationality. Most philosophers think that paintings are physical objects. But if they are physical objects, then they have all sorts of properties which are not relevant to their appreciation. Standardly, we don't think the weight of a painting is something we need to know in order to appreciate it as art, for example. And yet if a painting is a physical object, it does have some determinate weight. For a stark Priority Theorist, then, the perceptual properties of a conceptual work are like the weight of a painting, they are properties of the work all right, but they are not properties that are relevant to its value as art.

But we can imagine cases in which it is nonetheless rational for the artist to put effort into that aspect of a painting. Suppose, for example, an artist needed to send her work in the post, and because of practical requirements imposed by this, wanted her painting to weigh less than a certain amount, in order that it could be sent. In such a

case it would be completely rational for this artist to put some effort into ensuring that this requirement was met.

But in such a case, the fact that the artist has put thought and effort into the weight of the work does not entail that the work's weight is relevant to its artistic value. Thus the argument fails. And by analogy, so does argument (1) with CA.

What the weight example shows is that the claim that any time an artist puts effort into a certain aspect of her work, that aspect must be relevant to its value as art, must be false. So simply observing that the visual properties of some conceptual works took effort, is not enough to threaten the view that these properties are irrelevant to the value of these works as art.

The effort in the weight case is rationally justified with respect to considerations that are completely separate from artistic value. In general there are lots of factors that could reasonably figure in an artist's considerations besides her concern to make an artistically valuable work. Thus an artist's putting in effort to a certain aspect of her work does not entail that this aspect must be relevant to the work's artistic value. Another example of such a consideration would be fitting the space that has been allocated for the work. An artist who has been asked to make a work for a particular space has to make sure the work isn't too big for the space she been given for it, for otherwise it won't be possible for it to be displayed at all. That would be a case in which it's totally rational for an artist to put thought into the size of the work, *even if* its size is not relevant to its value as art.

It might be thought, similarly, that there are non-artistic considerations that might motivate conceptual artists to make their works look good. Helping the work to sell might be one such consideration. It is perfectly consistent to think that the striking visual appearance of a work makes it more marketable, while maintaining that it doesn't affect its value as art.

Whatever problems there may turn out to be with Stark Priority Accounts of CA on which perceptual properties are irrelevant to artistic value, the effort put into the appearance of certain works of CA is not one of them.

In general, then, it can't be right that the only way to rationally justify a certain amount of effort with respect to an artwork is that the results of that effort will enhance the work's value as art. So we are not compelled to treat Nauman and other conceptual artists as irrational for putting effort into the perceptual aspects of their work if the perceptual aspects are irrelevant to their value.

Argument (1), then, fails to refute the Stark Priority Account, on which perceptual properties are entirely irrelevant to artistic value.

Let us turn now to argument (2), which starts with the observation that some conceptual works - such as *One Hundred Live and Die* - are good or interesting perceptually, and infers from this that it cannot be true that the perceptual aspect of these works is irrelevant to their value as art.

At the risk of stating the obvious, It might be pointed out that saying that the perceptual properties of a work are irrelevant to its artistic value, is not the same as

saying that the work cannot have any perceptual properties whatsoever. As Sol LeWitt puts it, '[although] what the work of art looks like isn't too important, it has to look like something if it has physical form'.⁴⁵

To argue that conceptual works that look good count against the claim that appearance is irrelevant to value in conceptual art is to assume that the irrelevance of appearance in CA places some *restriction* on the kinds of appearance works of CA are allowed to have. But there is something problematic about this. The argument from the good-looking-ness of Nauman's work to the conclusion that its appearance must after all be relevant to its value, is paradoxical. It assumes that a condition of the appearance of a work's being irrelevant is that it not look good in any way. But this is self-defeating. If the appearance is truly irrelevant, it shouldn't matter if the work looks good any more than it matters if the work looks bad. Thus it can't be right to infer simply from the visual *appeal* of *One Hundred Live and Die* that its visual aspects must be relevant to its value as art. And so argument (2) fails.

In what follows I will argue that a different, more subtle argument for the axiological relevance of appearance in CA is suggested in Currie's paper, and one, moreover, that is more in keeping with the conceptualist agenda. This argument, I will argue, is successful in showing that appearance must after all be relevant in CA, thus it is sufficient to refute the Stark Priority Account on which perceptual properties are irrelevant. I will also argue, however, that it does not cover *all* the ways in which appearance can be relevant in CA.

⁴⁵ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 13.

Currie points out that even if we take the conceptualists on their own terms, appearance can be shown to be relevant to the appreciation of many conceptual works. One argument that a conceptualist might make about *One Hundred Live and Die* is that its elaborate appearance is a signal to the viewer about how unimportant appearance is in CA in general and in this work in particular. As Currie puts it,

It could, I suppose, be said that part of the meaning of the work is to get us to see that the work's rather elaborately crafted appearance is irrelevant to understanding that meaning - assuming it has one.⁴⁶

Currie points out that even this kind of move assumes *some* role for appearance in CA. The very idea that the appearance of the work is as it is just to get the point across to the audience how little appearance matters in CA, assigns some level of importance to appearance.

This claim that some works make the point about the lack of relevance of their appearance via that appearance itself might look to be self-undermining. Indeed, Currie points out that certain versions of this claim look paradoxical: specifically, versions on which what is demonstrated is the *complete irrelevance* of appearance. If it is claimed, for example, that the work gets across by means of its appearance that its appearance is completely irrelevant to its appreciation, this must be false. If appearance has a role in communicating that, then it cannot be that appearance is completely irrelevant to the appreciation of the work. In which case what it communicates cannot be true. However, the weaker claim that appearance has the role of showing that the appearance should not be the main focus of the audience's appreciation is not paradoxical, since the work's appearance's not being the main

⁴⁶ Currie, G. (2007), p. 35

focus is compatible with its having *some* role, and specifically it is compatible with its having a role in demonstrating that.

So perhaps Currie's argument for appearance playing a role in appreciation comes not from the observation that some works of CA are striking-looking, but rather from the fact that some works of CA make the point about the lack of importance of their appearance, *by means of their appearance itself*. In which case the argument here is not 'why does it look so interesting if we're not supposed to be interested in appearance?', or 'why did the artist put time and effort into the appearance if it is irrelevant to artistic value?', but is rather that the appearance plays a role in getting the audience to see that appearance is not the important thing in these works. Understood this way, Currie's claim is something like an expansion of Timothy Binkley's point about Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*, that 'no important information about Rauschenberg's piece is presented in the way it looks, *except perhaps this fact, that looking at it is artistically inconsequential*'.⁴⁷

But if this is the point, Currie's argument need not - and perhaps should not - be couched in terms of visually arresting/striking pieces like Nauman's. The point Currie is making is I think better illustrated by works whose appearance is deliberately uninteresting; where the uninterestingness of the work's appearance is supposed to guide the viewer to look to other aspects of the work for value/reward. In other words, if Currie is using the Nauman piece to show not that (some) works of CA are all about looking good after all, but rather that appearance can be one of the means by which conceptual works demonstrate the point that they're *not* all about looking good, the

⁴⁷ Binkley, T. (1977), p. 265 (Emphasis mine).

visually lush appearance of *One Hundred Live and Die* is something of a red herring here. This is, firstly, because the relevant phenomenon is not *visually interesting conceptual works*, but rather *conceptual works that use their appearance to demonstrate that appearance is not their main dimension of value*; and even if *One Hundred Live and Die* falls into both categories, the fact that it more obviously falls into the first obscures the issue in a way that an example that clearly belonged only to the second category would not. And secondly because it's not altogether clear that *One Hundred Live and Die* really does fall into the second category anyway, since the argument that its elaborate appearance serves to highlight the lack of importance of its appearance doesn't look particularly convincing.

Furthermore, this argument - unlike arguments (1) and (2) above - takes as its starting point a phenomenon that is plausibly central to CA, rather than one that looks to go against it. Many works of CA represent concerted efforts on the part of their makers to steer their audience away from looking to the appearance for artistic value. And a lot of these works do this by means of their appearance itself. One common way to do this is to make works whose appearance is not particularly rich. The following works might be thought to be examples of this trend.



Figure 8. *One And Three Chairs*. Joseph Kosuth. (1965).



Figure 9. *Measurement Room*. Mel Bochner. (1969).



Figure 10. *Index 01*. Art & Language. (1972)

Of course, one may disagree about individual examples. But the thought that there is a tendency in conceptual art towards presenting objects that are not especially visually remarkable, is the orthodox position in philosophical and art-historical writings alike.

Harold Osborne states that 'Conceptual artists deliberately make their productions uninteresting or trivial from a *visual* point of view in order to deflect attention from the perceptible object to the 'idea'.⁴⁸ Peter Goldie observes that 'works of conceptual art sometimes consist just of typed words, or very poor photographs, which do not seem to be suitable for [the] purpose [of being objects of appreciation]',⁴⁹ and Arthur Danto describes the 'almost striking banality' of Sol LeWitt's piece *Autobiography*.⁵⁰

The art-historian Robert C. Morgan notes that

The artists of the sixties tended to be austere and reductive in their means of presentation. Lawrence Weiner's phrases painted in straight Helvetica directly on the wall, Robert Barry's slide projection pieces of typed words or short sentences, Joseph Kosuth's dictionary definitions printed as negative photostats, and On Kawara's *Date Paintings* are examples.⁵¹

Similarly Thomas Crow observes that 'Works like the *Index* of the Art & Language group dared the spectator to overcome a positively forbidding lack of outward enticement in order to discover a discursive and philosophical content recorded in the most prosaic form possible,'⁵² and Johanna Drucker comments on the 'aesthetic

⁴⁸ Osborne, H. (1979), p. 178.

⁴⁹ Goldie, P. (2009), p. 203.

⁵⁰ Danto, A. (2007), p. 93.

⁵¹ Morgan, R. (1996), p. 14.

⁵² Crow, T. (2006), p. 54.

austerity' of Kosuth's early work,⁵³ while Jason Gaiger describes the conceptual artist Daniel Buren as 'stripping away all remnants of aesthetic and visual interest' in order to 'redirect the spectator's attention back to the conditions of exhibition and to the particular circumstances under which works of art are circulated and displayed.'⁵⁴ And Steve Edwards, writing about the popularity of the photograph in CA, explains that for conceptual artists 'The blandness, anonymity and everyday associations attached to photographic documents were central to their appeal.'⁵⁵

Finally, consider Marcel Duchamp's account of his efforts to avoid visual interest in his work:

I had to be careful to avoid the 'look' [of being art]. It's very difficult to choose an object, because after two weeks you either love it or hate it. You have to become so indifferent that you have no aesthetic feeling. The choice of readymades is always founded on visual indifference and a total lack of good or bad taste.⁵⁶

There are, of course, other ways besides making the appearance uninteresting, for an artist to indicate to the viewer, via the work's appearance, that the appearance isn't where it's at. Consider Duchamp's *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*. This is a work which Duchamp presented as a companion piece to *L. H. O. O. Q*, which, to recap, consists of a copy of the Mona Lisa with a moustache drawn on it (see Figure 3). *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*, on the other hand, lacks the moustache. Thus it is essentially a copy of

⁵³ Drucker, J. (2004).

⁵⁴ Gaiger, J. (2004), p. 97.

⁵⁵ Edwards, S. (2004), p. 137. For more on this quality of CA, see Harrison, C. (2002), who identifies the following as typical of CA: 'There was not much colour and there was not much stuff; no expressive brush-work on the walls, no accumulations of three-dimensional form on the floors. Instead, there were diagrams and texts, the latter varying in length from a few words to many pages.' (p. 320.), Lippard, L. (1995) states that in CA 'the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or "dematerialized"' (p. 17.). See also descriptions of Ed Ruscha's *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* by Ruscha himself in (Coplans, J. (1965), p. 25, and by Melanie Marino in Marino, M. (2004), p. 68.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Cabanne, P. (1976), p. 141.

the Mona Lisa, without any alterations. But because it looks so much like the Mona Lisa, this in effect makes the point that its appearance is not the main focus. Someone who admired *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* as art because of properties it inherits from the Mona Lisa would no doubt be missing the point. Because any value you attribute to *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*'s appearance is actually properly attributable to the Mona Lisa instead, the point is thereby made that one's appreciation of *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* should not be centred on its appearance. If this is correct then *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* is an example of a work which communicates to its audience the lack of relevance of its appearance, through its appearance.

Another way, perhaps, is to make a work that has the same appearance as an object that is not valued for its appearance. Consider works like Robert Barry's *All The Things I Know but of Which I am Not at the Moment Thinking* (figure 6), which present to the viewer only a written sentence. Because we don't normally attend to inscriptions of sentences (at least those not in unusual fonts) as interesting visual objects, this is arguably another way for the artist to signal to the viewer that the way this work looks is not all that important to its value. Works that use text in this way are very common in CA.⁵⁷

In their 1966 work *Air Show*, Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, later to found the group Art & Language, presented a typewritten essay as an artwork. The following works might also be thought to exemplify this tendency.

⁵⁷ That conceptual works convey the unimportance of their appearance by means of the use of text, and that this alone secures a role of sorts for appearance, is perhaps what Peter Osborne has in mind when he says: 'However, this does not mean that the visual dimension of linguistic inscription is irrelevant, even when it is the function of such inscription to *negate* the intrinsic significance of visual form. On the contrary, it is precisely its 'unmarked' or neutral *visual* quality that performs the negation.' (Osborne, (2002), p. 32)



Figure 11. *Date Painting*. On Kawara. (1978).

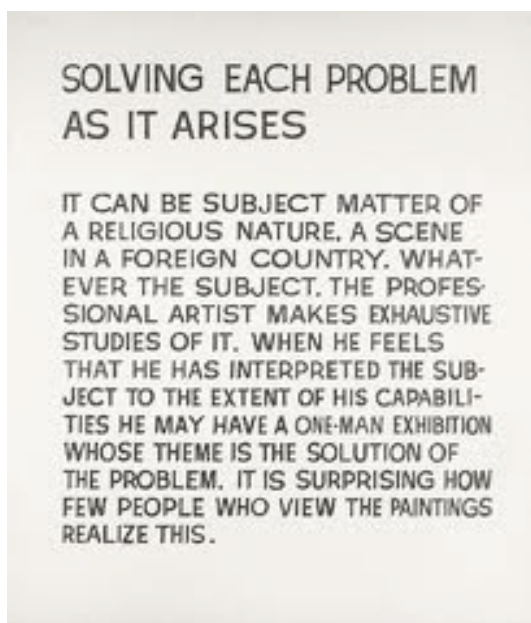


Figure 12. John Baldessari *Solving Each Problem as it Arises*. (1967).

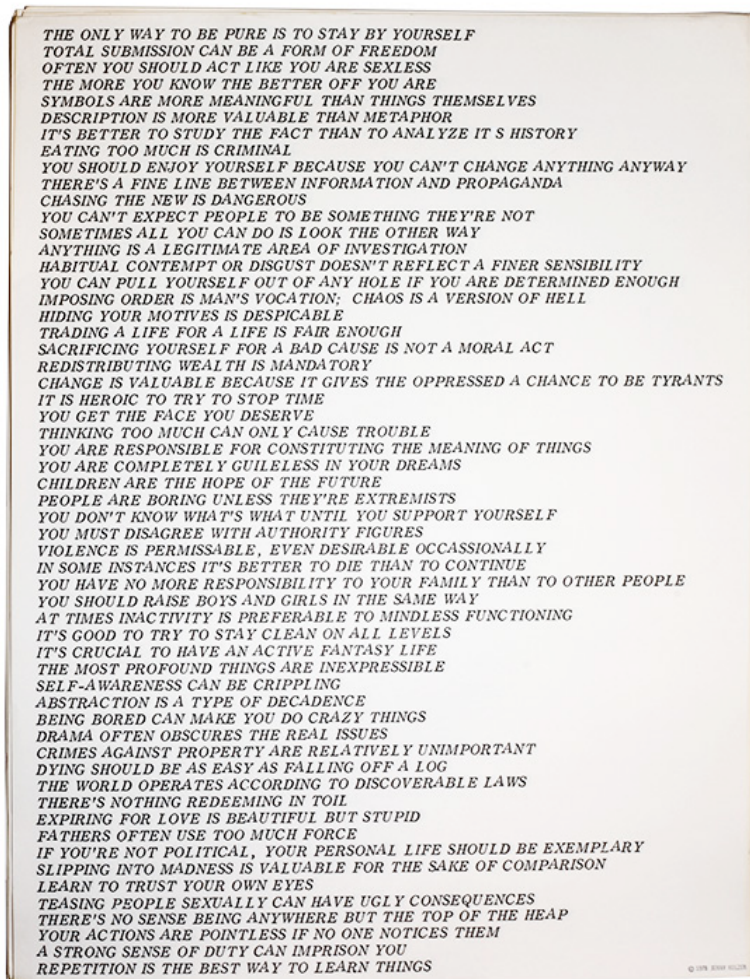


Figure 13. *Truisms*. Jenny Holzer. (1977).

But if all this is correct, these are cases of the perceptual properties of works of CA playing *some* role in their appreciation after all. It is *by* looking the way it does that the work gets this point across to the viewer. It seems that conceptual works often do indicate, by means of their appearance, that that appearance should not be the main focus of the audience's attention.

It is important, though, to be clear on what the claim is here. The claim is not that works of conceptual art *have* to convey this to their audience, or that they *have* to do this by means of their appearance. The argument relies only on the weaker claims

that *some* works of conceptual art *do* convey this to their audience, and that *one way* in which they can do this is via that appearance itself. It seems that there are other ways besides this in which works of conceptual art can communicate the diminished role of appearance to their audience.

The tendency in conceptual art for artists to commission someone else to actually make the work might also be thought to lend some support to the view that conceptual works often not only accord a diminished role to perceptual properties but convey this to their audience. If all the activity that pertains to the perceptual aspects of the work is delegated to someone else, this makes it clear that the features we are supposed to praise the artist for - and thus the features that we are supposed to admire in that work *qua* work by that artist, are not the perceptual features. An example of this that is particularly relevant here is Douglas Huebler's *Location Piece No. 7*.

Figure 14. *Location Piece No. 7*. Douglas Huebler. (1971).

Huebler asked professional photographers from the photography company Shunk-Kender to photograph two views of Pier 18 that they considered the most aesthetically pleasing, and mark in chalk with an x the position from which they had taken each photograph. They then sent the photographs they took to Huebler, who then went to the site himself and took photos, using the chalk marks to get the same results.

This looks to be an example of the work's perceptual properties being attributable to someone other than the artist. If the professional photographers had taken photos that had looked different, Huebler's photos would also have looked different. And this

helps to convey to the audience that the appearance of these works is not all that important to the overall success of the work as art.

But if Currie is right, conceptual works sometimes communicate this by means of their appearance itself. If the reasoning above is correct, what we've established is that appearance is not necessarily entirely irrelevant to appreciation in CA, since some works of conceptual art use their appearance to indicate to their audience that appearance should not be the main focus. What I want to show in the next section is that this is not the only way in which the appearance of conceptual works is relevant to their appreciation. In the next section we will see arguments for two more ways in which the appearance of works of CA is relevant to their value.

Section 3. A Further Role for Perceptual Properties

We've argued that some conceptual works use their appearance to make the point that appearance is not the main aspect of the work in which their value inheres. What I want to argue here is that, firstly, the point from the previous section generalises: works of CA use their appearance to make their points more generally (not just to make the point that appearance isn't the main focus), and secondly, that what falls out of this is that the appearance of a conceptual work potentially doesn't just determine *what* is communicated, it can also affect *how* and *how well* what is communicated is communicated.

On the first point, the following observation from Savedoff looks persuasive. Savedoff agrees with the Stark Priority Theorist that ‘the look is irrelevant if by that we just mean that we don't look for aesthetic values, such as beauty of line, [in conceptual works]’.⁵⁸ However, she argues that there is, plausibly, still a role of some kind for perceptual properties in CA: namely, ‘differences in look are important to the extent that they create differences in meaning.’⁵⁹

She articulates this point in detail in relation to an example, Duchamp's *L. H. O. O. Q.*, of which one might think that it's as good an example as any of a work in which perceptual properties are irrelevant to artistic value.

L.H.O.O.Q. is a postcard of the Mona Lisa with a moustache and goatee drawn on her. Does it make no difference what the moustache and goatee look like? The meaning of the work may be affected by whether the moustache is of a type sported by artists or businessmen, labourers or professionals. Differences such as these will determine differences in allowable readings and interpretations. For instance, if the moustache is typical of those worn by businessmen of the time, it could be appropriate to see the work as addressing the commercialization of art. If, on the other hand, it's a moustache typical of bohemians, such an interpretation becomes less plausible. And if we were to discover that the moustache and goatee were exactly like those worn by Duchamp, a whole new range of interpretative possibilities would be opened by Duchamp's imposing of himself on a masterpiece of painting. We need to know what the moustache and goatee look like in order to discover which interpretations are plausible.⁶⁰

This seems right. In many cases a work's perceptual properties are the means by which it conveys its meaning. But if this is right, then it is plausible that there is a further way in which the perceptual properties of a conceptual work affect its value - if they can affect *what* is communicated, then plausibly they can also affect *how* what is communicated is communicated. If changing certain perceptual properties of a work

⁵⁸ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 164.

⁵⁹ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 164.

⁶⁰ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

can affect the work's meaning - as Savedoff shows - then it seems that even changing the perceptual properties in ways that leave the meaning unaltered can potentially affect the work's nature and potentially its value, by changing not the meaning itself but how well that meaning is conveyed. The perceptual aspects of a work can be more or less apt, better or worse suited, to conveying its meaning.

That such aptness is highly relevant to artistic value in art in general is a pretty common observation in philosophical aesthetics. Peter Lamarque argues that 'consonance of means to ends'⁶¹ is an important dimension of artistic value. Matthew Kieran illustrates this point with a discussion of Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, which concerns a particular emotion, grief, and argues that 'appreciating the work involves delighting in its form as an aesthetically artful and apposite means of portraying such grief.'⁶²

It seems right to say, in other words, that just as one can praise a work as art for its meaning itself, one can also praise such a work for how well the meaning is conveyed. One can praise a work for insight, wit, etc., but one can also praise a work for clarity, vividness, poeticness in terms of how that meaning is put across. So it shouldn't be too much of a surprise if this goes on in CA too. In fact, the point has been made specifically in relation to CA by Elisabeth Schellekens⁶³ and Peter Lamarque.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 10.

⁶² Kieran, M. (2005b), p. 55. See also Eldridge, R. (1985), p. 309.

⁶³ Schellekens, E. (2007), pp. 77-82.

⁶⁴ Lamarque, P. (2007), pp. 9-11.

So if what is important in CA is its meaning, and if perceptual properties can be the means by which the meaning is articulated, *and* if the aptness of means to ends can be an artistic value, then it follows that perceptual properties in conceptual works can contribute to their value by being more or less apt to convey the meanings they convey.

To recap, then, what emerged from the discussion of Currie and Savedoff in Section 2, was three ways in which the perceptual properties of conceptual works can be relevant to the appreciation of them as art:

Firstly, they can be the means that the artist employs to signal to the audience that the perceptual properties should not be the main focus of their appreciation. Works such as Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* and Bochner's *Measurement Room* arguably convey this by not offering the viewer much in the way of visual interest. Works such as *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* convey it by sharing their visual appearance with an existing artwork. This was the point we took from Currie's argument.

Secondly, perceptual properties can play a role in the appreciation of conceptual works as art by being the means by which the artist communicates all sorts of other things. If, as is commonly thought, an important part of appreciating conceptual works is engaging with their message, and if this message is sometimes conveyed via the work's perceptual properties, then in these cases the perceptual properties can play a role in appreciation as they are the means by which the audience comes to grasp the work's message. This was a point made by Savedoff.

Thirdly, perceptual properties, because they do sometimes serve to communicate content, can be a crucial factor in *how* this content is communicated (not just in what content is communicated).

None of this shows that *all* conceptual works have perceptual properties that are relevant to their value as art. It is compatible with there being conceptual works that don't have perceptual properties, and it is compatible with there being conceptual works whose perceptual properties do not have any effect on their value as art.

There are, for example, some works of CA that are claimed - rightly or wrongly - to lack perceptual properties entirely. Some commentators think that Robert Barry's 1969 *Inert Gas Series*, for which the artist released various invisible inert gases into the atmosphere and documented them with photographs (see figure 1) is imperceptible, being made of inert gases.⁶⁵ Perhaps more plausibly, Michael Asher's removal works might also be thought of as imperceptible, since for each work the artist's activity just consists in the removal of something from the gallery, and so what is presented to view is always something that was already there but not ordinarily visible. Take, for example his 1974 untitled exhibit at Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, for which he removed the partition wall separating the main gallery space from the offices, thereby exposing to view aspects of the art gallery that were usually hidden, or his 1973 work in which he sandblasted the walls of Galleria Toselli, Milan, removing all the previous layers of paint and revealing the plaster beneath.

And perhaps we might also want to allow that there are some works of CA which have perceptual properties, all of which are entirely irrelevant.

⁶⁵ Osborne, P. (2002), p. 123.

I am not here concerned to argue that there are such works, but merely to note that the three considerations above about roles for perceptual properties in CA do not preclude either of these claims. But what these three points do show is that Stark Priority Accounts of CA, on which perceptual properties are *always* completely irrelevant to artistic value, must be false.

This doesn't mean, however, that we must give up on the possibility of distinguishing CA from other art in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual in CA. For the points we've enumerated might be compatible with a Subtle Priority Account on which the role of the perceptual is in some sense lessened in CA.

There might be good reasons for favouring this kind of approach. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that there is a lot of support for the idea that CA is in some sense less perceptual than other art. Thus it might be thought, taking this together with the arguments we've just seen, that a Subtle Priority Account on which perceptual properties have less of a role in CA than in other art provides the ideal middle ground.

Indeed, some philosophers explicitly indicate that they are distinguishing CA from other art in terms of a diminished, though not non-existent, role for the perceptual. Harold Osborne, for example states that in CA the object is not 'something to be contemplated and appreciated for itself', but rather 'a mere instrument for communicating an idea'.⁶⁶ And Peter Lamarque and Gregory Currie, whose arguments we looked at in Section 2, both indicate that they see their arguments as

⁶⁶ Osborne, H. (1980), p. 15.

pointing not towards giving up on characterising CA in terms of a *diminished* role of the perceptual, but rather as reasons to reject treating CA as *entirely non-perceptual*.⁶⁷

So the question now is what kind of Subtle Priority Account does all this suggest? What contrast in terms of the role of perceptual properties can we, or should we, make between CA and other art? In the next section I will introduce a distinction which, I will argue, we have independent reason to believe exists, and which will be of particular use to us in delineating a role for perceptual properties in CA.

Section 4. Direct and Indirect Relevance to Artistic Value

One way in which something can be relevant to an artwork's artistic value is by being a good-making or bad-making feature of that work. Being a feature that we need to *appreciate* in order to fully appreciate the work. So, for example, when it is claimed that 'Vermeer's work is rightly celebrated both for the sheer smoothness of his painted surfaces and for the subtle interplay of light, shadow, colour and

⁶⁷ Lamarque, P. (2007) recommends that we 'make the perceptual [in CA] subservient to the conceptual in some way' (p. 9), and Currie, G. (2007) claims that works of CA do need to be looked at, but in CA, unlike other art, the looking is done in the service of some other activity'. (p. 46).

proportion',⁶⁸ this looks to be an example of two features of Vermeer's work being identified as good-making features, features that one appreciates in appreciating the work. But there are reasons to think this is not the only way in which something can be relevant to the value of a work.

There are countless arguments in the philosophy of art which draw attention to certain contextual facts about artworks which plausibly one has to attend to in order to appreciate those works fully. Kendall Walton⁶⁹ has argued that we need to know the artistic category to which a work belongs in order to properly appreciate it. Arthur Danto, Jerrold Levinson, Gregory Currie, and others have argued that we may need to know something about its historical context to fully appreciate it.⁷⁰ Noel Carroll, E. D. Hirsch, Paisley Livingston, and others argue that we might need to know something about what the artist intended the work to communicate.⁷¹ And Denis Dutton has argued that we need to know something about the process by which a work was made in order to properly appreciate that work.⁷²

In all these cases, the properties identified are not aspects of the work in which its value resides. Indeed, in some cases it would be a stretch to call them aspects of the work at all. But what's important is that even for those that could be called aspects of the work, they are definitely not good or bad making features. A work's historical context, on its own, is not a good-making or bad-making feature of it. Neither is the

⁶⁸ Kieran, M. (2005b), pp. 11-12.

⁶⁹ See Walton, K. (1970).

⁷⁰ See Danto, A. (1981); Levinson J. (1980); Levinson (2007); and Currie, G. (1989).

⁷¹ See Carroll, N. (1992); (1997); (2000); Hirsch, E. D. (1967); (1976); Livingston, P. (1998); and Irwin, W. (2000).

⁷² See Dutton, D. (1979).

work's category, the intentions of the artist, nor the process by which the work was made.⁷³ Rather, they are factors which *affect* aspects of the work in which artistic value might reside.

Walton's arguments do not establish that it would ever be correct to say, 'what makes the work so good/bad is its category'. What they show - if they are right - is that the category can *affect* how good the work is, by virtue of affecting some properties of the work that *are* relevant to its value. To apply this to one of Walton's examples, the category that Picasso's *Guernica* belongs to affects whether it is correct to describe it as 'violent, dynamic, vital and disturbing'⁷⁴. And plausibly this work's being 'violent, dynamic, vital and disturbing' can be part of what makes it good as art. So indirectly, the category the work belongs to can affect how good it is as art.

Similarly, if Levinson and his fellow contextualists are correct, it's not that the art-historical context in which a work is produced is a good-making or bad-making feature of that work, but rather just that it can determine whether the work has certain good-making or bad making features, like originality or derivativeness. In other words, a work's art-historical context is not a feature of the work that we should *appreciate* in appreciating the work, but it is one we should *register* if our appreciation of the work is to be complete.

If Actual Intentionalists like Carroll are correct, it's not that the intentions of the artist can constitute any part of the value of the work; rather, it is that these intentions can determine whether the work has certain properties that might then partly constitute

⁷³ Admittedly this last example will not appeal to someone who is persuaded by David Davies's arguments for this process in fact being the work. (See Davies, D. (2004)).

⁷⁴ Walton, K. (1970), p. 347.

the work's value. So for example, if intentions are what determine whether Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* is an ironic comment on economic injustice or a serious recommendation of cannibalism, then it's not that the intentions are themselves bearers of artistic value, but rather that they determine what properties the work has which potentially enhance or detract from the work's artistic value. In terms of appreciation, it's not that the intentions an artist had regarding her work are something we can or should *appreciate* in appreciating that work; it's just that they are something we need to know about in order to be in a position to appreciate the work.

Finally, if Dutton is right, certain aspects of the process by which a work was made can affect its character, and thereby its value. It's not that the process is an aspect of the work that has or lacks value, but rather that the process can determine what value-enhancing or detracting qualities the work has. For example, the process the artist was engaged in can determine what artistic problems the work had to solve. A painting's being a clever resolution to a compositional dilemma (to use one of Dutton's examples) is at least partly a matter of the process by which the work came into being, and almost certainly contributes to its value as art. In terms of appreciation, it's not necessarily that we must appreciate the process, but rather that awareness of the process is a precondition of appreciating the work.⁷⁵

It looks, then, that there are different ways in which something can be relevant to the appreciation of a work. One is by being a good- or bad-making feature of the work,

⁷⁵ Of course, if Davies, D. (2004) is right that works are to be *identified* with these processes, then the point doesn't hold in this particular case. But if we want to stick to a more conventional ontology but still allow that the process by which a work was made can be relevant to its appreciation, this would be an example of taking aspects of the process whereby a work is created to be *indirectly* relevant to its value.

something that one appreciates in appreciating the work. But another, different way in which something can be relevant to the appreciation of a work is by affecting aspects of the work which *are* good- or bad-making features of the work.

The distinction is between things that *affect* the work's value, and aspects of the work which partly *constitute* the work's value; between things that one must *appreciate* to appreciate the work and things that one must just *attend to* to appreciate the work. So for example, the category to which a work belongs, if Walton is right, is something that one must attend to to appreciate the work, but not something one must appreciate; something that *affects* the work's value but is not *part of* the work's value. So there are two different ways in which a property can be relevant to the artistic value, and hence the appreciation, of a work. Let us, then, coin some new terminology in order to articulate this distinction:

Direct relevance to artistic value:

A property is *directly* relevant to a work's artistic value if it is partly constitutive of that work's value as art. So only if it is correct to say that this property is part of what is good or bad about the work, is that property directly relevant to that work's artistic value.

Indirect relevance to artistic value:

A property is *indirectly* relevant to a work's artistic value if it *affects* the work's artistic value without in any way constituting it.

And in terms of artistic appreciation: a property is *directly* relevant to the appreciation of a work if it is something that one must *appreciate* to appreciate the work. A

property is *indirectly* relevant to the appreciation of a work, on the other hand, if it is something that one must notice, but not appreciate, to appreciate the work.

On Walton's view, then, *Guernica's* category is indirectly relevant, while its dynamism is directly relevant, to its artistic value. *Don Quixote's* historical context - if contextualists such as Levinson are correct - is indirectly relevant, while its originality is directly relevant, to its artistic value. Thus *Guernica's* category, and *Don Quixote's* historical context, are indirectly but not directly relevant to the appreciation of these respective works.

Furthermore, and perhaps most relevant for our purposes here, some philosophers argue, as we saw above, that an important component of artistic value is what is sometimes called 'means-ends aptness'; how well-chosen certain aspects of a work are as means to achieve a given artistic purpose integral to the work. As Peter Lamarque puts it in the case of literature, for example, 'melifluous prose is not a literary virtue if one is trying to portray a dialogue between teenage street gangs.'⁷⁶

In other words, for some aspects of artworks, in addition to evaluating them for how valuable they are in themselves, there is an evaluation that is relativised to broader artistic aims that the work has. These two ways of evaluating may on occasion be at odds with each other, as in the imagined case where the flowing quality of the prose compromises certain aims integral to the work.

I want to argue that the distinction between these two ways in which an aspect of a work may be evaluated, is another case of the distinction between direct and indirect

⁷⁶ Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 10.

relevance to value. Lamarque's discussion of melifluous prose in a dialogue between teenage street gangs would be a case where the same aspect does well insofar as it is *directly* relevant, but badly insofar as it is *indirectly* relevant. Perhaps what is being urged here by Lamarque is that any direct relevance of the prose style in his imagined case is cancelled out by how poorly it performs in terms of its *indirect* relevance.

What I want to propose here is that in CA perceptual properties are *only* evaluable as means to further artistic ends. The *only* contribution, positive or negative, they can make to a conceptual work's artistic value is in terms of their aptness to artistic aims integral to the work.

What I want to argue is that this distinction maps on to the contrasting roles of perceptual properties in ordinary art and in conceptual art. In conceptual art the perceptual properties are at most indirectly relevant to artistic value, while in other art they are directly relevant.

Other artforms allow perceptual properties to be directly relevant, but CA does not. Perceptual properties are never good- or bad- making features of conceptual works. At most they can affect properties that are themselves good- or bad- making features of a work.

We've seen that what tends to be contrasted with the de-emphasis of perceptual properties in conceptual art is an emphasis on the work's meaning. In terms of the contrast I'm introducing of direct vs indirect relevance, the meaning of a conceptual work would be directly relevant. And if the work's meaning is directly relevant, then if

the perceptual properties being the way they are is part of what makes it the case that the work has the meaning it has, then the role that falls out of this for perceptual properties is a kind of indirect relevance to artistic value.

And as long as the perceptual properties are not themselves good- or bad-making features of the work, then they can be said to have a diminished axiological role in CA in that their relevance to artistic value is never direct, but always at most indirect. And if perceptual properties are limited to having at most an indirect role in CA, this would indeed be a sense in which their role in CA counts as diminished since in other art they can be and often are directly relevant.

So looking again at Savedoff's argument about Duchamp's *L. H. O. O. Q.*,

The moustache and goatee of *L.H.O.O.Q.* are very careful, neat and relatively unobtrusive. Would the work be unchanged had the moustache and goatee been crudely dashed off with a thick black crayon? Could not subtle changes in meaning result? The look of the moustache might determine whether we perceive the work as comic or mocking, affectionate or contemptuous, mischievous or defiant, or some combination of these. The tone of the work is best known through viewing the object itself and the manner in which the moustache and goatee are drawn.⁷⁷

We can make sense of the intuition here by saying that certain perceptual properties of *L. H. O. O. Q.* - viz. the way the moustache looks - are indirectly relevant to its artistic value. They are not properties that one must *appreciate* in appreciating the work. Rather they contribute to the work's artistic value by affecting something else, in this case the work's meaning. The fact that the moustache and goatee are 'very careful, neat and relatively unobtrusive' is relevant not because these are qualities

⁷⁷ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

we are supposed to appreciate *in themselves* but rather because they determine the work's meaning, which we *are* supposed to appreciate in itself.

A similar point can be made about *L. H. O. O. Q.*'s successor, *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved*. It is clearly relevant that it looks like the *Mona Lisa*. One couldn't possibly be described as appreciating the work if one failed to notice this. However, the way in which its visual resemblance to the *Mona Lisa* is relevant is not direct but indirect. We are not supposed to value *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* for the same qualities as we value the *Mona Lisa*. Rather, we are supposed to value *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* for its meaning, and its resemblance to another highly regarded artwork is the way in which it conveys its meaning. The visual qualities of *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* affect its artistic value - via affecting its meaning - but they do not in any way constitute that value. The qualities it has in common with the *Mona Lisa* are qualities we are supposed to notice, but not appreciate. For to appreciate them - to think, for example, that *L. H. O. O. Q. Shaved* is valuable for its stunning visual beauty or its capturing of a subtle and enigmatic facial expression, would be to miss the point rather spectacularly.

Similarly with *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, plausibly, what is perceptually important here is that there's literally not much to see. It looks pretty similar to an ordinary blank piece of paper. There's no drawing to look at.

Note that this account of CA can also yield plausible analyses of the works we identified in Chapter 2 as being the favourite examples of Constitution Accounts. We saw there that Weiner's instructions are not plausibly taken to be a documentation of the work. If we take them to be the work rather than just a documentation, we can say that the way they look is not relevant to value *directly*, in that our appreciation

should be directed at the work's appearance, but might be relevant *indirectly*, insofar as it plays a role in getting the meaning across, we may appreciate how well it does this.

In this regard, we may praise the utilitarian/functional look of the piece as being particularly apt to the work's message. If the font had been more unusual, or more pleasing to the eye, it would be less apt to convey some of the messages it conveys, eg. about the unimportance of its appearance, in much the same way as 'melifluous prose' isn't a virtue in a drama about street gangs.

Section 5. Summary

We've argued that the distinction between direct and indirect relevance to artistic value adequately captures the way in which the role of perceptual properties is limited in CA. In the remaining chapters we will consider various arguments and alternative positions that might be thought to pose challenges to the view for which we have here argued.

In Chapter 1 we identified two different dimensions of variation between the main lines of thought on CA. Firstly there was the distinction between Constitution and Priority Accounts. We discussed Constitution Accounts in Chapter 2 and found them to be unsatisfactory. But a second dimension of variation between accounts was

what the emphasised and de-emphasised properties are taken to be. We found that in addition to accounts that stress the importance of meanings and the unimportance of perceptual appearances (like the account for which we have argued here), some accounts instead stress the importance of conception and the unimportance of execution. In Chapter 5, then, we will explore this possibility and address the arguments that have been put forward for favouring this kind of view over the one for which we have here argued.

First, though, there is some clarificatory work to be done on the view we have advanced here, and what it commits us to. In Chapter 4 we will identify a distinct but related claim which is often conflated with claims about the de-emphasis of perceptual properties: the claim that *perception* is unnecessary for the appreciation of conceptual works. I will argue that the two issues are in fact distinct and that, contrary perhaps to initial impressions, nothing about *perception* follows from claims about the diminished role of perceptual properties.

The second part of Chapter 4 will concern another issue about what follows from the account we have here advanced: whether it entails anything about the *aesthetic* value of conceptual works.

Chapter 4.

Perception and the Aesthetic

Introduction

In the last chapter we built up a case against Stark Priority Accounts of CA that claim that perceptual properties are entirely irrelevant to the appreciation of conceptual works, and went on to argue for a Subtle Priority Account, which allows perceptual properties a role of sorts, albeit a limited one. In order to articulate the precise nature of this limited role, we introduced a distinction, between direct and indirect relevance to artistic value; we argued that while in other art perceptual properties can be *directly* relevant to artistic value, their role in conceptual art is always at most *indirectly* relevant.

In this chapter I want to address two issues about what follows from this view. Firstly it becomes important to distinguish the view for which we have argued from a superficially very similar-sounding view. The relation between these two views will be the focus in Sections 1 - 5. And secondly it is necessary to address the question of what our favoured view entails for the role of the aesthetic in conceptual art. This will be the task of Sections 6 to 8.

Section 1. Perceptual Properties and Perception

It is important to distinguish the view that has been our target

(1) the claim that in CA perceptual properties are not relevant to appreciation

from another related but different claim,

(2) that it is possible to appreciate works of CA without perceiving them.

These two claims haven't been sufficiently differentiated, and it appears to be fairly standard to run them together, and treat them as a single position.

In the previous chapter we argued against the view that perceptual properties are entirely irrelevant in CA. But I want to show in this chapter that - contrary to what looks to be a standard assumption shared by writers on this topic - in doing so we are

not thereby committed to rejecting the view that one can appreciate conceptual works without perceiving them.

Now there is one sense in which these are clearly different claims - the second is a claim about the mode of apprehending the work - what one must do to appreciate the work. To paraphrase Robert Hopkins (2006) it's about what are the 'legitimate routes to belief' about a work's artistic value.¹ But the first claim lacks the epistemological flavour of the second. The first is a claim about the work itself and which of its properties are relevant to its appreciation. However, it has been standard to take these two claims to be very closely related: perceptual properties - one might think - are surely just exactly those properties that it requires perception to detect, and so perception of an artwork is necessary to appreciate it just to the extent that its perceptual *properties* are relevant to its appreciation.

This assumption is implicit in the arguments we discussed in Chapter 3 from Peter Lamarque, Gregory Currie, and Barbara Savedoff. There we discussed these as arguments against the view that perceptual properties are irrelevant in CA, but these writers in fact do not see this view as any different from the view that CA doesn't need to be perceived, and thus take their argument to be just as much an argument against this latter view. Lamarque, throughout his 'On Perceiving Conceptual Art' alternates freely between talking of the necessity of perception and the relevance of perceptual properties, and talks as though 'recover[ing] at least some role for the visual aspects of conceptual art' 'return[s] us inevitably to perception'.² Gregory Currie, in his 'Visual Conceptual Art', conflates the claim that the 'elaborately crafted

¹ Hopkins (2006), p. 85.

² Lamarque (2007), p. 8.

appearance' of Bruce Nauman's *One Hundred Live and Die* is relevant to its appreciation,³ with the claim that it 'needs, after all, to be seen' to be appreciated.⁴ He also moves between talking about 'the priority of looking' and 'the role of appearance' as though they are unproblematically equivalent.⁵

Further, James Shelley's 2003 paper 'The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art' begins by clearly stating that he is talking about works that 'you can appreciate ... as artworks without perceiving them with your senses', works for which 'a description will serve just as well as seeing them',⁶ but at other times he takes the issue to be whether 'there can be artworks whose appreciation as artworks does not ... depend on their perceptual properties'.⁷

All these writers seem to assume that the relevance of an artworks's perceptual properties to appreciation and the necessity of perception for appreciation are exactly equivalent; just two different ways of putting the same issue. Here I will argue that - perhaps despite initial appearances to the contrary - this equivalence does not hold.

The question of whether perceptual properties are relevant to appreciation, and the question of whether the work needs to be perceived to be appreciated, are in fact two different questions. And moreover, it is possible to say yes to the first and no to the second. That is, it is possible to maintain that the perceptual properties of a

³ Currie (2007), p. 35.

⁴ Currie (2007), p. 35.

⁵ Currie (2007), p. 43.

⁶ Shelley, (2003) p. 364.

⁷ Shelley, (2003), p. 368.

conceptual work are relevant to its appreciation, while still holding that one can have a full appreciation of the work via a description of the work.

Some kinds of perceptual properties of artworks are such that you need to see the work to find out that it has them. But there are some kinds of facts about the perceptual properties of a work that you can find out about from a description. This should be fairly uncontroversial - it is possible to describe the perceptual appearance of something, so it should be no surprise that there are some facts about the perceptual properties of something that one can come to know on the basis of a description. I can come to know, for example, that Boris Becker has red hair from a description of him. Provided the description is reliable etc., this would just be a standard case of knowledge by testimony.⁸ Of course, I can't come to know the precise nature of his appearance without seeing him (or at least a picture of him) for myself. But I can come to know certain facts *about* his appearance on the basis of a description.

What's the difference between the perceptual properties that one can come to know that something possesses just by means of a description, on the one hand, and the perceptual properties that cannot be known other than by means of a direct encounter? Perhaps it has to do with level of detail. Perceptual properties of Boris Becker surely include the fact that he has red hair. But they also include much more detailed facts about his appearance. One can come to know that Boris Becker has red hair from a description. But one cannot come to know exactly what he looks like from a description.

⁸ For more on testimony as a route to knowledge see, for example, Coady, C. (1992); and Audi, R. (1997).

If this is right, if one can come to know certain things about the perceptual properties of something from a description, then establishing that the perceptual properties of conceptual works can be relevant to their appreciation is not sufficient to establish that the appreciation of conceptual works requires perception.

So for this reason, the arguments we discussed in the previous chapter against Stark Priority Accounts which treat perceptual properties as completely irrelevant, do not establish that conceptual works need to be perceived to be appreciated. In order to establish such a conclusion it would have to be shown that the perceptual properties that are relevant to the appreciation of conceptual works are of the type that need to be perceived (like Boris Becker's exact appearance), not of the type that we can come to know by other means (like Boris Becker's red hair).

In what follows I will address the question of whether conceptual works are ever such that they need to be perceived to be appreciated, or whether the general claim that it's characteristic of CA that it doesn't, is accurate.

Section 2. Conceptual Art and Perception

In his 2003 paper 'The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art', James Shelley defends the claim that there exists what he calls non-perceptual art. By non-perceptual art he means 'artworks that need not be perceived by means of the five senses to be appreciated as artworks'.⁹

⁹ Shelley, J. (2003), p. 363.

To be clear, Shelley's project here is not to offer a definition of CA. Rather, it is to identify what follows from the existence of non-perceptual art (the question of whether this non-perceptual art corresponds with CA is not addressed). Namely Shelley identifies two claims, both standard within philosophical aesthetics, which cannot both be true if there is non-perceptual art:

- (i) art is essentially aesthetic (which is upheld by Beardsley,¹⁰ Schlesinger,¹¹ Lind,¹² Anderson,¹³ among others).
- (ii) the aesthetic is necessarily perceptual (a view taken by Eaton¹⁴ and Greenberg,¹⁵ among others).

The central concern of Shelley's paper is to investigate which of these two claims should be rejected, given his commitment to the existence of non-perceptual art (and to back up that commitment with argument). Shelley argues that we should keep (i) and reject (ii).¹⁶

Despite the lack of explicit reference to CA, there is reason to think that this is what Shelley has in mind. The examples he discusses are all works that most people unproblematically categorise as CA - Duchamp's *Fountain* and *L. H. O. O. Q.*, and

¹⁰ Beardsley (1983). Beardsley argues that 'an artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest' (p. 21).

¹¹ Schlesinger (1979) argues that 'a work of art is an artifact, which under standard conditions provides its percipients with aesthetic experience' (p. 175).

¹² Lind (1992) 'An "artwork" is any creative arrangement of one or more media whose principal function is to communicate a significant aesthetic object' (p. 124).

¹³ Anderson, John (2000).

¹⁴ Eaton, M. (2004).

¹⁵ Greenberg, C. (1986).

¹⁶ For more discussion of this aspect of Shelley's paper, see Sections 6 - 8 of this chapter.

Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing*. Others have certainly taken him to be referring to CA. Noel Carroll, in his response paper, takes Shelley's 'non-perceptual art' to be referring unproblematically to conceptual art,¹⁷ as does Robert Hopkins in his 'Speaking Through Silence: Conceptual Art and Conversational Implicature',¹⁸ and Matthew Kieran in his *Revealing Art*.¹⁹

Further, Shelley's definition of non-perceptual art looks initially like a rather promising characterisation of CA. The view that perception is not necessary to engage with conceptual works certainly appears to have its share of advocates among artists, art historians, and philosophers:

The conceptual artist Douglas Huebler claims that works of CA are 'beyond perception',²⁰ Sol LeWitt claims that CA is 'made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye',²¹ and Mel Bochner states that 'a doctrinaire conceptualist viewpoint would say that ... the 'ideal Conceptual work ... could be described and experienced in its description'.²² The implication being that such works do not need to be perceived. The art historian Robert C. Morgan observes that in CA 'the act of viewing was often considered superfluous to the work',²³ and Benjamin Buchloh and Charles Harrison seem to be in agreement when they claim, respectively, that 'the proposal inherent in Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and

¹⁷ Carroll, N. (2004), p. 413 and throughout.

¹⁸ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 51 and throughout.

¹⁹ Kieran, M. (2005b), p. 260, n. 13.

²⁰ Huebler, D. (1972) *Art and artists*, Volume 7, Issues 7-12, p. 22

²¹ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 15.

²² Coplans, J. (1974), p. 62.

²³ Morgan, R. (1989), p. 42.

perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone',²⁴ and that these works achieve 'their intended form of distribution...not through being beheld... but through being elaborated, extended, or otherwise worked on'.²⁵ In philosophy, Paul Crowther claims that conceptual works 'do not require direct perceptual acquaintance',²⁶ while Francis Sparshott thinks that works of CA, being 'nothing other than 'things to think about', owed nothing to any mode of perception',²⁷ and Timothy Binkley argues that since conceptual art 'creates primarily with ideas', 'to know the art is to know the idea; and to know an idea is not necessarily to experience a particular sensation, or even to have some particular experience.'²⁸

Perhaps the most detailed articulation of this point comes from Noel Carroll, who reasons, with respect to *Fountain* but takes his point to apply to CA in general,

[*Fountain*] has been widely discussed by artists, philosophers, critics, art historians, and innumerable members of the lay audience who follow the art world. But one wonders whether all those who speak of it have seen it or even a photograph of it. Of course, that they speak of it shows nothing. Yet I conjecture that quite often commentators who have not directly encountered *Fountain* have nevertheless made insightful remarks about it or, at least, have thought them to themselves when they have heard or read about *Fountain* second hand - that is, they have, so to say "gotten it", but without eyeballing it.²⁹

We might be inclined to agree with Carroll here. In terms of appreciating *Fountain* as art, it's hard to imagine what extra could be gained from seeing it.

²⁴ Buchloh (1990), p. 107.

²⁵ Harrison, C. (2003a), p. 51.

²⁶ Crowther, P. (1991), p. 308.

²⁷ Sparshott, F. (1982), p. 199.

²⁸ Binkley, T. (1977), p. 266. See also Nathan, D.(2006), p. 316.

²⁹ Carroll, N. (2006), p. 78.

We noted in the previous chapter that works like *Fountain* and *Erased de Kooning Drawing* seem to exemplify the claim that CA's perceptual properties are less relevant to its appreciation. But Shelley uses just these examples to illustrate his view that these works don't need to be perceived to be appreciated. And they seem to be good choices of example for this point as well. It's highly plausible that Duchamp's *Fountain* does not need to be the object of sense-perception in order to be appreciated as art. The features that are of interest, and potentially relevant to its value as art, one might think, can be accessed from hearing it described.

As for *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, one might wonder what role directly seeing the work could possibly play in its appreciation given that, as we noted in the previous chapter, this work was made by erasing all the perceptually interesting features of another work.

Thus, initially at least, characterising CA as art that doesn't need to be perceived to be appreciated has a certain degree of plausibility. It seems to fit well with some examples of conceptual works and how we think they should be appreciated. It is also a fairly common view among philosophers. But it is not universally accepted as true. I will discuss two possible lines of objection.³⁰

³⁰ A third objection to this account argues that it fails to distinguish CA from other art since there is another kind of art that counts as non-perceptual in the relevant sense. A full appreciation of a literary work, so the objection goes, is possible without any particular kind of perceptual experience. Thus if we characterise CA as non-perceptual art, we fail to distinguish it from literature, even if we do succeed in distinguishing it from other kinds of art. This objection is the subject of extensive discussion in the next chapter, so for now I will put it to one side.

Section 3. The Objection from Copies

There appear to be reasons to think that as a characterisation of CA, Shelley's non-perceptual art fails to distinguish CA from other art. There are reasons to think that the requirement that a work be perceived by means of one of the five senses is simply too strong. In some sense all art can be appreciated without being perceived by means of any of the five senses - very often what we appreciators of art perceive is a copy in a book, or a print, and not the actual work. In these cases, strictly speaking, we are not perceiving the work. And yet, so the argument goes, it seems we are still able to appreciate the work in question.³¹

If this argument goes through, we should reject the account on which CA is characterised as non-perceptual art in Shelley's sense, since what we are looking for is an account of what is *distinctive* about CA, what distinguishes it from other art. But if the argument above is correct, *all* art is non-perceptual in Shelley's sense, so characterising CA as non-perceptual art would not help us in any way to distinguish CA from other art.

The claim needn't rely on the adequacy of current techniques of art reproduction. To be sure, the ways in which copies often in fact fall short of providing a full experience of originals is well documented. But a distinction should be drawn between contingent shortcomings of actual copies on the one hand, and *in principle* limits on what copies can do, on the other. These two are often confused. Focussing on

³¹ The point that perceiving a copy of a work/painting can be adequate for the purpose of appreciating that work has been made by Alan Tormey, Mary Mothersill, Paisley Livingston and Peter Lamarque, among others. See Tormey, A. (1973), p. 39; Mothersill, M. (1961), p. 78; Livingston, P. (2003), p. 262; Lamarque, P. (2007), p. 15.

paintings, Barbara E Savedoff³² argues that the widespread practice of attending to photographic reproduction in place of originals leads to a distortion in our understanding of art, and identifies several reasons why she takes this to be so. However, (with one exception, to which I shall return) the ways in which the reproductions are argued to be inadequate are all contingent features of our current practice, not barriers *in principle* to copies serving as adequate means for appreciating artworks.

Some of the points Savedoff makes are points about the limitations of the medium in which reproductions tend to be rendered - namely photography. There are contingent limitations of this medium, such as the fact that it doesn't reproduce colours with 100% accuracy, and there are necessary limitations of the medium: photographs do not replicate the surface-texture of paintings, for example. But neither the contingent nor the necessary limitations of photographs with respect to replicating artworks entails any kind of general problem for reproductions of artworks. That reproductions tend to be rendered in the medium of photography is contingent, and thus limitations of this medium - necessary or contingent - are not the same thing as limitations of copies *per se*. While photographs do differ from paintings in these ways, and while the copies that we in fact make use of do tend to be photographs, there is no principled reason why a copy could not replicate exactly the surface texture and the colour of an original painting.

Other points Savedoff makes are just about the conventions that we in fact have for how copies are displayed: not replicating the frame, not being the same size, being displayed in books (at which the viewer looks *down*, as opposed to on gallery walls,

³² Savedoff, B. (1993), pp. 455-462.

at which the viewer looks *up*), and thus having paper as a backdrop rather than wall. Finally, given the tendency of reproductions to be on a smaller scale than originals, and to be displayed in books rather than on walls, the viewer cannot so easily experiment with moving closer to and farther away from the image.

Savedoff makes only one point that could be taken as an *in principle* objection to copies. I will quote this in full:

In reproduction, the physical presence of the painting is lost. The importance of this loss is most obvious for works which emphasize their objecthood through size, unusual shape, multiple panels, or three dimensionality of painted surface, but it is no less an issue for standard easel paintings. Even a full size reproduction of a Vermeer portrait does not have the physical presence of the original. The reproduction is an image of something which exists elsewhere.³³

It looks slightly ambiguous what point is being made here. On one hand it could be taken to be a fairly innocuous point about reproductions tending not to replicate the size, shape or three-dimensionality of their corresponding originals, in which case it falls into one of the two categories above (either ways in which the medium that we tend to use for reproductions is not fully adequate, or ways in which our current practices with reproductions - putting them in books etc. - impose limitations). On the other hand, it could possibly be taken as a problem stemming from the very nature of copies.

Sentences like ‘the physical presence of the painting is lost’, and ‘the reproduction is an image of something which exists elsewhere’, suggest this reading. However, it is hard to locate a good argument in this. The first quote suggests that the objection here is that when you look at a copy instead of the original, what you lose is the

³³ Savedoff, B. (1993), p. 458.

physical presence of the original. But given that you gain in its place the physical presence of the copy, a further argument is surely needed for why the physical presence of the original is preferable to the physical presence of a copy. And this is hopelessly close to the question with which we started.

The second quote seems to be guilty of either the same error or a related one. The complaint here seems to be either that the copy, unlike the original, is a reproduction of something else, *or* that the copy is numerically distinct from the original.

In the first case, the problem is the same as above - the claim needs to be supplemented with an argument for why being a reproduction of something else is a bad thing. In the second case, a different problem arises. It is question-begging to argue that the reason copies are inadequate is that they are not numerically identical with their corresponding originals. All parties to the debate agree that copies and their originals are numerically distinct. That's part of what it is for something to *be* a copy, after all. The question of whether copies can be adequate as means of appreciating originals, is precisely the question of whether it is possible for one to appreciate a work by looking at something numerically distinct from the work (given the widespread practice of using certain numerically distinct things - copies - as proxies for the works themselves). Someone who argues that the answer is 'no' needs to provide an argument for why this is so.

To reiterate, I'm not denying that in fact copies in many ways very often fall short of being adequate proxies of their corresponding originals. That point is fairly easy to establish. What is much harder to establish is that copies can, in principle, *never* be adequate proxies, that very notion of an adequate proxy is impossible.

So it seems we should take seriously the thought that in art in general, appreciation is possible (at least in principle) without perceiving the work. Does this, then, render useless any attempt to distinguish CA from other art in terms of its being non-perceptual?

Two ways of dealing with this objection present themselves. First, we might be tempted to argue that although one can get somewhere with copies in place of originals, we are not able to *fully* appreciate a work just by looking at a copy of it. If it turns out that this is the case, then defining CA as non-perceptual art *does* distinguish CA from other art in this respect, since if CA were non-perceptual art, CA would be art that can be *fully* appreciated without being perceived by means of any of the five senses, while other art cannot be *fully* appreciated without being perceived by means of one of the five senses.

However, we should be careful here that we are not guilty of the confusion identified above between *in principle* limitations on the role of copies in appreciation, and contingent limitations on actual copies. Admittedly several aspects of the appreciation of artworks can be lost when we look at a copy instead of the original (see Savedoff's list.³⁴) But what aspects of appreciation are *in principle* unavailable when we use copies?

³⁴ Savedoff, B. (1993), pp. 455-462.

A better response is to point out that the considerations about copies do not render all art non-perceptual anyway.³⁵ If the considerations above are right, what they show is that appreciation of the work in normal art doesn't necessitate perceiving *the work*. But it *does* necessitate perceiving *something*, namely an adequate copy (or the work itself). Thus what is eliminated is not the role of perceptual experience in appreciation of art, but rather the role of a *direct* perceptual experience of the unique object that is the work.

With this in mind, one can respond to the objection from copies by modifying the definition so that it says: CA is art in which no perceptual experience (either of the work or an adequate proxy thereof) is necessary for appreciation. While appreciation of other art, by contrast, necessarily involves a direct perceptual encounter with either the work *or an adequate proxy thereof*. So defining CA as non-perceptual art can maintain a contrast between CA and other art; the contrast is precisely that no perceptual experience is necessary to appreciate a work of CA, whereas for other art, some perceptual experience is always necessary (be that an experience of the work itself or of an adequate proxy).³⁶

So the objection is not a deep one. At most the distinction needs to be put slightly differently, but in any case there is still a contrast to be drawn between art whose

³⁵ It is worth emphasising that this objection to defining CA as non-perceptual art would also have implications for Shelley's discussion/treatment of non-perceptual art independently of whether it was being offered as a characterisation of CA. If it's true that you don't in general need to have a direct perceptual experience of a work in order to appreciate it, then non-perceptual art doesn't look to be the minority category that Shelley takes it to be. However, the category that Shelley describes does look to be a real one, even if the way Shelley identifies it needs to be reformulated so that it captures that category and nothing more.

³⁶ Of course, this modification would require our being able to specify what it takes for something to be an adequate proxy of a work. There is quite a lot of discussion about how this should be done. See Livingston, P. (2003) for a discussion of the problem of specifying the conditions under which something is an adequate proxy.

appreciation necessarily involves perception and art whose appreciation does not. On the view that CA is non-perceptual art, then, there is no necessary role for perception in the appreciation of conceptual art. One can appreciate CA without having any particular perceptual experience. And this is in contrast with other art, whose appreciation does necessarily involve a certain kind of perceptual experience (even though there might be some work to be done on articulating exactly what kind of perceptual experience is required in each case).

Section 4. Does Conceptual Art Need to be Perceived After All?

Rather than arguing that the irrelevance of perception is not *sufficient* for being conceptual art, as in the objection above, some philosophers have argued that it is not *necessary* - that some works of CA do need to be perceived to be appreciated after all. Here I will consider five arguments for this. Since the conclusion of these arguments is just that *some* works of CA do need to be perceived, not that *all* of them do, all the arguments here take the form of identifying a counterexample; each discusses a particular conceptual work and tries to show that *it* needs to be perceived to be appreciated, in order to refute the conclusion that CA is art that doesn't need to be perceived.

In what follows I will discuss some new arguments and some that we have seen before. The most sustained philosophical attack on the position that CA doesn't need

to be perceived is surely in Savedoff's 1989 paper 'The Art Object'. So most of the arguments we will discuss here come from that paper. I will begin by discussing two arguments that I take to straightforwardly fail. Later in this section I will revisit two arguments which we discussed in Chapter 3. We noted that all the philosophers whose arguments we discussed there against the view that perceptual properties are irrelevant in CA, are in fact to some extent ambiguous about whether they are arguing against that view, or against the view that conceptual works don't need to be perceived to be appreciated. Against the view that perceptual properties are irrelevant in CA we found arguments from Savedoff and Currie convincing. Taken as arguments against the view that CA doesn't need to be perceived, however, I will argue that they are less compelling. Discussion of both will be instructive here, however, as it will suggest a form of argument which would establish the conclusion that perception can sometimes be necessary in CA. Finally I will discuss a new argument, also from Savedoff, that I will argue does look to take this form, and which is more convincing.

The first argument I will discuss appears in Savedoff's 'The Art Object'. Savedoff argues that we are never in a position to be sure that a given description captures all of the meaning of the work. 'We can be sure of this only if we can be sure that we know everything there is to know about the meaning of the work, that is, only if we discount the possibility of discovering new meanings.'³⁷ This suggests that the only way we can know if a description is accurate and complete, is by seeing the work for ourselves. Thus there's no getting around the requirement of perceiving the work.

³⁷ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

However, this argument is flawed. Suppose Savedoff is right that we can't know if a description is accurate unless we see the work for ourselves. That doesn't establish that direct perception of conceptual works is necessary for their appreciation. All it shows is that we can't be sure *that* we've had a proper appreciation of the work unless we perceive it; it *doesn't* show that we can't *have* such an experience without perceiving it. This argument is guilty of a confusion akin to what is known as the kk fallacy in epistemology - a barrier to knowing that you know that P isn't necessarily a barrier to knowing that P. You can know that P without knowing that you know that P; and similarly you can have a proper appreciation of an artwork without knowing that you have done so.

Thus Savedoff's first argument fails to establish that perception is necessary to the appreciation of works of conceptual art. At most, it shows that perception is necessary to *knowing that you have had* a proper appreciation of the work.

In another attempt to establish that some works of CA need to be perceived, Savedoff argues that it matters - at least in some cases - that the work has actually been made.

L. H. O. O. Q., the plan, would not have the same meaning that *L. H. O. O. Q.*, embodied, does. Suppose Duchamp had just written and submitted for our contemplation the direction: 'Draw a moustache and goatee on a postcard of the Mona Lisa and entitle it " *L. H. O. O. Q.* " ' It is unlikely that the plan would have the same impact or ultimate meaning as the executed idea. The plan lacks the significance we find in the actual presentation of such an object as a work of art.³⁸

This may well be true. However, it does not support the view that one needs to perceive the work to appreciate it. What it says is that the work needs to exist; or

³⁸ Savedoff, B. (1989), pp. 165-6.

perhaps even that the work needs to exist in the particular perceptual form in which it does in fact exist - that the work needs to be *executed*. But that is not the same as saying that the appreciation of it necessarily involves perception of it. One can agree with Savedoff that it is essential to the identity of works of CA that they exist in the particular material form in which they do exist, and still hold that CA is art that does not need to be perceived to be appreciated.

The two arguments we've just discussed, then, fail to establish that perception is ever necessary for the appreciation of conceptual works. I will now look again at Savedoff's and Currie's arguments that we discussed in the previous chapter.

In Chapter 3 we found the following argument from Barbara Savedoff to be successful in demonstrating that perceptual properties are relevant to the appreciation of CA.

Seeing the work is also important if we are to understand its tone. The moustache and goatee of *L.H.O.O.Q.* are very careful, neat and relatively unobtrusive. Would the work be unchanged had the moustache and goatee been crudely dashed off with a thick black crayon? Could not subtle changes in meaning result? The look of the moustache might determine whether we perceive the work as comic or mocking, affectionate or contemptuous, mischievous or defiant, or some combination of these. The tone of the work is best known through viewing the object itself and the manner in which the moustache and goatee are drawn.³⁹

As an argument for the necessity of perceiving the work, however, it is less clearly convincing.

Savedoff claims that certain features of the way the work looks can affect its meaning. We agreed with this claim in Chapter 3, and took it to straightforwardly

³⁹ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

entail the conclusion of interest to us there, that perceptual properties can be relevant to the appreciation of conceptual works. Does it also establish the conclusion of interest to us *here*, that these works need to be perceived? I think the answer here is 'no', or at least 'not obviously', depending on how the argument is interpreted. As we argued in Section 1, identifying perceptual properties that are relevant to appreciation is not enough to show that the work needs to be perceived, since it would have to be shown, in addition, that the perceptual properties in question were of the type that need to be perceived. If Savedoff's point is that the fact that the moustache and goatee are 'careful, neat and relatively unobtrusive' is instrumental in determining the work's meaning, then this provides no reason to think that the work needs to be perceived. One way of finding out that the moustache and goatee are drawn this way, of course, is to see it for yourself. But that's not the only way of discovering that. You could find this out by being told that they are. And so this argument does not look to be successful in establishing that the work needs to be perceived. All Savedoff has done is identify a fact about the work that is relevant to its appreciation, but as this appears to be a fact that one can come to know without ever perceiving the work, it fails to show anything about the necessity of perception.

However, it seems that the reader has the option to attribute a more subtle point to Savedoff here. If the thought is that the work's meaning depends not merely on the fact that the moustache and goatee are 'careful, neat and unobtrusive', but rather on *the precise way* in which the moustache and goatree are 'careful, neat and unobtrusive', a better case could be made for the necessity of perceiving the work. In other words, if not just *any* careful, neat and unobtrusive moustache and goatee ensemble would do, but rather, only *that* particular one - then it begins to look more like these features that affect the work's meaning are in fact features that one cannot

come to know that something has on the basis of anything other than perceiving the thing oneself. On this reading of Savedoff's argument, the description 'careful, neat and unobtrusive' should not be read as capturing definitively the exact features that matter, but should be understood, rather, as imperfect shorthand for something much more specific - a *particular way* in which it is careful, neat and unobtrusive.

To put it in the terms of our earlier discussion in Section 1, if the properties on which the meaning depends are like Boris Becker's red hair, then this won't entail a need to perceive the work; if they are like Boris Becker's exact appearance, then they do.

If there are conceptual works whose *exact appearance* is instrumental in conveying their meanings, such works would be conceptual works that need to be perceived to be appreciated.

It is worth looking in detail at *why* this is a possibility on the Subtle Priority Account for which we have argued. The account for which we have argued allows perceptual properties the following role in appreciation of CA: since some conceptual works convey their meanings by means of their perceptual properties, taking account of the perceptual properties of a conceptual work, firstly, enables one to see *what* the work's meaning is, and secondly puts one in a position to appreciate how well or badly the work conveys its meaning.

Although this definition does not by itself entail that conceptual works need to be perceived, it leaves room for two possibilities for how perception could be necessary to appreciate a conceptual work. If the perceptual properties of a conceptual work serve to convey its meaning, and if at least some of these perceptual properties are

of the kind that need to be perceived to be identified, then there are two ways in which perception could be necessary:

Firstly, in order to identify the work's meaning. If the exact message that is conveyed is only conveyable by that exact appearance - i.e. the description couldn't capture the meaning any more than it could capture the appearance - in both cases we're resorting to imperfect approximate descriptions. If this is the case then one needs to perceive the work if one is to even get a handle on its meaning.

Secondly, in order to be in a position to say how apt these perceptual properties are to the work's meaning. If the way the message is conveyed is important - to appreciate the work one must be in a position to appreciate the aptness of the work's perceptual properties to its meaning. This circumvents the objection that you don't need to perceive the work because even if the work conveys the meaning via the perceptual properties, you don't need to perceive the work once you've grasped the meaning.

In the first kind of case, one would need to perceive the work in order to access its meaning, since, by hypothesis, this meaning is not conveyable by a description. In the second kind of case, one would need to perceive the work in order to be able to see how apt or otherwise the perceptual aspect of the work is to its meaning.

But, to summarise, so far all we have done is highlight a possibility that our account of CA leaves open: we haven't done more than merely identify the conditions under which a conceptual work (as defined by the Subtle Priority Account we argued for)

would need to be perceived to be appreciated. We haven't said anything about whether any conceptual works in fact satisfy those conditions.

We highlighted a particular reading of Savedoff's argument according to which she is claiming that the exact way in which the moustache and goatee are drawn in *L. H. O. O. Q.* affect its meaning. But how plausible is this claim?

Whilst it might seem intuitively right that it matters that the moustache is careful, neat, etc., the stronger claim that the *particular manner in which* it is careful, neat, etc. is what's doing the work, is one that requires further argument.

I think a similar analysis can be given of Currie's argument that we looked at in Chapter 3. The argument was that some conceptual works use their appearance to make a point about the unimportance of appearance. The example we took to be most convincing as an illustration of this was visually uninteresting conceptual works which thereby make a point about how unimportant their appearance is. Again, if it is the uninterestingness *per se* that is doing the work, such works would not be examples of conceptual works that need to be perceived. But if, on the other hand, it is the *particular mode of* uninterestingness, in each case, that is doing the work, this looks more promising. However, one should ask at this point how plausible it is as a premise, that some conceptual works communicate the unimportance of their appearance not via certain describable features of their appearance like being uninteresting, but rather via their exact appearance. This seems, at the very least, to be something requiring argument.

Whether conceptual works ever need to be perceived to be appreciated, then, depends on whether their exact appearance is ever what does the work, meaning-

wise. We have not yet seen a strong argument that this does ever happen. In Savedoff's and Currie's arguments it looks much more plausible - at least on the face of it - that describable properties of their appearance are what does the work. We will now discuss an argument along similar lines that looks a bit more promising.

Savedoff claims, still in relation to *L. H. O. O. Q.*, that 'there are aspects of the work which could not be captured by a description, no matter how complete'. If this is true, and if such aspects are relevant to the appreciation of the work, then it will follow that perception is, after all, necessary for the appreciation of *L. H. O. O. Q.*, and thus that the unimportance of perception does not characterise *all* CA. But what are these aspects? Savedoff identifies two examples in relation to *L. H. O. O. Q.*: firstly she says that, 'without seeing the work, we don't see its possible reference to transsexuality';⁴⁰ and secondly, 'without seeing the work, we don't see the way in which the disrespectful title changes the meaning of Mona Lisa's enigmatic expression. The re-interpretation of the smile as sexually suggestive requires seeing the work.'⁴¹

At first glance these might look unconvincing. Why not just include these aspects of the work in the description? If a description of the work includes the fact that it is 'a possible reference to transsexuality', and that the 'disrespectful title changes the meaning of Mona Lisa's enigmatic expression', then in what sense does apprehension of these features of the work require seeing the work?

⁴⁰ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

⁴¹ Savedoff, B. (1989), p. 165.

However, it is possible here to attribute a more subtle point to Savedoff. If the features of *L. H. O. O. Q.* we were required to be aware of here were just *that* it is ‘a possible reference to transsexuality’, and *that* the ‘disrespectful title changes the meaning of Mona Lisa’s enigmatic expression’, then neither of these constitute any reason for requiring that the work be perceived. We can find out *that* *L. H. O. O. Q.* has these features from a description. But if instead the point is that we need to be aware of *how* the work does these things, not just *that* it does them, the argument starts to look more persuasive.

If part of what we must appreciate in order to count as fully appreciating *L. H. O. O. Q.* is the exact *way* in which it suggests transsexuality, and the exact *way* in which the smile becomes sexually suggestive, rather than just noting *that* it does these things, then it would seem that perceiving the work in this case is necessary after all.

Section 5. Summary

To conclude, then, I think there is *some* reason to be open to the idea that *some* conceptual works need to be perceived to be appreciated as art. If this is right then this is enough to refute the general claim that CA can be appreciated without being perceived. All of this is compatible with the conclusion we drew at the end of Chapter 3, that CA is art whose perceptual properties play at most an indirect role in its appreciation. Equally, if it turns out that conceptual works *don’t* need to be perceived, this is also compatible with the view for which we’ve argued.

The purpose of the last four sections has been to get clear on the relationship between two similar-sounding types of claim. We have argued that claims about the irrelevance of perceptual properties in conceptual works and claims about the irrelevance of perception are in fact different kinds of claim. What makes these come apart is the existence of properties that count as perceptual, but which it is possible to find out that something has *without perceiving that thing*.

It follows from the existence of this category of property that our arguments in Chapter 3, for perceptual properties having a role in CA, do not entail the denial of the claim that CA can be appreciated without being perceived.

As for what the positive account of CA for which we have argued entails for perception, there are two important points.

Firstly, limiting the role of perceptual properties in the way we have for CA, does rule out *one* of the ways in which perception is important to appreciation. Our definition of CA rules out perceptual properties being the object of appreciation *in themselves*, which means that with CA one never needs to perceive the work to *appreciate* any of its perceptual properties.

Secondly, since our definition of CA does allow that for some works one must take account of perceptual properties, the question of whether perception is necessary for appreciation hinges on whether the perceptual properties that one must take account of are of the kind that can be accessed by perception only. If the perceptual properties that are indirectly relevant to appreciation are all of the kind that one doesn't need to perceive to find out that something has, then the relevance of these

properties does not secure any kind of role for perception. But if any of the relevant perceptual properties of a given work are of the kind that require *perception*, then the work must be perceived to be appreciated.

I've argued that in CA, whether a given work needs to be perceived to be appreciated depends not on whether any of its perceptual properties are relevant to its appreciation but rather on whether any of these perceptual properties are of the kind that can be accessed only through perception.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will discuss another kind of issue which might be thought to fall out of the definition of CA for which we have argued. To recap, we have argued for a view according to which CA is art whose perceptual properties are at most indirectly relevant to its artistic value. I now want to turn to an objection which has often been levelled at CA, and to which this particular definition of CA might be thought to be especially vulnerable. The objection is that, at least according to the definition we've advanced, CA looks to be an exception to a general rule according to which art is essentially aesthetic, and the value artworks have as art is properly understood as aesthetic value. The thought is that if perceptual properties are limited in the way described with respect to artistic value, then this appears to rule out the possibility of any of the *aesthetic* properties of a work of CA being relevant to its value as art.

But if this is correct, so the objection goes, we face the challenge of saying why CA should be counted as art at all, or at the very least why we should think of it as having any artistic value; for the aesthetic is plausibly central to art and its

appreciation. I will argue that the objection fails. To see how, we need to look more closely at it, and at the key term it employs, 'aesthetic value'.

Section 6. CA and the Aesthetic: The Objection

If our appreciation of conceptual art as art cannot take the form of a contemplation and appreciation of perceptual properties *for their own sake* (rather than merely as means to further artistic ends) then one might think appreciation of conceptual art cannot qualify as *aesthetic* appreciation, and that CA thus presents an exception to the general and widely held claim that our commerce with artworks is essentially aesthetic.

For some, this will look to be just the right result. The claim that CA is in some sense *anti-aesthetic* is widely held both by people on the art side of things and by analytic philosophers.⁴²

But it is important to be clear in what sense CA is anti-aesthetic. The definition we've advanced, if it entails a claim about CA's being anti-aesthetic at all, gives a particular flavour to that claim. If the definition we've defended makes CA anti-aesthetic, it does so not by entailing that works of CA never have aesthetic value or aesthetic

⁴² For philosophers who take this view see Carroll, N. (2000), p. 191; Slater, H. (1997), p. 229; Seamon, R. (2001), p. 139; Savedoff, B. (1993), p. 461; and Binkley, T. (1977). For material of a more art-historical, art-theoretical art-critical nature see Osborne, P. (2002), p. 16 and (2000), p. x; Buchloh, B. (2003), p. 211; Rosenberg, H. (1972), p. 29; Gaiger, J. (2004) p. 91; Stimson, B. (2000), p. xii; Meyer, U. (1972), p. xv; and Matthews, P. (2001), p. 400, n. 15. Conceptual artists who make similar claims include Joseph Kosuth (1969a) and Douglas Huebler (1982), p. 76.

properties, as some have claimed,⁴³ but rather by entailing that its aesthetic properties or aesthetic value are *irrelevant* to its value as art. This seems to chime with what various commentators on CA have in mind when they say things like that CA demonstrates that artistic value and aesthetic value come apart. Peter Osborne claims that CA ‘attempt(s) to systematically eliminate the aesthetic from artistic significance’,⁴⁴ Patricia Matthews identifies CA as an unusual case of art that ‘does not aim at aesthetic value,’⁴⁵ and the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth contended that CA shows that aesthetics is ‘conceptually irrelevant to art’.⁴⁶ The claim, in all these cases, seems to be precisely that CA is art whose aesthetic value is irrelevant to its artistic value.⁴⁷

But although many who have claimed this about CA have taken it to be one of its strengths, others have taken this to be a potentially deeply problematic feature of CA.

The argument comes in a variety of different versions but the gist of the argument in all cases is that any kind of break with the aesthetic is a break with something that is plausibly central to art, and so if CA is indeed anti-aesthetic, this is a discontinuity

⁴³ See Savedoff, B. (1993) who claims that CA ‘[abandons] aesthetic properties’, p. 461; Goldie, P. (2009) argues that ‘much conceptual art does not achieve’ ‘the function of producing in the viewer some kind of aesthetic experience, paradigmatically aesthetic pleasure’ (p. 203). Also Kieran (2005a) sees CA as a counterexample to aesthetic theories of art because ‘Conceptual art often ... is distinctly lacking in aesthetic qualities’ (p. 298). Kulka, T. (1981) identifies CA as a prime example of something which has artistic value but not aesthetic value’ (p. 342). Also Donnell-Kotrozo, C. (1980), p. 357.

⁴⁴ Osborne, P. (2000), p. x. (preface).

⁴⁵ Matthews, P. (2001) p. 400, n. 15.

⁴⁶ Kosuth, J. (1969a), p. 19.

⁴⁷ Also Binkley, T. (1977), and Kieran (1997c): ‘most conceptual art ... may almost entirely lack aesthetic value and yet clearly be considered artworks due to their expressive nature or cognitive content. In these cases even if the work does possess aesthetic value, this seems almost entirely incidental to the reasons we attend to and value them as artworks.’ (p. 386).

that at best needs to be explained and at worst disqualifies CA from counting as art at all.

Some worry about CA's status as art: Elisabeth Schellekens suggests that 'we might ... worry about the means by which art can be distinguished from non-art if an appeal to the aesthetic is no longer at our disposal',⁴⁸ while James Shelley asks 'if the appreciation of non-aesthetic art does not depend on the perception of aesthetic properties, on what does its appreciation depend?' and adds that 'if the appreciation of non-aesthetic art should turn out to be radically unlike the appreciation of aesthetic art', this would be a 'reason for asserting the discontinuity of allegedly non-aesthetic art with aesthetic art, and hence for rejecting the former's claim to the status of art.'⁴⁹ Both Schellekens and Shelley take this as reason to be sceptical about the claim that CA is anti-aesthetic. Others, though, such as Marcia Eaton, take that claim seriously and argue from it that CA thus cannot be art.⁵⁰

Others worry about CA's value as art. However, most versions of this argument proceed from the assumption that CA has little or no aesthetic value, going on to argue that, if all artistic value is aesthetic value, CA cannot therefore be good art. But, as we have seen, our definition of CA, if it entails anything about its aesthetic value, it's not about *how much* aesthetic value it has, but rather about the *relevance* of its aesthetic value to its artistic value. So on the definition of CA for which we have argued, this particular objection does not arise. However, someone who was

⁴⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 72.

⁴⁹ Shelley, J. (2003), p. 369.

⁵⁰ See Eaton, M. (2004), p. 70.

committed to the claim that all artistic value is aesthetic value might argue that our definition of CA cannot be right precisely because it entails the negation of that claim.

And some have questioned what criteria of evaluation are available if aesthetic value is not relevant in CA. T. J. Diffey, for example, argues that evaluation of conceptual works would be 'arbitrary in the strict sense that there could be no grounds upon which it could be based, and thus, as we have argued, not in place.'⁵¹

Here I will focus on the kind argument rehearsed by Shelley above, that 'if the appreciation of non-aesthetic art should turn out to be radically unlike the appreciation of aesthetic art', this would be a 'reason for asserting the discontinuity of allegedly non-aesthetic art with aesthetic art, and hence for rejecting the former's claim to the status of art.' But what I will say about this argument will also apply to other versions of it. The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

Premise 1: the appreciation of CA does not depend on the appreciation of its perceptual properties

Premise 2: the appreciation of CA does not depend on the appreciation of its aesthetic properties

Premise 3: the appreciation of art depends on the appreciation of its aesthetic properties

Conclusion: so CA is not art

⁵¹ Diffey, T. (1991), p. 203. Beardlsey, M. (1982) expresses the same worry when he says: we characteristically formulate our judgements of artworks in such terms as "this is a good poem" or "that was an awful movie." When we try to speak of conceptual artworks in such a way, we are frustrated: what is the class of things to which this particular item belongs, and of which it is so good or so poor an instance?' (p. 154). Harold Osborne and Philip Meeson also hint at this view, see Osborne, H, (1984a), p. 8, and Meeson, P. (1981), p. 22.

I want to argue that when close attention is given to how the term 'aesthetic' is used here, the validity of the argument begins to look questionable. Premise 1 is just our definition, and since the objection is an objection about what follows from this definition, we will accept premise 1 as true. The problem is with premises 2 and 3. A good deal of the plausibility of premise 2 comes from understanding 'aesthetic' in a particular way, and crucially, this doesn't appear to be the same use of 'aesthetic' that puts premise 3 in the most plausible light. When this is recognised, the argument looks a lot more controversial than it might initially seem.

The argument, I will argue, exploits the lack of consensus as to how the term 'aesthetic' should be used in order to equivocate between a use that makes premise 2 plausible, and one that makes premise 3 plausible. If the conclusion is to follow from the premises, the term 'aesthetic' must be used in the same way in each, but doing this, I will argue, renders either premise 2 or premise 3 implausible.

I will begin by looking at a few different standard ways of understanding the term 'aesthetic'.

Section 7. Ways of Understanding ‘Aesthetic’

1. Experience

One very common definition of the aesthetic understands it as the ability to afford a certain kind of experience - the experience of enjoying or valuing something for its own sake. Robert Stecker, for example, defines aesthetic experience as:

experience valued for its own sake in virtue of being directed to forms, qualities, and meaning properties of an object. The aesthetic value of an artwork is a function of its capacity to deliver such an appreciative experience.⁵²

Malcolm Budd, too, characterises aesthetic value in terms of an intrinsically rewarding experience: an object’s aesthetic value is a matter of ‘whether the object is intrinsically rewarding or displeasing to experience in itself’.⁵³ And Monroe Beardsley seems to have in mind the same kind of conception when he defines aesthetic value as ‘the capacity to provide valuable experiences of a certain sort’,⁵⁴ which he later elaborates as being characterised by ‘a sense of freedom from concern about matters outside the thing received, an intense affect that is nevertheless detached from practical ends, the exhilarating sense of exercising powers of discovery, integration of the self and its experiences.’⁵⁵

⁵² Stecker, R. (2005), p. 139. For a more detailed discussion of this notion of ‘aesthetic’ see Stecker (2010), Chapters 2 and 3.

⁵³ Budd, M. (2002), p. 14.

⁵⁴ Beardsley, M. (1962), p. 620.

⁵⁵ Beardsley (1983), p. 20.

2. Taste, Sensitivity, Discrimination

Some define aesthetic value as value inhering in properties that it takes taste, sensitivity or discrimination to discern.⁵⁶ Sibley, who developed this view, cites the following as paradigmatic examples of aesthetic properties: 'unified, balanced, integrated, lifeless, serene, somber, dynamic, powerful, vivid, delicate, moving, trite, sentimental, tragic',⁵⁷ and adds that,

The list of course is not limited to adjectives; expressions in artistic contexts like "telling contrast," "sets up a tension," "conveys a sense of," or "holds it together" are equally good illustrations.⁵⁸

3. By Example

Some, rather than just using examples of aesthetic properties to illustrate a given account of them, define 'aesthetic' by example: typically properties like beauty and elegance are listed. Nick Zangwill, for example, reasons thus:

The word 'aesthetic' is one in fairly ordinary usage. The dictionary definition firmly links the word with the concept of beauty. I think this is right. Beauty and ugliness are the pre-eminent aesthetic concepts, not merely two among many with no privileged position.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See Sibley, F. (1959).

⁵⁷ Sibley, F. (1959), p. 421.

⁵⁸ Sibley, F. (1959), pp. 421-422.

⁵⁹ Zangwill, N. (1998), p. 75.

Zangwill himself argues that the aesthetic *is* essentially perceptual, but this is not a straightforward consequence of defining 'aesthetic' in terms of beauty; it's something he argues for. We will discuss his argument in later in this section.

Now, with these three broad uses of 'aesthetic value' it doesn't seem obviously to be the case that there is any in principle barrier to something's having aesthetic value in virtue of properties other than perceptual ones. First, if aesthetic value is the capacity to afford experiences that are valuable for their own sake, it is certainly not obvious that such value can only inhere in something's perceptual properties. Moreover, one proponent of this view, Stecker, explicitly states that the 'meaning properties' of an object can be a locus of its aesthetic value. Second, if aesthetic value is value inhering in properties that it takes sensitivity, taste or discrimination to discern, as Sibley suggests, again, it is not clear that this would make aesthetic value something that is essentially perceptual. After all, even Sibley himself lists 'moving', 'powerful', 'trite', and 'sentimental', as well as "telling contrast," 'sets up a tension,' 'conveys a sense of', or 'holds it together' as examples of aesthetic value, and these certainly don't look to be necessarily perceptual.

Some commentators,⁶⁰ however, have interpreted Sibley as treating the aesthetic as essentially perceptual, on the basis of assertions like the following:

It is of importance to note first that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to see the grace or unity of a work, hear the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, notice the gaudiness of a color scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone. They may be struck by these qualities at once, or they may come to perceive them only after repeated viewings, hearings, or readings, and with the help of critics. But unless they do perceive them for themselves, aesthetic enjoyment, appreciation, and judgment are beyond them. Merely

⁶⁰ See Binkley, T. (1977), p. 268.

to learn from others, on good authority, that the music is serene, the play moving, or the picture unbalanced is of little aesthetic value; the crucial thing is to see, hear, or feel. To suppose indeed that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception, say, by following rules of some kind, is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment.⁶¹

But I think this is misleading in an important sense. As James Shelley argues, Sibley is using 'perception' in a broad sense, where it just means that one needs to directly experience the work for oneself - i.e. he is stating a version of the Acquaintance Principle. Perception here is opposed to inference.⁶²

Thirdly, even if aesthetic value is equated with beauty, it's not obviously true that things can only have it by virtue of their perceptual properties. The idea that beauty, elegance, and other paradigmatic aesthetic properties can be attributed to things that have no perceptual properties whatsoever, such as mathematical proofs, theories, and arguments, is a widely held view with a long history.

Aristotle argued that

Those who assert that the mathematical sciences say nothing of the beautiful are in error. The chief forms of beauty are order, commensurability and precision.⁶³

Hutcheson's *Inquiry* contains a section entitled 'the beauty of theorems' in which he discusses, for example, the propositions of Euclid's geometry as beautiful.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Sibley, F. (1965), p. 137.

⁶² Shelley, J. (2003), pp. 371-373.

⁶³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XIII, 3 107b.

⁶⁴ Hutcheson, F. (1973), § III.

More recently Harold Osborne identifies the following aesthetic properties as rightly ascribable to mathematical formulae:

harmonious coherence among ideas, conceptual lucidity, elegance, clarity, economy or sparseness, significance, depth, simplicity, comprehensiveness or reach, and insight.⁶⁵

And Peter Kivy argues that

The criteria that scientists customarily cite in support of their apparent aesthetic judgments are certainly the kind that we tend to cite in another, and uncontroversial, cases of the aesthetic: symmetry, simplicity, order, unity, coherence, elegance, harmony, to name the most representative. Those are just the criteria one might cite in praise of a concerto by Mozart, a poem by Pope, or a painting by Raphael. And I take it as received analytic opinion that if we cite aesthetic criteria in support of a judgment, we hardly need any more proof that the judgment is an aesthetic one.⁶⁶

and, further, takes ‘the quest for theoretical beauty’ to be one of the main motives ‘driv[ing] the institution of science when it is functioning as it ideally should’.⁶⁷

Thus if the aesthetic value of *perceptual properties* of conceptual works is precluded from counting towards its artistic value, this doesn’t seem - on any of the above construals of aesthetic - to obviously rule out their having aesthetic value that does so contribute, since conceptual works may have aesthetic value by virtue of properties besides its perceptual ones. And not only does none of these understandings of ‘aesthetic’ obviously rule out CA, but further, a good positive case can be made, for each of these construals of ‘aesthetic’, for conceptual works having aesthetic value relevant to their artistic value.

⁶⁵ Osborne, H. (1984b), p. 293.

⁶⁶ Kivy, P. (1991), p. 185.

⁶⁷ Kivy, P. (1991), p. 188.

Understood in terms of intrinsically rewarding experience, it's not clear that aesthetic value cannot be a component of (or even exhaust) the artistic value of conceptual works.

Some people might argue that there is something peculiarly non-experiential about conceptual works. I think this is linked to the thought that conceptual works don't need to be perceived to be appreciated. We saw earlier in this chapter some reasons to doubt that this is true; but even if it turns out that conceptual works don't need to be perceived, it doesn't follow from that that they don't need to be *experienced*. And hence it doesn't follow that their value couldn't be a matter of their capacity to afford a certain kind of experience (albeit a non-perceptual one).

So if conceptual works just differ from other art in terms of their perceptual properties being limited in their contribution to overall artistic value, then it's not clear how this would preclude such works affording intrinsically rewarding experiences or, crucially, this capacity contributing to or even constituting their value as art.

Similarly, if 'aesthetic' is defined by example, in terms of beauty, or other standard examples of aesthetic properties, then insofar as conceptual works can be beautiful by virtue of non-perceptual properties such as meaning, then the aesthetic is relevant to artistic value even in CA. Elisabeth Schellekens, for example, argues that properties like beauty, elegance, and gracefulness can be central to the appreciation of conceptual works:

We speak of the elegance of a mathematical demonstration, the beauty of a chess move, and the ungainliness of a failed experiment. Similarly we hear of the beautiful simplicity of a good explanation or solution, and the dynamism of a team effort. Again we speak of the

gracefulness or insipidness of a personality trait. There seems, then, to be no difficulty *per se* in the suggestion that ideas and intellectual processes can allow for aesthetic qualities.⁶⁸

And if 'aesthetic' is understood in Sibley's sense, there is no reason why conceptual works can't have aesthetic value in this sense relevant to their artistic value. Just as it takes taste, sensitivity and discrimination to discern that the particular combination of colours in a given painting is delicate, so it takes taste, sensitivity and discrimination to discern that *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is bold, *Fountain* witty, and Adrian Piper's *Phillip Zohn Catalysis* poignant and moving.

As James Shelley argues, Sibley's is a notion of the aesthetic 'according to which daring, impudence, and wit are no less aesthetic than are grace, elegance and beauty', and 'according to which *Fountain*, *L. H O. O. Q.*, and *Erased De Kooning Drawing* are no less aesthetic than are the Trevi Fountain, the *Mona Lisa*, and the De Kooning drawing that Rauschenberg erased.'⁶⁹

Perhaps there is a sense of 'aesthetic value' in which it by definition is tied to the perceptual properties of a thing. This sense is often attributed to those who deny on aesthetic grounds that CA is art (Noel Carroll attributes it to Marcia Eaton and Monroe Beardsley, for example).⁷⁰ And it is often claimed that this use inherits a certain amount of legitimacy from the Ancient Greek use of the term 'aesthetic', as relating to sense-perception, and from Baumgarten's use of it as pertaining to objects of sense-perception as opposed to objects of thought.

⁶⁸ Schellekens, E. (2007), p. 85.

⁶⁹ Shelley, J. (2003), p. 373.

⁷⁰ See Carroll, N. (2004), p. 414, n. 2, and Davies, S. (1991), pp. 56-57.

Eaton certainly looks to be understanding 'aesthetic' in a sense that cannot but be essentially perceptual. She states that 'when individuals have aesthetic experiences, a necessary element of the experience is that attention is paid to intrinsic properties of objects and events - properties that can be perceived directly.' But she doesn't do much more than state it. Are we to take this as a stipulative definition of 'aesthetic', or is it supposed to follow from some other conception of 'aesthetic' that we're supposed to already have assumed? It's not clear, as Eaton doesn't say much besides this about what she takes the term 'aesthetic' to mean.

In Beardsley's case, however, I'm not all that sure whether these attributions of this use of 'aesthetic value' as essentially perceptual are warranted. It seems to me that on closer inspection the way in which he has defined 'aesthetic' carries no such restriction.

Although Beardsley expresses scepticism about CA's being aesthetic, his doubts about it do not appear to straightforwardly fall out of his conception of the aesthetic. Beardsley, to recap, defined aesthetic value as the capacity to afford a valuable aesthetic experience. His definition in full, of aesthetic experience is:

Reception comprises a variety of activities engaged in, in the presence of - or perhaps in response to reproductions or reports or memories of - sculpture, oral performances of literature, films, operas, etc. We view, listen to, contemplate, apprehend, watch, read, think about, peruse, and so forth. Sometimes in this receptive interaction we find that our experience (including all that we are aware of: perceptions, feelings, emotions, impulses, desires, beliefs, thoughts) is lifted in a certain way that is hard to describe and especially to summarize: it takes on a sense of freedom from concern about matters outside the thing received, an intense affect that is nevertheless detached from practical ends, the exhilarating sense of exercising powers of discovery, integration of the self and its experiences. When experience has some or all of these properties, I say it has an *aesthetic character*, or is, for short, an aesthetic experience.⁷¹

⁷¹ Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 20.

One problem is that this definition of aesthetic is so vague, that it's really not clear what satisfies it and what doesn't. But it doesn't look to be restricted to the perceptual; on the contrary - if 'thinking about' or 'contemplating' a work can count as an experience of it, and potentially an *aesthetic* experience of it (a possibility that Beardsley's definition explicitly leaves room for), then it seems one can have an aesthetic experience of a work by virtue of properties other than perceptual properties.

Beardsley, however, seems to proceed as though there is something essentially perceptual about the aesthetic, so defined. Firstly, he identifies 'composition, color harmony, subtle variations in light and texture'⁷² as clear examples of aesthetic properties (properties that will make something 'capable of satisfying an aesthetic interest'),⁷³ but his characterisation of the aesthetic does not in any way tie it to perceptual properties.

Secondly, he claims that various conceptual works do not satisfy his requirement. He explicitly says of *Fountain* and of Readymades in general, that to think of them as aesthetically valuable is to flout both common sense and 'philosophical acumen'. Further he hints that he has strong doubts about conceptual works such as Robert Barry's *Closed Gallery Piece* being capable of satisfying aesthetic experience.⁷⁴ But looking at the definition he offers of aesthetic experience, there's no reason to think it would be particularly hostile to these works.

⁷² Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 23.

⁷³ Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 23.

⁷⁴ Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 22.

But regardless of whether Beardsley's conception of the aesthetic restricts it to the perceptual, the important point here is that unless there is something essentially perceptual about the aesthetic, premise 2 is not obviously true.

If this is right, then premise 2 is not true on these uses of 'aesthetic', since CA can plausibly be appreciated as art for properties such as wit, ingenuity, originality and insight. And so if these are aesthetic properties, as the usages above would indicate, then it seems that the appreciation of CA does plausibly depend on the appreciation of aesthetic properties.

Of course, it would be open for someone who used 'aesthetic' in one of these ways to argue that in fact it does only apply to something in virtue of its perceptual properties. So for example, someone could argue that beauty only applies to things by virtue of their perceptual appearance, and that any ascriptions of beauty to non-perceptual things such as arguments and proofs must be either metaphorical or mistaken.

Nick Zangwill, for example, who as we have seen defines 'aesthetic' by example, argues:

It is true that we sometimes call a theory or proof 'elegant' or 'beautiful', but such a description might be metaphorical, like calling a company take-over 'elegant', a hand of cards 'beautiful', or a mood 'ugly'. The use of these terms is defeasible evidence for the aesthetic nature of a judgement. But that evidence is not decisive since their use is sometimes metaphorical. Company take-overs, hands of cards, proofs, theories, and chess moves may all be things to admire or even marvel at. But that does not mean that we are admiring or marvelling at their aesthetic properties.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Zangwill, N. (1998), p. 78.

But if such an argument were to succeed, it would result in a conception of the aesthetic for which is essentially tied to the perceptual, even if not by definition. So we can conclude that if Premise 2 is to have any prima facie plausibility, 'aesthetic' must be understood as essentially tied to the perceptual.

But this causes problems for the argument as a whole. For if the conclusion is to follow from the premises, 'aesthetic' must be being used in the same way throughout. And crucially, if 'aesthetic' is used in premise 3 as being tied to the perceptual, premise 3 looks far less plausible than it might have looked at first blush.

Premise 3, to recap, was:

the appreciation of art depends on the appreciation of its aesthetic properties

If we are understanding 'aesthetic' as essentially perceptual, in the way that would guarantee the truth of premise 2, this amounts to the rather controversial claim that the appreciation of perceptual properties always plays a direct role in artistic appreciation.

Now, of course, there is a very widespread use of the term 'aesthetic' on which premise 3 is trivially true. Philosophers very often use the term 'aesthetic value' as synonymous with 'artistic value', and similarly, 'aesthetic properties' as meaning art-relevant properties.

Thus it is common to frame the debate about the interaction of ethical and artistic values in art in terms of the question 'does the moral value of an artwork bear on its aesthetic value?' The question here is not whether a work of art is made more or less

beautiful visually, for example, by its moral properties. The participants of the debate are clear that the question with which they are concerned is that of whether a work's moral properties can make it better or worse *as art*.

Similarly in the discussion of whether something's being a forgery is relevant to its value as art, is very often couched in terms of the bearing of forgery on aesthetic value. Again, all parties to the debate acknowledge that something's being a forgery does not affect the way the work objectively looks, and cannot, therefore, affect its visual beauty, even if knowledge of a work's being a forgery might affect our ability to enjoy this beauty.

Rather, the forgery question is (largely taken to be) of interest precisely because it raises the question of whether there is more to the value of a work than what one could in principle take from attending to its perceivable features. The question, then, is simply whether a work's being a forgery makes it less good as art.

On this use of 'aesthetic', which is extremely widespread, it should come as no surprise that premise 3 would come out as true. But what's crucial to note here is that this is not the same use of 'aesthetic' that puts premise 2 in the most plausible light. When 'aesthetic' is understood as 'art-relevant' it plausibly covers a whole range of properties of artworks that are not tied to their perceptual features - originality well-constructed plot (in narrative works), wit, ingenuity, insight, to name a few.

And to hold that 'aesthetic' is both essentially perceptual in the way required for premise 2 to look true *and* essential to artistic value in the way asserted by premise 3, is to hold a very particular, and quite radical, view on the nature of artistic value -

that the appreciation of art is always essentially a matter of appreciation of its perceptual properties. And this flies in the face of a great deal of our commerce with art.

My line, then, is that the burden of proof is on those who use this argument, to show that there is a sense of 'aesthetic' which is both essential to art in the way required *and* essentially perceptual. This is a significant thesis. It amounts to saying that art is essentially such that its value inheres in its perceptual properties. There is much *prima facie* reason to be suspicious of such a claim, since there are many plausibly central artistic values that do not essentially involve perceptual features of works.

I do not want to argue here for one particular construal of 'aesthetic' over another. I am happy to accept that there is a sense in which it is true that CA is not aesthetic, and there is a sense in which it is true that the value of art is essentially aesthetic. My claim is that it is a significant, and far from obviously true, claim that these two senses are the same - since this amounts to the claim that the value of art is essentially perceptual. Thus the argument that appeared to pose a significant threat to CA in fact only gets off the ground if this rather controversial claim is true.

Some people have defended CA against this argument in a different way. James Shelley sets out the options available to someone who wants to do this as: (1) deny that the aesthetic is essentially perceptual, or (2) deny that art is essentially aesthetic, and he himself chooses option (1).⁷⁶ Peter Lamarque, also defending CA against this kind of art, denies both.⁷⁷ But I have argued that you don't need to

⁷⁶ Shelley, J. (2003).

⁷⁷ Lamarque (2007), p. 9.

commit to denying either, all that's needed is to note that you can't hold both views on the aesthetic without thereby taking on the very significant burden of proof of showing that the appreciation of art always essentially involves its perceptual properties.

Section 8. Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to disentangle the claim for which we have argued - that CA is art whose perceptual properties are at most indirectly relevant to its value as art - from two other claims.

In Sections 1-5 we argued that the question of whether CA can be appreciated without being perceived is not settled by the account of CA we have proposed. We then investigated some arguments for the necessity of perception for appreciation in some cases of CA, and found one to be promising.

In Sections 6-7 we discussed a particular kind of argument that is sometimes made against CA, that it represents a break with the aesthetic, and that that makes it difficult to explain how it can be art at all. We argued this objection rests on an equivocation between two uses of 'aesthetic', so that insofar as it is plausible to say that CA breaks with the aesthetic, we lose any license to say that a break from the aesthetic is problematic for art-status; while insofar as the aesthetic can be said to be central to art, it becomes implausible to treat CA as non-aesthetic in a way that would cause problems for its art-status.

Chapter 5. Priority Accounts and the Conception-Execution Distinction

Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at Priority Accounts that define CA in terms of its emphasis of meaning and its de-emphasis of its perceptual aspects. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the challenges posed here to this approach by an alternative kind of Priority Account, which takes the fundamental distinction to be that between conception and execution.

When it comes to the use of this distinction as the basis for a Priority Account of CA, the only detailed articulation of this kind of view in philosophical writing comes from Robert Hopkins, who also explicitly argues that this kind of Priority Account is preferable to the perceptual vs. meaning version. Hopkins's challenge

to that account, then, is twofold, comprising an objection to it, and the formulation of two ways of developing the alternative, conception-execution strategy. I will argue here that the perceptual vs. meaning view survives both challenges. I will argue, that is, that Hopkins's use of the conception-execution distinction does not result in a satisfactory account of CA, *and* that his arguments against defining CA in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual are not successful.

In Sections 1 and 2 I discuss Hopkins's objection to the standard characterisation of CA in terms of the perceptual. I argue that the objection fails. In Sections 3 and 4 I discuss the two alternative accounts of CA Hopkins proposes, both of which use the conception-execution distinction, and identify some problems for each.

The conception-execution distinction, as we saw in Chapter 1, has a long history of being used in philosophical aesthetics. It tends to be understood as the distinction between the artist's plan or guiding intention for the work versus the carrying out of that plan. But it is also very commonly used by philosophers to distinguish between different aspects of the work to which skill or value can be attributed. In a discussion of the high artistic value of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Alfred Lessing talks of 'the scope, profundity, daring, and novelty of the conception', and praises 'the excellence of its execution',¹ and Jack Glickman talks in the abstract of 'skill in execution' which he takes to include things like 'ability or cleverness of the hand' and 'ingenuity, wit, and insight of conception' as two distinct dimensions of artistic value.²

¹ Lessing, A. (1965), p. 465.

² Glickman, J. (1987), p. 183.

And the use of this distinction in some form to say what is distinctive about CA is also quite common. The view certainly has a basis in the claims made in the non-philosophical literature on the topic, most famously, perhaps, the artist Sol LeWitt's claim that 'in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work [and] the execution is a perfunctory affair'.³ Joanna Drucker's claim that 'conceptual art shifted the foundation of the value of an art object from *production to conception*'⁴ is also an example.

Hopkins motivates his move to the conception-execution distinction by identifying what he takes to be a significant and insurmountable problem for accounts that characterise CA in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual.

While Hopkins's attack seems to be focussed - as we will see - on a very specific position, I think it is right to take him to be articulating a broader scepticism about the possibility of defining CA in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual *in general*. I will argue that his objection fails not only against the specific view he identifies as his target, but also against the general strategy of which that view is an example.

Broadly, the general thrust of the objection is that the art of literature is going to be a problematic case for attempts to define CA in terms of its being less

³ LeWitt, S. (1967), p. 12. See also Borden, L. (1972) 'The category "Conceptual art" is an imprecise term for the multitude of works which claim to elevate concept over material realization.', Stewart (2011), who states that CA 'subordinates execution to conception' (p. 73), Mooney, K. (2005), p. 2, characterises CA as 'de-emphasizing the manner of execution' and Alberro, A. (2003), p. 40, claims that in CA the execution of the work is 'devalued'.

⁴ Drucker (2004), p. 251.

perceptual than other art. This is because literature too turns out to be equally non-perceptual, and so defining CA in terms of this feature of it will always result in conditions that - even if necessary - fail to be sufficient for CA. If this general worry is right it will potentially affect the view for which we have argued in the preceding chapters, as well as the one which Hopkins explicitly identifies as his target.

I will argue, however, that the guiding intuition about the non-perceptuality of literature, is false. Literature, I will argue, is *more* perceptual than CA, not less. And thus that taking non-perceptuality to be distinctive of CA isn't problematic in the way described.

To begin we will identify the view that Hopkins takes as his target, and look closely at his argument against it. I will then try to show that this argument rests on a false assumption, and that this undermines not only that particular argument, but all arguments of that type, against accounts that define CA in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual.

A note on terminology: to reiterate, for the purposes of the present argument I take 'perceptual' and 'sensory' to be equivalent, and 'sense experience' and 'perception' to be equivalent.

Section 1. The view Hopkins is opposing

Hopkins's target is the view that in CA (unlike other art) sense experience is, what he calls a mere 'means of access' and not a 'medium of appreciation'. What determines whether a type of experience is a medium of appreciation for a given work? Hopkins takes the deciding factor to be *permeability*.

Permeability:

Where sense experience is the medium of our appreciation, that experience is altered by our awareness of the feature we experience. When, for example, I appreciate the muscularity of Caravaggio's style, my awareness of that feature is part of what constitutes my experience of the work: had I not been aware of it my experience would have had a different phenomenology. In contrast, when sense experience merely provides a means of access to the work's nature, that nature, via my awareness of it, does not permeate the experience itself.⁵

The following elaboration in another paper is also helpful:

A feature figures in experience of an object if the thought that the object has that feature leads one to experience the object in a way phenomenologically distinct from the experience one would otherwise have had.⁶

It's not entirely clear how strict a criterion Hopkins has in mind here. Which features of a work need to figure in sense experience if sense experience is to be a medium of appreciation for that work? To say that all do seems obviously too strong, since all works have features that don't permeate experience. But to require merely that some of the work's features figure in sense experience seems too weak, and it would be odd to say that a sense experience is a medium of appreciation for a given work on the basis that some features of it that are not in

⁵ Hopkins, R. (2007), pp. 55-56.

⁶ Hopkins, R. (2005), p. 127.

any way relevant to its appreciation figure in sense experience. I will interpret the permeability criterion as being that *some* of the work's *art-relevant* features are such that awareness of them affects the phenomenology of one's sense-experience.⁷

On this reading, a work is such that sense-experience is a medium of appreciation, if the work has some art-relevant features such that awareness of those features affects the character of one's experience of the work. And sense-experience is a means of access for a given work if that work has *no* art-relevant features such that awareness of those features affects the character of one's experience of the work.

This, Hopkins thinks, will be true of most art. And perhaps the intuition is something like the following: for most artworks, there will be certain features such that, if someone points out a feature of a work that you hadn't noticed before, then you want to go and look at the work again, because you think that looking at it with this in mind will make you experience it differently from before. Finding out about this other feature of a work isn't yet the whole story - finding out about that feature makes possible a different experience of the work.

If sense experience is just a means of access to the work, on the other hand, new sensory experiences of the work on the basis of new information about it are not possible.

⁷ Where by 'art-relevant' I mean features that are directly relevant to artistic value. This way the criterion looks to have a plausible chance of ruling out CA.

Does this entail anything about the necessity of perceiving works? Does the means-medium distinction correspond to the distinction between works that need to be perceived to be appreciated and works that do not? No. All the permeability criterion states is that some of the art-relevant features of the work are such that awareness of them changes the phenomenology of one's experience. It doesn't say that any of the work's art-relevant features need to be perceived - it just says that *if* the work is perceived with an awareness of these features, one's sense-experience of the work will be different from how it would have been *without* an awareness of these features.

Sense experience's being merely a means of access doesn't entail that the work doesn't need to be perceived. Perception might, for some of the work's features, be the only possible means of access, and if this is the case, then, as long as none of the work's art-relevant features permeate experience in the way specified above, perception counts as a mere means of access to the work despite the fact that perception is necessary for the appreciation of that work.

The distinction between works for which perception is a means of access and those for which it is a medium of appreciation distinction, then, does not correspond to the distinction between works that need to be perceived to be appreciated and those that do not.

Hopkins's Objection

Hopkins identifies what he takes to be a 'serious difficulty' with the claim that CA is distinctive in that sense-experience is merely a means of access; arguing that this 'is just as much a feature of at least one of the traditional arts - literature'.⁸

Hopkins's claim, then, is not that it is inaccurate to characterise CA as art for which sense experience is a means rather than a medium. In fact, he seems to be in agreement with the claim that CA is art for which sense experience is only ever a means of access.⁹ Hopkins's point, rather, is that this fails to hit upon what is *distinctive* about CA, since it is also true of literature.

He takes this to be sufficient motivation for a 'radical rethink'¹⁰ involving giving up on the possibility of locating 'conceptual art's specialness ... in its relation to the senses'.¹¹ What he proposes is that we turn instead to the distinction between conception and execution to define CA. The thought seems to be that defining CA as art in which the particular way in which the work has been executed is de-emphasised will serve to distinguish CA from painting and the rest in much the same way as before, but will also serve to distinguish it from literature, unlike theories which stress the unimportance of perception.

⁸ Hopkins, R. (2007), pp. 56-7.

⁹ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 56: 'the points just made look, prima facie, as if they should hold of most, perhaps of all, the works that have been considered conceptual'.

¹⁰ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 58.

¹¹ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 58.

I will argue that the condition that sense experience is merely a means of access does not in fact look to apply to literature as an artform at all. Furthermore, I will argue that an analogous objection to the position for which we have argued in the preceding chapters, would also fail. If CA is art whose perceptual properties are at most indirectly relevant to its appreciation, there should be no analogous worry that this fails to distinguish CA from literature, since, I will argue, perceptual properties are sometimes *directly* relevant in literary works, and so, again, any characterisation of literature as an artform in which perceptual properties are only ever indirectly relevant would be inaccurate.

I will begin by highlighting some considerations that put pressure on the thought that literature is less perceptual than the other arts. These considerations should motivate a rejection of the thought that literature as an artform is non-perceptual, and that attempts to define CA in terms of the diminished role of the perceptual fail to distinguish it from literature. And I will also show, in particular, how they refute both Hopkins's claim that in literature perception is never a medium of appreciation but only a means of access to the work, *and* the claim that in literature perceptual properties are never directly relevant to value.

Section 2 - Hopkins and Literature

Hopkins's arguments against the view that CA is art for which sense experience is never a medium of appreciation, are based on his claim that this definition fails to distinguish CA from literature, since this applies just as much to literary works. In this section I want to throw some doubt on Hopkins's assumption that literary works are non-perceptual in this way, and also on the general assumption that literary works don't involve the perceptual in any important sense.¹²

I will argue that any *prima facie* appeal of such a characterisation of literature dissolves on closer inspection of the latter. Looking at scholarly/academic discussions of literary works it quickly becomes apparent that it would be a mistake to think that the appreciation of such works is never concerned with aspects which are intrinsically perceptual.

Rather, it is quite typical for analyses and discussions of poems to draw on the sonic features of poetry. Firstly it is something of a commonplace that engaging with a poem often involves attention to features such as rhythm and repetition. Indeed there is a whole area of study, prosody, which centres around the study of sound-structure in poetry, and sonic patterns made up of different types of syllables. Secondly, much literary criticism focusses on the evocative and musical properties of sound.

¹² The assumption that literature is peculiarly non-perceptual is shared by Walton (Walton (1988), p. 358, and Lamarque (Lamarque (2007), p. 9).

In what follows I will highlight some aspects of discussions of the work of two very different poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Carlos Williams, which exemplify this aspect of literary criticism.

Raymond D Havens, in his 'Structure and Prosodic Pattern in Shelley's Lyrics',¹³ identifies certain poetic effects that arguably have their basis in the these sound-properties of the poems.

In his discussion of Shelley's *A Dirge*, below,

Rough wind, that moanest loud
Grief too sad for song;
Wild wind, when sullen cloud
Knells all the night long;
Sad storm, whose tears are vain,
Bare woods, whose branches strain,
Deep caves and dreary main,-
Wail, for the world's wrong!

Havens comments that 'Unity of mood is assisted by beginning each line with a stressed syllable'. And he also makes much of the evocative properties of sound:

One of the most unusual features of the piece is that with four exceptions it consists entirely of monosyllables and that each of these exceptions is a dissyllable that forms the next to the last word of the longer lines. Here, as in the final stanza of *The flower that smiles to-day*, Shelley uses spondees and monosyllables, which sound like the regular tread of heavy feet, to reinforce the gloom and despair that the words of the two poems express.¹⁴

¹³ Havens, R. (1950), pp. 1076-1087.

¹⁴ Havens, R. (1950), p. 1077.

If Havens is right, not only does it make sense to attribute perceptual - specifically sonic - properties to poems, but also attending to such properties can form an important part of our appreciation of the poem.

One might object here that the fact that the words tend to be one syllable in length is not strictly speaking a purely sonic feature of the work. One hears it as a string of one-syllable words because one hears the sounds as being divided into words, and one knows where the particular divisions fall.

However, this objection does not entail that there is *nothing* perceptual going on here. Yes you need to bring a certain linguistic knowledge to your appreciation of the poetry, but *that* shouldn't be in the least surprising. But Havens's point still stands, that - although you need linguistic knowledge to know that it is a string of monosyllables - there is a way that this string of monosyllables sounds: namely, 'like the regular tread of heavy feet', and that this turns out to be instrumental in the poem's reinforcement of its themes of gloom and despair.

In his discussion of another of Shelley's poems *To a Skylark*, Havens emphasises the way in which the poem mimics the sound of birdsong,¹⁵ before presenting a detailed analysis of how this is achieved by means of complex patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Here Shelley is credited with a mastery not just of meaning but of sound. The general point underlying this appears to be that the choice of words is important

¹⁵ Havens, R. (1950), p. 1084.

in poetry not just for their semantic and associative properties but also for their straightforward sonic properties - the words are not just building blocks of meaning but also of sound: rhythms and sound-structures can be constructed using them, and often the sound-structures a poet creates are an inextricable aspect of their poem.

Havens comments further:

This likewise ... reduces still further the already short lines that constitute four fifths of the lyric. As a result of this catalexis the opening lines would normally begin with a stress, with which, as we have seen, the second and fourth lines end. Obviously here was danger of the lines becoming over-emphatic and heavy, a pitfall which Shelley avoids by often giving the theoretically-stressed initial syllable little or no stress ("Of the sunken sun," "From one lonely cloud") or by restoring the initial unaccented syllable.¹⁶

The idea of there being 'pitfalls' in terms of the sound of a poem that poets try to avoid suggests that some of the evaluative judgements to be made of poems are of its sonic properties.

All this seems to strongly suggest that perceptual properties of poems - in the form of sonic properties - can play an important role in their character and value, and thus an engagement with these properties is part of a full appreciation of them.

Would it also be a counterexample to Hopkins's view that in literature sense-experience is never a medium of appreciation? This depends on whether sense-

¹⁶ Havens, R. (1950), pp. 1084-1085.

experience is permeable by any of the work's artistic properties. I think the answer has to be 'yes'.

Hearing the monosyllables in *A Dirge* as 'sounding like the regular tread of heavy feet' and hearing *To A Skylark* as sounding like birdsong both look to be central cases of one's awareness of properties of the work figuring in sense-experience. It seems absolutely right that one's experience of *To A Skylark* would have been phenomenologically different had one not noticed the birdsong-like quality. It also seems absolutely right that one's experience of *A Dirge* would have been different had one not noticed the way in which it sounds like the regular tread of heavy feet.

Havens's analysis of Shelley's poems is far from atypical, and is in fact representative of the way in which poems are treated, as artworks with an important perceptual dimension. Consider the following comments about the poetry of William Carlos Williams.

J Hillis Miller, one of the most prominent critics of Williams, observes that:

Many of his poems are marvels of exquisite auditory harmony, each word fitting perfectly in sound the others. Criticism can only in lumbering awkwardness catch and analyze these evanescent melodies.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hillis Miller, J. (1965), p. 319.

and argues that part of what his poems achieve is the construction of 'a complex acoustical space'.¹⁸

This understanding of Williams's poetry as deeply concerned with sound is common to the vast majority of his critics. In his discussion of Williams's *Paterson*, Joel Osborne Conarroe echoes the New Critics' mantra that 'a poem should not mean but be',¹⁹ when he states that:

Paterson is a major work of art by virtue of what it is, and not primarily because of what it says or means. Just as Williams' best short poems have an existence, a texture, related to but not dependent upon the ideas they contain or the things they illuminate (the poems are themselves things, not mirrors) so Paterson, on a much vaster scale, exists as a complete entity with its own special reality.²⁰

Conarroe goes on to draw attention to features like 'gentle alliteration', 'unobtrusive interior rhymes', and the cumulative functioning of the words 'like notes, in a musical pattern', and the 'evocative quality' of 'the tune they make in the reader's ears'.²¹ All of which all look like straightforward sonic properties of the poem.

Again, it is highly plausible that hearing the words in *Paterson* as being 'like notes in a musical pattern' could affect the phenomenological quality of one's experience of the work. Furthermore, if part of what we appreciate in appreciating

¹⁸ Hillis Miller, J. (1965), p. 319.

¹⁹ This was appropriated as a statement of the new criticism, from Archibald MacLeish's 1926 poem *Ars Poetica*.

²⁰ Conarroe, J. (1969), pp. 547-558.

²¹ Conarroe, J. (1969), p. 547.

Paterson is its melodic quality, this looks to be a case of perceptual properties being *directly* relevant to appreciation.

Consider also the following responses to the same poem, Tennyson's 'Maud'. John Forster describes it as 'exquisitely musical',²² while George Eliot complains that it lacks the 'wondrous melody' of Tennyson's other works.²³ While they disagree in their evaluation of the poem, what these two responses share in common is a commitment to thought that among the criteria for value in poetry are criteria that are in some sense musical.

Finally, it is notable how often literary critics attribute innovation to writers, not just of in terms of the meaning of what they write, but in terms of its perceptual properties. Much critical writing on Spenser attributes high praise to him as a prosodic innovator. George Saintsbury, in a discussion of Spenser's 'The Faerie Queene', notes that

The long alexandrine at the close seems to launch each stanza on towards its successor, *ripae ulterioris amore*, or rather, with the desire of fresh striking out in the unbroken though waveswept sea of poetry. Each is a great stroke by a mighty swimmer; it furthers the progress for the next as well as in itself. And it is greatly in this that the untiring character of *The Faerie Queene* consists.²⁴

And Kenneth Gross identifies this as 'Spenser's most surprising prosodic innovation', and adds that

²² Quoted in Shannon, E. (1953), p. 399.

²³ Quoted in Shannon, E. (1953), p. 413.

²⁴ Saintsbury, G. (1923), p. 366-67.

If Saintsbury's account were put in less affective terms, however, one might begin to qualify it by saying that Spenser's final hexameter subtly extends the prosodic and syntactic movement before the verse comes to rest on the final rhyme. Nor do readers cross the slight but inevitable abyss of white space that divides stanza from stanza until they have gained a sense of secure, full, and yet dilated energy. The hexameter thus diffuses (and defuses) the crisis moment of closure by delicately balancing ending and continuity.²⁵

To summarise, we've looked in detail at some examples of engagement with poems that represent them as having auditory properties, and, further, draw on certain of these auditory properties as highly relevant to their appreciation.

In addition to making particular critical statements that appear to presuppose a commitment to the sonic properties of poetry being important to its appreciation, literary theorists and critics often explicitly make the general point that this is the case.²⁶ For more examples of poetry being treated as essentially involving sound, see Paul Fussell *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, John Hollander *Rhyme's Reason*, Derek Attridge *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*, and Saintsbury *History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*.

It's worth noting, too, that poets themselves, in their own reflections on writing poetry, also very often seem to talk as though part of what they are up to concerns sound. T. S. Eliot, for example, 'I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realise itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches

²⁵ Gross, K. (1983), p. 23.

²⁶ See Vendler, H. (1997), who says that 'knowing the musical weight of every possible syllable ... in the language is the gift of great poets' (p. 72), Ciardi, J (1959) argues that 'good poets do not work by rule but by ear ... by ...feel rather than by meticulous observance of generalizations about metrics [and then] work against a pattern of expectation' (p. 923).

expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image'.²⁷

Furthermore, there are good reasons to think auditory properties are relevant to some prose works, as well as to poems.²⁸ And there are cases of visual properties being relevant to the appreciation of literary work.²⁹

All this seems to definitively preclude characterising literature as an artform whose works are not perceptual, either in the sense of being such that perception is not a medium of appreciation or in the sense of not having perceptual properties directly relevant to their appreciation.

²⁷ Eliot (1942), p. 28.

²⁸ Saintsbury, G. (1922) and Lipsky (1908).

²⁹ See Baker, T. (1984), Bradford, R. (1990), and Conarroe, J. (1969).

Section 3 - CA and the Conception-Execution

Distinction: A First Attempt

There are lots of different ways in which the conception-execution distinction can be used as the basis for an account of what's distinctive about CA. I want to begin by drawing attention to two dimensions of variation between different possible kinds of account based on the conception-execution distinction:

- (i) they can vary according to what kind of account they are in terms of the schema we introduced in Chapter 1, according to which accounts can be Constitution or Priority Accounts, and, within the latter, Stark or Subtle.
- (ii) they can vary in terms of what use they make of the conception-execution distinction.

In Chapter 2 we discussed the possibility of defining CA according to a Constitution Account on which conception alone is sufficient for a work, and execution is not necessary. Hopkins's account, as we will see, is a Priority Account. Hopkins is clear that the view he is articulating is supposed to be a development of the thought that 'what makes CA distinctive is ... that its value lies entirely in the idea'.³⁰ So in terms of the schema we've been using, it's a Stark Priority Account - it distinguishes CA in terms of the relevance of different aspects to its artistic value.

³⁰ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 58.

A second way of dividing up accounts that use the conception-execution distinction is in terms of how exactly the distinction is utilised. Not only can accounts differ as to whether they are Constitution or Priority Accounts (and whether Stark or Subtle) but there seems also to be scope for variation of a completely different kind, in terms of how the conception-execution distinction is used.

Hopkins, I will argue, proposes two distinct accounts of CA, which use the conception-execution distinction in different ways.³¹ Both, I will argue, face problems.

He begins by considering the view that the work doesn't need to be executed:

a crude first attempt would be to suggest that with CA it does not even matter that the work has been made. Conception is so central that execution is not even necessary.³²

I take this to be the same view as one of the two that we discussed in Chapter 2, a Constitution Account which uses the conception-execution distinction. Hopkins's argument against this view is that it doesn't allow us to make the kinds of claims about these artworks that we standardly make.

³¹ Hopkins seems to assume they are equivalent, and that the latter is simply a more formal articulation of the former (see p. 60) but I will argue that they are in fact two distinct claims.

³² Hopkins, R. (2007) p. 58.

Using the examples of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* and Walter De Maria's *Vertical Earth Kilometer*, a kilometre-long brass rod buried vertically in the ground. Hopkins argues in each case that at least some of the properties we attribute to conceptual works depend on their actually having been made:

What is lacking, in the case of *Vertical Earth Kilometer* or *Fountain*, if all we have is the conception of the work? The answer, surely, is the audaciousness of the latter, or the imposing pointlessness of the former. Ideas can be audacious, but thinking of something audacious is not itself necessarily to think audaciously. And this is true even if one has conceived of every aspect of the thing on which its audacity turns. The boldness of the gesture in *Fountain* required that Duchamp really put an ordinary urinal into a space devoted to art; merely thinking of doing so was, in contrast, timid. These points are even more plausible for the imposingness of gesture of *Vertical Earth Kilometer*³³

For works like *Fountain* and *Vertical Earth Kilometer*, then, the fact that they were executed is crucial to their identity - *Fountain* would be a different work if the conception were not executed - something that was just that same conception but not executed would be a different work, with different properties, and different value. Thus, argues Hopkins, it cannot be that conceptual works don't need to be executed, since looking at our actual practice/engagement with such works, execution can be crucial.

However, although Hopkins rejects the extreme view on which execution is unnecessary in CA, there is still, he thinks, a distinction that can be drawn between CA and other art in terms of the unimportance for the former of execution. Hopkins's line is that in CA, while it can in some cases matter a great deal *that* the idea was executed, it never matters *how* the idea was executed.

³³ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 60.

One can distinguish, in other words, between cases where the work's artistic properties 'are absent until something has been built to fit that conception' like *Fountain's* audacity, and cases where 'the way in which the thing is executed determines whether or not it will have those properties after all'.³⁴ And he thinks that a definition of CA should allow for the first kind of case but not the second, while other art, by contrast, allows for both. In the light of this he proposes the following definition:

'the distinctive thing about conceptual art, I suggest, is that [all artistic properties are] already determined in conception'³⁵

'Artistic properties' is just Hopkins's term for the properties 'that we appreciate in appreciating [the work] as art'.³⁶ A property counts as 'already determined in conception' just in case the work's having that property is in some sense fixed by a full specification of the work's conception. There are two ways this can happen:

- (i) it can be a property of the conception, or
- (ii) it can be a property that the work does not have unless executed, but that *any* successful execution of the conception will have, simply by virtue of being an execution of that conception. Audacity, in the *Fountain* example, will be of this second kind - a property that any adequate execution of the work's conception will have. Anything that lacks this property fails to count as an execution of *that* conception.

³⁴ Hopkins. R. (2007), p. 59.

³⁵ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 59.

³⁶ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 60.

This second way allows the definition to deal with cases like Fountain's audacity, since:

In conceiving Fountain, Duchamp had come up with a work that would be audacious, were it executed. For he had conceived it as having features sufficient, on instantiation, to render it audacious. Execution mattered ... [But] it did not matter how the work was executed - provided the execution was true to the conception, the resulting work would be dazzlingly bold.³⁷

Thus audacity is a property that depends on the work's actually being executed *but* still counts as a property that has been determined in the work's conception since it does not depend on the particular way it is executed - *any* execution of that conception will have the property of audacity. Nothing that is not audacious would count as an execution of that conception.

But the thought is that in non-conceptual art, by contrast, at least some of the properties that are relevant to the appreciation of the work are properties that are attributable to the particular way in which the conception was executed. And thus they are not determined in conception. So in Vermeer's *Woman with a Water Pitcher*, for example, part of what we appreciate is the mastery of painterly technique it exhibits, which surely belongs to the work's execution if anything does.

But this definition won't work without some modification, for as it stands it is vulnerable to counterexamples. As Hopkins himself notes, we need to 'set aside the trivializing case, in which the work is conceived as having a certain artistic

³⁷ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 59.

property,' we should 'stick to conceptions which specify only the properties on which artistic properties are to depend'.³⁸

Why must we set this kind of case aside? Given the second way in which something can meet Hopkins's condition, there doesn't seem to be any limit on the kinds of properties that can count as being determined at the level of conception. Which means that there is no limit on the kinds of property that can be relevant to the appreciation of conceptual works. Even properties which intuitively we'd want to treat as less relevant, such as visual beauty, could be just as relevant as any other kind of property to the appreciation of conceptual art.

Suppose an artist conceived of a work and specified in this conception that the work in question be visually beautiful. On the basis of this it then becomes a condition on any putative execution of that conception that the resulting work be visually beautiful. Anything which is not beautiful to look at simply fails to count as an execution of that conception, just as failing to be audacious would disqualify something from being an execution of *Fountain*.

If a conception of a work can be such that any possible execution of it is visually beautiful, then such a work would be an example of a work that is visually beautiful, *and whose visual beauty is specified in its conception*. Such a work could thus meet Hopkins's criterion for being conceptual art. But this is presumably exactly the kind of thing a definition of CA should be ruling out. In other words, Hopkins's view has the consequence that, since visual beauty can

³⁸ Hopkins, R. (2007), pp. 59-60.

be specified in a work's conception, visual beauty is one of the properties that can be relevant to the appreciation of CA. But if there's any kind of property that we should expect an account of CA to rule out as relevant to appreciation in CA, it's surely visual beauty.

And of course this same argument can be run for any property whatsoever. But this is odd, that a definition that purportedly distinguishes CA from other art in terms of the relevance of different properties to its artistic value, does not in fact impose any restriction on the kinds of property that can be relevant to its artistic value.

The problem is that being 'already decided in the conception of a work' is not something that can be true of only a certain type of property. Rather, there seems to be no limit on the *kinds* of property that can meet this condition, and there's no kind of property that only emerges at the stage of execution. *Any* kind of property can meet Hopkins's condition, because *any* kind of property can be specified in the conception (including visual beauty).

And one might worry, further, that if the line that this definition draws between relevant and irrelevant properties does not demarcate one *kind* of property from another, the distinction it makes between CA and other art is not as deep as might be expected.

This can be seen by looking at the kinds of counterfactual statements this account would license. For any work that is not in fact CA, the account entails

that under certain conditions, it would have qualified as CA. Take any work that is not a work of CA. On Hopkins's view, if all the properties of this work that are relevant to its appreciation had figured in the artist's plan for the work, this would be sufficient to make this work a work of CA. But intuitively you'd think that in order to change a work into conceptual art, you'd need to do more than just change which aspects of it the artist planned from the outset. Standardly we'd think it would be more of a matter of changing the aspects themselves.

So the definition needs to be modified in order to rule out cases where the property in question meets the criterion simply by being itself stipulated in the conception. This doesn't look hard to do. We just have to write into the definition that a property's being 'determined in conception' means determined *by the specification of properties other than itself*. The definition would then be as follows:

A work is CA if and only if: for every property P that is an artistic property of the work, P is fully determined at the level of conception by means of properties other than P.

How does this modified version of Hopkins's definition fare? I will argue that this modified definition still falls foul of the same kind of consideration as the earlier version - the distinction is still not really a distinction between *kinds* of property. The problem emerges when we consider the case which Hopkins found to be fatal to the rival approach - literature.

We saw in Section 1 that Hopkins's rejection of the standard characterisation of CA as non-perceptual rests on his charge that it fails to rule out literature. But does Hopkins's proposed definition do any better on this count? For Hopkins's definition to avoid falling prey to the objection he levelled at its rival, he needs to show that literature is not such that all of its artistic properties are determined (by other properties) in conception.

Hopkins thinks that literature does fall on the right side of the divide here, because 'the conception of a novel or poem is insufficient to determine its artistic properties'³⁹; rather 'the idea [in literature] must be executed, and the details of execution will be crucial to the success or otherwise of the finished work'.⁴⁰ In other words, in literature it is not the case that all the artistic properties are 'already determined in conception'.

But this seems to be based on an overly simplistic notion of what the conception of a literary work amounts to. Hopkins seems at one point to equate the conception in literature to a basic plot structure or 'central idea'.⁴¹ But this looks wrong. If the conception of a work is just the artist's initial plan for it, why would this necessarily be limited to plot structure or central idea? To insist that it is

³⁹ Hopkins (2007) p. 59.

⁴⁰ Hopkins (2007), p. 58.

⁴¹ See Hopkins, R, (2007), p. 58: 'One respect in which literary art is quite typical of art as traditionally conceived is in the importance of execution. It is not enough, to appreciate a work of literary art, that one grasp its central idea. That idea must be executed, and the details of execution will be crucial to the success or otherwise of the finished work. For a novel, for instance, knowing the mere outline of the plot, however original or intriguing, is hardly a sufficient basis for appreciating the work.' This looks like he is taking the plot outline and the central idea to be paradigmatic examples of the conception of literary works. Why, otherwise, would it be relevant to point out that grasping the central idea is not enough to appreciate a literary work? And knowing 'the mere outline of the plot' of a novel is presented as an example of focusing on the conception but not the execution.

seems arbitrary. Surely pretty much any feature of a literary work is one that could in principle figure in the artist's conception of it.⁴²

But if that's right then one might wonder how we can be sure that the condition rules out literature after all. Unless we know, for every literary work, which features of it were specified in the artist's conception, then we won't be in a position to say whether literary works are always such that their artistic properties are determined in their conception.

Hopkins does allude to the possibility of someone conceiving a literary work in all its detail, but I think he misses the point. He argues that in such a case there's no distinction between this and actually executing the work.⁴³ But that wouldn't solve the problem, since such a work would still count as one whose 'artistic properties are 'already determined in conception' and thus would count as conceptual art. Whether conception is indistinct from execution in such a case does not make a difference to whether the work meets Hopkins's condition.

As it happens, I think it is a pretty safe bet that no literary work has been conceived in all of its detail. The problem is not that Hopkins's condition doesn't rule out literature, but rather that it does so in what we might think is the wrong kind of way. His distinction between CA and literature (and indeed other art) turns

⁴² It's important to note that the modified definition doesn't restrict the kinds of properties that can count as determined in the conception - it just sets aside, for any given property, the case in which the property is specified in the conception directly, and focusses only on the question of whether the property is specified by means of other properties.

⁴³ See Hopkins p. 60: 'The point rather is that by the time conception is sufficiently determinate to secure this result, there is nothing left for execution to do. If one has conceived every word of the poem or novel, the thing is written.'

upon contingencies like which aspects of the detail of a particular work the artist in fact thought of in advance. On his view if these exhaust all the aspects that are relevant to appreciation, the work is conceptual; if not, it's not. But that seems to be the wrong kind of distinction.

In other words, the earlier objection about counterfactuals returns in some form. On the modified version of Hopkins's view now under consideration, the conditions under which that work would count as CA are a matter not of which *kinds* of aspects are important to artistic value, but of which *of the* aspects that are important to artistic value figured in the artist's plan. Here's why:

Take any work that is not a work of CA. Now take all the properties that are relevant to its appreciation. And now consider the properties that underlie those properties. On Hopkins's modified definition, if all of *these* properties had figured in the artist's plan for the work this would be sufficient to make this work a work of CA.

This is strange, for this is not a case of changing anything about the work itself. All that is different in this hypothetical case where the work qualifies as CA, from the actual case in which it does not, is which features of the work the artist had in his mind in advance of making the work.

But, to repeat the point from the earlier use of this argument, one would think that in order to change a work into conceptual art, you'd need to do more than just

change which aspects of it the artist planned from the outset. Standardly we'd think it would be more of a matter of changing the aspects themselves.

Now, it may be worth reiterating that of course the level of detail in which one would need to conceive a work in order to fix all its artistic properties is plausibly so high that no one has succeeded in doing so. And if this is right, there won't be any actual literary works that meet Hopkins's criterion for conceptual art. But this is not the point of the objection. The hypothetical literary work all of whose detail has been conceived in advance is supposed to show that although Hopkins's account might rule out all *actual* literature, it doesn't rule out all possible literature, since the grounds on which it rules out all actual literature are based on what we might classify as accidental, rather than essential, features of literature - features that all literature might in fact share, but does not share as a matter of necessity. In other words, if all literary works are such that their authors did not conceive of every feature in advance, this looks to be an accidental feature of all literature, since it is possible at least in principle for there to be a literary work that was conceived in all its detail. Indeed, Hopkins acknowledges that 'it is only contingency that prevents being able to plan every word of a novel; and nothing prevents us from being able to plan a poem in sufficient detail to fix its artistic properties'.⁴⁴

To reiterate, the objection is not that Hopkins's account fails to rule out the works it should rule out; it's rather that the criteria by which it rules them out are too flimsy. Even if Hopkins's account delivers the right results in terms of what it rules

⁴⁴ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 60.

in and what it rules out, the basis on which it does so doesn't look to be the right one.

Section 4 - CA and the Conception-Execution distinction: a Second Attempt

In this section I will discuss another definition that Hopkins offers, which although presented as merely an alternative formulation of the same definition, is, I will argue, different in some important ways.

In CA 'the work's artistic properties are fully determined by a less than fully specific conception of its base properties'⁴⁵

This looks to be different from the definition Hopkins offered earlier. The first definition states that in CA (unlike in other art) all artistic properties are determined in conception. Now it's stressed that the conception in question cannot be 'fully specific'. This is a criterion that wasn't present in the first definition.

⁴⁵ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 61.

Further, this definition introduces a new distinction, between ‘base properties’ and ‘artistic properties’. The latter, we’ve seen already, and refers to the properties that are relevant to appreciation; the former, though, is new, and refers to ‘the properties on which [a work’s] artistic properties depend’.⁴⁶

It might seem that the reason for modifying the definition in these ways is to deal with worries like the two we raised above, and the general problem they highlight. Firstly, if a distinction is made between base properties and artistic properties, and we’re only talking about the specification in conception of the former, not the latter, this looks to enable us to set aside what Hopkins describes as ‘the trivialising case in which the work is conceived as having certain artistic properties’,⁴⁷ and thus deal with counterexamples to his first definition like our example above in which it is specified in the conception that the work be beautiful to look at.

And secondly, if what we require for CA is that the artistic properties be determined by a *less than fully specific* conception of the work’s base properties, we also don’t need to worry about cases like the literary work which is conceived in its entirety, which formed our other problematic case for his first definition.

Both of these were problems for Hopkins’s earlier formulation, but appear to be dealt with by the new one. However, even if this is right, what we have as a result is not a fortified version of Hopkins’s earlier definition, but rather a substantially

⁴⁶ Hopkins, R, (2007), p. 60.

⁴⁷ Hopkins, R. (2007), pp. 59-60.

different definition, and one which, I shall argue, faces some different problems. I will raise two different kinds of problem for this second definition that Hopkins offers. Firstly I will try and show that the underlying intuition that I take it this view is trying to capture, about how CA differs from other art, is misguided. Secondly I will argue that, independently of this, the definition suffers from a major flaw.

Objections

In characterising CA as art in which ‘the work’s artistic properties are fully determined by a less than fully specific conception of its base properties’, I will argue, Hopkins is implicitly appealing to a certain view - typified by philosophers like Sibley - on the kinds of property our appreciation of art centres around. According to this view these properties always in some sense depend on (in Hopkins’s terminology) non-artistic properties *but* there are no laws linking non-artistic properties to artistic properties.

Sibley identifies as examples of such properties,

that a poem is tightly-knit or deeply moving; that a picture lacks balance, or has a certain serenity and repose, or that the grouping of the figures sets up an exciting tension; that the characters in a novel never really come to life, or that a certain episode strikes a false note.⁴⁸

and claims that while they ‘ultimately depend upon’ non-aesthetic properties,

There are no sufficient conditions, no non-aesthetic features such that the presence of some set or number of them will beyond question justify or warrant the application of an aesthetic term.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Sibley, F. (1959) p. 421.

⁴⁹ Sibley, F. (1959) p. 426.

He also ventures that

No doubt one way of putting this is to say that the features which make something delicate or graceful, and so on, are combined in a peculiar and unique way; and that the aesthetic quality depends upon exactly this individual and unique combination of just these specific colors and shapes so even a slight change might make all the difference.⁵⁰

This view has become something of an orthodoxy in discussions of art. If this view about the kinds of properties central to artistic appreciation is right, i.e. if they stand in the peculiar relation to non-artistic properties that Sibley describes, (on which they are underpinned by non-artistic properties (base properties), but that there are no laws linking artistic properties with their underlying properties), then it seems that we can infer something from this about the extent to which the artistic properties of a work can be determined by a specification of base properties in the work's conception. Namely that:

(i) To the extent that it is possible to specify in the work's conception every single one of its base properties, doing so will fix all the work's artistic properties.

BUT

(ii) Anything less than a full, maximally detailed, specification will be insufficient to determine what artistic properties the work has.

(i) follows from the claim that artistic properties do 'ultimately depend' on non-artistic properties. If you couldn't fix a work's artistic properties with even a maximally detailed specification of its base properties, it seems there would be

⁵⁰ Sibley, F. (1959) pp. 434-5.

no sense in which the artistic properties were grounded in the non-artistic properties.

(ii) follows from the claim that despite there being some dependence of artistic properties on non-artistic properties, it is not a lawlike dependence. As Sibley himself puts it, the base properties of a work 'are combined in a peculiar and unique way; and that the aesthetic quality depends upon exactly this individual and unique combination of just these specific colors and shapes so even a slight change might make all the difference.'⁵¹

So perhaps the thought is that if Sibley *et al* are right that the properties on which the appreciation of art centres are of this kind, then it will follow that anything less than a complete specification of *every single* base property of a work will fail to determine that work's artistic properties. In fact, the claim that anything less will fail to fix the work's artistic properties is just another way of putting Sibley's point that 'even a slight change' in the underlying properties 'might make all the difference' to what artistic properties it has.

In the light of this, Hopkins's second definition of CA looks to be an elaboration of the thought that CA is an exception to this general rule. That while the standard scenario in art is that the properties on which our appreciation centres are of this peculiar kind described by Sibley etc, in CA that's not the case.

⁵¹ Sibley, F. (1959) pp. 434-5.

So even for cases like literature, in which it might be possible to conceive all the work's base properties in their entirety, the point is that anything *less* than a completely thorough conception of the work's base properties is insufficient to fix its artistic properties. And it is this that provides a contrast with CA.

If this is right, the distinction offered in Hopkins's second definition is not in terms of how much of the work's artistic properties it is possible to fix at the level of conception, but rather is in terms of whether the artistic properties are of this peculiar Sibleyan kind, which cannot be determined by anything less than a full specification of the base properties.

This is a very different kind of line to draw between CA and other art, from that which was drawn in Hopkins's first definition. Instead of CA's being distinctive in terms of all the artistic properties being fixed at the level of conception, it is now being claimed that it is distinctive in terms of the artistic properties having a more lawlike link with the base properties, than artistic properties standardly do. To put it another way, the distinction with other art is a matter of the artistic properties in CA not being 'aesthetic' properties in the Sibleyan sense.

In what follows I will argue that this cannot be the right kind of line to draw between CA and other art.

Problem 1

I've argued that Hopkins's definition is based on the intuition that whichever properties are relevant to the artistic value of a conceptual work, these don't include properties of the kind described by Sibley.

But when we look at actual conceptual works, it seems to go strikingly against our actual practice to say that our appreciation never involves these kinds of properties. In fact, it seems that the properties we take to be central to appreciation tend to be of this exact kind. Even the properties that Hopkins himself identifies as artistic properties in CA seem to fall under this category - audacity or 'dazzling boldness'⁵² in the case of *Fountain*; imposingness in the case of *Vertical Earth Kilometer*. These look to be examples of exactly the kind of thing Sibley is concerned with.

Of course, certain properties that we might standardly think to be irrelevant in CA, while relevant in other art, also fall very clearly within Sibley's remit (such as visual beauty), but the crucial point is that these properties don't exhaust that category. Plausibly, what's going on is that the kinds of properties that are Sibley's focus are central to appreciation across art in general, including conceptual art, but also the properties that are de-emphasised in CA are a subset of these.

⁵² Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 59.

Problem 2

There is a further problem with Hopkins's definition. Let's consider again the way Hopkins defines the categories of artistic properties and base properties that his definition appeals to:

a work's artistic properties are those we appreciate in appreciating it as art, and its base properties are the properties on which its artistic properties depend.⁵³

If this is how these two categories are to be understood, then the requirement his definition sets out is actually impossible to meet. How could *any* artwork be such that a less than full specification of the base properties can determine the artistic properties?

If the base properties are the properties that the artistic properties depend on, then surely by definition the base properties must be fully specified to determine all the work's artistic properties. If you can omit some property from your specification, and nonetheless determine by that specification *all* the work's artistic properties, then that property *cannot be* one of the properties on which the work's artistic properties depend. That is, it cannot be one of the base properties.

If this is right, then Hopkins's criterion for CA is impossible to meet. So maybe Hopkins means something different.

⁵³ Hopkins, R. (2007), p. 60.

We've been interpreting Hopkins's terms 'base properties' and 'artistic properties' as *work-relative* - that is, we've interpreted him as thinking of these as categories that it makes no sense to ask whether a given property falls into, without first specifying a work that it is a property of. Rather, something's being a base property, or an artistic property, is a matter of the role it plays in a specified work.

And it is for this reason that it is a contradiction in terms to talk of the possibility of a work having base properties that don't need to be specified in order to fully determine its artistic properties. Since what it is for something to be a base property in a given work entails its being a necessary part of what must be specified to determine the work's artistic properties.

But given that attributing this view to Hopkins means that his definition ends up being impossible, maybe we should instead interpret Hopkins's base property/artistic property distinction as a non-work-relative distinction between *kinds* of properties: between properties of the kind that we appreciate in appreciating something as art, and those of the kind that underlie those first kind of properties.

If being a base property were a matter of being a certain kind of property, rather than being a matter of playing a particular role in a specified work, then a work can have base properties that aren't required to determine its artistic properties. Since something can be a base property in the general sense without its playing that particular role in the work in question. And it is the gap between being a base property in this sense, and playing the role of base property in a particular work,

that allows it to be possible that some works can have base properties that can be omitted from a specification without affecting the work's artistic properties.

However, it doesn't look to be true that 'base properties' forms a kind. On the contrary, it seems that *any* property can be a base property. Indeed, there doesn't seem to be any principled reason why properties that are artistic properties can't also play the role of base properties.

The converse, however, does not appear to be true. It's not the case that any base property can be an artistic property. Some properties are not of the kind that can be appreciated as part of an appreciation of the work (it wouldn't make sense, for example, to say that part of what you need to appreciate in appreciating this work is *that* it is 5 ft high, or *that* it is blue, or made of marble).

So while artistic properties plausibly form a kind, base properties do not. Being a base property, it seems, is work-relative after all. Because all it takes to be a base property is to be a property on which other properties, that we're supposed to appreciate in appreciating the work, depend. It depends on the work what counts as a base property, and there is no in principle limit on what kinds of properties can play this role.

But then we are back to our original problem: If being a base property *is* work-relative, and is a matter of being something on which the work's artistic properties depend, then it doesn't make sense to talk of works whose artistic properties can

be determined by a less than full specification of their base properties. Hopkins's definition of CA is impossible to meet after all, and thus cannot be right.

Section 5 - Summary

To sum up, then, we've argued that Hopkins offers two accounts of CA, both Stark Priority Accounts, but which use the conception-execution distinction in different ways. We've argued that both of these ways of using the conception-execution distinction result in definitions of CA that are in some important sense unsatisfactory. The first drew the wrong kind of distinction between CA and other art; the second put forward a necessary condition that it was impossible in principle for anything to meet.

In addition we've argued that Hopkins's objections to characterising CA in terms of the limited role of the perceptual fails. The account of CA that we developed in Chapters 3 and 4, then, emerges unscathed. The direct objections to it have been shown to rest on false assumptions about the nature of literature, and the alternative theory proposed in its place has serious problems.

Conclusion

1. Summary

In this thesis we have addressed the question of what is distinctive about CA. In doing this we have engaged with the non-philosophical literature on CA in significantly more detail than has been done before, certainly in analytic philosophy.

We noted at the beginning that CA has received disproportionately scant attention from philosophers, compared with art historians, art critics and art-theorists.

A large part of the task here was to impose a structure on the extensive but somewhat murky non-philosophical literature on CA, identifying patterns and trends, and the main points on which commentators' opinion is divided.

In this regard, we began by noting that CA is overwhelmingly often characterised in terms of the importance of what is called 'the idea', but that typically, those who discuss CA, even philosophers, leave the notion of 'ideas' unexamined. We have here helped to shed some light on this ill-defined but central notion by teasing out two

different ways in which the term is used: to refer to a work's meaning, and to refer to its conception. These two different ways of understanding 'idea', we argued, dominate the non-philosophical and philosophical literature alike.

Secondly we identified two main types of account of CA, which we called Priority Accounts and Constitution Accounts. Both define CA in terms of the importance of the idea, but this importance takes different forms in each case: Priority Accounts define CA in terms of the degree of relevance of the idea for artistic value, Constitution Accounts define CA as art in which the idea *constitutes* the work. Again, as with the two construals of 'ideas' this divide between Priority and Constitution Accounts applies to the philosophical just as much as the non-philosophical literature on CA.

We then located various philosophical accounts of CA on this conceptual map. So for example, the view for which Elisabeth Schellekens argues in 'The Aesthetic Value of Ideas' is a Constitution Account that takes ideas to be meanings; while Robert Hopkins, in 'Speaking Through Silence: Conceptual Art and Conversational Implicature' argues for a Priority Account that takes ideas to be conceptions.

We have engaged closely with both non-philosophical and philosophical literature on CA, and produced a kind of 'conceptual map' of the territory. And on the basis of this, we've developed a new account of CA which, we have argued, doesn't face the problems which afflict its rivals. According to the account we developed here, CA is art whose meaning is directly relevant to its artistic value, while its perceptual properties are at most indirectly relevant.

This allows for conceptual works that lack perceptual properties, as well as conceptual works that have perceptual properties all of which are irrelevant to its value, but importantly it also allows for conceptual works that have perceptual properties that play a role in its artistic value. The contrast with other art is just that perceptual properties being *directly* relevant to artistic value is precluded in CA.

In terms of the schema we introduced earlier, the account we have developed is a Subtle Priority Account. Our argument for this view partly consisted in eliminating different kinds of rival view. In Chapter 2 we argued against Constitution Accounts of CA on which conceptual works lack perceptual properties entirely. In the first part of Chapter 3 we argued against Stark Priority Accounts of CA which allow that conceptual works have such properties but deny them any artistic relevance. In Chapter 5 we examined arguments for preferring the conception-execution distinction to the contrast between meanings and perceptual properties, as the basis for a Priority Account of CA, and found problems with both the arguments and the proposed alternative.

In formulating the positive view for which we have argued, we introduced the distinction between direct and indirect relevance to artistic value, and argued that this forms the correct basis for the distinction between the role that perceptual properties can have in CA and the role they have in other art. Treating perceptual properties as being at most indirectly relevant in CA, we argued, both respects the intuitions which led us to reject Stark Priority Accounts, and still allows room for a contrast with other art in terms of the role of perceptual properties.

2. Directions for further research

We noted in the Introduction that CA is of philosophical interest largely because of the philosophical questions and problems it is thought to raise for general theories of art. CA is thought to reveal important truths about art, often by exposing the falsity of certain received theories of art, by being a counterexample to them.

We noted that a proper philosophical examination of these kinds of claim should be grounded in a fully worked out account of the distinctive nature of CA. If this thesis achieves its aims, this is exactly what we have provided here. This thesis, then, puts us in a good position to conduct such an enquiry. The question of the philosophical implications of CA represents an important direction for future research. Here I will briefly discuss five areas (some overlapping) in which CA is thought to have philosophical implications, in the light of the definition of CA for which I have argued.

- (1) aesthetic definitions of art status and/or artistic value
- (2) skill as a requirement for art status and/or artistic value
- (3) the Acquaintance Principle
- (4) conceptual art and experience
- (5) ontology of art

(1) Conceptual Art and the Aesthetic

Perhaps the main way in which CA has been claimed to have implications for the definition of art is that it is thought to stand as a counterexample to aesthetic definitions of art, such as Beardsley's definition that

An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest.¹

We saw in Chapter 4, however, that this depends on how 'aesthetic' is understood here. On many uses of 'aesthetic', definitions like the above don't appear to have any special problem accommodating CA. In fact, one could make a case for Beardsley's use of 'aesthetic' being one of these. Beardsley, in the same paper, states that an experience is aesthetic if it has 'some or all' of the following characteristics:

a sense of freedom from concern about matters outside the thing received, an intense affect that is nevertheless detached from practical ends, the exhilarating sense of exercising powers of discovery, integration of the self and its experiences.²

It doesn't seem obviously wrong that conceptual art is made with that intention. Or to put it another way, it doesn't seem *more* wrong in the case of CA than other art. i.e. without taking a stand either way on the correctness of Beardsley's aesthetic definition of art, it doesn't seem that CA in particular poses problems for it - Beardsley's definition, if true, doesn't look to be unproblematically true of all art bar conceptual.

¹ Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 21.

² Beardsley, M. (1983), p. 20.

As we argued in Chapter 4, the only sense in which CA would constitute a counterexample to aesthetic definitions of art is if 'aesthetic' is understood in a sense that ties it to the perceptual properties of an object. If CA is art whose perceptual properties are never directly relevant to its artistic value, it looks like the value of CA can't be aesthetic in this sense. This doesn't mean that conceptual works can't have high aesthetic value in this sense - it's just that they needn't to be good art.

This feature of CA has been argued to show that the concept of artistic value is not exhausted by aesthetic value. As Theodore Gracyk puts it:

Aesthetic value will not explicate the value of every work of art as art; conceptual art makes it very clear that we are not going to get very far if we insist that all art is interesting for its aesthetic value.³

In the same spirit, Matthew Kieran argues that CA 'may have little aesthetic value but posses artistic value due to its cognitive and art-historical aspects'.⁴

But it is important to realise that this is *not* a consequence of the definition of CA for which we have argued. Although we've defined CA in terms of its *value*, it is not in terms of the kind of value but rather the location of that value. It's not that CA has cognitive value instead of aesthetic. It's that CA's value cannot be ultimately grounded in its perceptual properties. So unless aesthetic value is something that can only be had by something in virtue of its perceptual properties, this doesn't constitute a reason to think of CA as art whose value is non-aesthetic.

³ Gracyk, T. (1999), p. 219. See also Kieran, M. (1997c), p. 386, and Kaufman, D. (2002), who wonders at the persistence of this view 'in the wake of the conceptual revolution in art'. (pp. 152-153).

⁴ Kieran, M. (1997b), p. 292.

(2) Conceptual Art and Skill

Berys Gaut,⁵ Jerome Stolnitz⁶ and Larry Shiner⁷ take conceptual art to demonstrate the falsity of the assumption that artworks must 'be the product of skill by the artist'.⁸

There is some sense in which conceptual works tend not to involve skill in the same way as other art. Firstly, many works of CA involve less skill in terms of the manipulation of materials than other art. With *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, for example, all Rauschenberg physically did was erase a drawing. That's not hard to do, and there's nothing particularly impressive about the way he did it. It seems right to say, once the brief was specified, that anyone could have done it. Contrast this with, say, Michelangelo's *David*. We think of what was physically done as involving a great deal of effort, and displaying a combination of natural talent and diligent training. It's certainly not true that anyone could have done it.

Secondly, in many conceptual works the artist let it be known that the physical making of the work was done by someone else whom they commissioned.⁹ And this conclusively rules out the attribution of skills with materials to the artist.

⁵ Gaut, B. (2005), p. 283.

⁶ Stolnitz, J. (1979), p. 402.

⁷ Shiner, L. (2009), p. 168, n. 28.

⁸ T J Diffey, too, takes CA not to involve skill, although he takes this to be a problem for CA rather than for skill-based theories of art. See Diffey (1991), p. 196.

⁹ Molesworth, H. (2003) observes that 'the development of Minimalism and CA relied upon the delegation of artistic activity by the artist to another person' (p. 151), and Alberro, A. (2003) talks of the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth's 'eschewing personal contact with the work of art altogether in favour of employing studio assistants or industrial manufacturers, who would run off the silkscreens or follow exacting specifications concerning materials, colors, scale, and surfaces in which the art object would be produced'. (p. 32).

However, none of this entails that conceptual works don't involve skill *tout court*. Two points are relevant here. Firstly we need to distinguish between skill *per se* and skill pertaining to the perceptual aspects of the work. Looking at the examples above, they all seem to be cases of a particular *kind* of skill not being involved, but not, crucially, of a lack of skill *per se*.

Conceptual works, we have argued, are works in which the perceptual aspects are limited in their relevance to artistic value. So it shouldn't be surprising that in many cases conceptual artists don't expend much effort on this aspect of their work. But, since this doesn't mean that *no aspect of the work* is relevant to artistic value, we should not expect to find that works of conceptual art involve no skill of any kind.

While it would be odd to admire *Erased de Kooning Drawing* for skill in terms of the manipulation of materials, it's not necessarily odd to admire it for skill in other respects. Those who admire *Erased de Kooning Drawing* do so because of, among other things, the way it manages to convey a complex of messages through such a simple gesture, and the way it displays a significant level of originality and creative thinking. And if *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is indeed to be admired in these respects, it seems that we can correspondingly admire the skill which is responsible for those aspects of the work. Thinking originally and creatively is surely a skill, as is the ability to find simple ways of doing something complex.

Indeed, many of the properties that tend to be cited as paradigmatic examples of the kinds of property on which positive evaluations of conceptual works are based, are

properties that easily lend themselves to being thought of in terms of skill. Shelley, for example, cites wit and cleverness as such properties.¹⁰ And if a work is praised for being witty or clever, this seems to entail the possibility of a corresponding praise for the wit and cleverness of the artist who is responsible for it.

The claim that works of CA don't involve skill, then, is based on a confusion between skill and a particular kind of skill. And in some cases, this confusion is easy to spot. Stolnitz, for example, seems to equate skill to 'manual dexterity'.¹¹

As we have seen, though, there are other types of skill that can be important in art, and CA might be thought to emphasise 'intellectual over manual skills'.¹² Lacking skill in the sense of manual dexterity, then, does not entail lacking skill *tout court*.

This, however, is not the whole story. There is a second confusion underlying the remark that conceptual works don't involve skill. Even for skill understood as manual dexterity, the definition for which we've argued doesn't preclude conceptual works displaying a high degree of skill. What's ruled out, at most, is this counting in a certain way towards the work's overall artistic value.

This point requires a bit of elaboration. A plausible principle about skill links it to the aspects of a work in which its artistic value inheres.

¹⁰ .Shelley, J. (2003), p. 370.

¹¹ Stolnitz takes conceptual works to be examples of a trend for works 'that manifestly have no need of manual dexterity', but then moves from this to the general claim that they don't involve skill (Stolnitz, J. (1979), p. 402).

¹² Meeson, P. (1981), p. 31, footnote 1; or as Glickman, J. (1987) puts it, 'intellectual' over 'technical' skill (p. 183).

skill is relevant to artistic value only if, for any aspect of an artwork, skill with respect to that aspect is relevant to artistic value only insofar as the aspect itself is relevant to artistic value.

If this principle is right, then what our definition of CA entails for skill is that in CA skill with respect to the work's perceptual properties is only at most indirectly relevant to the work's artistic value. Which means that a work's involving a great deal of skill with respect to its perceptual properties can be part of the means by which it conveys its meaning.

So skill with perceptual properties can be relevant to artistic value in CA but only indirectly. If this skill is part of the way in which the work makes its points then it is relevant to artistic value.

Perhaps an example of this might be Ellen Harvey's 1999-2001 *New York Beautification Project* which consisted of very small, painstakingly rendered oil paintings painted directly on graffiti sites in New York (see Figure 15). Here it seems that the more technical skill of a traditional kind these paintings exhibit, the more striking the juxtaposition with the graffiti, and thus the better the piece *works*.

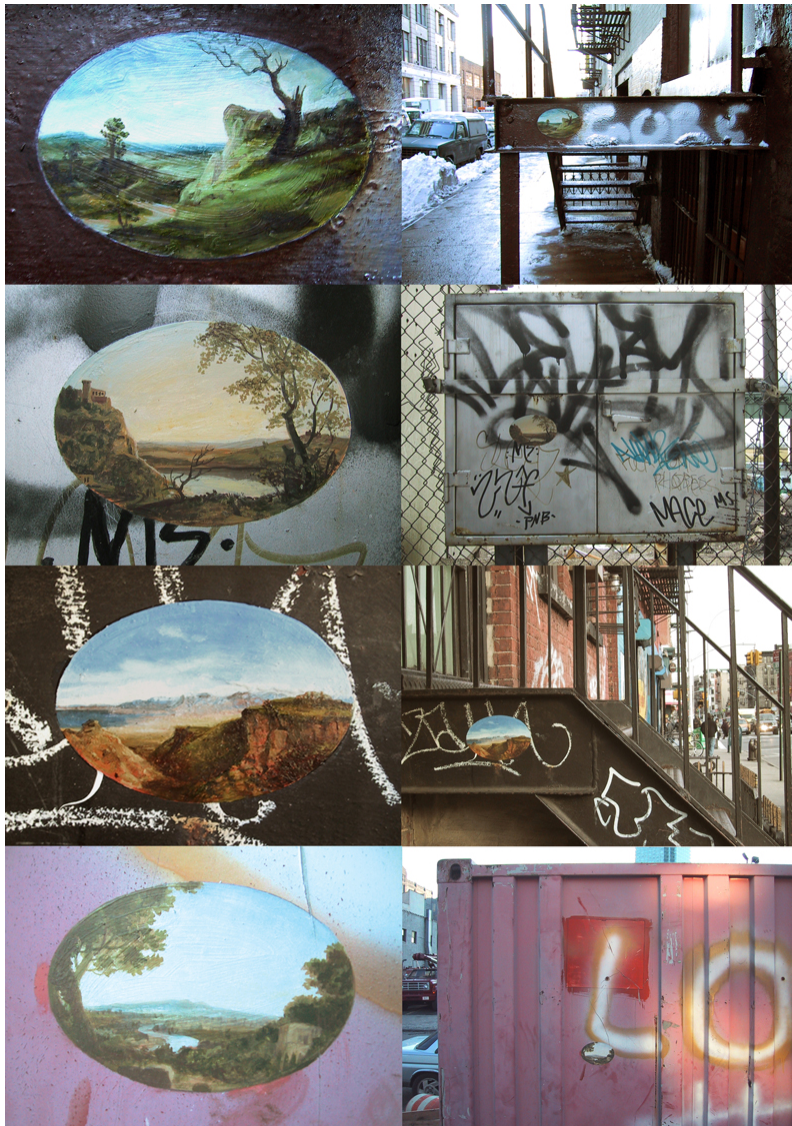


Figure 15. *New York Beautification Project*. Ellen Harvey. (1999-2001).

But it is never the case, for any conceptual work, that the manual dexterity it displays is appreciated *in itself* as part of appreciating the work. If this is correct, it explains why in general works of CA very often do not display much skill in the sense of manual dexterity. Why put effort into an aspect of a work if that effort won't accrue to artistic value? But it also leaves room for the possibility of conceptual works that *do* display skill of this kind, and explains how this can be relevant.

The main point here is that it's not the case that skill *per se* is irrelevant in conceptual works - it's that skill relating to *certain aspects* of the work is *less* relevant in CA than in other art, corresponding to the decreased relevance of those aspects themselves in CA.

(3) Conceptual Art and the Acquaintance Principle

We saw in Chapter 2 that CA defined in accordance with a Constitution Account where the work is identified with a message/meaning, has certain implications for the Acquaintance Principle. Namely that, since one can become acquainted with a work as message via a description, the claim that one cannot appreciate a work or form judgements of it on the basis of a description is not a corollary of the Acquaintance Principle, as appears to have been assumed. But this is of limited interest since we ultimately rejected the Constitution Account.

Does the account of CA that we went on to develop and defend have any implications for the Acquaintance Principle?

Of central importance here are our conclusions from Chapter 4, about whether conceptual works need to be perceived. We argued there that in general, for any given artwork, there are two kinds of route to the conclusion that it needs to be perceived to be appreciated. (And that in CA only one of these routes is available). Firstly it can be such that part of appreciating the work is appreciating its perceptual properties - i.e. its perceptual properties are directly relevant. Secondly it can be such

that its perceptual properties are indirectly relevant, but some of the perceptual properties that are indirectly relevant are of the kind that need to be perceived.

In CA, as we've defined it, the first route is blocked, since CA is art whose perceptual properties are never directly relevant to its appreciation. But since there are perceptual properties that one must perceive a thing to even discover that the thing has them, and since perceptual properties can be indirectly relevant in CA, this leaves open the possibility of there being conceptual works that need to be perceived to be appreciated since some of the properties that are indirectly relevant are accessible by perception only.

The distinction between those works of CA that need to be perceived to be appreciated and those that do not thus corresponds to the distinction between works of CA whose indirectly relevant properties are accessible by perception alone and those whose indirectly relevant properties can be accessed without perception.

Given the possibility of works of the former kind, it's possible that some conceptual works need to be perceived to be appreciated. Given the possibility of works of the latter kind, it's possible that some conceptual works can be appreciated without being perceived.

Works of this second kind seem to be a counterexample to some versions of the Acquaintance Principle; namely they will be counterexamples to the description version, since one can in principle become acquainted via a description not with the work itself but with all of the aspects of the work which are relevant to its

appreciation. Given this, it doesn't look like there is any in principle barrier to a conceptual work's being appreciated without being experienced in full.

They won't necessarily be counterexamples to the testimony version though. With respect to the testimony version, conceptual works don't look to weigh decisively in favour of the Acquaintance Principle or against it.

(4) Experience

In (1) we reiterated what CA entails for the relation between artistic value and aesthetic value, discussing the claim that CA refutes a strong link between these.

But some have gone further, arguing that CA refutes even the weaker claim that the value of a work of art is a matter of the experiences, not necessarily aesthetic, that it affords us. This view, championed by Malcolm Budd,¹³ Monroe Beardsley,¹⁴ Robert Stecker,¹⁵ among others, is claimed to be inadequate since 'the point of conceptual art lies not in any experience afforded but - in the recognition of a given idea.'¹⁶

This does not look to be an obvious implication of CA as we've defined it.

¹³ Budd, M. (1995).

¹⁴ Beardsley, M. (1962).

¹⁵ Stecker, R. (1997), pp. 251-8.

¹⁶ Kieran, M. (1997a), p. 246. See also Davies, D. (2006).

If 'experience' is understood in a broad enough sense not to be restricted to perceptual experience, it's not at all clear that this would be less applicable to CA than to other art.

And although appreciation of conceptual works involves the recognition of ideas, this does not look to be in opposition to the experiential view of artistic value, since one can argue that what it is for the idea to be valuable is for it to give rise to valuable experiences of a certain kind.

(5) Ontology of art

Philosophers have tended to think of CA as raising difficult issues for the ontology of art. (See Boden,¹⁷ Goldie & Schellekens,¹⁸ Goldie¹⁹ and Levinson²⁰). Peter Goldie argues that 'conceptual art raises ontological questions in an especially pressing way'.²¹

Having presented his own theory of the ontology of artworks, Jerrold Levinson acknowledges that the theory would need more work if it is to be adequate to deal with conceptual art. But there is an underlying assumption that CA presents such a difficulty here that this shortcoming is an understandable one.

¹⁷ Boden, M (2011), p. 12.

¹⁸ Goldie, P. & Schellekens, E. (2009), pp. 51-60.

¹⁹ Goldie, P. (2009), pp. 203-204.

²⁰ Levinson, J. (1996), p. 137, and (2006), p. 29.

²¹ Goldie, P. (2009), p. 204.

The nature of the work of art in the spheres of conceptual art and performance art is obviously - and purposely - rather problematic, and what has been said here about the ontology of objects in the ordinary fine arts would not apply without some modification.²²

The thought is that conceptual works span more diverse ontological categories than other artworks, and so are thought to nudge us towards a broader ontology for artworks.

What issues CA raises for ontology of art would need to involve a further investigation into particular works. Since the definition we've argued for here leaves it open what ontological categories these works fall into - it's compatible with the definition that they all fall into categories which we have independent reason to believe contain artworks anyway; and it's also compatible with the definition that some or all conceptual works belong to categories not previously thought to contain artworks.

To answer the question, then, we would need to look at actual conceptual works to see which ontological categories they most plausibly fall into, and whether these are categories that we already have reason to think contain artworks or not.

We've surveyed a few general kinds of implication CA is thought to have, and briefly talked through what kind of position our definition of CA entails on these matters.

²² Levinson, J. (1996) p. 137.

Further research would engage in much more detail with these questions and others. But I hope to have laid the groundwork for that research here. A philosophically rigorous account of CA, informed by a close engagement with what has been written on CA by artists, critics, historians, etc., is invaluable as a grounding for investigation into CA's implications for art in general.

In tackling the question of what CA is and how it differs from other art, we've confronted what is largely regarded as a source of unease and uncertainty in aesthetics. CA is used as a counterexample to such a vast variety of theories, but largely without a thorough understanding of its nature. A greater understanding of the nature of CA clears up the uncertainty and hopefully, with it, the unease.

Bibliography

Adler, A. (2009) 'Against Moral Rights' *California Law Review*, Vol. 97 Issue 1, p. 263-300.

Alberro, A. (2000) 'Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977' in A Alberro & B. Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), pp. xvi-xxxvii.

Alberro, A. (2001) 'At the Threshold of Art as Information' in P. Norvell & A. Alberro (Eds.) *Recording Conceptual Art*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press) pp. 1-15.

Alberro, A. (2003) *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. (Eds.) (2000) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press).

Alberro, A. & Buchmann, S. (2006) *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Allen, G. (2011) *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).

Anderson, John (2000) 'Aesthetic Concepts of Art' in N. Carroll (Ed.) *Theories of Art Today* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press): pp. 65-92.

Art & Language (1969) 'Introduction' *Art-Language* 1(1): pp. 1-10. Reprinted in A. Alberro & B. Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 98-105.

Atkinson, T. (1986) 'Concerning the Article "The Dematerialization of Art"'. Reprinted in A. Alberro and B. Stimson (Eds.) (2000) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* ((Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 52-59.

Attridge, D. (2002) *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- Audi, R. (1997) "The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34: 405–422.
- Baker, T. (1984) 'The Comedian as the Letter 'N': Sight and Sound in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams' *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 89-103;
- Barnitz, J. (2001) *Twentieth-century art of Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press).
- Battcock, G. (1970) 'Documentation in Conceptual Art', *Arts Magazine*, 44, pp. 42-45.
- Battcock, G. (1973) *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton).
- Beardsley, M. (1962) 'Beauty and Aesthetic Value' *Journal of Philosophy* 59 (21): 617-628.
- Beardsley, M. (1981) *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.).
- Beardsley, M. (1982) 'What are Critics for?' in *The Aesthetic Point of View*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press).
- Beardsley, M. (1983) 'An Aesthetic Definition of Art' in H Curtler (ed.) *What is Art?* (New York: Haven Publications): pp. 15-29.
- Betti, C. (2008) *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach* (CA: Thompson Learning).
- Binkley, T. (1977) 'Piece: Contra Aesthetics' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35 (3):265-277.
- Bochner, M. (1970) 'Excerpts From Speculation (1967-1970)' *Artforum* 8 (9): 79-83. Reprinted in Meyer, pp. *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton).
- Boden, M. (2007a) 'Creativity and Conceptual Art' in P. Goldie, P. & Schellekens, S. (Eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 216-237.
- Boden, M. (2007b) 'Review: Creativity and Reason in Cognitive Development' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47(2): 219-221.
- Boden, M (2011) *Creativity and Art: Three Roads to Surprise* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Borden, L. (1972) 'Three Modes of Conceptual Art' *Artforum*, June 1972, pp. 68–71.
- Bradford, R. 'Poetry and Painting: An Essay on Visual Form in Modern Verse'
- Brook, D. (1986), "The Flight from the Object," in Bernard Smith ed., *Concerning Contemporary Art: The Power Lectures 1968-1973* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 16–34.

- Budd, M. (1995) *Values of Art* (London: Allen Lane/ The Penguin Press).
- Budd, M. (2002) *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Budd, M. (2003) 'The Acquaintance Principle' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, 386-92.
- Burn, I. (1975) 'The Art Market' *Artforum* 13:8, pp. 34-37. Reprinted in Alberro & Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 320-333.
- Buchloh, B. H. D. (1990) 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions' *October*, Vol. 55, pp. 105-143.
- Buchloh, B. (2003) *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (MIT Press).
- Budd (2003) 'The Acquaintance Principle' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43(4), pp. 386-392.
- Cabanne, P. (1976) *The Brothers Duchamp* (Boston: New York Graphic Society)
- Carrier, D. (1979) 'Art Without its Objects?' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19(1): 53-62.
- Carrier, D. (1980) 'Paintings, Conceptual Art and Persons' *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 187-195.
- Carroll, N. (1992) "Art, Intention and Conversation" G. Iseminger (ed.) *Intention and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) pp. 97-131
- Carroll, N (1997) "The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Myself" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (3):305-309.
- Carroll, N. (1999) *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge).
- Carroll, N (2000) "Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism" *Metaphilosophy* 31 (1-2):75-95.
- Carroll, N. (2001) 'Interpretation, Theatrical Performance, and Ontology' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (3): pp. 313-316.
- Carroll, N. (2004) 'Non-Perceptual Aesthetic Properties: Comments for James Shelley' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (4):413-423.
- Carroll, N. (2006) 'Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content' in M. Kieran (Ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp. 69-97.

- Carney, J. (1994) 'Defining Art Externally' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34(2): 114-123.
- Campany, D. (1999) 'Conceptual Art History, of A Home for Homes for America' in Bird and Newman (Eds.) *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books) pp. 123-139.
- Chandler, A., Neumark, N. (2005) *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press).
- Chilvers, I. (2004) *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ciardi, J. (1959) 'How Does a Poem Mean?' Part 3 of *An Introduction to Literature*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).
- Claura, M. & Siegelau, S. (1973) 'L'art conceptuel' *XXe siecle*, 41. Reprinted in Alberro and Stimson (2000), pp. 289-290.
- Cloninger, C. (2009) *Fresher Styles for Web Designers: More Eye Candy from the Underground* (Berkeley, California: New Riders).
- Coady, C. (1992) *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Collins, J. (1973) 'Things and Theories' *Artforum* May 1973, pp. 53-8.
- Colpitt, F. (2004) 'The Formalist Connection and Originary Myths of Conceptual Art' in M. Corris (Ed.) *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 28-49.
- Copland, J. (1965) 'Concerning "Various Small Fires"' *Artforum* Vol 3, no 5 1965, pp. 24-5.
- Copland, J. (1974) 'Mel Bochner on Malevich, An Interview' *Artforum* Vol 12, no 10, pp. 59-63.
- Conarroe, J. (1969). 'A Local Pride: The Poetry of "Paterson"' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 547-558.
- Corris, M. (2004) *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice* (Cambridge University Press).
- Costello, D. (2007) 'Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art' in P. Goldie and E. Schellekens *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 92-115.
- Crawford, D. (1991) 'The Questions of Aesthetics' in R. Smith & A. Simpson (Eds.) *Aesthetics and Arts Education* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), pp. 18-31.
- Crow, T. (2006) 'Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art', in A. Alberro & S. Buchmann (Eds.) *Art After Conceptual Art* (MIT Press), pp. 53-64.

- Crowther, P. (1991) 'Creativity and Originality in Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 31 (4): 301-309.
- Currie, G (2007) 'Visual Conceptual Art', in Goldie & Schellekens (eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 33-50.
- Currie, G. (1989). *An Ontology of Art*. (London: Macmillan).
- Danto, A. (1964) 'The Artworld' *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 62, No. 19: pp. 571-584.
- Danto, A. (1981) *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Harvard University Press).
- Danto, A. (2003) *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company).
- Danto, A. (2007) 'Sol LeWitt' in his *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 93-100.
- Davies, D. (2004) *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing)
- Davies, D. (2006) in M. Kieran (Ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp. 22-34.
- Davies, P. et al (2007) *Janson's history of art: the western tradition, Volume 2* (Pearson Prentice Hall).
- Davies, S. (1991) *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press).
- Davies, S. (2004) 'Weitz's Anti-Essentialism' in P. Lamarque & S. Olsen (Eds.) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 63-68.
- Davies, S (2006) 'Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks, and Functional Beauty' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 223: pp. 224-241.
- Dickie, G. (1974) *Art and the Aesthetic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- Diffey, T. J. (1991) 'The Evaluation of a Work of Art: The Problem of Minimalism' *The Republic of Art and Other Essays* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing).
- Donnell-Kotrozo, C. (1980) 'The Intentional Fallacy: An Applied Reappraisal' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 20(4): 356-365.
- Drucker, J. (2004) 'The Crux of Conceptualism' in M. Corris (Ed.) *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 251-268.
- Dutton (1979) 'Artistic Crimes' *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19: 302-341.
- Dziemidok, B (1988) 'Controversy about the Aesthetic Nature of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 28(1): 1-17.

- Eaton, M. (1992) 'Integrating the Aesthetic and the Moral' *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 67, No. 3, pp. 219-240.
- Eaton, M. (2004) 'Art and the Aesthetic' in Kivy (ed) *Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 63-77.
- Eaton, M. (2001) *Merit: Aesthetic and Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Edgar, A. and Sedgwick, P. R. (Eds.) *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* (Routledge Key Guides).
- Edwards, S. (2004) 'Photography Out of Conceptual Art', in G. Perry & P. Wood (Eds.) *Themes in Contemporary Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 137-180.
- Eldridge, R. (1985) 'Form and Content: An Aesthetic Theory of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25 (4):303-316.
- Eliot, T. S. (1942) *The Music of Poetry* (Glasgow : Jackson, Son, Publishers to the University).
- Fahlman, B. (1996) *American Images: the SBC Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art*.
- Fussell, P. (1965) *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (McGraw Hill).
- Gaiger, J. (2004) 'Post-Conceptual Painting: Gerhard Richter's Extended Leave-Taking' in G. Perry & P. Wood (Eds.) *Themes in Contemporary Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 89-135.
- Gaut, B. (2005) 'The Cluster Account of Art Defended' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (3): 273-288.
- Gettier, E. (1963) 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* v.23, pp.121-123.
- Glickman, J. (1987) 'Creativity in the Arts' in J. Margolis (Ed.) *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), pp. 168-185.
- Godfrey, T. (1998) *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon).
- Godlovitch, S. (1993) 'The Integrity of Musical Performance' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (4): 573-587.
- Goldie, P. (2009) 'Conceptual Art' in S. Davies, K. Higgins, & R. Hopkins (Eds.) *A Companion to Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Blackwell) pp. 202-204.
- Goldie, P. & Schellekens, S. (Eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Goldie, P. & Schellekens, E. (2009) *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art* (London: Routledge).
- Goldstein, A. & Rorimer, A. (Eds.) (1995) *Reconsidering the Object of Art* (Exh. Cat.) (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and MIT Press).
- Goodman, N. (1968) *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs Merrill).
- Gracyk, T. (1999) 'Valuing and Evaluating Popular Music' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 57, No. 2, Aesthetics and Popular Culture, pp. 205-220.
- Graw, I. (2006) 'Conceptual Expression : On Conceptual Gestures in Allegedly Expressive Painting, Traces of Expression in Proto-Conceptual Works, and the Significance of Artistic Procedures'. In A. Alberro & S. Buchmann (Eds.) *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 119-134.
- Greenberg, C. (1986) 'Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press): pp. 292-303.
- Gross, K. (1983) "'Each Heav'nly Close": Mythologies and Metrics in Spenser and the Early Poetry of Milton' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 98, No. 1, pp. 21-36.
- Gruen, J. (1970) Review of conceptual art and conceptual aspects exhibition, *New York Magazine* 27th April 1970, p. 65.
- Hagberg, G. (2000) 'Foreword: Improvisation in the Arts' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 95-97.
- Hamilton, J. (2001) 'Theatrical Performance and Interpretation' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 307-312.
- Harrison, C. (2002) 'Conceptual Art' in P Smith and C Wilde (Eds) *A Companion to Art Theory* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell) pp. 317-26.
- Harrison, C. (2003a) *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).
- Harrison, C. (2003b) *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).
- Havens, R. (1950) 'Structure and Prosodic Pattern in Shelley's Lyrics' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 65, No. 6,, pp. 1076-1087.
- Higgins, H. (2002) *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Hillis Miller, J. (1965) *Poets of Reality* (Harvard University Press).
- Hirsch, E. D. (1967) *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), and *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

- Hirsch, E. D. (1976) *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Hollander, J. (2001) *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (Yale University Press).
- Hopkins, R. (2005) 'Aesthetics, Experience and Discrimination' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (2):119–133.
- Hopkins (2006) 'How to Form an Aesthetic Belief: Interpreting the Acquaintance Principle' *The Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 3 (3): 85-99.
- Hopkins, R. (2007) 'Speaking through Silence: Conceptual Art and Conversational Implicature', in Goldie & Schellekens (eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 51-67.
- Huebler, D. (1982) 'Saboteur or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?' *Artforum* Vol. 20 No. 9, pp. 72-76.
- Huebler, D. Interview with Patricia Norvell in P. Norvell & A. Alberro (Eds) *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley, LA, London: University of California Press), pp. 135-153.
- Hutcheson, F. (1973) *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, (Ed.) P. Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff).
- Irwin, W. (2000) *Intentionalist Interpretation: A Philosophical Explanation and Defense* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood).
- Jamieson, D. (1986) 'The Importance of Being Conceptual' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45 (2):117-123.
- Jenkins, S. (1995) 'Information, Communication, Documentation: An Introduction to the Chronology of Group Exhibitions and Bibliographies' in *Reconsidering the Object of Art* (Exh. Cat.), pp. 269-275.
- Karlen, P. (1979) 'Legal Aesthetics' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (3):195-212.
- Karshan, D. (1970) 'The Seventies: Post-Object Art', *Studio International*, vol. 180, no. 925, pp. 69-70.
- Kaufman, D. (2002) 'Normative Criticism and the Objective Value of Artworks' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 151-166.
- Kleiner, F. S. (2009) *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective* Vol. 2.
- Kieran, M. (1997a) 'Book Review: Budd - Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 187, pp. 246-248.
- Kieran, M. (1997b) 'Book Review: Richard Etlin - In Defense of Humanism' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37(3): 292-294.

- Kieran, M. (1997c) 'Aesthetic Value, Beauty, Ugliness and Incoherence' *Philosophy*, Vol. 72, No. 281, pp. 383-399.
- Kieran, M. (2005a) 'Value of Art' in B. Gaut & D. Lopes (Eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge), pp. 293-306.
- Kieran, M. (2005b) *Revealing Art* (London: Routledge).
- Kivy, P. (1991) 'Science and Aesthetic Appreciation', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 16: pp. 180-195.
- Kosuth, J. (1969a) 'Art After Philosophy' *Studio International* Vol. 178, Nos. 915-17. Reprinted in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990*, pp. 13-32.
- Kosuth, J. (1969b) in K. Fischer & H. Strelow (Eds.), *Prospect 69*, exh cat. (Dusseldorf Kunsthalle).
- Kosuth, J. (1993) 'Art as Idea as Idea: An Interview with Jeanne Siegel', in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990* (Cambridge, MA), pp. 47-50.
- Kozloff, M. (1972) 'The trouble with ART-AS-IDEA', *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 33-7. Reprinted in A. Alberro & B. Stimson (eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 268-279.
- Kozloff, M. (1969) '9 in a Warehouse: An Attack on the Status of the Object' *Artforum* 7(6) (February 1969), pp. 38-42.
- Kulka, T. (1981) 'The Artistic and the Aesthetic Value of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (4):336-350.
- Laetz, B. (2008) 'A Modest Defense of Aesthetic Testimony' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (4):355-363.
- Lamarque (2007) "On Perceiving Conceptual Art" in Goldie & Schellekens (eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 3-17.
- Lee, P. (2001) *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press).
- Lessing (1965) 'What is Wrong with a Forgery?' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, p. 461-471.
- Levey, M. (1968) 'Looking for Quality in Pictures' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 8 (1): pp. 3-15.
- Levinson J. (1980) 'What a Musical Work Is.' *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 77: pp. 5-28;
- Levinson, J. (1990) 'Refining Art Historically' in his *Music, Art and Metaphysics*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 37-59.

- Levinson, J. (1993) 'Art Historically Defined: Reply to Oppy' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33(4): 380-385.
- Levinson, J. (1996) *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Levinson, J. (2006) *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Levinson (2007) 'Aesthetic Contextualism' *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 4, No. 3.
- Levinson, J. (2009) 'The Aesthetic Appreciation of Music' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (4): 415-425.
- LeWitt (1967) 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' *Artforum* 5, no. 10, pp. 79–83. Reprinted in Alberro & Stimson (eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass., London: MIT Press): pp. 12-16.
- LeWitt (1969) 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' *Art-Language* 1: 11-13. Reprinted in Alberro & Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press), pp. 106-109.
- Lipsky, A.(1908) 'Rhythm in Prose' *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 277-289.
- Lippard, L. (1995) 'Escape Attempts' in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*. (Exh. Cat.)(The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and MIT Press).
- Lippard, L. (1997) *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 – 1972* (London: Studio Vista).
- Lippard L. & Chandler, J. (1968) 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, February 1968, pp. 31–6.
- Lind, R. (1992) 'The Aesthetic Essence of Art' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50: pp. 117-29.
- Livingston, P (1998) "Intentionalism in Aesthetics" *New Literary History* 29 (4): pp. 831-846.
- Livingston, P. (2003). 'On an Apparent Truism in Aesthetics'. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (3): 260-278.
- Lopes, D. (2011) 'The Myth of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value' *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 61, Issue 224: pp. 518-536.
- Lopes, D. (2009) 'Aesthetic Acquaintance', *The Modern Schoolman Special Issue on Varieties of Perception* 86.2-3, pp. 267-81
- Marino, M. (2004) "Almost not Photography" in M. Corris (Ed.) *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 63-79.

Margolis, J. (1987) *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

Matthews, P. (2001) 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Art and Nature' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 41(4): 395-410.

Matthews, R. (1979) 'Traditional Aesthetics Defended' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 39-50

Meeson, P. (1981) 'Art as Symbol or Thing' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 21(1): 22-31.

Merriam Webster Dictionary online

Meskin, A. (2004) 'Aesthetic Testimony: What Can We Learn from Others about Beauty and Art?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, 65-91.

Meyer, U. (1969) 'De-Objectification of the Object' *Arts Magazine* 43:8: pp. 20-22.

Meyer, U. (1972) *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton).

Molesworth, H. (2003), Alexander, M., & Bryan-Wilson, J. *Work Ethic* (Penn State Press).

Mooney, K. (2005) *The Evolution of Art in America*.

Morgan, R. (1978) *The Role of Documentation in Conceptual Art: An Aesthetic Inquiry* (PhD Thesis: New York University).

Morgan, R. (1989) 'The Situation of Conceptual Art' *Arts Magazine* 63 February 1989: pp. 40-43.

Morgan, R. (1994) *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective* (Jefferson, NC & London: McFarland & Co.)

Morgan, R. (1996) *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art*, (London: Cambridge University Press).

Mothersill, M. (1961) 'Critical Reasons' *Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (42): pp. 74-78.

Nathan, D. (2006) review of Gary Iseminger 'The Aesthetic Function of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46(3): 315-317.

Newman & Bird (1999) 'Introduction' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books), pp. 1-10.

Norvell, P. (2001) 'Introduction to *Eleven Interviews*' in Norvell & A. Alberro (Eds.) *Recording Conceptual Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 17-18.

- Novitz, D. (1996) 'Disputes About Art' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp. 153-163.
- Oppy, G. (1992) 'On Defining Art Historically' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (2): pp. 153-161.
- Osborne, H. (1979) *Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Osborne, H. (1980) 'Aesthetic Implications of Conceptual Art, Happenings, Etc.' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 20 (1): 6-22.
- Osborne, H. (1984a) 'Assessment and Stature' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 24(1): 3-13.
- Osborne, H. (1984b) 'Mathematical Beauty and Physical Science' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 24(4): 291-300.
- Osborne, P. (2000) *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (Oxford: Routledge).
- Osborne, P. (2002) *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon).
- Perreault, J. (1973) 'It's Only Words' *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 135-139.
- Pettit, P. (1983) 'The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism,' in *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 17-38.
- Piper, A. (1969) 'Idea, Form, Context', in her *Out of Order, Out of Sight - Volume II: Selected Writings on Art Criticism 1967-1992* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press).
- Piper, A. (1993) 'The Logic of Modernism' *Flash Art* 168. Reprinted in A. Alberro & B. Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 546-549.
- Predelli, S. (1999) 'Goodman and the Wrong Note Paradox' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39(4): pp. 365-375.
- Predelli S (1995) 'Against Musical Platonism' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35(4): 338-350.
- Reilly, E. *The 1960s*.
- Rood, K. (1994) *American Culture After World War II* (Detroit: Gale Research).
- Rorimer, A. (2004) *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (New York: Thames & Hudson).
- Rose, A. (Joseph Kosuth) (1969) 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', *Arts Magazine* 43 (4), pp. 22-23. Reprinted in Battcock (Ed.) *Idea Art*, p. 142.

- Rosenberg, H. (1972) "De-aestheticization," in *The De-Definition of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) pp. 28–38.
- Saintsbury, G. (1910) *A History of English Prosody from the 12th Century to the Present Day* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.).
- Saintsbury, G. (1923) *History of English Prose Rhythm*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.).
- Saltz, D. (2001) 'What Theatrical Performance Is (Not): The Interpretation Fallacy' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 299-306.
- Savedoff, B. E. (1989) 'The Art Object' *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 29, No. 2: 160-167.
- Savedoff, B. E. (1993) 'Looking at Art through photographs' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol 51, pp. 455-462.
- Schellekens, E. (2007) 'The Aesthetic Value of Ideas' in P. Goldie & E. Schellekens (Eds.) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp. 71-91.
- Schlesinger, G (1979) 'Aesthetic Experience and the Definition of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19: pp. 167-76.
- Sclafani, R. (1975) 'What kind of nonsense is this?' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33 (4): pp. 455-458.
- Scruton, R. (1974) *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen).
- Seamon, R. (2001). 'The Conceptual Dimension in Art and the Modern Theory of Artistic Value' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2):139–151.
- Seeley, W. (2008) 'Book Review: Goldie & Schellekens (Eds.) - Philosophy and Conceptual Art' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2): 203–205.
- Shannon, E. (1953) 'The Critical Reception of Tennyson's "Maud"' *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jun., 1953), pp. 397-417.
- Shelley, J. (2003) "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 43, No. 4 pp. 363-378.
- Shiner, L. (2009) 'Continuity and Discontinuity in the Concept of Art' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2): 159-169.
- Shirey, D. (1969) 'Impossible Art - What it is' *Art in America* 57 (3), pp. 32-47.
- Sibley, F. (1959) 'Aesthetic Concepts' *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4, pp. 421-450.
- Sibley, F. (1965) 'Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic' *Philosophical Review* 74: 135–159.

- Sibley, F. (1974) 'Particularity, Art, and Evaluation,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 48, pp. 1-21.
- Siegelaub, S. (1969) (Exh. Cat.) *January 5-31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegelaub).
- Slater, H. (1997) 'Art and Aesthetics' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 37, No. 3: 226-231.
- Smith, R. (1994) 'Conceptual Art' in N. Stangos (Ed.) *Concepts of Modern Art*, (London: Thames & Hudson), pp. 256-70.
- Smith, T. (2000) 'Propositions' In A. Alberro & B. Stimson (Eds.) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 258-261.
- Smithson, R. & Flam, J. (1996) *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings* (University of California Press).
- Sparshott, F. (1982) *The Theory of the Arts* (Princeton University Press).
- Stecker, R. (1994) 'Art Interpretation' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), pp. 193-206.
- Stecker, R. (1997) *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Stecker, R. (2010) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).
- Stewart, G. (2011) *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Stewart, R. (Ed.) (1997) *Ideas that Shaped Our World: Understanding the Great Concepts of Then and Now* (London: Marshall Publishing).
- Stiles, K. (1996) 'Introduction' to section entitled 'Concepts and Language' in K. Stiles & P. Howard (Eds.) *Theories and documents of contemporary art: a sourcebook of artists' writings*, pp. 804-816.
- Stimson, B. (2000) 'The Promise of Conceptual Art' In A. Alberro & B. Stimson (Eds) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), pp. xxxviii-iii.
- Strickland, C. & Boswell, J. (1992) *The Annotated Mona Lisa: A Crash Course in Art History from Prehistoric to Postmodern Times* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel Publishing).
- Stolnitz, J. (1979) 'The Artistic and the Aesthetic "In Interesting Times"' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 401-413.
- Taylor, M. (1999) *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the ends of representation* (London: University of Chicago Press).

- Tilghman, B. (1984) *But Is It Art?: The Value of Art and the Temptation of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Tormey, A. (1973) 'Critical Judgements' *Theoria* Vol 39 (1-3): pp. 35-49.
- Treidler, L. (1993) 'History and the Ontology of the Musical Work' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 3, pp. 483-497.
- Vaughan, W. H. T. (2000) *Encyclopedia of Artists: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Vendler, H. (1997) *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*. (Boston: Bedford).
- Walker, J. A. (2001) *Left shift: radical art in 1970s Britain* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris).
- Walton, K. (1970) 'Categories of Art' *Philosophical Review* 79 (3): 334-367.
- Walton, K. (1988) 'What Is Abstract about the Art of Music?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring, 1988), pp. 351-364.
- Wells, L. (2000) *Photography: a Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge).
- Weiner, L. (1969) 'October 12, 1969' in U. Meyer (Ed.) *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton), pp. 217-219.
- Wilde, C. (2007) 'Matter and Meaning in the Work of Art: Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*', in P. Goldie & E. Schellekens (Eds) *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, pp. 119-137.
- Willis, G. (2004) *Key Issues Concerning Contemporary Art*.
- Wollen, P. (2004) 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art' in his *Paris/Manhattan: Writings on Art* (London: Verso Books) pp. 15-34.
- Wollheim, R. (1980) 'Art and Evaluation,' in *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 227-240.
- Wolterstorff, N. (1980) *Art in Action* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing).
- Wood, P. (2002) *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate Publishing).
- Young, J. (2003) *Art And Knowledge* (London: Routledge).
- Zangwill, N. (1998) 'Aesthetic/Sensory Dependence' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1): 66-81.
- Zangwill, N. (1999) 'Feasible Aesthetic Formalism' *Noûs*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 610-629.

Zangwill, N. (2002) 'Are There Counterexamples to Aesthetic Theories of Art?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 111-118.