

ART, RESEARCH, PHILOSOPHY  
CLIVE CAZEAUX



# ART, RESEARCH, PHILOSOPHY

*Art, Research, Philosophy* explores the emergent field of artistic research: art produced as a contribution to knowledge. As a new subject, it raises several questions: What is art-as-research? Don't the requirements of research amount to an imposition on the artistic process that dilutes the power of art? How can something subjective become objective? What is the relationship between art and writing? Doesn't description always miss the particularity of the artwork?

This is the first book-length study to show how ideas in philosophy can be applied to artistic research to answer its questions and to make proposals for its future. Clive Cazeaux argues that artistic research is an exciting development in the historical debate between aesthetics and the theory of knowledge. The book draws upon Kant, phenomenology and critical theory to show how the immediacies of art and experience are enmeshed in the structures that create knowledge. The power of art to act on these structures is illustrated through a series of studies that look closely at a number of contemporary artworks.

This book will be ideal for postgraduate students and scholars of the visual and creative arts, aesthetics and art theory.

**Clive Cazeaux** is Professor of Aesthetics at Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales, UK. He is the author of *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy: From Kant to Derrida* (2007) and the editor of *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (2011). His research interests are the philosophies of metaphor, visual thinking, artistic research and art-science practice.



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*Clive Cazeaux*

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**For my mother, Dorothy Jean Cazeaux.**



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# CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
Introduction	1
1 The theories that wedge art and knowledge apart	11
2 What is artistic research?	33
3 We need to talk about concepts	51
4 Writing as rupture and relation	77
5 Insights from the metaphorical dimension of making	91
6 Does 'art doctored' equal 'art neutered'?	109
7 Drawing with Merleau-Ponty: a study in the constellation of concepts	129
8 The aesthetics of research after the end of art	151
Conclusion	175
<i>Index</i>	<i>183</i>



# FIGURES

- 3.1 Karla Black, *Pleaser*, 2009. Cellophane, paint, Sellotape, thread, 250 x 200 cm. © Karla Black. Courtesy Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photograph © Fred Dott. 57
- 5.1 Vija Celmins, *Night Sky #19*, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 57.0 x 67.3 cm. © Vija Celmins. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photograph © Tate, London 2016. 99
- 5.2 Vija Celmins, *Night Sky #18*, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 48.5 x 58.5 cm. © Vija Celmins. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photograph © Tate, London 2016. 103
- 7.1 *humhyphenum* (Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon), *The Taste of Tree? Layer 3 Digital Drawing 2*, 2011. © Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon. Courtesy the artists. 133
- 8.1 Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, still from *We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask*, 2003/2006. DVD projection, colour, 18 minutes. © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. 166

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# INTRODUCTION

What is ‘artistic research’? I say ‘artistic research’. I could have used a number of alternative names: ‘art as research’, ‘arts-based research’, ‘creative research’, ‘fine art research’, ‘practice-based research’, ‘practice-led research’ and ‘visual arts research’. It is by no means clear whether they all refer to exactly the same thing. I don’t propose to identify how one differs from another, since there is too much shifting and sharing of cares and concerns between them. The growth in very similar vocabulary, together with the number of publications, is an indication of interest in the area(s), but also a sign of the uncertainties and anxieties surrounding the idea that *art can be or can create research*. There are also similar developments in creative writing, music, theatre and performance. For a list of some of the book-length studies in the fields, see the bibliography at the end of this introduction. In this book, I am primarily interested in fine art or visual arts research. I shall refer to the topic as ‘artistic research’, while being mindful of its near-synonyms and the fact that it does not have an agreed definition. This is because it draws a contrast with conventional or scientific research, and appears to be sticking as a title in recent literature (e.g. Borgdorff 2012; Schwab 2013; Slager 2015).

While there is uncertainty over the name and the idea, one area upon which there is general agreement is the origin of artistic research: the growth of audit culture in university research, and the marketization of higher education. The first research assessment exercise (RAE) was conducted in the United Kingdom in 1986 with the purpose of identifying which university departments merited government research funding (although it was originally called the Research Selectivity Exercise). As Bence and Oppenheim note, it was ‘a relatively low-key affair involving only “traditional” universities’ with ‘only a small proportion of [government] funding being apportioned as a result of the ratings’ (Bence and Oppenheim 2005: 144). However, by the third RAE in 1992, virtually all government research funding was decided by the ratings scored by university departments in the exercise (Bence and

## 2 Introduction

Oppenheim 2005: 144). By the end of the 1990s, comparable exercises were being conducted in Australia, Hong Kong, Poland and Slovakia, with Germany, Italy, the Nordic countries, Hungary and New Zealand using a small component of research assessment alongside another, more heavily weighted measure, typically research student numbers (Roberts 2003: 92). Up until this point, art had not been a research subject in the sense recognized by the RAE. In the United Kingdom, art had only entered the academy as a subject for study in higher education in the 1960s as a result of the Coldstream Report, published by the National Advisory Council on Art Education. The recommendation of Coldstream was that art education should move from its traditional emphasis on drawing skills, anatomy and professional craft-based training towards 'a liberal education in art', with the main manifestation of this shift being the addition of an historical and contextual studies component that would constitute 20 per cent of the course (Candlin 2001: 303–304). If government funding, and consequently the prestige and viability of a department, were now linked to research quality and the number of research degree students, then art, or the managers who now had responsibility for the subject in their universities, would need to get a slice of the pie.

As a result, artistic research emerges with a number of anxieties: (1) It is wholly the product of institutional, managerial forces, a subject brought into being to raise the profile and the income of departments. This worry is made even stronger when it is recognized that much of modern art, especially as an *avant-garde*, works in opposition to the economic and industrial forces that seek to monetize and standardize artistic and cultural expression. On this reading, artistic research either amounts to the university sector raising income by creating demand for a new highest qualification for art lecturers (the PhD) that takes them away from the customs and demands of the art world (Craig-Martin and Baldessari 2009; Thompson 2011) or, even worse, amounts to art relinquishing its critical potential and rolling over to become one more player in the knowledge economy (Busch 2011).

(2) A second worry is that, although it is discussed as a form of knowledge, the artwork itself is never acknowledged as the site of knowledge, but has to be supported or defended by textual commentary. The 'sharpest possible definition [of] the problem', according to Jon Thompson, is contained in a paper from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council) (Thompson 2011: 487). The following passage from the paper shows how 'the academic screws are really being tightened': 'creative works, no matter how highly esteemed, cannot in themselves be regarded as outputs of research. They can only become so in association with explanatory or contextualizing text' (quoted in Thompson 2011: 487). This is a sign of what Thompson calls, after Félix Guattari, 'linguistic imperialism' (Thompson 2011: 487). The work done by the artist is never enough on its own to constitute research, the argument runs. It is only once the artwork has been categorized and placed within the comparisons and contrasts enabled by historical, theoretical and aesthetic discourse that it can be accepted as a contribution to knowledge.

(3) A third anxiety is the question of what exactly artistic research is or might become. The concept pushes together some of the most strongly opposing terms

from the history of ideas, creating a complex of forces that shows no sign of resolution or definition. How can art practice, which is ostensibly rooted in *subjectivity*, produce knowledge, i.e. offer something *objective*? The playful, ambiguous nature of art means it is impossible to produce a class of observation statements that is logically equivalent to any given theoretical statement. More generally, the multiple, divergent, deceptive appearances displayed by art are simply antithetical to the formation of clear and distinct ideas about the fundamental nature of an object or topic. If the experience of art lies in the appreciation of its *visual* or *sensory form*, how can this be captured in *writing* without losing or distorting the essence of the experience? Furthermore, doesn't the attempt to position an artwork as a contribution to knowledge have to overlook the *physical particularity* of the work in the interests of locating it within the *verbal, theoretical generalities* that define a research context? There is the danger that artworks become classified as 'outputs' or 'outcomes', assessed in accordance with criteria that measure contribution to knowledge, rather than being appreciated in terms of responses drawn from the history of art and aesthetics. Surely the *freedom* with which an artist is entitled to work is *constrained* by the requirement to show fidelity to certain research methods or to produce work that *conforms* to the vocabulary of a research question? The demands of making a contribution to a discursive body of knowledge would appear to oppose modernist notions of the self-contained, autonomous nature of art and sensory experience. As I explain in chapter 2, one of the most often quoted attempts to clarify the meaning of artistic research is Frayling's threefold distinction between research *into*, *through* and *for* art (he includes 'design' as well), but the paper concludes by implicitly trying to keep art and knowledge wedged apart (Frayling 1993: 5).

Despite these anxieties, I think artistic research is a positive development for the arts and the theory or philosophy of knowledge. I see it as a new and exciting episode in the history of the tension between aesthetics and epistemology (the theory of knowledge). I don't accept the argument that, because of its origins in managerial audit culture, artistic research can only amount to being a vehicle for creating demand for academic qualification or to being another piece of product in the knowledge economy. The argument is not sound. The fact that artistic research originates in the audit culture surrounding university research is not denied. What is challenged, however, is the inference from this fact to the conclusion that artistic research can only ever amount to being an expression of that same culture. This assumes a simplistic cause-and-effect relationship, and adopts the principle that the effect (artistic research) can only possess qualities that were present in the cause (audit culture). No allowance is made for the fact that the nature of an object can outgrow the nature of the conditions that gave rise to it. Origination can be a process of transformation, and not simply repetition of the same. This is because a much more complex set of forces is at play than is recognized by a simple cause-and-effect structure. Questions of the nature of art, aesthetics, knowledge and epistemology are forces with a historical and contemporary presence that needs to be included in any assessment of the consequences of audit culture and what might be subsumed within it. While one of the forces will undoubtedly be the need to demonstrate

## 4 Introduction

departmental prowess in terms of publication and student numbers, others might include the contest between art and knowledge, the desire to articulate a new kind of aesthetic–epistemological practice, and the will to find a new space in which art can operate. Although research assessment was the motivation, in exercising itself it cannot help but pull into its mechanisms larger, historical and contemporary ideas from aesthetics and epistemology that become involved and, in the process, create a form whose nature and scope far exceed the values and properties of the original cause. This is not to say we mustn't be alert to the ways in which institutional factors impose themselves. My point is that one also needs to be alert with regard to counting the forces at play, and to be wary of adopting a simplistic model of the situation that discourages recognition of a wider, complex array of factors with the potential to affect and transform the outcome.

This book turns to philosophy, specifically to aesthetics and epistemology, to address the concerns and to explore the possibilities within artistic research. It seems to me that there is insufficient recognition of the resources within the history of philosophy that can assist the new subject. This is not to say that art–research–philosophy exchanges are not already taking place. As I indicate in chapter 2, many figures working in artistic research have turned to philosophy in order to present theories of knowledge that show how art creates knowledge, either in its own terms or in the terms of a philosophical theory (for example, Bolt 2004; Coessens et al. 2009; Scrivener 2010; Slager 2015; Smith 2014). All offer valuable, possible directions for a philosophically informed concept of artistic research. Similar or related themes are pursued in this book, although not necessarily in the terms set out by the authors. The idea that experience is not simply the receipt of the world but includes an act of creative openness towards it (part of Bolt's and Smith's interest in Heidegger; Bolt 2004: 188; Smith 2014: 151) and, as such, is valuable for artistic research, is considered in chapter 3 in relation to Immanuel Kant (the philosopher who laid the groundwork for Heidegger's phenomenology). The assertion that Scrivener draws from Rancière, that aesthetic expression is always implicated in *and active upon* conceptual discourse, is also a Kantian claim (Scrivener 2010: 261), and I develop the point in several chapters. Much of what is sought for artistic research in the Deleuzian concept of deterritorialization, especially the claim that objects combined in an artwork can coalesce in ways that transform their identities (Slager 2015: 43) or disclose their agency (Coessens et al. 2009: 92, 95), is available in terms of metaphor, although Deleuze and Guattari would probably not agree. They hold a narrow concept of metaphor that limits the figure to being a relation between proper and figurative meaning (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 21–22), when an altogether more metaphysically dynamic concept is available from Max Black and Paul Ricœur (Black 1993; Ricœur 1978). I consider the importance of metaphor, inspired by Kant, Black and Ricœur, in relation to making in chapter 5 and artistic research after the end of art in chapter 8.

Many of the uncertainties surrounding the nature of artistic research stem from regarding art and knowledge as two distinct domains. Accordingly, there is the concern that knowledge imposes its nature on and, thereby, reduces or

contaminates art (see, for example, Busch 2011; Holert 2011), and the endeavour to extract a model of knowledge from art that is unique to it (see, for example, Biggs and Büchler 2010; Borgdorff 2010). However, aesthetics and epistemology teach us that while art and knowledge are more often than not defined in relation to one another, the relation is not always one of opposition. Focusing on these debates and the terms in which they are set, I propose, can help to overcome the uncertainties, and can generate new concepts and proposals for the future of artistic research. One of the motivations for writing this book was noticing that many of the problems surrounding artistic research centred around oppositions, such as subjective–objective, visual–verbal, theory–practice, freedom–constraint, where philosophy has made some headway, but where that philosophical knowledge was not being drawn upon. I am not saying philosophy has all the answers. My point is that some progress might be made in the development of artistic research if, instead of seeing art and knowledge as a two-term affair, where the attempt is to extract one (knowledge) from the other (art) or to prevent one from dominating the other, we recognize that, from Kant onwards, the two terms become entangled in ways that promise to be fruitful for artistic research. One of the most valuable properties of philosophy is the attention it pays to the concepts and images used in thought, especially the thinking that prompts us to distinguish one thing from another, e.g. ‘inside’ from ‘outside’, ‘mind’ from ‘body’, ‘word’ from ‘image’, ‘knowledge’ from ‘art’. Admittedly, philosophy is responsible for introducing, propagating and deepening some of the distinctions, but it also questions them, and advances theses that produce relations instead of oppositions or subterranean undercurrents that unify what appears divided on the surface. In referring to ideas of ‘unification’ and ‘relation’, I am not promising an end to distinctions and the oppositions to which they can lead. Rather, it is more a case of how we think about and picture the distinctions, relations and unities that are proposed. A unity, by definition, will be a unity of parts, whose internal organization and articulation may still need deliberation.

Chapter 1 reviews the history of aesthetics and epistemology to identify the principal theories responsible for defining art and knowledge as opposites. It extends from the ancient Greek metaphysics of Plato to twentieth-century philosophy of science, and includes modern theories of art and the self. Resistance to artistic research, it argues, might arise within the arts as a result of modernist notions of the integrity of art and of sensory experience. Both are conceived as being discrete, self-contained domains, with a uniqueness that cannot be distributed or conveyed by language or other forms of reproduction, including research discourse. The artist might subscribe to the concept of the ‘artist-genius’ and regard their practice as the creation of forms that display connections between things that science is unequipped to classify or measure. There is also resistance to the idea of art as knowledge from the history of philosophy and the philosophy of science. I show how the art–knowledge opposition arises from certain binary distinctions, and indicate some of the problems inherent in the binary models adopted. I also respond to the oppositions with alternative theories of knowledge throughout the book, from chapter 3 onwards.



In chapter 2, I consider various responses to the question ‘what is artistic research?’, and analyze the concept of research in general to assess its proximity to art. These studies lead to two conclusions. First, common to many attempts to define artistic research is an interest in the exercise of concepts or classification. This might take the form of: (1) artistic research working to extend the concept of ‘art’; (2) displays of the aesthetic or poetic nature of knowledge production, and the impact made by images, artefacts and performances on the concepts involved in the production of knowledge; and (3) work that is across disciplines or which challenges classification. Second, distilling a definition of research from three institutional sources produces a notion which is very close to Margaret Boden’s definition of creativity, where the principle requirement is to produce ‘ideas that are *new, surprising and valuable*’ (Boden 2004: 1, original emphasis). The idea that research and creativity are strongly similar raises the question of what the articulation of surprise or insight in the context of art might look like. In order to establish how questions of conceptualization and novelty might be worked through to arrive at a definition of artistic research, I suggest we need to turn to the interaction between aesthetics and epistemology as it features in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Chapter 3 is the Kant chapter. The value of his philosophy for artistic research is that he makes aesthetic experience central to his account of the creation of knowledge. I produce a line of interpretation that translates Kant’s combination of aesthetics and epistemology into a way of approaching artworks *in the particular* as research. The key element here is the role played by concepts in Kant’s theory of knowledge. One of the most contentious topics within artistic research is the opposition between aesthetic experience and conceptual knowledge, with the latter often being equated with language and taken as a generalizer or ossifier of experience. However, while all words are concepts, *not all concepts are words*, which is to say that concepts do more than simply describe experience. Kant offers a very particular understanding of the notion of a concept: the concept as a shaper of experience. The fact that I experience the world as an organized sequence made up of items that I recognize and interact with, and in addition *am aware of myself as a continuously existing being*, is the result of concepts chunking experience into cognizable pieces. In addition to this shaping role, Kant ascribes them the agility with which to connect to other concepts. As such, they become elements which can simultaneously explain the power of art to create novelty and surprise, while locating that novelty and surprise within a conceptual, cognitive framework.

The idea that experience is shaped by concepts, and that this process is somehow constitutive of our identities as subjects located in a world, is pursued in relation to writing in chapter 4. As noted above, concepts do more than simply describe experience. While chapter 3 explains Kant’s account of the ‘shaping’ role of concepts, and its relevance to artistic research, chapter 4 focuses on the nature of writing and its effect on art as research. We have already encountered some of the antipathy directed towards writing within artistic research, e.g. Thompson’s charge of ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Thompson 2011: 487). In this chapter, I argue that much of this antipathy is the product of dualistic thinking, i.e. thinking that sets one domain

against another in the belief that one is antithetical to the other, e.g. words and experience. I turn to Sartre to provide an alternative configuration of the relationship between art and writing. The difference between sensory experience and writing is not denied, but rather than assuming it to be antithetical, it is reconfigured so that writing is recognized as contributing to the experience of making artwork.

The idea that working artistically with materials can generate novelty through metaphor is examined in chapter 5. Within the visual arts, material is often understood either as a vehicle for self-expression or as the means to achieve certain kinds of effect. In addition, within artistic research, there is the concern that the significance of the research is located in the conceptual or theoretical framework that surrounds the making, rather than in the making itself. I argue that the manipulation of materials in art has a metaphorical nature that can be the basis for epistemic enquiry. I show how the generative aspect of making can be attributed to the metaphorical nature of material, and develop themes of 'collision' and 'demand' from Max Black's and Paul Ricœur's theories of metaphor to illuminate the process whereby the manipulation of material in art produces novelty (Black 1993; Ricœur 1978).

A worry that is often raised in relation to artistic research is that the art itself is not very good. The requirement to produce a body of artwork in relation to a programme of research has somehow resulted in the creation of works which, in having to respond to cognitive or epistemic demands, are judged to be lesser works of art. I address this concern in chapters 6 and 7. At the heart of the worry is the belief that art has intrinsic properties, especially freedoms, that are in danger of being restricted by the requirements of research. One of the principles underlying modern art, especially as an *avant-garde*, is its autonomy: its capacity to work independently of, and thereby offer critical resistance to, any orthodoxy, whether cultural, political or economic. The key to the concern, I argue, lies in probing how the concepts of autonomy and 'own-ness', as in 'on its own terms', are understood. Two philosophers strongly associated with the autonomy of art are Kant and Theodor W. Adorno. They formulate art's autonomy as a matter of its engagement with already-active ways of knowing and its capacity to affect those ways of knowing. In chapter 6, I argue, on the strength of their theories, that the antagonism between art and research can be rethought as a productive relationship.

The result is a joint insistence from Kant and Adorno that the autonomy of art resides in the way in which the work of art can both be approached through concepts, yet nonetheless pose a challenge to conceptualization. I concentrate upon Adorno's thesis that the work of art is surrounded by a constellation of concepts, where the interplay of comparison and contrast between concepts demonstrates the power of art to stimulate thought. Chapter 7 puts this theory into practice with a close reading of a research project on synaesthetic drawing by Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon, who work under the collective pseudonym '*humhyphenhum*' (always italicized in the exposition of their work). Alternative connections between the concepts gathered by *humhyphenhum* are also exercised as a way of demonstrating the different ways in which art's autonomy can be expressed through a constellation of concepts.

In chapter 8, I consider the implications of the death of art for artistic research. The ‘death of art’ or ‘end of art’ thesis asserts that art has come to an end as a series of practices that can be clearly defined in terms of their material condition, e.g. painting, sculpture, photography, or the modes of signification they offer, e.g. representation or expression. The transition in the twentieth century from the ready-made, through happenings and conceptual art, to socially engaged art practice and institutional critique, means there is no longer a set of clearly defined properties which belong exclusively to art practice. If, as Osborne states, the possibilities within art have expanded to infinity, where does this leave the artist-researcher (Osborne 2013: 48)? What materials or contexts do they reach for, and how do they begin to come to terms with what the ‘artistic’ might be doing to ‘research’ within artistic research? In the absence of a definition of art, I recommend that the concept of research itself might be the source of an aesthetic. I set out the history of the ‘end of art’ thesis, and consider recent responses to it. I build upon Osborne’s concept of ‘transcategoriality’ to construct an epistemology that takes seriously the idea that anything can be art, and obliges the artist-researcher to recognize all the elements that might become their practice as concepts that are ripe for transformation.

Although a glance at the contents page and a flick through the book will reveal there is a lot of talk about concepts, I must emphasize that, in applying philosophy to artistic research, I do not see myself *binding* art practice within a theoretical straitjacket. While it cannot be denied that art is always theoretical, that is to say, it is always perceived and understood through one or more theoretical lenses, I am nevertheless mindful of the ways in which thinking and description open on to, and are moved by, artistic and sensory experience. Art and the senses exert a counter-pressure on the theorization to which they are subject, and the impact on theoretical concepts and claims needs to be felt and acknowledged. The notion of ‘concept’ that is put forward is drawn from Kant. One of its defining properties is that the concept does not *impose itself on experience* but is *active within it*. As a consequence of it, we are reminded to pay closer attention to the detail in experience and in art: sensory qualities, material properties, the effects of technologies, the forms taken in a social or institutional encounter. I look closely at four works, by five artists: Karla Black (chapter 3), Vija Celmins (chapter 5), Harty and Sawdon (working collectively; chapter 7) and Walid Raad (The Atlas Group; chapter 8). I study the works’ formal properties, the marks that are made, the effects that are produced, the differences that are created and the implications which these details have for the context or enquiry which surrounds them. It could be argued that these are *just* formal properties, and that the important issues lie elsewhere, not in the work. But what is the ‘just’ doing in that sentence? Modernism, with its emphasis on formal properties being qualities that refer only to the work’s internal logic, has encouraged us to think that sensory or aesthetic qualities never extend beyond their own domain. But on the theory of concepts developed here, emphasis is placed on the potential for any element within experience to reach out and open up another part of experience, where the ‘opening-up’ action will be an occasion where new

concepts have to be found or coined, and where these conceptual movements become expressions of art's epistemic force.

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# 1

## THE THEORIES THAT WEDGE ART AND KNOWLEDGE APART

In his study of the history of the relation between word and image, W.J.T. Mitchell argues that the point is ‘not to heal the split between words and images, but to see what interests and powers it serves’; in other words, the point is not to heal but to historicize (Mitchell 1987: 44). The broader interest served by this point, for Mitchell, is the affirmation of a ‘dialectical pluralism’ wherein contraries have to exist by ‘structural necessity’ as the forces through which political and ideological conflicts are played out (Mitchell 1987: 207). While I would endorse Mitchell’s claim that there is no single, essential difference between word and image, only *differences* as they are driven by the political and ideological values within a particular culture, I would *not* want this view to be translated into the claim that we have to accept, by ‘structural necessity’, the contrary between art and knowledge. Without wanting to deny that art and knowledge are determined by institutional forces or wanting to appear naïve by suggesting that artistic research might operate independently of them, I think philosophy has the resources to challenge the ‘structural necessity’ that impels us to regard contraries as opposites, and can suggest frameworks in which contraries are arranged in more complex or varied ways. The point is to acknowledge contraries or differences but not to leap to the conclusion that they are antithetical or binary opposites. Difference can be articulated or pictured in various ways, with the potential for alliances, interminglings and transformations that are more suggestive in terms of implication and future direction than binary opposition. Some of these non-binary frameworks are explored in this book.

In this chapter, I set out some of the theories of art and knowledge that have been responsible for wedging art and knowledge apart. My aim is to draw attention to the small number of concepts and images that underpin claims regarding the distance between art and knowledge in the history of ideas. I disclose the tendency to think in binary oppositions, such as ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘reason’ and

‘sensation’, and ‘reality’ and ‘appearance’, and show how the oppositions prioritize art or knowledge in such a way that the possibility of a relationship is always precluded. I demonstrate some of the problems inherent in the binary models adopted, and set out some responses from the history of philosophy.

### The integrity of art

The first view I want to consider is the anti-artistic research position: the idea that art is distinct from and wholly other to knowledge, and that the emergence of research culture is detrimental to art practice. The central claim is usually that art or sensory experience has a unique, distinctive nature that thrives in and for itself, and any attempt to bring it into relation with a theoretical, epistemological or administrative framework is a contamination or reduction of the experience, or a threat to its production. I call this ‘integrity’ in the sense that art or sensory experience is understood to function as a self-contained whole with a distinctive nature that thrives on its own terms. Relationships with other subjects or domains are resisted in case its distinctive nature is compromised or lost. The anti-research view is usually presented in terms of art being constrained by academicization in the form of either institutional requirements, for example, the research degree as a new and arguably unnecessary qualification for those who want to teach in higher education (Baldessari and Craig-Martin 2009), or textual requirements, as in the stipulation that artworks have to be accompanied by critical, verbal commentary to be recognized as research (Thompson 2011). The specific, disciplinary demands of art, according to Candlin, put artistic researchers in the position of having to produce work that not only satisfies aesthetic criteria but also has to be validated according to the standards of academic knowledge-production (Candlin 2000a). ‘By moving the right to legislation from the practising artist to the academic’, she argues, ‘a different series of institutional norms, professional and pedagogical practices are brought into play. It is this overlap between art practice and academia that potentially makes students, staff and management anxious’ (Candlin 2000a: 4).

Theories of the integrity of art are a product of modernism. While only one of the theories (Dewey’s) addresses the question of art as knowledge, they all nevertheless affirm that art must be understood and appreciated for the way it operates *on its own terms* (Dewey 2005). However, this idea of ‘own-ness’, I think, poses difficulties for artistic research. ‘Modernism’ here is understood as the artistic and cultural reaction to the technological and social changes created by industrialization in nineteenth-century Europe and, in particular, the avant-garde or revolutionary nature that art develops as it seeks to counter the values and objects of mass production and to carve out an autonomy for itself in the face of these values. But while the quest for autonomy leads to the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, it has the unfortunate consequence of promoting concepts of purity, internalism and self-containment in art, which unwittingly act against the idea of art as a force that has impact beyond its own realm. This can be found in a number of theories of modern art. Both the English critic Clive Bell and the American critic Clement Greenberg propound

theories of formalism which disregard the representational property of art, i.e. its capacity to be about the world beyond art, and identify the value of art in its own terms, although the terms differ between Bell and Greenberg (Bell 1992; Greenberg 1992). Bell's ambition is to solve what he takes to be 'the central problem of aesthetics': to identify 'the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of all from all other classes of objects' (Bell 1992: 113). No matter what form art takes, e.g. pictures, sculptures, buildings, textiles, etc., he reasons, it always provokes 'a particular kind of emotion' which he calls 'the aesthetic emotion'. The quality common to all kinds of art that provokes this emotion, he declares, is 'significant form': 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, [in] certain forms and relations of forms, [to] stir our aesthetic emotions' (Bell 1992: 113). This means that, in Bell's words:

To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation ...

To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three dimensional space.

*(Bell 1992: 115)*

The essence of art, for Bell, therefore, lies in the capacity of its formal properties of form, colour and three-dimensional space to stimulate aesthetic emotion. An artist who has to reinforce the emotional power of their work by representing an aspect of the world, and the emotions that are associated with that aspect, e.g. an execution (Bell's own example), he describes as 'feeble' (Bell 1992: 115).

Representation is similarly criticized by Greenberg. The problem with representational painting, such as an 'Old Master', he asserts, is 'that one tends to see what is in an Old Master before seeing it as a picture' (Greenberg 1992: 756). In other words, one's eyes pass through the status of the picture as a picture to dwell on the scene or objects depicted, when, for Greenberg, it is the status of picturing *as picturing* that is key. The value of modernist painting, he declares, is that it is painting that explores and tests its own condition:

The essential norms or conventions of painting are also the limiting conditions with which a marked-up surface must comply in order to be experienced as a picture. Modernism has found that these limiting conditions can be pushed back indefinitely before a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object; but it has also found that the further back these limits are pushed the more explicitly they have to be observed.

*(Greenberg 1992: 758)*

While one can choose to view any painting, Old Master or modernist, first and foremost as a picture, before dwelling on the people and objects depicted, the success of modernism, Greenberg asserts, is that it 'imposes it as the only and



necessary way' of viewing a painting (Greenberg 1992: 756). This, he adds, 'is a success of self-criticism' (Greenberg 1992: 756). His inspirations for the value of a practice concentrating upon its own conditions are science and the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Scientific method, Greenberg writes, 'asks that a situation be resolved in exactly the same kind of terms as that in which it is presented – a problem in physiology is solved in terms of physiology, not in those of psychology' (Greenberg 1992: 758). Kant is 'the first real modernist', he claims, on the grounds that his philosophy introduces the concept of immanent criticism, that is, 'the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself' (Greenberg 1992: 754–755). This is a reference to Kant's critical philosophy in which he examines the scope and limits of our cognitive powers, and demonstrates the necessary application of reason within experience and the errors in thinking that are created by exercising reason beyond the limits of experience (Kant 1929).

Although Bell addresses all forms of art, while Greenberg concentrates on painting, their arguments nevertheless share a commitment to the autonomy and distinctiveness of their respective domains. As such, their theories do not deny art or painting as knowledge. If anything, their arguments could be interpreted as the reaffirmation of art and painting as disciplines, as domains with their own specialist histories and methods and, therefore, as bodies of knowledge. However, it is the idea of something working on its own terms, of 'own-ness', that is the problem, and that turns these theories into obstacles between art and knowledge. The problem occurs in general terms with regard to the notion of 'disciplinarity', and in more specific terms arising from the appeals made by Bell to significant form and Greenberg to painting as an exploration of its own condition. The history of disciplinarity is complex. As Shumway and Messer-Davidow indicate, the origin of the term is a confluence of meanings derived from the authority that is contained in widely accepted empirical methods and truths (as opposed to abstract doctrine or the writings of an individual), and from 'the "rule" of the monasteries' and 'the methods of training used in armies and schools' (Shumway and Messer-Davidow 1991: 202). While referring to a subject as a discipline implies the positive qualities of rigour and legitimacy, Michel Foucault's recent analyses of the power relations that operate in knowledge-construction also present disciplinarity as a 'system of control in the production of discourse' (Foucault 1972: 224; quoted in Shumway and Messer-Davidow 1991: 201).

While systems of control might be active in policing the boundaries of a discipline, its walls are not hermetically sealed. In none of the above definitions is there the suggestion that disciplines are pure or self-contained or constituted by only one kind of knowledge or practice. Rather, disciplines are hybrids, with knowledge sets that may have very specific application in that disciplinary area, but which also draw their methods and definitions from other disciplinary domains. This is evident as soon as one considers, for example: the role of statistics, whose home province is presumably mathematics, in the physical sciences; an archaeologist's reliance on the chemical analysis of artefacts; the place of visualization in science which, as several studies have shown, quickly undermines any simplistic

art–science distinction (Elkins 2008; Galison 1997; Lynch and Edgerton Jr 1988); and the contribution that writing makes to all forms of knowledge, although, as Collini observes, recognition of the contribution that writing makes to knowledge-production is one factor that tends to divide the arts from the sciences (Collini 1998: lix). The problem is that, by Greenberg’s lights, disciplinarity is equated with singularity or purity. He needs an immanence or discipline-specificity in order to create a space in which culture can survive in the face of capitalism, and where avant-garde art can be something other than kitsch.

It is worth noting that a comparable claim for the integrity of the aesthetic is made by the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. The idea of art being distinct from knowledge is central to his aesthetics (Dewey 2005). Pragmatism seeks to avoid the metaphysical oppositions that lead to conflict or stalemate within philosophy, e.g. scientific versus religious values, truth as an absolute versus truth as a construct, often with the recognition that the application of philosophy to practical concerns introduces particularities that get philosophical thinking out of its conceptual dead-ends. Art’s contribution to life, for Dewey, stems from the fact that it transcends knowledge, but his theory struggles to explain how something transcendent can apply at ground level. In *Art as Experience*, he argues that, in the production and perception of art, ‘knowledge is transformed’ and ‘becomes something more than knowledge because it is merged with non-intellectual elements to form an experience worthwhile as an experience’ (Dewey 2005: 302). Whereas ‘reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form’, aesthetic experience takes the ‘tangled scenes of life’ and makes them more intelligible ‘by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or “impassioned” experience’ (Dewey 2005: 302). The key element here is what Dewey understands as ‘an experience’, and why he defines ‘art as experience’ (after his book title). ‘Experience’ here does not refer to any experience, or to the empiricist notion of a discrete, sensory impression of an external world. Neither does it designate the Kantian idea of experience as a state of awareness that has been shaped and organized by a concept. Rather, it is a ‘distinctively aesthetic’ state with its own ‘integrity’ or ‘dynamic organization’:

I call the organization dynamic because it takes time to complete it, because it is a growth. There is inception, development, fulfilment. Material is ingested and digested through interaction with the vital organization of the results of prior experience that constitutes the mind of the worker. Incubation goes on until what is conceived is brought forth and is rendered perceptible as part of the common world. An aesthetic experience can be crowded into a moment only in the sense that a climax of prior long enduring processes may arrive in an outstanding movement which so sweeps everything else into it that all else is forgotten.

(Dewey 2005: 57–58)<sup>1</sup>

‘An object is peculiarly and dominantly aesthetic’, he goes on, ‘when the factors that determine anything which can be an experience are lifted high above the threshold of

perception and are made manifest for their own sake' (Dewey 2005: 58–59). Thus, art or the aesthetic – the terms, while not synonymous, are closely linked for Dewey (2005: 51) – is *an experience* in Dewey's heightened sense of the term because it involves an 'incubation' of elements that lift it above any interest, description or conceptual judgment that would otherwise contain it or incline it towards an end or purpose. The emphasis once again is on aesthetic experience existing 'for its own sake', and previous aestheticians are criticized by him for producing theories that 'superimpos[e] some preconceived idea upon experience instead of encouraging or even allowing aesthetic experience to tell *its own tale*' (Dewey 2005: 286; emphasis added).

But there is a problem for Dewey's position. If aesthetics wants to tell its own tale, which language would it use? How does something that exists for itself meet with or adopt more general, shareable terms for communication without surrendering some of the distinctive properties that make it an aesthetic experience? Dewey distances his theory from those accounts that present the aesthetic as a form of escape from the world, namely, theories in which art offers imitation rather than reality (Dewey 2005: 286–287) or 'induce[s] cerebral reveries' in the individual (Dewey 2005: 302), but he does not explain how his own theory offers anything more than reverie in and for itself. According to Alexander, Dewey's concept of experience is central to his pragmatism, and signifies 'the *shared social activity* of *symbolically mediated behaviour* which seeks to discover the *possibilities* of our *objective situation* in the *natural world* for meaningful, intelligent and fulfilling ends' (Alexander 1992: 119; original emphases). But most of the words italicized by Alexander, e.g. '*shared social activity*', '*symbolically mediated behaviour*', refer to elements that have to exist outside the experience in order for it to be shared or mediated, and so work against the idea of an experience existing purely for itself.

The theories from Bell, Greenberg and Dewey all position art as something with a unique, self-defining nature that works against the possibility that it might interact with another subject. Only Dewey explicitly defines his aesthetics in opposition to knowledge, on the grounds that art offers 'incubation' in contrast to the 'reductions' performed by concepts. It is not necessarily the case that Bell's and Greenberg's theories are anti-research. They could be mobilized in support of a theory of artistic research which operates *on its own terms*, but it's not clear what these terms would be. If we stayed true to the words of Bell and Greenberg, they would have to remain within the conditions of the possibility of the work itself, i.e. only those elements that are intrinsic to the work coming into being, and not stretch beyond 'a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three dimensional space'. But the problem with defining art as a self-critical whole is that it is never clear where the boundaries lie. The possibility that a painting might be slashed (as in the work of Lucio Fontana) or have found objects attached to it (Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbilder*) or be collapsed as sculpture (Angela de la Cruz) indicates that painting, far from being a circumscribed domain, is actually always reaching out to appropriate or to arrange itself in relation to other forms. Despite these difficulties, it is nonetheless evident how Bell's and Greenberg's logic of art functioning on its own terms might be mobilized in support of an argument against artistic research, where one might

have to adapt one's practice in accordance with the demands of an external subject or historical or theoretical writing. Even if the historical writing deepens an understanding of what is unique to a medium or discipline, it is still conceivable that the emphasis on art for its own sake promotes the idea of a self-sustaining whole that does not require academic or verbal contextualization for its own possibility.

### The particularity of the senses

There is another theme in Greenberg's theory that warrants attention. I have separated it out from the earlier section because it implicitly draws upon a strand of seventeenth-century empiricist philosophy and leads to an idea that either resists the notion of artistic research or is problematic for it. The idea is that sensory experience has a peculiar property of its own and, as such, contains qualities that cannot be captured verbally and so will always evade classification for the purposes of knowledge, or become something that is its own kind of knowledge. This might sound like a reiteration of Dewey's theory, but the focus here is on *sensory* experience rather than on artistic experience. We have to be careful here of an ambiguity in the word 'aesthetic' since it can refer to both. The ancient Greek term *aisthesis* refers to lived, felt experience, knowledge as it is acquired through the senses. However, the meaning of 'aesthetics' changes in the mid-eighteenth century, following its usage by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in his 1750 book *Aesthetica*, to refer to the study of the feelings evoked by works of art and, in particular, the experience of beauty or 'the perfection of sensible cognition', where 'sensible cognition' suggests there is a harmony between thought and the sensory form that gives rise to it (Guyer 2014). The latter sense covers the idea of a specific kind of emotion, experience or discipline that Bell, Greenberg and Dewey respectively sought to define for art. However, the status of sensory perception, 'aesthetics' in the ancient Greek sense, also has to be considered.

Greenberg's formalism is reinforced by the claim that the lines, colours and patterns in a painting should 'confine [themselves] exclusively to what is given in *visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in other orders of experience*' (Greenberg 1992: 758; emphasis added). Here we find another step to assert the integrity of art by defining visual experience as being an 'exclusive' domain and having its own order. The idea originates in the seventeenth-century British empiricism of John Locke. As an empiricist, Locke makes sensory experience the foundation of his theory of knowledge, in opposition to the priority given to reason and intellectual ideas by the rationalist philosophers Descartes and Leibniz. The basic constituents of human knowledge, for Locke, are 'simple ideas', obtained through sensation and reflection (Locke 1997: II.ii.1). At birth, the mind is a sheet of 'white paper void of all characters', and we accumulate knowledge through experience by objects impressing themselves on our senses and creating in us simple ideas such as 'whiteness', 'hardness' and 'sweetness' (Locke 1997: II.i.1). The

notion of simplicity, of being composed of a single element, is important. Simple ideas are ‘unique’ in the sense that each one contains ‘one uniform appearance’ and comes to us ‘by the proper inlets appointed to each sort’ (Locke 1997: II.ii.1, III. iv.11): ‘the coldness and hardness, which a man feels in a piece of ice, being as distinct ideas in the mind, as the smell and whiteness of a lily; or as the taste of sugar, and smell of a rose’ (Locke 1997: II.ii.1). Furthermore, simple ideas are unique in that their content cannot be conveyed verbally:

all the words in the world, *made use of to explain, or define any of their names, will never be able to produce in us the idea [which the name] stands for ...* He that thinks otherwise, let him try if any words can give him the taste of a pineapple, and make him have the true idea of the relish of that celebrated delicious fruit.

*(Locke 1997: III.iv.11, original emphasis)*

Locke wants to show that it is direct experience of the world and not relationships between a set of universal concepts innate in the mind which is the foundation of knowledge. Thus, he ascribes to experience a quality that cannot be predicted or captured by verbal or conceptual knowledge. However, while simple ideas might serve as the foundation of knowledge, there is nevertheless the problem that they are ‘remote from [the] real internal constitution [of things] ... and are made up of nothing but an imperfect collection of those apparent qualities our senses can discover’ (Locke 1997: IV.vi.10). As a consequence, we have to be vigilant when ascribing the qualities we *find in objects to the objects themselves*. For our purposes, it is the concept of ‘simple idea’ that is key, for it is the origin of a claim that leads to two opposing arguments on artistic research: either (1) the content of sensory experience is so unique it cannot be captured in a knowledge–claim, therefore, art cannot *or should not* be classed as a form of knowledge, or (2) the value of art as knowledge is precisely because it has a quality that transcends verbal description, in which case the value of the verbal commentary that universities demand as an accompaniment or supplement to artistic research, or even the requirement for one, needs to be questioned (Candlin 2000a, 2000b; Macleod and Holdridge 2010; Thompson 2011). While (1) straightforwardly pitches uniqueness against the generality of words, (2) suggests that we should be looking to articulate forms of knowledge that are amenable to the uniqueness of sensory experience. However, what these forms might be is not clear.

In the case of visual experience, they would presumably take the form of an artwork or pictorial display. Except that an artwork is never *purely* visual. At the very least, there has to be a verbal or conceptual frame directing attention towards the artwork as an artwork. This is one response to the philosophical move that tries to make individual, particular sensations the foundation of a theory of knowledge. For there to be an understanding of the particular ‘this’ or ‘that’ that is in front of me, I need a concept drawn from a vocabulary that applies beyond this moment in order to place the ‘this’ or ‘that’ in a meaningful context. Twentieth-century empiricism knows this as the problem of sense data. H.H. Price argues that when

something is presented to consciousness, for example, a tomato, although it can be doubted that it is a tomato, what cannot be doubted is that there is a red, round patch in front of the perceiver. This state of being present to consciousness Price terms 'being given', and the item that is present he calls a 'sense datum' (Price 1932: 3). However, the notion of immediate acquaintance can be criticized for its reliance upon general, mediating concepts such as 'red', 'patch', 'round', etc. One critic of sensation as the foundation of knowledge is Ludwig Wittgenstein, who asserts that all references to sensation, no matter how basic or private, presuppose a shared language (Wittgenstein 1953: §§256–272). Thus, it is not the sense datum alone that provides the foundation, but the determination and contextualization provided by the already-established, linguistic concepts that are brought to it.

There is the more far-reaching claim that care needs to be taken over how the senses are theorized. There never can be *pure* sensation of the kinds envisaged by Locke and Greenberg because any reference to sensation will always, already be informed by language or theory. 'Pure' is a metaphor before it is a condition of the senses. Even to talk of 'the senses' is to introduce a common frame that suggests they are just different kinds of receptor channel, and to ignore the very different kinds of experience or world that sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell and kinaesthesia provide. Scientific studies cannot avoid this theory-dependence either, for they too will also have to rely upon definitions, criteria and instruments of detection. One might think one could resort to the concept of the senses as 'qualia', the idea that there is something that it is *like* for me to experience a certain sensation, in order to retain a notion of the senses possessing intrinsic properties, but this overlooks all the concepts and the awareness that are keeping oneself focused on the moment, not to mention the extrinsic details that are introduced as soon as one begins to entertain what the 'likeness' is like. This, though, is not the place to resolve the word-image or word-sensation opposition in artistic research. My intention here is simply to call attention to the concept of the uniqueness or the particularity of the senses, and show how it can both work against the idea of artistic research and suggest the possibility of a 'purely visual' mode that, while attractive to some, is nevertheless problematic.

## Genius

The idea of art as research is also discouraged by the romantic concept of 'genius'. The concept continues to be active today due to the importance that romanticism has for modern thought, and because it can all-too-readily be taken as an endorsement of artistic insight over rational analysis. The concept of 'genius' is arguably an extension of the ancient image of the inspired poet and the Renaissance concept of the *divino artista* (Murray 1989). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticism, it is formulated as the capacity of an artist to produce work which transcends the established rules of composition, as part of the reaction against the neo-classical commitment to rational and mathematical knowledge. The status of artistic imagination is elevated to being the faculty that recognizes similarities between things, in

contrast to reason which (it is claimed) separates objects out or perceives differences between them. It is not simply a power of visualization or forming images after the fact, as it had been for Aristotle (in ancient Greece), and Addison and Hume (in the eighteenth century), but a creative power by means of which the mind (to quote Richards writing on Coleridge) ‘gains insight into reality, reads nature as a symbol of something behind or within nature not ordinarily perceived’ (Richards 1934: 145). Underlying much romantic thought is an idealist thesis to the effect that human ideas and things are not two distinct classes, but are linked on account of the fact that ideas are expressions of the human being’s interests in the world, of the way in which the human mind carves up the world into things which can be manipulated to meet human ends. While the everyday, visible world would appear to be divided into isolated things which exist independently of the ideas and words used to refer to them, imaginative expression reveals the interaction between mind and reality by producing forms that discover unconventional or invisible associations between objects. On this understanding, the work of the artist-genius transcends research because it can access reality in ways that are above and beyond rational, scientific study.

I want to concentrate upon Immanuel Kant’s concept of ‘genius’, (a) because he is widely regarded as the founder of modern aesthetics, and (b) because his account includes claims that, at face value, promote art over knowledge, but which, when set in the wider context of his critical system, have a different meaning. In attempting to reconcile the impasse between the principal philosophies of his day, rationalism and empiricism, Kant argues that concepts (customarily privileged by rationalism) *have to apply* to sensibility (customarily privileged by empiricism) in order for experience to be possible (Kant 1929: A84–A130, B129–B169). As a result, the way in which concepts apply to reality as it is received through sensibility becomes extremely important for Kant. It also becomes highly problematic, because it requires the *freedom* with which human reason exercises concepts, on the one hand, to be reconciled with the causal laws of *nature* located in reality and received through sensibility, on the other, without the impression being given that reason is free to create its own subjective reality. He therefore needs to find a bridging concept, something that can demonstrate freedom and nature working in unison.

Kant in fact introduces several bridging concepts, but the one that interests us here is ‘genius’. In his system, the genius is an artist whose work displays the freedom of creative invention but does so without appearing to follow any rational rules, and so it appears to be the result of nature. ‘*Genius*’, he writes, ‘is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art’, where ‘talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature’ (Kant 1987: 307, original emphasis). Fine art is the product of genius for Kant because, when we perceive a work of fine art, ‘we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature, and yet the purposiveness [the appearance of design or purpose] in its form must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature’ (Kant 1987: 306). The appearance of art ‘as if it were a product of mere nature’ would seem to suggest that Kant confines fine art to imitation, but this is not the case. While it is true that fine art as a concept is introduced and defined in the

eighteenth century as the imitation of beauty in nature, Kant is more interested in the capacity of the genius to create forms that stimulate reason *as if they were nature*, rather than having to appear slavishly like nature.

The idea that human creations can motivate thought independently of rules informs Kant's assertion that the genius gives material expression to 'aesthetic ideas' (Kant 1987: 313–317). Aesthetic ideas are the counterpart of 'rational ideas', ideas that can be thought or held in the intellect but cannot be encountered or evidenced in experience, e.g. infinity, the sublime, the universe. An aesthetic idea does not try to match the rational idea with a single representation but instead tries to be 'a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] concept, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it' (Kant 1987: 314). The examples he gives are 'Jupiter's eagle with the lightning in its claws [as] an attribute of the mighty king of heaven, and the peacock [as] an attribute of heaven's stately queen' (Kant 1987: 315), in other words, metaphors or analogies. The role of these metaphors is to prompt

the imagination to spread over a multitude of kindred presentations that arouse more thought than can be expressed in a concept determined by words. These aesthetic attributes yield an *aesthetic idea* ... [whose] proper function is to quicken the mind by opening up for it a view into an immense realm of kindred presentations.

*(Kant 1987: 315, original emphasis)*

This quotation and the one above ('a presentation of the imagination') would seem to encapsulate the 'art is not research' position: art and the aesthetic are forms that stimulate 'kindred presentations' to provoke thought but cannot be contained by any conceptual framework that seeks to grasp or assimilate its insights. However, to dwell only on the image of more thought being stimulated than can be expressed in a concept determined by words is to maintain too narrow a focus. It lifts an idea out of context and fails to recognize that the action of going beyond concepts is a step taken by Kant to grant flexibility to his larger theory of the conceptual organization of experience. It is this theory which, I think, can provide a foundation for artistic research, and which I set out in chapter 3.

### **Plato's theory of the Forms**

So far I have concentrated upon ideas from the side of the arts that are against artistic research. Now I want to address theories from the history of philosophy that directly or indirectly place art and knowledge in opposition. The first has to be the metaphysics of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (c. 427–347 BC). No review of the relation between art and knowledge in the history of philosophy would be complete without referring to him. The extent of his influence means his ideas are prominent not just in the history of philosophy but in Western thinking



in general. The argument which affects us is his theory of art in the *Republic*. This is a text on justice, education and how a society should be organized, all hinged around the notion that underlying each and every person and thing is an ‘excellence’ or true nature, the best way an entity can possibly be. It is on the basis of this idea that Plato maintains that certain kinds of people respond to certain kinds of education and are equipped for certain kinds of role in society, e.g. future guardians of the state will be those pupils who show themselves to be ‘not easily bewitched’ and ‘able to maintain in all circumstances both their own integrity and the principles of balance and harmony [in matters physical and intellectual] they learned in their education’ (Plato 1987: 412a, 413e). The idea at the centre of this worldview is the theory of the Forms: for each and every thing in existence, physical or abstract, there is its perfect, original essence or (what Plato terms) ‘Form’ existing in a higher, transcendent world. These Forms stand as templates, giving shape and determination to reality. As Lee notes in his translation of the *Republic*, ‘particular things “share in” or “partake of” (*metechein*) the Forms which they exemplify; and the Form is a pattern (*paradeigma*) to which particulars approximate’ (Plato 1987: 472c). If it wasn’t for the stencilling action of the Forms, impressing their nature on to an indeterminate existence, the theory runs, there would be no order or structure in reality.

This metaphysics also determines Plato’s theories of art and knowledge. While it should be acknowledged that the ancient Greek concept of art differs from the concept we have in the West today, the views expressed by Plato are such that they can still be applied to present-day, representational image-making. Art in Plato’s time is the imitation (*mimesis*) or representation of the physical world, and is dismissed by him as being ‘at a third remove from the truth’ because it is the product of imperfect knowledge about reality (Plato 1987: 599d). True knowledge, he asserts, consists of direct, unmediated knowledge of the Forms gained through the study of philosophy: the eyes of the philosopher ‘are turned to contemplate fixed and immutable realities, a realm where there is no injustice done or suffered, but all is reason and order’ (Plato 1987: 500c). Empirical knowledge of our everyday, physical reality is two steps from the truth because, as far as Plato is concerned, it is *indirect, sensory knowledge of a secondary level of existence*. To create representations of this secondary reality, as the artist does, is a third step away from the truth because it is a copy of a physical object (a copy of a copy of a Form), produced without proper knowledge of the original object (the Form) in question. Plato makes the point through the following dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon. What is it, Socrates asks, that a painter represents when they produce an image of a bed: is it the bed-in-itself as it is in nature, i.e. the Form of the bed, or the mere appearance of a physical bed?

SOCRATES: If you look at a bed, or anything else, sideways or endways or from some other angle, does it make any difference to the bed? Isn’t it merely that it *looks* different, without *being* different? And similarly with other things.

GLAUCON: Yes, it’s the same bed, but it looks different.

SOCRATES: Then consider – when the painter makes his representation, does he do so by reference to the object as it actually is or to its superficial appearance? Is his representation one of an apparition or of the truth?

GLAUCON: Of an apparition.

SOCRATES: The art of representation is therefore a long way removed from the truth, and it is able to reproduce everything because it has little grasp of anything, and that little is of a mere phenomenal [sensory] appearance.

(Plato 1987: 598a–b)

Art, understood as imitation, cannot be a source of or a path towards knowledge because it refers only to appearances, which can be *many* and *varied*, and so tells us nothing about the *singular, essential* reality behind appearances. Because it operates in the playful realm of appearances, it sits alongside the practice of the conjuror as a work of bewitchment (Plato 1987: 602d), and because it imitates the physical world, it is in danger of deceiving ‘children or simple people’ into mistaking imitation for reality (Plato 1987: 598b–c). The artist ‘wakens and encourages and strengthens the lower elements in the mind to the detriment of reason’ and, therefore, Plato concludes, should be banished from the state (Plato 1987: 605a–b). The claim that some people can mistake art for reality might seem far-fetched or exaggerated, but this is essentially the same argument that is used today against pornography and violence in screen media: these are forms of representation that some might take as guidance on how to act in reality, and so should be restricted or banned. Plato gives us the first argument for media censorship. For our purposes, even though art after Plato becomes more than imitation, he sets in place a metaphysics in which knowledge is equated with reasoning towards a singular, abiding essence, and in which sensory experience and visual depiction are presented as occlusions or deceptions on account of their multiple, playful, ever-changing nature.

## Descartes’s homunculus

Similar values regarding the value of sensory perception in relation to knowledge are reasserted at the beginning of modern philosophy in the seventeenth century by the French rationalist René Descartes, but with a new and far-reaching consequence for artistic research. The findings of newly formed methods of scientific observation, e.g. the perception of celestial bodies enabled by telescopes, begin to clash with the established teachings of the Catholic church. In response to these conflicts, Descartes proceeds to subject all knowledge to doubt in the interests of arriving at a foundation for knowledge that is *beyond doubt* and, therefore, has to be accepted by everyone. One of the most important outcomes of his method of doubt is the argument ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’, ‘I think, therefore, I am’ (Descartes 1968: 53–54). It is a bedrock (one cannot dig down any deeper) because to doubt the argument is also to confirm it. If I doubt I am thinking, then I am also thinking, because to doubt is to think; therefore, there must be something that is doing the doubting or thinking. However, the knowledge provided by the senses can be doubted, because in the

world of the senses, things are always in flux. Descartes examines a piece of wax by the fire. Unsurprisingly, the wax melts. Descartes asks himself what he knows of the wax after it has melted and replies: ‘Certainly ... nothing of all the things which I perceived by means of the senses, for everything which fell under [them] is changed’ (Descartes 1968: 109). The information about the wax conveyed by his senses is constantly changing, making it at odds with his rational conviction that there is a singular substance before him corresponding to the concept ‘wax’. Descartes’s search for a foundation of knowledge, therefore, reasserts the distinction found in Plato between truth as something essential and unchanging, and elements that obstruct the path towards truth because they offer multiple, divergent appearances, i.e. sensory experience.

The new and far-reaching consequence I referred to is the mind–body distinction, with the privileging of the former term, and the associated concept of experience as something that occurs ‘in the head’. Mind is privileged over the body in Descartes’s method of doubt as the something or the ‘I am’ that does the doubting. For Descartes, the human being is first and foremost a thinking substance. He is committed to this view not only because of the importance he places on doubt and the demonstration of certainty, but also because the idea of a ‘thinking substance’ coheres with the Catholic doctrine of the soul, and so is a step towards ensuring that his philosophy doesn’t draw the attention of the Roman Inquisition. Descartes nevertheless asserts that mind and body are strongly connected. Sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., he argues in the ‘Sixth Meditation’, show that ‘I am not only lodged in my body, like a pilot in his ship, but, besides, that I am joined to it very closely and indeed so compounded and intermingled with my body, that I form, as it were, a single whole with it’ (Descartes 1968: 159). However, despite his declaration of unity between mind and body, the emphasis that is put on mind as the substance which does the doubting means that, counter to his own statement, the image of ‘a pilot in a ship’ has become one of the dominant images of Cartesian philosophy. It is frequently pictured as a homunculus or ‘little person’ residing in the head, *receiving* sensory experiences from the body on a screen-like retina, and acting as the seat of consciousness (the idea of consciousness having a seat or backside continues the personification). It is called the ‘homunculus fallacy’ (Kenny 1984: 125–136) and the ‘numbskull fallacy’ (Morgan 1977: 135–138), with the screen or stage, ‘where it all comes together’, referred to as the ‘Cartesian theatre’ (Dennett 1991: 101–138). It attempts to explain a human process, e.g. conscious experience, with reference to the existence of a human-like agent, such as a homunculus, and therefore starts an infinite regress, since it creates the job of having to explain the homunculus, who will presumably contain another homunculus, and so on. Descartes is explicitly aware of the problem. He warns us in *The Dioptrics* that ‘we must not hold that it is by means of this resemblance [between object and optical image] that the picture causes us to perceive objects, as if there were yet other eyes in our brain with which we could perceive it’ (quoted in Clarke 2003: 57). Despite this, Descartes’s emphasis on doubt and reason at the expense of the body, and his distrust of the senses, have meant that Cartesian philosophy has helped to form the

image of the modern self as a homunculus inside the head who perceives the world via their own private film show.

Why is this an issue for artistic research? In addition to reinforcing the Platonic claim that sensory experience is too fleeting and varied to contribute to knowledge, it also encourages the idea that sensations are things that are received or possessed, moments within the film of a person's experience. As Dennett observes, 'propriety' is a metaphor that is highly active in determining thoughts about sensory experience. People insist that 'I know *how it is with me right now*', but this, he thinks, is essentially people wanting 'to reaffirm their sense of proprietorship over their own conscious states' (Dennett 2002: 233). Further, the 'seductive step' taken by the same people upon learning that the sensation of colour is not a possession but a relational property, constituted by a relation between our faculties and the world, is 'to cling to intrinsicity ... and move it *into the subject's head*' (Dennett 2002: 241). Do we *have* sensations? Is that area of white of my bedroom wall *mine*? There is an unfortunate alliance between Cartesian philosophy and capitalism in that, as Marx observes, the creation of private property by capitalism breaks down fundamental relations into things, including sensory experience: '*all the physical and intellectual senses*', he writes, 'have been replaced by the simple estrangement of all the senses – the sense of *having*' (Marx 2011: 229). The issue of the 'propriety' of sensory experience or its occurrence 'inside the head' is an issue for artistic research because it affects how we think of the nature of experience. If experience of the making or the perception of art is understood as a wholly internal and private affair, then this obstructs the possibility that any part of that experience might be available to participate in a more discursive or public exchange, e.g. consideration of the role that sensations or their description might play in artistic or aesthetic enquiry. Art might be theorized as generating a particular or special kind of experience, e.g. poetic, sublime, antagonistic, but if that experience is then understood as being 'personal', i.e. 'locked in the head', then it becomes very difficult to situate that experience within debate without the allegation that the 'inner essence' of the experience has been lost or distorted, e.g. by verbal description.

It might seem that I am questioning the privacy of experience, i.e. that only the person who *has the experience* knows what it is like – what I referred to above as 'qualia'. Surely it would be absurd to question this. I am not questioning that each person has their own experience, their own, private sensory life. What I am calling attention to is the formation, with the Cartesian theatre, of a model of experience which pictures that experience as an impression or datum inside the head of the individual, where the 'inside the headness' is interpreted as making the impression qualitatively unique, so that there is no component that is rooted in a common or shared condition, e.g. a sensory modality or the concept of a particular kind of experience, such as 'walking' or 'feeling the wind on one's face'. As I shall go on to explain in later chapters, one of the most important developments in aesthetics and epistemology in the last two hundred years is the rethinking of experience in terms that depart from the 'inside the head' model and move towards theories that have experience involve, but not be reduced to, a structure that is derived from a shared or sharable condition.

This, I shall argue, is an important step in allowing so-called ‘inner’ experience to have meaning and impact beyond being an episode in a homunculus’s film show.

### Positivism and hermeneutics in the philosophy of science

The final area I want to draw upon for theories that keep art and knowledge apart is the philosophy of science. Recent debates are relevant because science is widely regarded as the paradigm of knowledge-construction, and there are conflicting voices within artistic research as to whether the field should or should not be drawing on the sciences for inspiration (Borgdorff 2010; Elkins 2009; Emlyn Jones 2009). The positivism that supports the development of the sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remains a prominent, if not to say dominant, theory of knowledge. Positivism holds that knowledge and truth rest solely upon what can be evidenced or verified in experience, and disregards any claims that go beyond what is given in experience as meaningless, e.g. claims about the hidden or metaphysical nature of reality. It has its origins in the eighteenth century, in both the French Enlightenment’s emphasis on the ‘clear light of reason’ and the empiricist commitment to what can be evidenced by the senses, especially the sceptical form of empiricism presented by David Hume. The philosophy is first formulated, and given its name, by the nineteenth-century French thinker Auguste Comte. In his *Course on Positive Philosophy* [*Cours de philosophie positive*] (1830–42), Comte argues that the ‘scientific or positive’ is the third and final stage of human intellectual development, after the theological and metaphysical, characterized by the views that all knowledge rests upon observed facts, and that ‘all phenomena are subject to invariable natural laws, the discovery of which, and their reduction to the least possible number, is the aim of and end of all our efforts’ (Comte 1974: 24). The ‘logical’ variety of positivism, or neopositivism, of the Vienna Circle group of philosophers in the 1920s was inspired by Hume, Comte and the philosophy of science of Ernst Mach (a reader of Hume). Because of the success with which science was accessing and explaining the natural world, and because it produced statements which could be verified by experience, Circle members, such as Hans Hahn, Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap, took the scientific view of the world to be the true one, and sought to make philosophy the clarification and critique of scientific claims, concepts and methods.

The positivist’s theory of knowledge is founded on sense-certainty, the indubitability of what is given in immediate sense experience. This is a change from the uncertainty with which sensation is characterized by Plato and Descartes. The newfound credibility is a product of the success achieved by science through observation and measurement, and the consequent belief that, while the claims *based on sensation* might need to be checked for the logical strength of the steps they take beyond sensation, the immediate contents of sensation themselves provide a cognitive or epistemological bedrock. A distinction between theoretical and observational terms is employed – the former are theory-specific whereas the latter, it is claimed, refer directly to experience – and a central part of the positivist’s enterprise consists of the attempt to translate the former into the latter so that, for

every theoretical statement, there is a class of observation statements which is logically equivalent to the given theoretical statement. The assumption is that there is a single, unified stratum of sense experience which can serve as the court of appeal for all scientific observation and, *in direct, literal correspondence with this*, an unambiguous ‘observation language’ which can describe the immediate contents of experience, including the readings from measuring devices, and serve as the court of appeal for all scientific theorizing. There are difficulties with this. For example, there is seldom a deductive relation between an explanation, described in theoretical language, and the phenomenon to be explained, described in observation language, due to difficulties with the correspondence rules between the theoretical and the observational languages. As Nagel illustrates the point, the conditional observation statement ‘If the galvanometer on that shelf were introduced into this circuit, the pointer of the instrument would be deflected from its present position’ cannot be deduced from the theoretical statement ‘There is now an electric current in this wire’, primarily because the theoretical statement ‘implies not only a single statement about a particular galvanometer but an indefinitely large class of similar statements about all other such instruments’ (Nagel 1982: 124). In order for a theory to be falsified, the deductive model of explanation requires that the consequences of a deductive chain of inference be shown to be false through observation. In terms of the example, this would amount to checking the behaviour of an indefinitely large number of galvanometers. Admittedly, the observation statement could easily be reworded and deictics, such as ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘these’, ‘those’, could be removed so that the new sentence covers all suitable instruments, but the deduction would nevertheless remain ultimately invalid.

I do not think we need to go any further into these technicalities. What does concern us is the impression that the construction of knowledge consists in a correspondence between a theoretical and an observation language, with the requirement that the correspondence follows from strict requirements of deduction or high probability. These requirements might be appropriate for a form of knowledge that aims to theorize the causal structures in the world with greater and greater accuracy, but are wholly inappropriate for the range and diversity of expression produced within the arts. But herein lies one of the main epistemological objections to artistic research: the subjective, associational, poetic leaps and juxtapositions that define art do not lend themselves to measurement or the consistent, conventional vocabulary that would be used in observation statements based on measurement. An apparatus has yet to be invented that can assess the aesthetic qualities of a work of art, primarily because aesthetic responses are not causally determined. This is in keeping with the philosophical tradition, following Aristotle, Aquinas and Descartes, of defining human reason as the ability to think freely and creatively, i.e. independently of natural, causal laws. Which is not to say that there haven’t been attempts to turn aesthetics into a science. As noted above, in the eighteenth century, Baumgarten defines aesthetics as ‘the science of sensible cognitions’, where ‘sensible cognition’ refers to the idea that there is a harmony between thought and the sensory form that gives rise to it (Guyer 2014), but this is a philosophical thesis that

remains undeveloped. There is also the newly established field of neuroaesthetics, but this operates with a narrow concept of what counts as art, focusing on works that produce measurement-friendly effects, i.e. works from early modernism (Hyman 2010).

Positivism therefore keeps art and knowledge apart because of its commitment to observed facts, and to the idea that, in Comte's words, 'all phenomena are subject to invariable natural laws' (Comte 1974: 24). There is the question of how a theory of knowledge with such commitments can accommodate human being and human activity, that is, aspects of life that are internal or private, and non-causal, especially if it aspires to be *the* theory of scientific knowledge. Positivism responds to the question by giving rise in the 1920s to behaviourism: the doctrine which states that all matters regarding inner, psychological states can be understood in terms of behavioural, i.e. publically observable, criteria. For a behaviourist, as Graham writes, 'there is no knowable difference between two states of mind (beliefs, desires, etc.) unless there is a demonstrable difference in the behaviour associated with each state' (Graham 2015). Early supporters of the doctrine include Vienna Circle member Rudolf Carnap and associate and critic of the Circle, Carl Hempel.

For our purposes, the more significant response to positivism's stance in relation to human being comes from the German hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. Modern hermeneutics, under Dilthey's influence, becomes the study of how what appears present and immediate is in fact structured and enabled by a set of prior, historical conditions and concepts. Dilthey attacks positivism as a whole on the grounds that (1) it cannot begin to comprehend history and human, inner experience, and (2) it seeks to determine what can and cannot constitute a science (Dilthey 1989: 49, 57). In his attempt to construct a hierarchy of the sciences, Comte does include history but, according to Dilthey, he does so in positivistic terms, with the result that historical reality is 'truncated' and 'mutilated' in the interests of assimilating it to the concepts and methods of the natural sciences (Dilthey 1989: 49). Another form of science is needed therefore to address the fact that history and human self-consciousness are distinct from the invariable, causal laws of nature. If an intrinsic part of being human is to be creative, then understanding that creativity is not going to follow from plotting 'the mechanical course of natural change', but is itself going to require examination from a subjective, creative point of view (Dilthey 1989: 58). For this reason, and in order to demonstrate that positivism is not the only form of science, Dilthey distinguishes between the natural sciences [*Naturwissenschaften*] and the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] (Dilthey 1989: 57). The natural sciences are typified by a model of knowledge which assumes that nature as a series of causal laws is observable in virtue of a direct relationship between subject and object, or one made almost direct through the correspondence rules between theoretical and observational languages. In contrast, the human sciences are characterized by a 'reflexive awareness' [*Innewerden*] in the sense that human experience is always recognized to be rooted in a socio-historical reality, and so any attempt to understand that reality is understood to be formed from

terms made available by it (Dilthey 1989: 247; Makkreel and Rodi 1989: 25–26). This is one form of the hermeneutic circle: the situation whereby elements present in the object of knowledge are also those that are active in the knowing subject. The circle is not necessarily something that has to be overcome. Rather, it is a condition that calls attention to the need to acknowledge reflexivity in any expression of human being, including the construction of knowledge.

The introduction of hermeneutics and Dilthey's concept of 'reflexive awareness' suggests we are moving into territory where there are theories of knowledge that might find connections between art and knowledge. This is certainly the case with Dilthey, for whom poetic expression is significant as a display of the processes whereby perception is filtered and guided by what is judged by a person to be significant (Dilthey 1985). My point though is not that we can simply take the human sciences, as conceived by Dilthey, as the more sympathetic and supportive domain for artistic research and, therefore, all our worries about its epistemological status can be put to rest. This is not least because the battle against positivism, and the scientism to which it can often lead, continues to this day in all academic and professional fields where measurement and verification are exercised uncritically, that is, in the absence of any reflection on the choice of categories used and what other modes of enquiry might have been possible. Furthermore, we shouldn't be positioning artistic research merely in contrast or reaction to scientific research. Rather, I want to pursue questions of the relation between mind and world, and a form of knowledge that is mindful of its own conditions of possibility, back to an older philosophical debate. This will provide a more fundamental account of how aesthetics and epistemology might intersect in ways that are productive for artistic research.

## Conclusion

As we can see from this survey, there are a number of theories of art and knowledge that are responsible for wedging art and knowledge apart. These are: (1) modernist notions of the discrete, self-contained nature of art and of sensory experience; (2) theories of the private nature of experience that prevent it from entering into a more discursive or public exchange; (3) the idea that art is the product of genius and displays connections that science is unequipped to classify or measure; (4) the claim that art and aesthetics are disqualified from contributing to knowledge because they present multiple, divergent, deceptive appearances; and (5) the positivist requirement that sensory perception can serve as a basis for knowledge but only on the condition that there is a class of observation statements that is logically equivalent to any given theoretical statement. These theories do not just reside within philosophy but are also active in determining how art, science and personal experience are conceived and discussed. Given the prison houses of purity and 'my-ness', and the multiple, sensory appearances that lack or obscure singularity and clarity, it has to be admitted that the prospects for artistic research do not look good. However, a move is made in eighteenth-century German philosophy, hinted at in Baumgarten's concept of aesthetics as 'sensible cognition', that has major



consequences for the subject. More importantly for us, it and its consequences have the potential to create a much more optimistic future for artistic research. This will be the subject of chapter 3.

## Note

- 1 Reference to ‘the mind of the worker’ is made by Dewey in this quotation as part of his thesis that an important dimension of work is that it should grant the worker artistic satisfaction. This is in contrast to the effects of mechanization on work which, Dewey argues, limit the potential for workers to participate creatively in the production of goods.

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## 32 Theories that wedge art and knowledge apart

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# 2

## WHAT IS ARTISTIC RESEARCH?

In addition to arguments against the idea of art being knowledge, presented in chapter 1, there is also uncertainty over what ‘artistic research’ or ‘art as research’ actually means. One of the most often quoted attempts to clarify the meaning of artistic research is Frayling’s threefold distinction between research *into*, *through* and *for* art (he includes ‘design’ as well), but it is essentially a call for further investigation (Frayling 1993: 5). ‘Into’ is the ‘straightforward’ study of the historical, social or material nature of art; ‘through’ is the ‘materials research’ and ‘development work’ that extend what materials and technologies can achieve; but ‘for’ is the ‘thorny one’, ‘where the thinking is, so to speak, *embodied in the artefact*, and where the goal is not primarily communicable knowledge in the sense of verbal communication, but in the sense of visual or iconic or imagistic communication’ (Frayling 1993: 5, original emphasis). Of course, as the ‘thorny one’, this category is left ungrasped and unexplored, and the paper concludes by implicitly trying to keep art and knowledge apart: the goal of the Royal College of Art (where Frayling was Rector at the time), he declares, ‘is the art rather than the knowledge and understanding’ that surrounds or enables it (Frayling 1993: 5). Given the concerns regarding language and the academy expressed by Candlin, Thompson and others in the previous chapter, and the attempt here to keep art and knowledge apart even in a definition of artistic research, it is no wonder that the topic has been the subject of so much discussion in art school committees, and in its own, expanding academic literature.

The ‘thorny’ proposal, that artistic research is research for art, has been developed by a number of authors, although not necessarily with reference to Frayling. Stephen Scrivener configures artistic research as ‘transformational practice’, or ‘art that changes art’ (Scrivener 2010: 261). His account focuses on the idea that artistic research should consist in the interpretational and material practices that enable artistic novelty and renewal to be achieved. The aesthetic theory of Jacques

Rancière is helpful in this regard, Scrivener argues, since it presents sensibility as being always already organized or ‘distributed’ conceptually. This means that aesthetic expression will always be implicated in *and active upon* conceptual discourse or thought in general, and that novelty can emerge through the challenges posed to thought by aesthetic expression. As a result, a concept of material practice emerges which functions, in Rancière’s words, as ‘a conceptual space of articulation between [artistic] ways of making and forms of visibility and intelligibility determining the way in which they can be viewed and conceived’, with the interaction between making and intelligibility serving as the engine of novelty in Scrivener’s notion of transformational practice (Rancière 2007: 75–76; quoted in Scrivener 2010: 262).

However, a problem faced by any approach that ties artistic research to the transformation of art is that the definition of ‘art’ is itself far from straightforward. Since the transition in the twentieth century from the ready-made, through happenings and conceptual art, to socially engaged art practice and institutional critique, there is no longer a set of clearly defined actions or properties which belong exclusively to art practice. The concept of ‘art’ has had any hope of definition, essence, or necessary and sufficient conditions replaced by theoretical disputes, institutional forces and divergent practices that outwardly have very little to do with what is customarily judged to be art. This is referred to as the ‘end of art’ (or sometimes the ‘death of art’) thesis: art has come to an end as a series of practices that can be clearly defined in terms of their material condition, e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking, or the modes of signification they offer, e.g. representation or expression. Philosophy has made several attempts to define art, but theories which look to identify essential qualities or prominent traits, e.g. in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions or ‘family’ resemblance (with contender traits being, for example, representation, expression, metaphor), all run into difficulties. This is primarily because any prioritization of a quality or trait excludes works that don’t possess that trait, and so means the theory lacks the flexibility to accommodate the variety of natures that art can now adopt (Hanfling 1992). As a consequence, any attempt to build a concept of artistic research on the nature of art will face the problem that the concept of art offers nothing stable or determinate that can act as a foundation. I consider this predicament in greater depth in chapter 8.

In this chapter, I work towards a definition of artistic research by pursuing two lines of enquiry. Firstly, I consider various responses to the question ‘what is artistic research?’, and suggest that many converge on the notion of art’s cognitive significance lying in its capacity to challenge categorization or other forms of knowledge production. Secondly, I analyse the concept of research in general terms to assess its proximity to art or, given that the concept is problematic, some of the qualities that are commonly associated with it. What emerges is a notion of research that is very close to Margaret Boden’s definition of creativity, where the principal requirement is to produce ‘ideas that are *new, surprising and valuable*’ (Boden 2004: 1, original emphasis). While these two strands in themselves don’t lead to a definition, their emphasis on conceptualization, novelty and value nonetheless identifies the need for an epistemology which can accommodate all three. This ‘need for a theory of

knowledge', I suggest, is not a lack but an important feature, one which demonstrates the epistemological significance of artistic research and which is addressed in the following chapter.

## Theories of artistic research

One of the broadest and most comprehensive attempts to scope the various meanings of artistic research is provided by Kathrin Busch (Busch 2009). She suggests nine possible definitions, some of which allude to the contested nature of art. The following is a summary, in my own words. Artistic research, according to Busch, could be:

1. the 'absorption' of scientific knowledge, e.g. 'optics, colour theory, anatomy, natural science', etc., by artists in their practice;
2. the representation of science in art, as in the case of the depiction of scientific instruments in classical painting, e.g. Rembrandt's *The Anatomy of Doctor Tulp* (1632), or reflection on systems of classification in contemporary art, e.g. 'Mark Dion who is interested in the exhibition forms of scientific research, or Fiona Tan whose artistic research is based on the scientific categorization of ethnology';
3. the adoption of scientific methods *as art* as a form of institutional critique, i.e. occasions where 'scientific processes or conclusions become the instrument of art and are used in the artworks', as practised, for example, by Hans Haacke, Andrea Fraser and Marion von Osten;
4. the transformation of art into science through 'art's capacity for self-reflection and auto-theorizing', which Busch takes to be the principal territory of the art PhD programme;
5. art that recognizes that it is always, already engaged with other forms of knowledge, due to its 'diverse forms of presentation' reaching out to other practices; this emphasizes art's inherent interdisciplinarity, and resists its classification as wholly sensual and emotional;
6. (following from [5] and from Foucault's 'Discourse on Language') art that engages critically with other forms of knowledge by revealing what is concealed or overlooked by those other forms of knowledge, and the power structures that are responsible;
7. (following from [6] and still with Foucault) the calling-attention-to the constructed nature of knowledge, and the display of the 'performativity' or 'poetics of knowledge', in the sense that 'the creation of objects of knowledge [cannot] be separated from their presentation';
8. the expression of doubt as a response to the constructed and interest-laden nature of knowledge production, and a reaction against the 'oft-claimed usability and capitalization of knowledge'; and
9. the possibility of an 'intermediary zone' in which 'the actual object of research is still undetermined' and where (this is Busch quoting Marcel Mauss) 'knowledge of certain facts has not yet been put into concepts'.

(Busch 2009)

To summarize the summary: the range of possibilities identified by Busch for artistic research are: 'the absorption of science', 'the depiction of science', 'institutional critique', 'self-reflection', 'interdisciplinarity, or practice that is always, already engaged with other forms of knowledge', 'the revelation of what is concealed', 'the poetics of knowledge production', 'the expression of doubt' and a 'pre-conceptual intermediary zone'. Although the death of art is not addressed explicitly, there is nonetheless the recognition that what is called 'art' is understood now to operate not according to any essential principles of 'artness' or 'art in itself' but through the critique of other practices or the presentation of forms that seek to defy classification. The latter effectively takes art's resistance to classification as a new definition. Busch does not single out one definition for support or development, but the implication from her closing remark, to the effect that research needs 'a fundamental openness to anything that oversteps the framework and conditions of the previously possible', is that she favours the latter meanings (Busch 2009).

A growing number of manifestos for or theories of artistic research are available, and many can be classified in terms drawn from Busch's list of definitions, especially the latter terms that present art as the capacity to cross boundaries or to challenge other forms of knowledge. This is not meant to imply that the theories I am about to identify are confined to the terms of Busch's analysis, but simply to indicate that several notions of artistic research employ a theory of knowledge that bears a strong similarity to the epistemological sketch given by Busch. In turn, this is in order to get a tentative purchase on an expanding and complex field.

The idea that art can reveal other ways of knowing through self-reflection is proposed by Barbara Bolt, who draws on Heidegger to present a form of 'art research' that is distinct from what she claims are historical and theoretical ways of knowing art (Bolt 2004: 5). Whereas theory approaches art through the four modes of identification, classification, evaluation and interpretation, she argues that the motifs of disclosure and openness towards the world in Heidegger's phenomenology permit an understanding of how materials and technologies 'speak' during art practice, thereby identifying a 'logic of practice' that theory overlooks (Bolt 2004: 188).

The suggestion that artistic research might be a space in which the poetics of knowledge is performed, and where objects can be wrestled from their conventional identities, is made by Henk Slager (Slager 2015) and by Kathleen Coessens, Darla Crispin and Anne Douglas (Coessens et al. 2009). Both studies cite Gilles Deleuze as a principal influence, and argue that his notion of deterritorialization can offer guidance with regard to what artistic research might become. In contrast to academic or scientific concepts of knowledge that are 'sedentary' or 'arborescent', in the sense that concepts are attached to a central thesis like branches on a trunk, deterritorialization affirms that all things are in a constant state of connection and transformation, and this, it is claimed, is where artistic thinking excels (Slager 2015: 43). Objects, when inanimate and isolated, might appear to have a territory or identity of their own, but it only takes one thing to come into contact with another, and the interaction that occurs allows the two items to perform and coalesce in entirely new ways; they have become deterritorialized. Artistic research, for Coessens et al.,

represents a ‘detritorialization of the research space’ in the sense that ‘not only new knowledge but also new modes of knowledge – and, moreover, new actors – enter the stage of research’, with the artist as ‘actor’ or ‘agent’ and ‘where the processes of creation are the focus and the object of the research’ (Coessens et al. 2009: 92, 95).

For Graeme Sullivan (2005) and Paul Carter (2004), it is the interdisciplinary and performative nature of art practice that constitutes its research dimension. Sullivan sees art practice as a form of what he calls ‘transcognition’, meaning knowledge is configured as a dynamic process arising from relations between modes of cognition. The main modes he identifies are ‘art practice’, ‘interpretivism’, ‘empiricism’ and ‘criticality’. ‘Interpretivism’ refers to the hermeneutic models of understanding of Habermas and Ricœur (Habermas 1971; Ricœur 1981), ‘empiricism’ corresponds to the qualitative methods of the social sciences, and ‘criticality’ is derived from the constructivist arguments for research-as-social-change of Guba and Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln 1998). Unfortunately, no account is given of how the different theories might intersect productively. However, what is apparent is that Sullivan sees transcognition as the generation of possibilities, in the sense that multiple, rather than singular, meanings are produced, so that we are left in a state of having to consider that something *may be this* or *may be that* (Sullivan 2005: 133–135). According to Carter, interdisciplinarity generates insight, and the way we understand this generation of insight can serve (to quote the book’s jacket copy) as ‘an intellectual underpinning for the new, and still developing, field of creative research’. His thesis is inspired by the American artist Robert Morris, for whom art is ‘a complex of interactions involving factors of bodily possibility, the nature of materials and physical laws, the temporal dimensions of process and perception, as well as resultant static images’ (quoted in Carter 2004: 8). Working with diverse materials and methods, he argues, obliges artists to reflect: (a) on their working methods and assumptions and (b) on the ambitions of the project in hand, in such a way as to allow new methods and understandings to form and, perhaps most importantly, to leave traces of the zig-zagging conversations and thinking processes that produced the new methods and understandings so that others might follow the trail.

Another formulation of artistic research as interdisciplinary, although with greater interest on the intersection between art and science, is given by Borgdorff and Michael Schwab (Borgdorff 2012; Schwab 2013; Schwab and Borgdorff 2014a). They draw upon Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s concept of an ‘experimental system’: the interplay between an ‘epistemic thing’ and ‘technical objects’ (Rheinberger 1997: 28). The ‘epistemic thing’ is an object of enquiry that possesses an ‘irreducible vagueness’ because it is being drawn into the open by science for the first time and so ‘embodies what one does not yet know’ (Rheinberger 1997: 28), while ‘technical objects’ are the ‘instruments, inscription devices, model organisms, and the floating theorems and boundary concepts attached to them’ through which the newly identified objects of enquiry ‘become entrenched and articulate themselves in a wider field of epistemic practices and material cultures’ (Rheinberger 1997: 29). The process might be understood as a form of disclosure, whereby epistemic things are brought into being and articulated through the apparatus, visualizations, verbal accounts and



theories, where there is no binary division between knowledge and object; the former is understood as the articulation of the other. This means that different forms of cognitive representation or ‘technical object’ (in Rheinberger’s sense), rather than being placed in opposition, stand in relation to one another. One form of representation is able to bring to light an aspect of the epistemic thing because it gains its purchase on the thing from neighbouring forms of representation, and equally, is able to offer new representations for its neighbours to address. It is this process of interweaving and mutual articulation, including the interaction between art practice and writing, which Schwab calls ‘exposition’, that Borgdorff and Schwab see as being central to artistic research (Borgdorff 2012: 184–198; Schwab 2013: 5–14; Schwab and Borgdorff 2014a: 15–19).

From this brief survey, it is evident that coming to an understanding of the meaning of artistic research is complicated by the fact that art itself cannot be easily defined, and by the various ways in which art is placed in relation to knowledge. The survey is far from exhaustive and so cannot be the basis for the identification of trends. However, the nature of the theories considered does allow a conclusion to be drawn. By that, I mean it is possible to detect an interest in the theories that, by its very nature, implies a conclusion that reaches beyond them. In the theories consulted, there are three principal strands: (1) artistic research that benefits and extends art, but this has to contend with the problem of the definition of art; (2) artistic research that displays the poetic or performative nature of knowledge production; and (3) artistic research that addresses our handling of concepts, whether through inter-disciplinary practice or through the production of work that challenges definition. Underlying all three is an interest in the exercise of concepts or classification: (1) ‘artistic research for art’ raises it simply because it is obliged to confront how it is applying the concept of ‘art’; (2) displaying the aesthetic or poetic nature of knowledge production will bring into view images, forms or acts that carry with them concepts, e.g. of vision, of the body, of technology, of poetry, that interrupt or divert the conventional concepts of knowledge production; and (3) work that is across disciplines or which challenges classification, by definition, addresses the application of concepts. This interest reaches beyond the theories from which it emerged due to its focus on concepts, the means by which any understanding is articulated. Even though the conclusion originates in a handful of studies, the fact that it refers to the process of classification *that is required for any act of identification or description, in experience, in art, in knowledge, in communication*, means we have arrived at a context that is going to be relevant to any attempt to define artistic research. The fact that we have reached this point from two sources, the question of the definition of art and the question of the relation between art and research, suggests that maybe a research culture was always going to be a consequence of the uncertainty that followed the death of art.

### **The definition of ‘research’**

However, coming to an understanding of the meaning of artistic research involves a further complication: the meanings of ‘knowledge’ and ‘research’. Different

theories of knowledge within philosophy were identified in chapter 1, and these configured knowledge in such a way that made it distinct from subjectivity and aesthetic expression. I shall respond to this in the next chapter. Before then, it is worth observing that there is much wariness within the arts around the concept of 'research'. In these expressions of anti-research sentiment, the word itself is not defined, other than to suggest that it is the expression of a set of values that opposes or is in contrast to art. Although not described as such, they cluster around the modern, Cartesian distinction we saw in chapter 1, between language, concepts and the academy on the one hand and sensory material and artistic expression on the other. As Candlin makes the point:

by moving the right to legislation from the practising artist to the academic, a different series of institutional norms, professional and pedagogical practices are brought into play [*sic*]. It is this overlap between art practice and academia that potentially makes students, staff and management anxious.

(Candlin 2000: 4)

Furthermore, there is the worry that it is the institutional forces governing research that will dominate artistic research, and not art. According to Busch:

Regulations governing the allocation of research stipends or project funds and the awarding of doctorates ... [are] conspicuously not the work of artists, who in fact seem to have gradually lost interest in their new discipline. We have little reason, then, to describe the field of artistic research as autonomous, since it is decisively determined by criteria not immanent to art.

(Busch 2011: 72)

The idea that art and research are two distinct worlds is also asserted by Michael Craig-Martin, in his exchange with John Baldessari. Craig-Martin expresses his indignation that 'there are hundreds of kids in Britain doing PhDs – *PhDs!* – in fine art', and asserts that the qualification only has merit in the academy, not the art world. His position is that artists do 'the highest-level research in the world', anyway, and 'if you want the highest-level research, you need to go to Jeff Wall or whomever. You need people who are out there, in the world, doing what it is that an artist does' (Baldessari and Craig-Martin 2009: 45–46, original emphasis).

I am not convinced by these criticisms though. Candlin and Busch assume that art is state of freedom that is independent of institutional forces, as if the art market, galleries, curation, commissions and patronage were exempt from 'institutional' status. Busch also falls back on the notion of properties that are 'immanent to art', thereby contradicting the more open attitude she displayed when setting out her list of definitions above, while Craig-Martin takes 'what an artist does' to be self-evident. All fail to acknowledge the point that art after the 'death of art' has no intrinsic or immanent properties that can be taken for granted, meaning an 'art v. academy' or 'art v. institution' opposition cannot be so easily drawn. Craig-Martin's collapsing

of 'art' and 'research' is also unhelpful, since it glosses over the problems that make artistic research perplexing.

A more serious objection to the values of research is raised by Tom Holert (Holert 2011). He argues that the Western research ethic 'dismisses any form of speculation, reflection, reasoning and supporting argument that does not comply with the protocols of an alleged value-neutrality of science', and so any attempt to ally research with the states that are customarily regarded as aesthetic, such as 'the intuitive, the non-discursive, of physicality, not-knowing, absurdity, and purposelessness', will, he thinks, remain 'an ongoing source of irritation' (Holert 2011: 48–50). 'The intuitive, the non-discursive, of physicality, not-knowing, absurdity, and purposelessness', while not definitive of art, are nevertheless qualities that are important to it or have a place within it, yet they seem to be wholly antithetical to the creation of knowledge, understood as science. This is the art–science debate. It lies at the intersection of a number of recent cultural and theoretical developments: the postmodern challenging of boundaries between subjects; consequent interest in what comes to light when enquiry takes place between subjects; greater awareness of the power of technology to transform the world; C.P. Snow's assertion that art and science are becoming divergent cultures (Snow 1998); and research funding councils wanting media- or public-friendly art to promote their work. The art–science relation itself predates these events. It is in fact a product of modernity, a product of the awareness of the human being as an individual distinct from God who can know (scientifically) and can create (artistically) the world. As such, it has been at the centre of cultural and philosophical enquiry in the modern period, including romanticism's conception of the artistic imagination as the generator of insight that is not available to scientific methods of classification; Dilthey's distinction between the natural and the human sciences, with the latter constituted by a 'reflexive awareness' that is always rooted in a socio-historical reality (Dilthey 1989: 247); and Heidegger's assertion of the world-*creating* properties of language in the face of positivism's restriction of it to being mere world-*description* (Heidegger 1971).

But the fact that the art–science contest is historical and familiar, and that there have been arguments from the romantics (e.g. Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche), Dilthey, Heidegger and others to demonstrate the epistemic or metaphysical power of art, should mean that although the contest is not resolved, it nevertheless provides a context that artistic research can join, and to which it can make a contribution. The danger is to assume that 'research' equates to 'science', where 'science' is taken to mean a form of knowledge-production that is *not critical of its own theories and methods*. What the art–science debate proves is that other forms of knowledge exist and, while there might not be acceptance by all parties of all theories and methods, there is nevertheless a domain or series of domains where these disputes are recognized academically and culturally. Therefore, while Holert is right to raise the contrasting natures of art and science as an issue for artistic research, the contrast is not a barrier but a territory that offers concepts and concerns that can be taken up and advanced by artistic research. Furthermore, it entails that 'research' is bigger than 'science', narrowly conceived, and should be characterized in other terms.

What might these other terms be? Let's look at three institutional definitions of research. This is not to take refuge in institutional definitions, or to be blind to the values that have shaped them, but instead to conduct a close-reading of the definitions to see what concepts, above and beyond those commonly associated with science, are at work. The three institutional definitions of research are from: (1) the *Frascati Manual*, an internationally recognized methodology for collecting and using research and experimental development statistics; (2) the 2014 UK research assessment round, called the Research Excellence Framework (REF); and (3) the University of Toronto's Faculty of Research and Innovation (selected at random to offer an extra-European university perspective):

- (1) Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

*(OECD 2002: 30)<sup>1</sup>*

- (2) For the purposes of the REF, research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.

It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction ...

It includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports.

*(REF 2012: Annex C, 48)*

- (3) 'Research' means investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery or interpretation of knowledge, the systematic collection or revision of knowledge in light of new facts or theories, the development and application of methodologies to increase knowledge and the practical application of knowledge to specific problems or circumstances.

*(University of Toronto, no date)*

Reviewing the definitions, two common terms emerge: a 'systematic process of investigation' and the 'generation of or addition to knowledge'. Strictly speaking, only the Frascati and the Toronto definitions refer to the process as 'systematic', but arguably 'systematic' is akin to the sense of structure denoted by 'process' in the REF definition. 'Systematic' or 'structure' might imply 'scientific method', but this is only one interpretation. Any context that includes elements interacting in a

manner that is understandable by others, and in principle repeatable by others, would count as 'systematic'. I had thought to write 'includes elements interacting in an *organized* manner' but I think the sense of 'organization' or the interaction of organs within a body is already contained in the idea that the manner is 'understandable by others'. For to be understandable by others is to conform to or participate in a *sign system* that is shared or agreed by others. Being understandable by others therefore already includes being systematic.

However, the rub happens when it is proposed that 'elements interacting in a manner that is understandable by others, and in principle repeatable by others' means 'a manner that is independent of subjective whim'. This is surely a point where art and research are in opposition. But I don't think this is necessarily the case. 'Independent of subjective whim' simply means that there have to be components whose interactions are set in a context that is viewable and understandable by others. This does not pose any restriction to art, for 'components whose interactions are set in a context that is viewable and understandable by others' is arguably just another name, albeit a long one, for materials, technologies and interpretation. The way paint behaves on a canvas, the transition from one perspective to another in a video, or the way in which an installation greets potential visitors, all consist of interactions in a context that is viewable and understandable by others, on account of the fact they rely on publicly recognizable forms. Interpretation might not be immediate or obvious, but whatever descriptions are produced, whether literal or metaphorical, will be linguistic, i.e. a shared sign system, where even the most unconventional pairings of words can be considered in relation to surrealism, metaphor theory or language as a whole regarded as a structure.

This is an understanding of language that draws largely upon theories from Ferdinand de Saussure in linguistics (Saussure 1983) and Ludwig Wittgenstein in philosophy (Wittgenstein 1953). Although they worked independently, they nevertheless both produced versions of the thesis that language operates as a socially sustained network of relations between words before it functions as a series of names for things and actions. This move towards seeing the foundation of language as a shared structure is reinforced by second-generation cognitive linguistics, from the 1970s onwards, in which concepts are understood to derive from our condition as physically embodied beings, with the articulate nature of the body's coping with its environment serving as the basis for concept formation (Gibbs 1994; Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). This structural account of language does not undermine the capacity of any one mind to produce an unconventional or bizarre statement, but it does entail that the meaning of such a statement is not just a matter of the object or situation to which it refers, but also a matter of how the words in the statement interact with one another and other, neighbouring, related or could-have-been-used words within the web of language. Thus, 'a manner that is independent of subjective whim' is not intended to exclude artistic expression but to signal that it will involve elements interacting systematically, which can include materials and interpretation. The systematic nature of the interaction ensures that the expression rests upon a shared, public understanding that enables the expression

to be judged for what it adds or how it departs from shared, public understanding. This could be described as the objectifying role of systematicity.

So far, in working through the three definitions of research to extract common, key terms, I have focused on the claim that research is a systematic process of investigation, and the generation of or addition to knowledge. Carrying on through the definitions, only the second, United Kingdom REF definition makes explicit the requirement that the new knowledge is 'effectively shared'. It could be argued that sharing is implicit in the Frascati and Toronto definitions, since for something to be recognized as knowledge it has to be available for scrutiny and application within a subject community. Distilling the three definitions into one, I propose, gives us the following definition of research: *creative work undertaken on a systematic basis that leads to new insights, acknowledged by members of a subject community*. The reason for this distillation is to arrive at a definition of research that departs from a scientific characterization. Its alternative key terms are 'creative work', 'systematicity', 'insight' and 'acknowledgment by a subject community'. Interestingly, 'creative work', 'insight' and 'acknowledgment by a subject community' are terms that approximate to Margaret Boden's definition of creativity (Boden 2004: 1). I focus on creativity because it is often held to be intrinsic to the arts (although it is intrinsic to all subjects), and select Boden's theory because it asserts that 'creativity is the ability to come up with ideas that are *new, surprising and valuable*' (Boden 2004: 1). On this account, creativity is not just the production of novelty but a matter of generating ideas that critique or destabilize established thinking (i.e. they are surprising) and change or add to established thinking in ways that are acknowledged to be informative or beneficial (i.e. they are valuable), where acknowledgment comes from the members of the appropriate subject or 'idea' community. Therefore, we have reached a definition of research that is not formulated with reference to science and, furthermore, is very similar to a definition of creativity per se, apart from the requirement of 'systematicity' (which, as I have explained, is not a barrier to the arts). Of course, one could take issue with Boden's theory, but I think her emphasis on surprise and value is important for ensuring that the word 'creativity' is more than a synonym for 'novelty', which can mean a new instance of the same, and for 'productivity', which can include mechanical, predictable fabrication.

If there is one part of the distilled definition that is vague and open to challenge, it is the requirement that research is 'acknowledged by members of a subject community'. This is the political dimension of the definition of research: research is whatever is accepted as such by a particular institution, committee or board. Although there might be an argument for why a submission constitutes research, made in terms, say, of the first half of the distilled definition, i.e. it is creative work undertaken on a systematic basis that leads to a new insight, a community might choose not to acknowledge it, and so its status as research is denied. On the one hand, this need not be a worry for artistic research, since although the concept might mean different things in different quarters, there is nonetheless a growing number of institutional platforms where the concept is recognized, e.g. journals, conferences, exhibitions. On the other, the possibility of non-recognition remains

in situations where particular understandings of research, e.g. scientific models or projects tied to a desired outcome, persist. As Schwab and Borgdorff indicate, higher education-based artistic research in the Netherlands is ‘only eligible for funding when [it addresses] societal needs and contribute[s] to social welfare and economic growth’ (Schwab and Borgdorff 2014a: 12). One could respond by setting out the theory of knowledge which demonstrates the power of art to affect the way we think and live, or which articulates the systematic nature of the art project, but this assumes a willingness to listen. Such willingness, however, cannot be assumed. But that is not to say that the willingness to listen cannot be won. The fact that interdisciplinary enquiry occurs means it is possible for one discipline to recognize the theories and methods of another. But it also just might mean that a lot of work has to go into creating the conditions that prompt one discipline to look beyond its own silo in the first place, and to consider entertaining that another might be of interest to it. This would be a matter of identifying the kinds of event, whether it’s political, cultural or epistemological, that can fracture conventional ways of looking to allow new horizons of enquiry to appear.

Another concern with the phrase ‘acknowledged by members of a subject community’ in the context of artistic research is that it could be taken to imply that art is produced to satisfy a community, a form of ‘art by committee’ and, thereby, art that lacks vision or that has had its poetic edges smoothed over in the interests of meeting a range of criteria. I consider the worry that ‘art doctored’ (art produced in the name of research) is ‘art neutered’, on account of having to satisfy research criteria, in chapter 6. But on this occasion, I don’t think that community acknowledgment entails the production of work that has to be agreeable. ‘Acknowledgment’ can take many forms and, I would argue, can include cases where the work that has been produced defies convention or explanation. This could be the kind of work that Busch includes in the ‘intermediary zone’, her ninth category of artistic research:

This intermediary zone is characterized by the fact that the actual object of research is still undetermined, therefore, “knowledge of certain facts has not yet been put into concepts” [Busch quoting Marcel Mauss], by the fact that the methods are merely provisional and the knowledge structures and their categories and criteria are still in the making. In this liminal sphere of “wild” knowledge that is still unstructured, non-conceptual, and uncanonized, knowledge can flourish that was once termed “event” in philosophy, and which is characterized by the fact that it does not occur within the space and the framework of the expected.

*(Busch 2009; Mauss 1973: no page reference given)*

Except that, the point regarding inclusion from above notwithstanding, researchers are good at conceptualizing the unexpected. Exemplars of the academy’s accommodation of the nonsensical can be found in art historical accounts of dada and surrealism, and stream-of-consciousness writing in literary theory. There is a larger

point here. While I fully support the proposal that artistic research should pursue the ‘unstructured’, the ‘uncanonized’ and the ‘provisional’, I think Busch is wrong to lump these properties in with the ‘non-conceptual’. Irrespective of what is offered, no matter how unstructured or provisional its nature, it will always be conceptualizable, for the simple reason that it will be embodied, i.e. it will involve an object or an event in a location that will be perceived either directly or indirectly (via a screen or a recording) by people with similar sensory modalities in a context that, at some point or other, will be linked to institutions or conventions related to art or research, as opposed to those related to, for example (at random), bicycle repair, hairdressing or greengrocery. These three examples might seem to take us from the sublime to the ridiculous, but they are there to show that Busch’s intermediary zone will have to occur somewhere and that, wherever it is pitched, it will be an environment with concepts, meanings and associations that start to offer a cognitive purchase, albeit a very tentative or provisional purchase, on what is presented. Furthermore, she phrases the relationship between the conceptual and the non-conceptual in terms of spaces – the ‘liminal sphere of “wild” knowledge’ and the ‘space ... of the expected’ – which, as an image, is predisposed to create the impression that the two categories cannot co-exist or share common ground (Busch 2009). But it’s precisely this idea of the conceptual and non-conceptual as mutually exclusive domains that has to be questioned. While the ‘concept’ is commonly associated with intellectual ideas and words, largely because of the predominance of idealism and rationalism within the history of epistemology, Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy challenges this association and repositions the concept as an element that plays a much more ‘concrete’ role in experience, as I explain in the next chapter.

## A Kantian foundation for artistic research

My study of what ‘artistic research’ might mean, rather than aiming to move in the direction of a definition, seems only to have raised a number of problems. These are: (1) the various theories that wedge art and knowledge apart, from chapter 1; (2) the question of gaining greater clarity on the interest in concepts or classification, following the question of the definition of art, and the fact that art now either crosses disciplines or frustrates classification; and (3) the uncertainty of what the articulation of surprise, insight and value to an artistic research community might look like, especially if it relies upon the ‘systematic’ articulation of a medium or interpretation. I propose to address all three with one set of philosophical ideas: the critical epistemology of Immanuel Kant (Kant 1929). This might seem a daunting or futile task, since Kant’s epistemology is notoriously complex. It is set out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The book was published in two editions, first in 1781 and then a second edition in 1787 written in response to critics; the two editions are now combined in a single volume that is over 650 pages long. It is the first of three volumes expounding a philosophy that covers human being’s capacity for knowledge, morality, and mediation between the realms of freedom (in thought and



action) and nature. It sets up the theoretical structure that operates across all three volumes, with the third volume, the *Critique of Judgment* from 1790, aiming to bridge a gap in the structure created by the first two volumes. It is judgments within art and science that both exemplify the gap and also suggest a concept that might bridge it. Despite these complexities, there is at the core an elegant argument whose terms are arranged perfectly to display the epistemic power of art, to respond to the three concerns above, and to provide a foundation for artistic research. The contradiction posed by art and science to Kant's framework in the *Critique of Judgment*, and the resolution he proposes, only help to strengthen further the relevance of his system to artistic research.

The most important shift in thinking that his philosophy brings about, as far as artistic research is concerned, is to alter our understanding of the position occupied by concepts in experience and in knowledge. Concepts for Kant are not just words or mental units that oppose the variability of sensation but shapers of experience. They hold experience together, not in any reductive or locked-down fashion, but in such a way that there is always room for experience to be surprising, for experience to demand that other concepts are applied. Kant offers a framework in which experience is organized conceptually, but where there is also recognition that the conceptual organization of experience can be challenged and there must be a reframing of what is before us. It is the removal of the opposition between concept and experience, and the introduction of a model where concepts might often be in a state of trying to come to terms with an experience, that means his philosophy can respond to the three concerns above. Explaining how this is done in detail, and the consequences it has for the notion of a 'concept', is the job of chapter 3.

Does this mean I am leaving the question of 'what is artistic research?' unanswered, or postponing my answer till the end of chapter 3? It is certainly the case that by the end of chapter 3, the nature and implications of a Kantian theory of artistic research will be clearer. Nevertheless, it is possible at this stage to answer the question. In trying to formulate an answer, three concerns have arisen regarding: (1) the nature of knowledge, and why art is distinct from it; (2) the nature of classification; and (3) what might be involved in articulating an insight to a community, possibly in systematic terms. All three are questions of the relation between aesthetics and epistemology, and are set up in ways that invite Kantian responses. This, I think, is one kind of answer to 'what is artistic research?': a set of enquiries or practices that open on to at least three questions regarding the relation between aesthetics and epistemology, and in a way that points towards Kant. It is not a definitive answer. It answers a question with three more questions, but it at least hints at the direction in which we might turn to find a more conclusive answer. But I think the answer is nonetheless significant because the relationship between aesthetics and epistemology is the territory in which art, the senses, embodiment and technology are recognized to challenge and to inform theories of the nature and production of knowledge. At the core of the relationship is the notion that our sensory engagement with the world is always undergoing conceptual organization,

but in such a way that sensation can challenge conceptualization and require that novel or unconventional combinations of concepts are created in order to get to grips with the challenging situation. In this respect, I endorse the latter entries in Busch's list of definitions of artistic research which call attention to the capacity of art and the aesthetic to highlight the constructed nature of knowledge and to challenge the application of categories, i.e. 'interdisciplinarity', 'the revelation of what is concealed', 'the poetics of knowledge production' and a 'pre-conceptual intermediary zone'.

My answer to the question 'what is artistic research?' then is to say that artistic research has to recognize the way in which its combination of art and knowledge calls for philosophical appraisal. It is effectively to transform 'artistic research' into its philosophical counterpart, 'aesthetic epistemology'. Turning to Kant will give us one of the most important displays of what happens when epistemology draws upon aesthetics, and provide us with a concept of 'concept' that has the agility to accommodate and to promote the epistemic power of art.

## Note

- 1 As the 'Foreword' to the *Frascati Manual* explains, 'in June 1963, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) met with national experts on research and development (R&D) statistics at the Villa Falcioneri in Frascati, Italy. The result was the first official version of the *Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys of Research and Development*, better known as the *Frascati Manual*' (p. 3). The 2002 version is the sixth edition of the manual. In 2013, the OECD Working Party of National Experts on Science and Technology Indicators (NESTI) gave the go-ahead for the preparation of the seventh edition, with revisions focused on five objectives: (1) 'reflect changes in the nature of R&D, including cross-country, inter-firm and related arrangements'; (2) 'recognise the widespread and increasing use of the manual's guidelines among developing countries'; (3) 'highlight methodological approaches for addressing new survey challenges and making best use of complementary data sources'; (4) 'propose developments that facilitate the use of R&D statistics in other statistical frameworks'; and (5) 'ensure that the *Frascati Manual* provides an effective, "living" tool for the STI [Science and Technology Indicators] community'. Given the nature of the objectives, it seems unlikely that any will necessitate a major change in the manual's definition of research and experimental development. <http://www.oecd.org/sti/inno/frascati-manual-revision.htm> (accessed 23 September 2014).

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# 3

## WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT CONCEPTS

A ‘revolution’ in philosophy occurs towards the end of the eighteenth century which, I think, has the potential to provide a strong theoretical foundation for artistic research. ‘Revolution’ is in inverted commas because the claim for radical change is made by the author himself, Immanuel Kant, although the nature of the change and its impact on philosophy, I would argue, mean the claim is warranted. The relevance of Kant’s philosophy to artistic research has been observed by a number of authors (Borgdorff 2012: 151–153; Cobussen 2014: 69–72; Giudici 2013: 166–169; Johnson 2010: 143–144). These studies concentrate upon his making aesthetics central to the theory of knowledge. Art is defined by Kant as an occasion in which conventional, conceptual understanding of the world is stopped in its tracks, triggering a process of conceptual free play in which human understanding reflects on its capacity to find appropriate concepts. While this positioning of aesthetics by Kant at the heart of his epistemology is important (I return to it below), work has yet to be done on drawing out precisely how the terms of his aesthetic epistemology might apply to artistic research and provide a foundation for it.

In this chapter, I produce a line of interpretation through Kant that translates his combination of aesthetics and epistemology into a way of approaching artworks in the particular as research. The aspect of Kant’s philosophy that I focus upon is how it places concepts in relation to experience. It offers a very particular understanding of the notion of a concept, one that is especially suited to an artistic context in which there is interest in how a medium, technology, situation or meaning might be stretched or transformed. We need to talk about concepts in relation to artistic research because, after Kant, they become elements which can simultaneously explain the power of art to create novelty and surprise, while locating that novelty and surprise within a conceptual, cognitive framework. This chapter explains the theory.

## What is a concept?

What is a concept? Although the question can be asked in four words, a full answer would be much longer and more complex, since it would draw upon different theories of what constitutes a concept which, in turn, would involve one or more competing theories of mind, language and reality. In very general terms, a concept might be described as that which a person has when they are able to *recognize* or to *name* a particular object or event. There is an etymological relationship between ‘concept’ and ‘grasping’ displayed in German: *greifen*, ‘to grasp’, ‘to grab’; *begreifen*, ‘to understand’, ‘to grasp’; *Griff*, ‘grip’, ‘grasp’; *Begriff*, ‘concept’. However, the idea of what it means to grasp something quickly leads to ideas of perception, understanding and truth, all of which can be viewed in very different ways. ‘What is a concept?’ opens on to some of the oldest questions in philosophy, since it asks about the structure of knowledge and reality. Why is there something rather than nothing? How and why is the universe ordered? Why are there things?

The question gets very quickly to the heart of the ‘revolutionary’ nature of Kant’s thought. Philosophy as Kant finds it towards the end of the eighteenth century is polarized between the rationalism of Descartes, Leibniz and Baumgarten on the continent and the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley and Hume in Britain. Both schools are at an impasse on account of the fact that their own concepts and methods ultimately work to undermine themselves and to prevent the formation of coherent theories of knowledge. For example, Descartes fails in the *Meditations* (1641) to guarantee clear and distinct ideas (Descartes 1968: 113–141), and Hume realizes in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740) that an empiricist model of knowledge can only account for abstract, structural concepts such as causality, number and the self in terms of custom (Hume 1978: 183). Kant’s response is to entertain the possibility that the conceptual knowledge defined by the rationalists and the sensory knowledge advanced by the empiricists *actually require each other* in order for human experience to be possible. By creating this relationship between concept and sensation, Kant makes concepts *the shapers of experience*. In order for me to experience, there needs to be a structure in place that can receive and organize the world. This structure is not fixed but flexible, and can adapt and grow to meet the demands of what it encounters. The idea that experience is shaped is not a conventional one. It is commonly assumed that experience falls into neat bits and pieces because that’s the way the world is structured, i.e. it is full of things that can be readily compartmentalized, from atoms to skyscrapers. However, what we commonly attribute *to the world*, Kant attributes *to the structure of experience* in order to overcome the impasse between rationalism and empiricism. This introduces the thesis that experience, including the sense of self, is the result of a process whereby what is received through sensation has to be grasped, shaped and made intelligible. The elements that perform this role Kant calls ‘concepts’.

Before I set out the principal elements of Kant’s philosophy, I want to offer three examples to make Kant’s notion of a concept more tangible. The first is an elaboration of an example given by Alva Noë of the place of thought in

experience (Noë 2013: 179). When you first hear a new song by one of your favourite musicians, it is usually the case that you are not quite sure what to make of it. There might be some familiar sounds or moods due to the voice, the instrumentation and the emotional landscape that the artist tends to occupy. But after the first listen, the song still feels strange. On the second or third listen, certain phrases or sections might start to emerge and take your interest. They become the phrases that you look forward to hearing next time, and help to form an initial sense of how the song is laid out, including its narrative and emotional tone. It is no longer entirely strange. By the fourth or fifth listen, the structure of the piece is now familiar, and certain phrases or sections (not necessarily the same ones as before) have become ‘hooks’ or the highlights in your enjoyment of the song, and there is a much stronger sense of what it might suggest in terms of narrative and emotion. Whereas the first listen offers a sequence in which little is distinct with sounds that, although recognizable, cannot easily be placed, the fifth occurs as a sequence in which you feel oriented and where you wilfully follow the highs and lows of the narrative that you know are coming.

It is the difference between the first and fifth (or sixth or tenth) listens that I want to focus upon. What is the difference between them? The same piece of music is being played on each occasion, yet the experience feels very different. How is this possible? In one sense, the change can be explained simply by saying that the song has *become familiar* to us or that we have *grown to like* it. But, as phrases, they do not capture the stark qualitative differences between experiencing a lack of distinction in the first listen and the feeling of orientation and anticipation of what’s to come in the fifth. Furthermore, we can ask what is happening behind the phrases ‘become familiar’ and ‘grown to like’. A more satisfactory way of explaining the difference is to recognize that whereas initially details were hard to pick out, certain sections in the song now stand out as chunks, saliences, things that are prominent. They are the sections that you look forward to, that provide orientation in the piece and constitute the emotional highs and lows. One might say that your perceptual faculties have become ‘attuned’ to the song and, as a result, have become more adept at finding and drawing out elements within it. What was initially flat and indistinguishable has become a series of forms that stand out as distinct, recognizable features of the song. In Kantian vocabulary, you have acquired concepts, or concepts have formed, that are able to receive sensory material and draw out meaningful experience from it; ‘attunement’ and ‘chunking’ are metaphors for the same process. ‘Chunking’ might seem to be a different kind of image from ‘attunement’, to be more thing-like, but becoming attuned to a series of sensations is essentially the same as reaching a perceptual state in which things *stand out*, i.e. are chunked, as recognizable and meaningful.

The second example that I think will help to introduce Kant’s notion of ‘concept’ is scientific visualization. Scientific images take a variety of forms: diagrams, drawings from observation, depictions of method, data visualization, and the outcomes of technological or instrumental processes, such as positron emission tomography, magnetic resonance imaging and different kinds of microscopy. It is the



technological or instrumental image that I am interested in. The technological scientific image uses apparatus and the processing of data to access realms beyond human vision. One of the main purposes of the image is to show salience, to allow the subject of the image to stand out prominently against the interference from artefacts, the distortions or intrusions introduced by the imaging technology (Lynch and Edgerton Jr. 1988). It is because the image refers to *something*, a chunk, where reference is achieved through a series of causal connections with that ‘something’, that it is able to support a hypothesis (Perini 2005). But finding and representing this ‘something’ is not an easy matter. Although seeming to offer an objective representation of an object or event, i.e. this part of reality occurs in this way independently of human perception, the scientific image is in actual fact a bringing-into-being of that mode of appearing, according to the research interests, technology and rules of interpretation involved. To borrow terminology from Peirce, it is not an ‘icon’ in the sense of being a copy of a source object whose properties resemble those of the original object (Peirce 1982: 53–56). The objects that are depicted in scientific images are not pre-existent and imaginable independently of the image, for the image is *their being brought into being*. I am using ‘depict’ to mean ‘making visible’ or ‘bringing to light’. To draw on more of Peirce’s terminology, depiction here is a matter not of resemblance but of *symbolism* through convention – i.e. it is readable by a scientific community – and of *indexicality* through cause and effect, where the instruments and conventions that generate the display have been arranged to allow *something* (a cause) to appear (to have an effect).

As Ihde notes, the compulsion is to see scientific images as representational, as depicting the true nature of reality, when they are in fact ‘technological constructions’ that bring into being their objects by *giving them a voice, but the voice will be a duet* (Ihde 1998: 151, 163, 178–183). Ihde’s ‘voice’ metaphor in turn relies upon a metaphor from musical percussion: ‘the sound produced is both the voice of the thing struck and the voice of the striking instrument ... A bell struck with a wooden mallet produces a different “duet” of sound than one struck with a brass mallet’ (Ihde 1998: 151). In other words, what is shown in the picture derives just as much from the design and operation of the instrument as it does from the portion of reality at which it is pointed. Ihde’s analogy relies upon reference to bells and mallets – familiar, to-hand objects that we can imagine being struck. But in the case of scientific images, target-object and instrument are not pre-existent and to-hand. The conceptual dimension of this example is that something is drawn out and made to stand against a background. The study is looking for *something*. Precisely what that thing is might not be clear, but the act of focused, conceptualized looking, embodied in the combination of theory construction, instrument design and experimentation, *gives a voice* to what was previously non-existent or inaudible. The qualities of that which appears cannot be divided between instrumentation and reality. Just as we saw in the music example, perceptual faculties (in this case, partly theoretical, partly technological) have to be attuned to their portion of reality for perception in terms of objects to occur; chunks are brought into being *through the interaction between a preparatory structure and that on to which the structure opens*.

Ihde's 'voice' and 'chime' metaphors extend the themes of 'attunement' and 'chunking' by emphasizing that qualities do not inhere in objects but are *properties of the productive relationship between apparatus or concept and the reality that it encounters*.

The two examples illustrate that the thingly or object-filled nature of experience cannot be taken for granted, but rather needs to acknowledge the existence of a shaping or chunking process that occurs between us and the world, or between perceptual technologies and the world. It might be objected that the two examples are different: individual enjoyment of a piece of music on the one hand, and the bringing-into-being of a natural, cause-and-effect relationship on the other. The former, it could be argued, is subjective, within someone's experience, whereas the latter is objective, in the world and visualizable. However, as far as the examples are intended to illustrate the actions of concepts, the subjective-objective distinction is not a problem. Both examples involve forms of perception in which what is prominent or meaningful occurs not through a simple act of reception or impression but through a process in which an object is given form. It is worth pointing out that to take the first example as *just* the subjective matter of how someone hears a song 'in their head' is to assume that listening occurs in a private, internal space, when the qualities that have been made to stand out will originate to a degree *in sounds*, i.e. in phenomena that cannot be divided between what belongs to the hearer and what belongs to the objects making the sounds. Equally, to regard the visualization example as primarily a matter of conducting an objective check with reality is to assume that cause-and-effect relationships are simply 'in the world', and therefore to disregard the bringing-into-being of phenomena performed by scientific theory, instrumentation, and experiment design. It is the apparent simplicity of the subjective-objective distinction that is challenged by focusing on the action of concepts organizing sensory content, and by conceiving of experience in terms of chunks.

The thought that such a process might be occurring is counter-intuitive because the world always, already appears to be carved into objects. But this view overlooks the fact the process is happening unconsciously, that the *stable* appearance of the world is the result of our reliance on successful, productive, *shared* modes of perception that also *belong to the world*. Every now and again there are ambiguities in experience that offer occasions where the concept-sensation relationship momentarily falters. The ordered, compartmentalized structure of the world is temporarily suspended, and we are forced to work out exactly what kind of chunk is before us. Is that a red post or someone wearing a red coat that I can see through the trees? Is that the creak of the house cooling at night or a stair shifting under the weight of an intruder? Which experience can I draw upon that best characterizes the flavour I'm finding in the wine? All three are experiences in which, for a moment, it is uncertain which property or identity should be brought out into the open, i.e. which concept will shape the experience.

The fact that the examples are *described*, i.e. set out in words, would seem to suggest that concepts are the same as words, and that I am moving towards a theory that privileges the verbal over the visual. It could be argued that the examples are merely demonstrations of the capacity of description to isolate and

segment what is otherwise an undifferentiated flow of experience or section of reality. However, on Kant's account, while all words are concepts, since they are individual items in themselves and they refer to individual items, *not all concepts are words*. The conceptual and the verbal are often treated as synonymous, largely because of the over-generalization that surrounds similar but not identical meta-physical distinctions such as mind–body, universal–particular, verbal–sensible, etc. What the emphasis on ‘concepts as shapers of experience’ achieves is the recognition that experience can only happen as experience of *something*, as a result of a chunking process performed by concepts, with words being one – *but not the only* – expression of that process. Defining the concept as ‘a shaper of experience’ begins to show how Kant's philosophy avoids the image–word and experience–language oppositions that trouble artistic research. Experience and language are often taken to be two separate streams, the former consisting of inner, qualitatively unique particularities, the latter in public, sharable generalities. The persuasiveness of this model is a consequence of the separation of thought from sensation by rationalism and idealism, the privileging of sensation over language by empiricism, and the concentration in twentieth-century theory on language as the principle source of cultural and cognitive meaning. However, with Kant, there is only one stream, experience, and this is only possible if it already includes a shaping principle, i.e. concepts, of which, I would argue, *language is one manifestation*. The fact that while cycling, I am aware that there is a pedestrian on the cycle path that I have to avoid is part of the same chunking process as my capacity to describe what I see as ‘a pedestrian on the cycle path that I have to avoid’, even though I might not have to utter the sentence at the time. Therefore, to *describe* examples of concepts at work in experience is not to fall back on a model of language imposing generalities on the particularity of experience, but to explore in an entirely consistent way the idea that experience is a chunking process, with words playing a part in that. This is not to deny that words have properties of their own, but they will be properties that affect an already-underway chunking process, rather than being generalities that threaten to stifle the particularity of experience. I develop this line of argument in chapter 4.

### **Approaching Karla Black's *Pleaser* in terms of concepts**

For the third example, let us look at an artwork that has been discussed in relation to research. Karla Black's 2009 sculpture *Pleaser* is made from cellophane, Sellotape, thread and paint, salmon pink in colour (Figure 3.1). It is 250 x 200 cm in size, and suspended from a ceiling so that it hangs approximately 40 cm from the floor. Although not produced by Black as part of a formal or academic research programme, it is offered by Susanne Witzgall as an example of how engagement with materials through art practice can constitute a form of experimental system and, therefore, a form of research (Witzgall 2013). There is an important connection between the role of concepts in experience to which I am calling attention and the meaning that Witzgall attaches to experimental systems, to which I shall return.



**FIGURE 3.1** Karla Black, *Pleaser*, 2009. Cellophane, paint, Sellotape, thread, 250 x 200 cm. © Karla Black. Courtesy Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photograph © Fred Dott.

For the moment, let us focus on how the sculpture illustrates the role concepts play in experience. *Pleaser* is a good example not just because it has already been discussed in terms of research, but also because it is made of cheap materials arranged in ways that look crumpled, and therefore could easily be dismissed as an unwanted, discarded item. So the first salient, conceptual point to note is context: this crumpled mass of cellophane, Sellotape, thread and paint is encountered in an art gallery and not in the corner of a back alley. But what is ordinarily called ‘context’ is also an illustration of the Kantian point that we approach a situation through the lens of a particular concept. The concept of ‘art’ is playing a major role in determining how the material is perceived, although exactly how it determines perception is far from clear, since the nature and meaning of art after conceptual art is no longer straightforward (I explore the implications of this for artistic research in chapter 8). It could be argued then that the mass of cellophane, Sellotape, thread and paint is approached in a way where there is some recognition of the materials but there is also uncertainty as regards what to make of them in an art context.

This brings us to the second salient, conceptual point: initially we might be uncertain of what to make of the mass suspended from the ceiling, and so we begin to look for features that might offer a *way in*. Whether the emphasis is on features *standing out* or features that *draw us in*, we are now in a situation where we begin to grapple perceptually with the object that is before us. The use of the verb ‘to grapple’, an attempt *to grasp*, is deliberate. One feature that stands out is the fact that the work is suspended. It is not suspension in itself, on its own, that elevates the material as art. Many of Black’s works sit crumpled on the floor or against a wall, and draw equal attention. Rather, it is the fact that, hanging in mid-air, it assumes a

commanding position. It is not confined to a footprint or an area of wall, but instead reaches out to all other points in the room. This is assisted by the fact that the form is a combination of transparency and opaque splotches of paint that creates points of contact with the room either by letting them appear through the cellophane or by introducing a game of hide-and-seek: now you see the neck of the street lamp outside, now you don't, because it's hidden behind a pink streak. Furthermore, suspension means that *Pleaser* displays an array of qualities drawn from the way the material and the paint either reflect or impede light from the windows behind. There are concentrations of cellophane and paint, where areas have been crumpled together to create dark interiors. These create contrasts with the lines and flashes of light that collect on the folds and the buckles in the cellophane. Then there is the less dense, single-sheet, comparatively paint-free, transparent area, to the left in Figure 3.1, suggesting the tail-end of a creature in flight or that the entire form is the diagram of an event, from the impact to the outer ripples. A second, related strand of interest in Black's sculpture from Witzgall's perspective is the way it can be read as an expression of the new materialist conception of matter 'as recalcitrant and vibrant, possessing agency and driving forces' (Witzgall 2013: 42). The idea that our focus could or should be on the recalcitrant properties of matter indicates another array of concepts that might be brought to the work (especially as its research focus), although the fact that we have already been attending to the suspended, buckled and splattered nature of the work implies that these concerns are to the fore anyway. Interestingly, Witzgall quotes Black describing her practice as being 'about trying to find a way to ... bring raw material and colour just up – like into the air to eye-level' (Witzgall 2013: 42). While this can be read as confirmation that Witzgall's interest accords with Black's own intention, it is also the expression of a desire to make a particular aspect of the world prominent, to draw it out into the open for others to conceive.

Just as the examples from music and scientific visualization show how items stand out as we acquire the appropriate concepts, so Black's *Pleaser* demonstrates how an arrangement of materials qualifies as an object for attention because certain features are made prominent conceptually. Because this example is an artwork, it offers further relevant details. Viewing the work conceptually as 'art' is not an end to the matter (due to the variety of meanings the term has within its history, especially after conceptual art) but the introduction to a period of uncertainty, as the process starts of looking for aspects and relationships that might stand out to form the basis of an interpretation. Here we witness how concepts function not as containers – they do not confine the object they have drawn out to a particular, singular identity – but rather as sources of identity that bring other identities and aspects into view, (a) because concepts signify other concepts, and (b) because there is an object before us which is open to being viewed in terms of the concepts that arise. Thus attention moves from *Pleaser's* state of suspension, to its commanding the space, to its connection with other parts of the room being either concealed or revealed by the paint-splattered cellophane, and finally to the buckles and interiors in the cellophane that suggest it might be a creature or the diagram of an event.

This example lets us see how the initial, tentative perception of an artwork is shaped by concepts and, in particular, how the uncertainties posed by the concept 'art' and the physical nature of the artefact itself are occasions where the application of concepts is not straightforward, and a succession of them has to be drawn upon in order to begin coming to terms with the work.

### **Kant's argument for the necessary interaction between concept and intuition**

With the three illustrations, I have suggested in general, Kantian terms that the character of experience is such that things can appear or stand out, where the process of disclosure or chunking is created by concepts acting upon sensation. Furthermore, the action of concepts need not be the simple determination or 'locking down' of the qualities found in sensation but, as we saw in the case of Black's *Pleaser*, the prompting of other, seemingly unrelated concepts in a movement that might be likened to poetic or metaphorical association. How does Kant reach this point? Why is it compelling, when, as I indicated at the start, the definition of a concept is complicated, and there might be other competing but equally valid theories to consider? How is it beneficial for artistic research? I shall tackle these questions in order, but to indicate briefly the single argument that will underlie my answer to all three questions: Kant's focus on the structure of experience, as opposed to the structure of the world (and all the complications that this can supply), means his position on concepts acquires a simplicity and a flexibility that are conducive to showing how the various, particular experiences of art act upon the conceptual structures through which we know the world. The fact that objects are not given but are created through the chunking action of concepts on sensation means that the order and content of experience become much more flexible, with the result that room is made to critique the divisions that have been accepted as being 'in the world', and space is made for practices that offer new ways of shaping experience. In this way, art's aesthetic and epistemic (or cognitive) power become mutually inclusive.

How does Kant reach this point? The 'revolutionary' nature of his philosophy is that he focuses not on the nature of reality but on the nature of experience, and asks what has to be the case in order for experience to be possible. This is Kant's 'Copernican revolution'. The comparison with Copernicus is made by Kant himself (Kant 1929: Bxv). Just as Copernicus tries to remove the anomalies affecting sixteenth-century astronomy by adopting a new model of the cosmos, so Kant proposes to resolve the problems of metaphysics by attending to the nature of human experience, and looking to see what has to apply in order for it to exist with the character that it does:

Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption,

ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.

(Kant 1929: Bxv)

‘Conform to our knowledge’ does not mean that he expects the world to match our picture of it, but rather that he intends to work back from *the fact that we have experience, we have knowledge* (he equates experience with knowledge, as I explain below), to establish the minimal conditions necessary for this to happen. The shift from assuming that knowledge must conform to objects to focusing on the nature of experience to identify the structure at work within it, is the basis of this chapter, especially its opening: a move away from the common-sense worldview of a reality populated with objects to consideration of the idea that experience has its own structure in terms of chunks that is prior to or independent of the divisions presented by objects.

What makes Kant’s thesis compelling is its transcendental nature. The word ‘transcendental’ might give the impression that Kant is appealing to a higher realm, alongside Plato and Descartes. But this is not the case; ‘transcendental’ is not the same as ‘transcendent’. ‘Transcendental’ is a coinage made by Kant to describe *what can be known about the conditions of possibility of knowledge* (Kant 1929: A11–A12, B25). There is a self-referential character because he is reasoning *from* the nature of experience *to* the conditions that structure experience and allow it to occur. The concept of experience with which he starts is as minimal as possible, in order not to introduce elements that might create bias or predetermine the deduction. The only assumption he makes is that experience is the result of concepts organizing sensory ‘intuition’, a potentially misleading translation of *Anschauung*, which can also mean ‘outlook’, ‘view’ or ‘receptivity’. Intuition is the sensory material in need of organization by concepts; without intuition, concepts have no meaning and cannot be exercised or formed into judgments. It is the term which, in Kant’s philosophy, confirms that concepts always open on to a world, received through sensibility; it corresponds to concepts, but can also challenge and surprise them. Neither concept nor intuition has the upper hand, as Kant declares: ‘concepts without intuition are empty, intuition without concepts are blind’ (Kant 1929: A51, B75).

The argument where Kant demonstrates the necessary relationship between concepts and sensation is ‘The Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding’ (Kant 1929: A84–A130, B129–B169). The ‘pure concepts’ in the title denotes a set of twelve concepts, generally referred to in Kantian scholarship as the ‘categories’, that Kant reasons have to be in place prior to experience, e.g. ‘substance’, ‘causality’, ‘unity’ (Kant 1929: A76–83, B102–16). They constitute the structure of any experience, the concepts without which experience would not be possible. They are identified as ‘pure’ in order to distinguish them from the concepts that apply to experience in general, e.g. ‘cat’, ‘love’, ‘chocolate’, which Kant calls ‘empirical concepts’. For example, it is possible to have experience

without the concept of chocolate, but impossible, Kant argues, to have an experience that does not rely on a concept of substance, i.e. of an object or thing enduring through time. The table of categories, and the distinction between pure and empirical concepts, are widely debated within Kantian scholarship (e.g. Longuenesse 1998, 2000; Nunez 2014; Pippin 1976).

What is important for us is the idea that a concept brings together what would otherwise be inchoate or diffuse into a unit, lump or sequence that makes recognition possible. ‘Recognition’ carries a lot of the meaning in the previous sentence because, in making recognition possible, one is making experience as a continuous sequence possible. Kant makes the point as follows in the ‘Transcendental Deduction’:

If cinnabar were sometimes red, sometimes black, sometimes light, sometimes heavy, if a man changed sometimes into this and sometimes into that animal form, if the country on the longest day were sometimes covered with fruit, sometimes with ice and snow ... [there could never be] an empirical synthesis of reproduction.

*(Kant 1929: A100–A101)*

An ‘empirical synthesis of reproduction’ is Kant’s technical name for a stage in the process in which intuitions are combined to produce experience. He is thinking of experience as something that has to be held together moment by moment, as if he were a film editor splicing together a film from a pile of individual frames. In order for experience to be able to form as experience, as a sequential awareness that allows a being to become aware of itself in relation to certain familiar objects, e.g. this area of grass, this sound of an aeroplane, this weight felt through a pair of feet, there needs to be some stability. It is only possible to recognize and think about this area of grass, this sound of an aeroplane, etc., if they are *reproduced*, i.e. continuously there, from moment to moment. If there was no continuity, if the setting changed with each and every moment, i.e. the grass becomes the side of an elephant, which then becomes a swarm of wasps, and so on, then there would be no points of reference that would create the continuity necessary for a sequence to form as the experience that belongs to an individual. My sense of myself as a continuously existing being is only possible because the recognition – or *re*-cognition, to bring out Kant’s emphasis on moments being held together – of enduring objects around me enables continuity. No pre-existing ‘I’ is assumed as the subject of experience, as the ground which underlies it and holds it together, since this would mean Kant introduces another component into his deduction of the categories of experience, when the transcendental nature of the deduction requires him to demonstrate the conditions that are necessary for experience purely in terms of concepts and intuitions. Experience is only possible, Kant reasons, if there is a process whereby concepts create recognizable lumps from intuitions, for without recognition, the mutually defining elements of continuous objects and continuous experience of those objects would not arise. The idea that the continuity necessary for experience and



the continuity of the objects that are experienced are mutually defining conditions, effectively two sides of the same coin, is used later in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to refute idealism, the thesis that only mind or thought exists. I can only be conscious of my own existence as an experiencing being if there is something permanent in perception (Kant 1929: B274–B279).

## Kant and embodiment

As far as artistic research is concerned, Kant's epistemology deserves recognition as a theory that can support and extend the subject in a number of ways. First, although its emphasis on concepts could give the impression that it values reason over aesthetics, it is in fact a theory that is wholly consistent with recent philosophical theories of embodiment. As I note above, there is the etymological relationship between 'concept' and 'grasping' displayed in German: *greifen*, 'to grasp', 'to grab'; *begreifen*, 'to understand', 'to grasp'; etc. Although this looks as if I am just milking a metaphor – a concept is a grasp – in the attempt to make an overly abstract philosophy, in terms of concepts, appear to have something to do with the body, the point is in fact more substantial. While Kant does not refer to the body as a major subject in its own right, his assertion of human being's rootedness in the world, and the attention he pays to space, time and sensibility, mean the body is never far away from his philosophy. Grasping something in a hand is a very Kantian act. An object can only be held because the hand is such that it can arrange itself on or around the object, and because the form of the object lends itself to the hand. This might sound like a statement of the obvious but there are three important points here. A thing can only be grasped because (1) something has the capacity to open on to and make contact with that thing, and (2) the thing is graspable by that capacity. (3) In addition, the kind of contact that is had will be in accordance with the properties contained within the capacity. Grasping is not the complete consumption of an object but an ability to be articulate, to arrange a disposition in such a way that it can adapt itself to and meet with an object, with the grasp being a pressure against fingers and the texture of the *object-as-it-is-felt-against-skin*. I have italicized 'object-as-it-is-felt-against-skin' because what is important here is the grasp, or the object-as-it-is-grasped, as opposed to the object as it is in itself. The texture of the object, the pressure it exerts against the hand and the demands it makes on my hand to flex itself are not properties of the object in isolation but of how the object is greeted by a sensitive, articulate agent.

The Kantian dimension to all of this is the idea that a grasp is as much an expression of the hand as it is an expression of the object it has grasped. The inverted word order in the last sentence intentionally mirrors Kant's dictum: 'concepts without intuition are empty, intuition without concepts are blind' (Kant 1929: A51, B75). It is easy to miss the sense of mutual dependency in the concept of 'grasp': hands and objects can be conceived independently of one another in a way that concept and intuition cannot for Kant, so the analogy only extends up to a point. But in this example, our interest is in the grasp, not the object. Some sense

of mutual dependency is retained if it is recognized that, for the duration of the grasp, it is impossible to apportion qualities strictly either to the hand or to the object. Recognizing a concept as a form of grasping is therefore appropriate to Kant's philosophy, since a grasp displays three key qualities: (1) articulate sensitivity; (2) it requires an encounter with that which lends itself to the hand, i.e. what can be grasped (intuition in Kant's idiom); and (3) it occurs in terms which are an expression of how (1) articulate sensitivity interlocks with (2) that which lends itself to the hand.

For many contemporary philosophers and psychologists, the embodied, articulated nature of the world and human activity within it are described as 'conceptual'. In her work on the sensory-kinetic approach to the origin of language, the philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that:

Archetypal corporeal-kinetic forms and relations are conceptual by their very nature... [They] *embody* concepts, precisely in the sense in which we say that someone is the *embodiment* of courage, or that someone *embodies* the qualities we value. They are conceptual instantiations of such concepts as *insiderness, thickness, thinness, animate being, power, verticality, force*, and so on. They are structured in and by *corporeal concepts*.

*(Sheets-Johnstone 2009: 221, original emphasis)*

'Corporeal concepts' are 'fundamental human concepts', like those listed in the quotation, that emerge from bodily experience. What makes the corporeal *conceptual*, and vice versa, is a state of existence in which things are segmented, limbed, chunked and *relatable to other segments, limbs, etc.* An influence here is the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He defines the body as a *body schema*: the set of relations whereby that which is able to be aware of and orient itself in the world also belongs to the world. The body schema is both *sensor and sensed, seer and seen, toucher and touched*. In order to make a particular range of sense experience available to us, the body schema must belong to a world in which it can contextualize the information received. For example, when I perceive a cube, I never see it all at once, but I am able to conceptualize it as a regular six-sided solid because, by rotating the cube in my fingers, *the rotation in my fingers* is an action in space which allows me to orient the successive stages of the experience as a whole cube. The exploration of my hand and what it will teach me can only open on to a tactile world, Merleau-Ponty argues, if my hand

takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this criss-crossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange.

*(Merleau-Ponty 1968: 133)*

Experience has the form that it does, Merleau-Ponty argues, because it is organized (i.e. chunked, although he doesn't use this term) in accordance with the articulated, coordinated nature of the body schema. Whatever I experience or know or reach for has the qualities it has because this is how the body schema approaches it and sets it in the surrounding context of a series of possible encounters or movements, of which it is a part.

A different though nonetheless related thesis on the embodied nature of concepts is to be found in cognitive linguistics. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who cite Merleau-Ponty as an influence (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: xi), the reason why our concepts fit the world so well, is because 'they have evolved from our sensorimotor systems, which in turn evolved to allow us to function well in our physical environment' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 43–44). The concepts we use to describe relations and values have a spatial origin, such as 'happy is up', 'intimacy is closeness', 'important is big', and the concepts we attribute to objects and events in general ('starting', 'stopping', 'running', 'grasping') derive from bodily movement and action (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 38–39). 'What makes concepts concepts', they assert, 'is their inferential capacity, their ability to be bound together in ways that yield inferences. *An embodied concept is a neural structure that is actually part of, or makes use of, the sensorimotor system of our brains*' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 20, original emphasis). In other words, for Lakoff and Johnson, concepts are embodied in the sense that they are extensions of the neural processes employed by the body in coping with its environment. While this approach contributes to their aim of locating human cognitive capacities within bodily processes that are ultimately verifiable, e.g. through neuroscientific study, I neither want nor intend to pursue the neural dimension of concepts. I note it here merely to demonstrate the move towards understanding concepts as elements that are responsible for the limbed, chunked and relatable nature of experience.

It is therefore entirely consistent to talk about the body as a conceptual framework. In this context, the body is first and foremost a chunking process. Any situation will be segmented into graspable, intelligible items as a result of the dual, interlocking aspects of the body as that which senses and that which is able to locate what it senses through a network of limbs that moves about the world. Furthermore, from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, the capacity to make inferences and form connections between ideas is part of the same worldly articulacy as the capacity to move through the world, to adapt an environment, and to place one object in relation to another. As far as artistic research is concerned, it means that my focus on concepts is not a rejection of the aesthetic, bodily properties of art-making, but a recognition of how any part of experience that can be chunked, individuated, picked out, has the potential to be opened up, explored and made the basis for an enquiry. Of course, it is likely that there will be other ideas or concerns that frame or surround the part of experience to help define a research question. But my point is that an emphasis on concepts includes the body, and any physical or embodied effect that is sensed and made salient by the body.

## Experience as knowledge

A second way in which Kant's epistemology supports artistic research is through its redefinition of experience. The theories of knowledge we saw in chapter 1 regard experience as the conveyor of material that is either at odds with the singular nature of an object held by reason (e.g. Plato, Descartes) or so unique and particular that the possibility of relating it to wider, general topics is difficult or discouraged (e.g. Locke, Greenberg). However, with Kant, rather than being merely a conveyor in the service of a superior concern, experience is a domain in its own right. It is the domain whose nature is the basis for the introduction of concepts and systems that will go on to enable claims about human being and reality. This is the import of Kant's Copernican revolution: to 'make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge' (Kant 1929: Bxv). We have experience. Let us see what claims about human being and the world can be extracted from the nature of experience, but any concept that is introduced or any system building that occurs has to contribute in some way to demonstrating the possibility of experience.

We have already seen one aspect of this redefinition of experience in relation to the transcendental deduction: the thesis that the order necessary for experience is also the order that is necessary for a world. The contents of experience cease to be *wholly* matters of private, subjective awareness and instead become contents whose structure has meaning and importance beyond the moment, because they are informed by concepts that are responsible for binding together experience of a world. An idea in the last sentence needs drawing out and emphasizing, because it has the potential to be important for artistic research. Part of Kant's redefinition of experience includes the claim that *experience is knowledge*, on the grounds that experience is *determined by concepts that are responsible for binding together experience of a world*. Experience is a form of knowledge, Kant argues, because, if we weren't aware of the object before us as a particular kind of thing, i.e. it is *known* to be this kind of thing, then the order necessary for experience would be absent:

Experience ... rests on the synthetic unity of appearances, that is, on a synthesis according to concepts of an object of appearances in general. Apart from such a synthesis it would not be knowledge, but a rhapsody of perceptions that would not fit into any context according to rules of a completely interconnected (possible) consciousness, and so would not conform to the transcendental and necessary unity of apperception [the minimal, unified order that experience requires to be experience].

(Kant 1929: A156, B195)

The act of perception is not a simple state of 'having' or 'receiving' impressions from an external reality but an informed chunking action in which concepts as shaping agents draw out and give prominence to whatever is before me so that it abides as a recognizable chunk, thereby giving identity and continuity both to the

chunk and to me. This might give the impression that a theory of experience is being presented in which I am or have to be verbally or consciously aware of what is before me for experience to occur. But this is not the case. As I state above, concepts are shapers of experience for Kant, not necessarily words. The description of perception above is consistent with those occasions in which I am immersed in an activity but not explicitly aware of what's going on, e.g. riding a bike but without being cognizant of the flexing of my ankles with the turn of the pedals, since bodily immersion in the world is included (not by Kant but by phenomenologists) as part of the process of conceptual organization. In the case of ankles flexing when cycling, the ankle's chunking of the world, the ordering of the world that it permits, is still taking place. It is just that a lack of conscious awareness and a state of flow have been encouraged by shoe, pedal and bike design anticipating and accommodating the ordering of the world that an ankle permits when cycling. If the pedal were to snap off, the event would be encountered by my ankle and by me in an explicit, object-focused and non-immersive way.

The difference in the experience–knowledge relation between Kant and the epistemologies presented in chapter 1 cannot be overstated. Rather than experience being seen as a barrier to knowledge, it is here formulated as a state of being in which knowledge is always, already underway. This means that any practice which seeks to alter the character of experience or to create situations in which it is difficult to apply concepts acquires an epistemic, knowledge-affecting dimension, since it will be engaged in moving or creating concepts which not only allow purchase on the new or challenging character, but also enable the particular experience to be located within the wider network of concepts responsible for sustaining experience of a world. As we saw in chapter 2, the final and most open or extreme concept of artistic research entertained by Kathrin Busch was the possibility of an 'intermediary zone' in which 'the actual object of research is still undetermined' and where (this is Busch quoting Marcel Mauss) 'knowledge of certain facts has not yet been put into concepts' (Busch 2009). Although her emphasis on facts 'not yet being put into concepts' is incoherent, on the grounds that the beholding of any fact or object will have to involve a concept, I am nevertheless sympathetic to a definition of artistic research that assigns it the role of exploring forms that challenge conceptualization.

### **The creation of contextualized novelty**

This brings us to the third and final way in which Kant's epistemology supports artistic research. Its emphasis on experience being shaped by concepts provides a minimal and flexible structure that can explain the creation of contextualized novelty. By 'contextualized novelty', I mean that something new is drawn out and shown to be significant against a background of existing understanding. It is a version of the definition of research I considered in chapter 2: creative work undertaken on a systematic basis that leads to new insights, acknowledged by members of a subject community. The advantage of this definition, I argued, was

that it cohered strongly with Boden's thesis that creativity is not just the production of novelty but a matter of generating ideas that critique or destabilize established thinking (i.e. they are surprising) and add to it in ways that are acknowledged to be informative or beneficial (i.e. they are valuable) (Boden 2004: 1–10). 'Contextualized novelty' does not leave the body behind, since we are focusing on the capacity of a structure to promote connection and to identify and draw out new implications. Such elasticity and attention to how new situations might unfold are also properties of embodiment and, ultimately (taking embodiment in its full, phenomenological sense), the structure of any experience, since any experience *to be meaningful as experience* will have to be articulate, jointed, chunked. It is understandable to want to ask whether these processes are primarily 'conceptual' or 'embodied', but such a question falls back upon the mind–body divide which Kant's framework of concepts and intuitions, and most post-Kantian philosophy, rejects, in favour of working in terms of experience and whatever structure is deemed necessary for it (in order to avoid the pitfalls of binary divisions, such as mind–body and subject–object).

Contextualized novelty is also what I take to be the most exciting and enjoyable part of applying Kant to artistic research: approaching art as an encounter that makes demands on my understanding, in which new forms stand out as concepts are applied, and where there is the overall sense of an experience that flexes concepts responsible for organizing the world in a way that is rarely permitted in routine perception. The name 'contextualized novelty' implies that there might be two elements to consider, novelty and context, but there are in fact three, since there is also the interaction between the two. Novelty occurs through the challenge that is faced in finding concepts that can draw out and make prominent aspects of the artwork, and the combination of concepts that results, while context is provided by the fact that whichever concepts are summoned, they will have territories and associations of their own that now provide backdrops for the work. The character of the interaction between novelty and context depends upon the degree of smoothness or friction, similarity or difference, that occurs between the concepts as they gather around the work and the associations that accompany them.

I want to return to Witzgall's study of Black's *Pleaser* as an example. As I outline above, Witzgall has two interrelated interests in Black's sculpture: (1) how it can be read as an expression of the new materialist conception of matter 'as recalcitrant and vibrant, possessing agency and driving forces'; and (2) how her engagement with materials might constitute a form of experimental system and, therefore, a form of research (Witzgall 2013: 42). The two interests converge for Witzgall upon Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's concept of an experimental system (Witzgall 2013: 41–53): the interplay between an 'epistemic thing' and 'technical objects' (Rheinberger 1997: 28). As I explained in the previous chapter, the 'epistemic thing' is an object of enquiry that possesses an 'irreducible vagueness' because it is being drawn into the open by science for the first time and so 'embodies what one does not yet know' (Rheinberger 1997: 28), while 'technical objects' are the 'instruments, inscription devices, model organisms, and the floating theorems and boundary concepts attached to them' through which the newly identified objects of enquiry 'become

entrenched and articulate themselves in a wider field of epistemic practices and material cultures' (Rheinberger 1997: 29). The two form an interplay in that the technical objects 'determine the realm of possible representations of an epistemic thing', while 'sufficiently stabilized epistemic things turn into the technical repertoire' of the experimental system (Rheinberger 1997: 29).

The link between Rheinberger's concept of the experimental system and the recalcitrance of matter in Black's sculptures, for Witzgall, lies in the project of 'getting the investigated phenomena to talk' (Witzgall 2013: 44; quoting Rheinberger 2007: 86). Getting phenomena to talk is a process of creating and articulating 'material traces' of epistemic objects in experimental systems, where the traces are the marks left by vague epistemic objects as they causally interact with technical objects, typically instruments of detection or visualization, and the discourse constructed around the marks (Rheinberger 1997: 102–113). Salient here for Witzgall is the importance that Rheinberger gives to the process of giving expression to what was vague *not through language* but through the marks that one object (the epistemic thing) makes on another, i.e. an instrument (a technical object). The arrangement draws upon Peirce's concept of the sign as an 'index': a sign that denotes its object not because it looks like it (an icon, in Peirce's vocabulary) or by convention (a symbol), but because of a causal association, e.g. smoke signifying fire (Peirce 1982: 53–56). The same thinking is at work in Ihde's account of the scientific image at the start of the chapter, wherein the object (or epistemic thing) depicted within a scientific image is understood as being 'brought into being' or 'given a voice' by the theory, apparatus and experiment design (or technical objects) responsible for that mode of looking. This, Witzgall argues, corresponds to the declarations made by Black that her work avoids the representation of nature and 'doesn't point outside of itself to metaphor or to the symbolic, to language, to meaning', but instead seeks to 'call up the sensation of [nature]' by making her work look 'as if it just arrived in the world of its own accord – just naturally came into existence' (Witzgall 2013: 45; quoting Black 2010: 176; 2011: 1:28).

As an example of how concepts can yield contextualized novelty, we should be focusing upon what is standing out that can add to the situation, and how the significance of this new chunk can be developed by comparing and contrasting it with what is already known of the situation. Several things stand out. (1) Witzgall's comparison between Black, new materialism and Rheinberger's experimental system hinges upon the notion of nature coming into being or announcing itself afresh, independently of any predetermined vocabulary that might try to categorize it as one thing or another. (2) A minor problem for Witzgall's Black–Rheinberger alliance is the conflict between Black's intention to produce work that 'doesn't point outside of itself to metaphor or to the symbolic, to language, to meaning' (Witzgall 2013: 45; quoting Black 2011: 1:28) and Rheinberger's commitment to epistemic things only becoming manifest because they find instrumental and theoretical expression. But this is easily overcome with the recognition that the meaning of an artwork is not the same as the artist's intention,<sup>1</sup> and by Witzgall's interpretation of Black's sculptures not in terms of the entirety of Rheinberger's philosophy but just in terms of its emphasis on indexicality. This positions them

as works that ‘act not only as independent material phenomena but also as “tracers” for tracking purposes, enhancing the display of the marks of all the materials used’ (Witzgall 2013: 45). On this reading, Black’s sculptures are playgrounds for indexical expression: objects arranged so that the capacity for one material to leave a mark on another not through human expression but through causal friction is pushed to the extreme. (3) The third point that stands out is that Witzgall does not provide any examples of instances in which *Pleaser* performs as a ‘tracer’ or index. An illustration of the work is included, the same one that is reproduced here (Figure 3.1), but how the indexical display might unfold is not considered. On the one hand, this might be to act in accordance with Black’s wish that the works do not open on to verbal expression, but, on the other, it is a stance that is at odds with Rheinberger’s insistence upon epistemic things calling out for graphic, conceptual expression.

This is precisely where a Kantian theory of concepts can assist in the articulation of an artwork in a research context. The concern that putting the work into words might claim it for a symbolic or representational interpretation that takes it away from its preoccupation with material, I would argue, does not apply, (a) because an account’s being verbal doesn’t mean it necessarily offers a symbolic or representational interpretation, and (b) more importantly, because an analysis in terms of concepts undercuts the word–object opposition bequeathed to us by idealism, rationalism and empiricism. It is the conceptual act of being attentive to what stands out that is wholly consistent with and encouraging of the detection of marks and effects that might be recognized as part of the work’s indexical nature. Furthermore, to focus on the concepts that are at play is not just to make certain properties salient, but also to introduce those properties into a network of concepts corresponding to the ‘what can be grasped’, ‘what can be perceived’, ‘what can be understood’, that creates the toing-and-froing between what’s in front of me and a background context from which novelty arises.

The comments above from Black, Rheinberger and Witzgall provide enough concepts to furnish a context, but in order to witness how Black’s *Pleaser* might be novel in relation to that context, we need to view the work, i.e. view the work in terms of concepts. An initial viewing was conducted earlier in the chapter. The work is suspended. Hanging in mid-air, it assumes a commanding position, reaching out to all other points in the room. A combination of transparency and opaque splotches of paint creates points of contact with the room, introducing a game of hide-and-seek. The concentrations of cellophane and paint either crumple together to create dark interiors or produce buckles that throw flashes and lines of light. There is the suggestion of a creature in flight, a reading that would conflict with Black’s disregard of metaphor. This still might be an interpretation worth pursuing, since, as noted above, artistic intention does not govern the meaning of a work, and the use of metaphor is not restricted to representational, ‘the sculpture looks like this’-type of readings but is also prominent within indexical expression. In addition, the entire sculpture might also be seen as the diagram of an event. This coheres immediately with the concept of indexical expression, with the two converging on the idea that what we are seeing is the aftershock of a collision between cellophane, Sellotape and paint.



With the concept of indexical expression to the fore, we might also look again at the other features to see if new properties emerge. If each point on the structure is being read as the trace of an interaction between materials, then each mark or fold or buckle becomes a display of how the material behaves when subject to certain actions or interventions, except we don't know what those actions or interventions were. But we are given a large number of different effects which, through comparison and contrast, might offer some clues. If the sculpture is a network of traces, then we become forensic scientists, with each mark becoming a text. Suddenly a lexicon of splatters, splotches and lines emerges: smears of paint with clean edges and with rough edges, implying different kinds of treatment; smears that are largely solid but then stretch apart into lines, as if to suggest an act of violence; lines of light from folds and buckles that pay the splatter-patterns no heed, as if the installation wants to overwrite the original interaction of materials; and smears that are broken but suggest lines, possibly the traces of the ribcage of a creature that was once bound by the cellophane. This would be to jump tracks again on to a metaphorical reading of the work: if not a creature in flight, then sheeting that once bound a creature. It is not an attempt to contain the meaning or the impact of the work as the depiction of a creature, but part of the process where, once the material, embodied properties of an artwork are placed alongside the terms of a research question, comparisons and connections form which demonstrate how a material artefact acts upon a shared network of concepts. The 'creature' line of interpretation might be distinct from the 'indexical expression' line, but they are both indicators of the power of material artefacts to stimulate divergent meanings. The fact that they intersect – the trace of a material action or the trace of a creature – confirms that it is not easy to keep the interpretation of the work in neat, defined silos of signification.

As might be apparent by now, a large part of my interpretation of Kant on concepts can be pictured in terms of bringing objects into view or into prominence for grasping. One question that can help to demonstrate the importance of this 'bringing into view' is 'So what?' Why are these concepts, these details that have been drawn out, significant? To concentrate upon the thesis from Witzgall that *Pleaser* is a network of 'tracers', or what I have termed a 'playground of indexical expression', I would argue that close attention paid to the work shows how its material form is highly articulate, in the sense that it makes prominent a variety of effects, i.e. it is open to the application of a variety of concepts which, so far, cluster meanings around marks indicative of physical exertion (which lend themselves to thoughts of particular kinds of gesture), the binding of a creature, and the idea that the light effects in the gallery might be overwriting the original traces. In this regard, *Pleaser* has been well selected by Witzgall as an artwork that, in the words of Rheinberger, gets 'the investigated phenomena to talk' (Witzgall 2013: 44; quoting Rheinberger 2007: 86). As an illustration of contextualized novelty, this account shows how an artwork projects certain aspects that 'talk' in particular terms, that encourage lines of interpretation in specific directions. These are novel and significant, I would argue, as demonstrations of the articulacy of matter: how particular materials undergoing particular interventions can offer a variety of effects

that invite a range of metaphors and associations. The benefit of conducting this study in terms of concepts is that: (1) it highlights the importance of looking at the work and the details that emerge as chunks, and (2) it shows that once the material, embodied properties of an artwork are placed alongside the terms of a research question in a shared network of concepts, connections emerge that display the impact of the work upon the research context. This illustration has not even had the chance to explore the other, not-necessarily-trace-related observations that would be equally valid in a setting that is interested, with Rheinberger, in how an object that is 'vague' or at the edge of signification might enter discourse and find multiple articulations within it.

### When concepts are inadequate

Before I conclude, I need to anticipate one possible objection to my use of Kant in relation to artistic research. In *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the third and final book in the critical trilogy, an analysis of art and aesthetic experience forms a major part of Kant's theory of judgment, the theory of how concepts determine intuitions to form experience. A problem that his theory has to overcome is that there are some regions of experience that involve judgments that go beyond intuition by invoking concepts which cannot be explained *in terms of their application to intuition*, i.e. in terms of what is received via sensation. One of those regions is art. Matters of the appreciation or interpretation of art cannot be determined conceptually in the same way as the question of whether or not the object in front of me is a rock or a tree. This might be the declaration 'this is a powerful work of art', which makes a claim about the strength of the work in itself that should, in principle, be acknowledged by others, and so goes beyond the person's immediate sensory contact with the work. It might also be an interpretation, for example, 'the crumples make the sculpture look as if it is the diagram or trace of an event'. While 'crumples' might correspond to the work's physical condition, the notions of 'diagram', 'trace' and 'event' are metaphors that have been imported from elsewhere for which there is no directly corresponding sensory intuition. The threat of further incongruity between concept and intuition is posed by art's reliance upon ambiguity, especially in terms of poetic or what Kant calls 'aesthetic ideas'. He defines an aesthetic idea as 'a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] concept, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it' (Kant 1987: 314). This would seem to suggest that, in adopting a Kantian theory of concepts in the service of artistic research, I am in danger of ignoring or contradicting a major part of Kant's philosophy.

But this is not the case. It is possible to find several pronouncements in *Critique of Judgment* to the effect that aesthetic experience and the appreciation of art involve either judgments that go beyond intuition or ideas to which no concept can be adequate. Many of them form part of Kant's account of genius, discussed in chapter 1. But to focus on these in isolation is to overlook the fact that this is a

problem Kant is setting up in preparation for a solution. Furthermore, it is precisely because emphasis is placed by Kant on the challenge that art poses to conceptualization that makes his philosophy, and the solution he devises, so valuable for artistic research. The problem he faces is that there are judgments in art and teleology (the study of purpose or ‘final causes’ in nature) that cannot be explained in terms of concepts determining intuitions. This is in fact a major problem for him, since his entire critical system is based on the concept–intuition relation. His solution is to say that, in these instances, although determination is not taking place, *reflection is*; that is to say, he introduces a distinction between determinative and reflective judgment (Kant 1987: 179–181). In reflective judgment, intuitions are not determined, but, instead, there is reflection on the capacity to bring concepts to intuitions, a state of free play between the faculties of the imagination and the understanding in which concepts are considered in terms of how they might apply but are not exercised determinatively (Kant 1987: 217–218, 238–243, 286–287). Because all judgments require a concept, even reflective ones, the concept which accompanies the state of free play is the reflective or indeterminate concept of nature’s subjective purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), the idea that the world appears to us *as if* it had been designed for our awareness. Kant is *not* asserting that nature has been designed for our awareness, nor arguing for the presence of a *particular order* in nature. Instead, he is arguing for the possibility of order, the state of affairs upon which any experiential, intelligible purchase on the world is conditional. Without this, empirical differences ‘might still be so great that it would be impossible for our understanding ... to divide nature’s products into genera and species’ (Kant 1987: 185). I return to the concept of ‘purposiveness’ in chapter 6.

Thus, Kant accommodates those judgments in which concepts do not determine intuitions as occasions when there is reflection on the freedom and agility that a framework of concepts has to have in order for it to be possible for concepts to get a grip on intuitions in the first place. In the case of aesthetic judgments, if I were to respond to a sculpture by saying ‘the crumples make it look as if it is the diagram or trace of an event’, I am not asserting that it is a diagram but rather displaying the fact that the work has stimulated a state of conceptual free play, from which ‘diagram’ and ‘trace’ have emerged as concepts that might offer some purchase. Similarly, the claim that there can be aesthetic ideas to ‘which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] concept, can be adequate’ is his acknowledgment that art launches us into a state of conceptual free play. Thus, rather than certain remarks within *Critique of Judgment* making it appear that Kant’s theory of concepts might not apply to artistic research, it is the fact that he defines art as an occasion in which the stable pattern of concepts is thrown up in the air for reappraisal that makes his system suited to a demonstration of the epistemic force of art.

## Conclusion

We need to talk about concepts because an appreciation of the role they play in shaping experience promises to be useful in providing a foundation for artistic

research. A principal source for understanding concepts as shapers of experience, I have argued, can be found in Kant's theory of knowledge. There are a number of aspects of Kant's theory that make it well placed to contribute to an understanding of what artistic research might become. (1) The structure of Kant's system mirrors the concept of 'artistic research' by bringing aesthetics to the theory of knowledge. It does this by defining the receipt of sensory intuitions and, in particular, encounters with artworks as occasions where our ability to apply concepts is challenged but nonetheless ultimately successful, because the need for experience to continue means that concepts can be imported from other areas of experience to make sense of the situation. (2) It positions experience as a site that always, already includes knowledge, rather than simply being a conveyor of detail that either obscures knowledge or from which it has to be constructed. (3) It defines concepts as elements which give shape and order to experience, in a fashion that is consistent with later, phenomenological or embodied notions of the concept. (4) Perhaps most significantly, as far as the perception of art as research is concerned, it shows how paying close attention to the detail of an artwork can be presented in terms of concepts which, when set against the background of a subject or enquiry, prompt connections and leaps in association that demonstrate the effect that art can have on the concepts which frame the subject.

The first three points above are also responses to the epistemologies presented in chapter 1 which set art apart from knowledge. In response to (1) the modernist notions of the discrete, self-contained nature of art and of sensory experience, art and the senses are positioned by Kant as encounters that stimulate and make demands upon our capacity to know and to have experience. Although Greenberg refers to Kant, his reading is confined to the particular parts where reason's capacity to criticize itself and the capacity of beauty to please without a concept are addressed. This means he misses the deeper significance that Kant assigns to the aesthetic within his system, as Costello observes (Costello 2007). The idea that (2) the private nature of experience means it cannot enter into a discursive or public exchange is overturned by the principle that experience, to be experience, has to be chunked, and so it is already displaying the segmented character that will enable it to be articulated and shared verbally. (3) The concept of genius, as presented in chapter 1, readily lends itself to the anti-artistic research thesis that art displays connections that are beyond science and, therefore, beyond any notion of research. However, genius is also important for Kant's philosophy, and he redirects the concept so that it becomes the capacity to create aesthetic ideas or forms that stimulates the process whereby a range of possible concepts can be summoned that might be applied to what initially was overwhelming.

The claim that (4) art and aesthetics are disqualified from contributing to knowledge because they present multiple, divergent, deceptive appearances relies upon a theory of knowledge in which the true or the objective is assumed to be singular. But on Kant's terms, experience itself is already taken as a form of knowledge, with multiple, divergent appearances included as new, surprising details or chunks that can add to understanding. The notion that experience is a form of

knowledge also meets (5) the positivist requirement that there has to be a class of observation statements that is logically equivalent to a theoretical statement in order for sensory perception to serve as the basis for knowledge, since the very fact that experience is ordered means it already includes an epistemic dimension. It is unlikely that the positivist will accept this response, given the criteria they hold for scientific knowledge. However, in the history of ideas, in the mid-to-late twentieth century, positivism has to contend with its distinction between observation and theoretical statements being undermined by new constructionist and relativist philosophies of science, inspired by the Kantian thesis of the conceptually determined nature of experience.

The epistemology presented here could be argued to constitute a ‘poetics of knowledge’, to borrow a phrase from the title of Busch’s 2009 article, where ‘poetics’ denotes the leaps between concepts that are encouraged once the material, embodied properties of an artwork are placed alongside the terms of a research question in a shared network of concepts. Such leaps are accommodated in Kant’s epistemology in two ways: (1) by his configuration of experience as the shaping of intuition by concepts, so that experience is understood as a process in which concepts from a framework are leaping and flexing in order to accommodate what is received in intuition; and (2) more explicitly, in his account of reflective, aesthetic judgment, the act of conceptualization can only be completed if a spread of concepts is sought out and imported, even if it has to come from a domain that has no immediate bearing upon the situation. Epistemologies prior to Kant have defined the concept either as the imposition of a singular identity, e.g. Plato’s notion that each and every kind of thing derives its being from the one, perfect Form, Descartes’s insistence upon true ideas being those that are ‘clear and distinct’, or simply as containers for the purposes of life-denial or generalization, e.g. Plato’s analogy of knowledge as an aviary in the *Theaetetus*, where knowing is presented in terms of acquiring and keeping birds within an enclosure (Plato 1987: 197b–199e), and Aristotle’s metaphor of predicates as containers in *Prior Analytics*, where asserting that all cats have four legs is likened to thinking that ‘one term [“cats”] should be included *in another* [“have four legs”], *as in a whole*’ (Aristotle 1987: 24b, emphasis added). Against this, I would argue, the concept of ‘concept’ that we get from Kant is the formation of a chunk within experience, so that that chunk can form connections with others. To put it in more embodied terms: the concept is a foothold that enables a leap.

## Note

- 1 The meaning of a work is not the same as the intention of the artist. While the latter might influence the former, it cannot determine it entirely. This is because artworks are objects displayed in public and constituted by materials, where both setting and materials are open to interpretation historically, culturally and poetically and are larger than any one train of thought offered by an artist. Furthermore, while an author or artist might draw upon the meanings made available by a setting or a group of materials, the playful, associational nature of meanings entails that they can never be reduced to a single intention.

This point has been made by Wimsatt and Beardsley, who refer to the belief that ‘the meaning of a work’ equals ‘the artist’s intention’ as the ‘intentional fallacy’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954), and by Roland Barthes in his poststructuralist ‘death of the author’ thesis: the author or artist is ‘dead’ as the origin of art or literature because meaning resides first and foremost in the associations signified by materials, and the play of possibilities created when materials are transformed or juxtaposed, in which any one work is a participation (Barthes 1977).

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# 4

## WRITING AS RUPTURE AND RELATION

The relation between art practice and writing is one of the most actively debated areas in artistic research (e.g. Dronsfeld 2014; Hannula et al. 2005: 109–150; Macleod and Holdridge 2010). The requirement that doctoral research in the arts consists of both a body of art practice and a written, critical commentary is taken by many to mean that the artist-researcher is doing two PhDs: one studio-based, one written. According to Candlin, it puts artistic researchers in the position of having to produce work that not only satisfies aesthetic criteria but also has to be validated according to the standards of academic knowledge-production (Candlin 2000). Furthermore, the stipulation that artworks can only become research ‘in association with explanatory or contextualizing text’, made here by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Board (now a Council) and quoted by Jon Thompson in 2004, is judged by him to be an act of ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Thompson 2011: 487).

The art–writing distinction opens on to a broader set of tensions. It implies that there are *two kinds* of activity: one that deals with the tangible, physical world and is practical, and another that deals with words and concepts and is theoretical. With art practice, one is encountering ‘the stuff of the world’, ‘the stuff of life itself’, whereas words are echoes or vestiges of experience; dry, crackly leaves that have long since been drained of the sap’s vital force. The thinking here is that because of their generality, because they have to apply to many situations in the minds of many people, words cannot possibly exhibit the vivacity or immediacy of the individual thing or moment. Schopenhauer makes this observation in *The World as Will and Representation*: ‘books do not take the place of experience’, he writes, ‘because concepts always remain universal, and do not reach down to the particular; yet it is precisely the particular that has to be dealt with in life’ (Schopenhauer 1969: 74). It is true that writing is outwardly a more sedate occupation, usually undertaken when seated at a table, in contrast to the *bodily* exertion and precision involved in coming to terms with matter. The form of prose itself promotes the *aphysicality* of writing: a



linear flow of sentences and paragraphs, arguments and conclusions, cannot reflect or display the mental effort and torment which wrought them into being. It could also be said of an artwork that its final status *as a thing* conceals the history of its production. However, the materiality of the art object can often imply ardour in a way which the printed word cannot. Even the most intentionally lumpen poetry makes you feel you're being eased into reality rather than being bumped up against it.

Art and writing also sit in the world differently. Whereas words feel as if they belong to someone else, physical media can be manipulated in ways which make us think of the manipulations as being the product of an individual; a brushstroke or the images recorded on film feel as if they are mine. Furthermore, we experience artworks both as objects, like any other, but also as objects with significance and meaning over and above others. They therefore offer sensual and conceptual stimulation while existing in the world with the same non-verbal, pre-linguistic physicality as every other object, man-made or natural. This is not the case with language. Sentences are meaningful, but they occur as slices into or across the world. Producing a written text does not just add to the number of objects in the universe or re-arrange pre-existent ones, but also imposes divisions in the world where arguably there were none. The sentence is a specific arrangement of two basic elements, a subject and a predicate, e.g. 'the sky is blue', in the face of a world that is otherwise indifferent and multifarious. From all that could be said at that moment, one selection, one slice across phenomena is made: 'the sky is blue'. What had the character of a unique and particular experience is reduced or broken down into a set of general categories. This can be viewed either as an unwelcome addition, introducing a slice where there previously was none, or as a subtraction, where the description loses the particularity of the experience.

I want to present a different relationship between art and writing, one that doesn't ignore these differences but which reorients them. Instead of remaining on the seesaw of unwelcome addition or loss, I want to propose that the differences are part of the shaping process discussed in relation to concepts in the previous chapter. Building upon the notion that experience, to be experience, requires shaping, sculpting and slicing, I draw upon the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre to present writing as an aspect of this sculpting process. Present in Sartre's existentialism, I argue, is a 'topographical' theory of action, that is to say, a theory which emphasizes the way actions shape, sculpt and, generally, give form to experience, where the action can be anything from a physical act (something one would normally associate with the word 'action') to producing a description of an experience (something one perhaps would *not* normally associate with the word). On this account, the slices introduced by description are not of a different order to the physical, material actions made by the artist, but additional acts of shaping that contribute to the materiality of the work and to its status as research.

### Sartre's existentialism

Sartre's existentialism radically rethinks the nature of the self and the self's relation to the world. The human subject, after Kant and Nietzsche, rather than being a

distinct, self-contained entity, is shown to be something intimately intertwined with the world. Kant's deduction that experience can only occur through the conceptual determination of intuition is one expression of this. Whereas Platonic and Cartesian epistemologies assert that human beings have their innermost nature, including their moral being, determined in advance of experience by metaphysical essences (with Plato) or pure rationality (with Descartes), existentialism declares that the individual constructs themselves through action *in the absence of* an abiding, determinative moral agency. Sartre rejects outright the thesis that we are defined and motivated by a priori concepts or essences: 'the act is everything. Behind the act there is neither potency nor "hexis" [a magical spell or impulse] nor virtue' (Sartre 1958: xxii). Rather, it is only through active transformation of or engagement with the world, Sartre avows, that people and things acquire meanings. In this respect, Sartre can be regarded as developing Nietzsche's nihilistic rejection of all previous foundations of truth and identity. We believe that there are essences underlying and motivating every kind of thing, including the human being, Nietzsche argues, when in fact the notion of an essence or any state of being in itself is purely an anthropomorphic fiction: 'we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers [and, by extension, selves]; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities' (Nietzsche 2011: 67). If all previous conceptions of truth, i.e. those which assign truth a metaphysical or wholly rational origin, are rejected, then one is left with the situation where truth *has to be made*.

It is the role which action plays in Sartre's philosophy and, more especially, the topographical terms in which action is set that make his existentialism relevant to our concerns. For, in seeking to show how the self is made through action, a set of structural relations is invoked as the origin of the self–world distinction, with words and phenomena equally placed within these relations as 'shapers' of experience. Sartre studies how an action makes a difference to a situation in such a way that the difference becomes an object of attention, something which represents a moment of distinction in what would otherwise be a continuous, undifferentiated flow of experience. This view of action is topographical in the sense that acting, carrying out a gesture, making an impression on the world are events that rise above or drop below the flat line of inactivity. It is in terms of these ripples, ruptures, bumps and crevices, Sartre argues, that we must begin to construct our notions of meaning and personal identity.

Sartre theorizes the self as a 'gap' in the world. What is unique to consciousness, Sartre argues in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), is that it is the location of the perception of absence: it is only in consciousness that the impression of something *not being the case* can take place, for example, expecting to find thirty pounds in my wallet but finding only twenty, or waiting in a café for a friend who never turns up. As he states:

Every question in essence posits the possibility of a negative reply. In a question we question a being about its being or its way of being. This way of being or

this being is veiled; there always remains the possibility that it may unveil itself as a Nothingness. But from the very fact that we presume that an Existent can always be revealed as *nothing*, every question supposes that we realize a nihilating withdrawal in relation to the given, which becomes a simple *presentation*, fluctuating between being and Nothingness.

It is essential therefore that the questioner have the permanent possibility of dissociating himself from the causal series which constitutes being and which can produce only being.

(Sartre 1958: 23; *original emphases*)

It is the possibility of negation that disengages consciousness from the brute causal order of the world; ‘this cleavage is precisely nothingness’ (Sartre 1958: 27).<sup>1</sup> A cleavage divides the present of consciousness from all its past, ‘not as a phenomenon which it experiences, [but] rather as a structure of consciousness which it is’ (Sartre 1958: 28–29). This rupture in the causal order of the world *is* the structure of consciousness for Sartre. The perception of absence or negation creates a gap in experience, and it is because of this rupture or interval that the subject is able to become aware of itself standing before a world. It also means that there can never be a moment when consciousness is identical with an abiding, substantive self that can influence or determine its actions; rather, consciousness only exists in the world as a gap or a nothingness between things.

What this topography of action brings to the art–writing debate is a way of thinking that allows art and writing to stand alongside each other as mutually supportive ‘interventions’ in the development of an artwork. On this account, both art and writing can be understood as gestures that *make a difference*, make something stand out, rise above or drop below an otherwise undifferentiated field of experience. While we are probably accustomed to thinking of art practice as a form of action, it needs to be borne in mind that activity, i.e. activity in general, is being viewed here from a particular, existentialist perspective. With Sartre, we are theorizing the action as an event, a moment, a rupture, something which makes a difference where there was previously no difference at all, and which thereby allows the subject to orient itself in terms of the objects it encounters. Approaching the art-making process in these terms requires us to think about the way in which the work develops as a series of ruptures or saliences, for example, the effect of a brushstroke on an area of canvas, the prominence of a particular object in the viewfinder, the accentuation of certain qualities on a ceramic surface, the masking of those elements in a location that might interfere with a site-specific work.

### Sartre’s theory of description

The greater amount of work to be done lies with the question of how writing is accommodated in Sartre’s topography of action. Writing holds a position of special significance in Sartre’s philosophy precisely because it is one of the principal ways of rupturing or interrupting experience. And it is able to do this for the same

reason that many people (including Schopenhauer) see it as being removed from life: writing involves the application of generalities to particularities. The distinction between generality and particularity is crucial, Sartre thinks, because it introduces a gap between consciousness and experience. He explores this dimension of writing at length in his novel *Nausea* (1938). The book is a study of the non-identity between words and experience. The central character, Antoine Roquentin, is living in Bouville and trying to write a biography of the Marquis de Rollebon, a late eighteenth-century political activist. However, he gives up the project when the minutiae of his own life encroach upon him with ever increasing detail and sublimity, and convince him of the futility of trying to represent experience. The written word, it seems to Roquentin, will always distance you from experience, will never allow you to be identical with the present. The novel's first page outlines the diarist's dilemma:

The best thing would be to write down everything that happens from day to day. To keep a diary in order to understand. To neglect no nuances or little details, even if they seem unimportant, and above all to classify them. I must say how I see this table, the street, people, my packet of tobacco, since *these* are the things which have changed. I must fix the exact extent and nature of this change.

For example, there is a cardboard box which contains my bottle of ink. I ought to try to say how I saw it *before* and how I — it now. Well, it's a parallelepiped rectangle standing out against — that's silly, there's nothing I can say about it. That's what I must avoid: I mustn't put strangeness where there's nothing. I think that is the danger of keeping a diary: you exaggerate everything, you are on the look-out, and you continually search the truth. On the other hand, it is certain that from one moment to the next — and precisely in connexion with this box or any other object — I may recapture this impression of the day before yesterday. I must always be prepared, or else it might slip through my fingers again. I must never — anything but note down carefully and in the greatest detail everything that happens.

*(Sartre 1963: 9; original emphases)*

The ellipses — 'how I — it now' and 'I must never — anything' — are acknowledged in the text with the respective footnotes: 'A word is missing here' and 'A word has been crossed out here (possibly "force" or "forge"), and another word has been written above it which is illegible'. By leaving these gaps, Sartre makes it apparent from the start that language introduces a specificity that is not present in experience. The crossings-out are important: 'force', an exertion of will or an impulse to change the state or position of an object; 'forge', on the one hand, to give shape to what was originally shapeless or, on the other, to copy, to fashion something that is inauthentic.

The task of verbal description, for Sartre, reflects the cognitive relationship between being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*, human being) and being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*,

the being of objects). Objects, Sartre asserts, exist in themselves; they belong to the in-itself. The being of objects is 'full positivity': 'an immanence which cannot realize itself, an affirmation which cannot affirm itself, an activity which cannot act, because it is glued to itself' (Sartre 1958: xli). This makes objects opaque for us. Objects resist us in the world, assert a counter-pressure against perception, because they never disclose themselves all at once. On this account, it is precisely because things are to some degree closed to us that we have consciousness at all; consciousness is the partial, sequential disclosedness of things. Experience is successive: a continuum in which aspects appear and disappear, in which appearances are revealed and then withdrawn. Impressions move on: the object is not present to me now in the exact same way it was a moment ago. If all impressions were present in one instance, Sartre comments, the objective 'would dissolve in the subjective' (Sartre 1958: xxxvii). However, just as the appearance and disappearance of phenomena enable the perception of absence, so the application of general categories to particular experience puts experience at a distance, creates a phenomenological opening between writer and experience. As soon as Roquentin describes the bark of the tree-root as 'black', he feels 'the word subside, empty itself of its meaning with an extraordinary speed. Black? The root was not black, it was not the black there was on that piece of wood – it was ... something else' (Sartre 1963: 186). The perception that the generality of a word cannot capture the particularity of an object, that *something is missing*, thus appears, from Sartre's position, as one of the crevices in our topography of action and, therefore, as an episode that is vital to the construction of subjectivity and objectivity.

Because of the gap between universal and particular, description alters the situation. As Sartre observes, writing gives order and significance to something that is 'not yet there':

When you are living, nothing happens. The settings change, people come in and go out, that's all. There are never any beginnings. Days are tacked on without rhyme or reason, it is an endless, monotonous addition ... But when you tell about life, everything changes; only it's a change nobody notices: the proof of that is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be such things as true stories; events take place one way and we recount them the opposite way. You appear to begin at the beginning: 'It was a fine autumn evening in 1922. I was a solicitor's clerk at Marommès.' And in fact you have begun at the end.

*(Sartre 1963: 61–63)*

Sartre is building on Heidegger here, in particular, the distinction he draws in *Being and Time* between 'readiness-to-hand' (*Zuhandenheit*) and 'presence-at-hand' (*Vorhandenheit*) (Heidegger 1962: 95–107). The former denotes the state of busy, immersed occupation in which we deal with everyday activities, where objects are simply zones of interaction diffused into the greater backdrop of our routine intentions. For example, you walk across the zebra-crossing on your way to work

but are not aware of the exact number of stripes. In contrast, ‘presence-at-hand’ refers to occasions when, for whatever reason, we are stopped in our tracks and what was formerly the mere furniture of existence stands out as a thing, *against* a background, whose nature suddenly becomes of detached perceptual or conceptual interest. This, Sartre observes, is what writing does. Imposing a subject-predicate structure on otherwise diffuse interaction breaks (in Heidegger’s idiom) the ‘referential totality’ of equipment and elevates the thing so that it ‘announces itself afresh’ (Heidegger 1962: 105–107).

*Nausea* can be regarded as the diary of someone coming to terms with the realization that writing does not capture experience but, instead, disrupts experience, announces the existence of things, gives experience shape and form. Towards the end of the novel, Roquentin realizes that the complete description of experience – when the word captures or contains the thing – is an impossibility and *it is the undecidability of description* that is ‘the key to [his] Existence, the key to [his] Nausea’ (Sartre 1963: 185). How should or could he describe the tree-root: ‘snake or claw or root or vulture’s talon’; ‘a suction-pump’; its ‘hard, compact sea-lion skin’; its ‘oily, horny, stubborn look’; ‘knotty, inert, *nameless*’ (Sartre 1963: 185–186)? Similarly, when he looks at his hand spread out on the table, it seems to become first a ‘crab’, showing its ‘under-belly’, then a ‘fish’; his fingers become ‘paws’, then ‘claws’ (Sartre 1963: 143–144).

## Rupture and relation

At the start of the chapter, the relation between art and writing was an unwelcome profit-or-loss affair: either a slice was added to a moment or particularity was lost to generality. What is on offer from Sartre is a new way of understanding the relationship between description and experience. Writing is presented by Sartre as a rupture or an interruption in experience, the consequence of which is that an aspect of reality is raised up before the individual as an object, as something that helps to define the subjectivity of the individual. This theory of description, and the existentialism of which it is a part, can be useful in the context of artistic research, I aver, on two accounts. First, rather than being regarded as separate and unrelated activities, art and writing, from Sartre’s perspective, become parallel or congruent processes on account of the fact that they both create salience or assign prominence, that is to say, they are both processes whereby new objects of attention are brought before the viewer; it is just that the one does it through the application of words, while the other does it through the manipulation of art media. Second, the application of words reinforces the process of contextualized novelty presented in the previous chapter. This was the claim that the process of ‘chunking’ something into being makes an object stand out against a background. Sartre’s theory makes description a part of this. The situation he presents is not one of the particular being expressed (and diminished) by the general but by a chunk being sculpted into view and *located in a wider context defined in terms that can apply to other works, other meanings, other situations*, precisely because it has been chunked into

being by words that already exist and can be understood by others. This is precisely the step that needs to be taken if the intention is to explore how an artwork impinges upon a research topic.

Is it the chunk that comes first, and then a word is put to it, or vice versa? We have to tread carefully with this question, because it asks after priority, and it would be all too easy to resort to one of the conventional dualisms that puts the mental before the physical, or the inner before the outer, or vice versa. We need to hold on to the fact that we are within the terms of a metaphysics where the interest is in how experience acquires its structure, where it is a chunking process that creates the experience of an object, not a prior subject–object division. It might be more helpful to regard the question as a matter of articulacy in a sense that doesn't distinguish between the word's two applications to verbal dexterity and the flexibility in one's bodily joints. As I explained in chapter 3, concepts (in the broad sense, i.e. not just words) include embodied being, where the body is understood not as a container for a mind but as a condition of being located in the world. Description, as I have presented it with Sartre, is an extension of the chunking process. It is one more propensity for bringing things into view, but in a way that acquires a relatability on account of the generality of words. Merleau-Ponty, a contemporary of Sartre's, puts the point well when he says:

Words are behind me, like things behind my back, or like the city's horizon around my house, I reckon with them or rely on them ... It is enough that they exist for me, and that they form a certain field of action spread around me ... It is enough that I possess [a word's] articulatory and acoustic style as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body ... The phonetic 'gesture' brings about, both for the speaking subject and [their] hearers, a certain structural coordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others.

*(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 180, 193)*

Words are behind me in the sense that they are part of the socially and physically articulate environment in which I am located and which enables me to perceive and to act. I might reach for them or they might suggest themselves. They are the segments and joints that allow me with a degree of precision to be expressive and communicative in the presence of others. The metaphors are gentler than Sartre's: a 'field of action', a phonetic 'gesture', a 'modulation of existence'. In contrast, Sartre refers to a 'cleavage [that is] is precisely nothingness', primarily because his metaphysics rests upon the sharp distinction between people (beings-for-themselves) and things (beings-in-themselves) (Sartre 1958: 27). Despite this difference in the topography of the phenomenological landscapes drawn by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the latter's description of words is nevertheless helpful in demonstrating how they can be seen alongside the chunking, world-organizing properties of the body.

This makes the description of an artwork a significant event both in terms of what the work is perceived to be, i.e. which aspects are chunked into prominence, and which words are introduced as themes that might define its contribution to the research enquiry. Artworks can be described in two ways: factually or (after Kant) determinatively, in terms of their measurable or verifiable properties, and aesthetically, in terms of the interpretation that is given to them or the subjective impression that is drawn from them (Kant 1987: 179–181, 281–287). For example, in the case of Karla Black's *Pleaser* from the last chapter (Figure 3.1), factual, determinative judgments of the work are that it consists of cellophane, paint, Sellotape and thread. It is 250 x 200 cm in size, and is suspended from the ceiling in Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, Germany. Important as these details are, they are not the aspects that identify the work's status as an object of aesthetic appreciation or the aesthetic properties that will give it significance in research terms. For these aspects, we need to describe the work aesthetically, i.e. produce aesthetic judgments. Here are some of the aesthetic judgments I offered in the last chapter. The work assumes a commanding position in the room. The combination of transparency and opaque splotches of paint creates points of contact with the room either by letting parts of the room appear through the cellophane or by introducing a game of hide-and-seek. The work is the diagram of an event, from the impact to the outer ripples.

The judgments are metaphorical in the sense that words are summoned from other domains of reference to help come to terms with the work. First, an initial state of 'what have we got here?' or 'I am not quite sure what to make of this' is ruptured and certain aspects of the work are chunked, i.e. become prominent for me. Second, they are also relations in that the words bring general themes to the work that indicate potential research directions. 'Commanding', the creation of 'points of contact', and 'hide-and-seek' all cohere to promote the work's capacity to transform materials so that they address the space and make me aware of my own movements in relation to it. 'Diagram', 'impact' and 'ripples' cluster around a different theme, bringing to the fore the work's ability to transform materials so that they become displays of their own power to have an effect and to create marks on other materials that they come into contact with. These descriptions are examples of how the work could be said to be responding to the research themes suggested by Witzgall: (1) how the work can be read as an expression of the new materialist conception of matter 'as recalcitrant and vibrant, possessing agency and driving forces'; and (2) how Black's engagement with materials might constitute a form of experimental system in Rheinberger's sense, i.e. displaying an articulatory system that encourages it to mesh with and be expressed verbally or by other forms of signification (Witzgall 2013: 41–53). None of my metaphors could have been predicted by Witzgall's research themes in isolation, prior to seeing the sculpture. Rather, they demonstrate the research significance of aesthetic description, by making certain elements in the artwork stand out, cleaving them so they become chunks before me, and relating them to wider fields of association, in this case, through vocabularies of spatial sensibility and material as a cause-and-effect diagram.



## Art v. writing?

An objection at this point might be that I am reading meaning ‘into’ the work, that none of the qualities I have identified are in the work itself. The fact that I have called attention to my judgments as metaphors, i.e. ideas imported from other realms of association, would only seem to reinforce the objection. Three replies can be given. First, the objection relies upon the notion of the ‘artwork *in itself*’, indicating an object that exists with a set of properties that reside entirely within the work independently of any perception or interpretation. As such, it suffers from the problem associated with the ‘in itself’ in the history of philosophy: the ‘in itself’ can only be known from a point of view that *isn’t a point of view*, i.e. pure thought, independent of any experience (as proposed by idealism and rationalism), since any qualities ‘in the object’ detected from a particular perspective, i.e. particular senses and concepts, will always be mediated in terms of the concepts and sensory modalities that constitute the perspective, and so cannot be ascribed entirely to the object in itself. The ‘in itself’ relies on the image of an object in a space in possession of a full set of properties, but which forgets that even to picture an object in a space with intrinsic properties is to presuppose modes of viewing and spatial awareness supplied by the viewer, i.e. they are not in the object itself. This is Berkeley’s argument against primary qualities (Berkeley 1988: §23, 61; discussed in chapter 5 also). As a concept, the ‘in itself’ is the antithesis of art, if a ‘work of art’ is understood to be an object that is perceived by the senses and enjoyed for the manner in which it stimulates ideas and conceptual associations.

Second, the objection that I am reading meaning ‘into’ the work trades upon a binary, inside–outside model of meaning: either the meaning is inside the work or it is a random projection from outside. It suffers from the same spatial, thing-based approach to meaning identified above: meaning is pictured as residing inside objects. As such, it overlooks the relational nature of meaning, its distribution through a common network of embodied, sensory and linguistic capacities, and historical and cultural associations.

Third, although I have just dismissed the inside–outside model of meaning as being too simplistic, it is nevertheless helpful in emphasizing the fact that to be left with the question of how one describes a work of art is precisely *the* virtue of Sartre’s theory. The object, for Sartre, is not something that opposes description or alienates the writer but something that establishes a moral contract between itself and consciousness. I say ‘moral’ because the metaphors that best describe the relationship come from the sphere of social interaction: objects ‘invite’, ‘motivate’ or ‘demand’ description. Whether one is confronting a bottle of ink, a tree–root or an artwork, objects can only give themselves to the viewer incompletely and, therefore, in a way that requests or demands supplementation from them. The exchange is not necessarily an easy or harmonious one though. What am I looking at? What words might I bring to it? It’s not a case of finding the *right* phrase, in the sense of the one-and-only sequence of words that fits, but of finding words that constructively rupture the experience of the work, where by

‘constructive rupture’ I mean that a property is chunked into being, holds one’s attention and suggests other associations. Not quite knowing at the start how to describe the work aesthetically, and the need to look for words, are precursors to the arrival of words that may open up lines of interpretation that show how the work is addressing a research context. Metaphor is one factor that stops the process from just being an exercise in random word generation, because of its two-term nature. Metaphor is the description of one thing as something else. The fact that one mind’s eye is on the crumpled cellophane or on the trickles of pink paint means the other will not be wandering randomly but looking for another term that intersects with the first productively, if not poetically. This could be described as the moral dimension of metaphor.

The irony in turning to Sartre for an art–writing relation that avoids the customary opposition is that his later work maintains an oppositional understanding of the relation. In *What is Literature?* (1948), he argues that, of all the arts, prose is the only form of representation which returns us to the world (Sartre 1950). For the prose writer, he claims, words are ‘transparent’ (Sartre 1950: 15). This is an unfortunate metaphor, since it is associated with the philosophical ideal of passing through concepts to things in themselves. But this is not Sartre’s meaning. The prose writer makes their words transparent so that their readers ‘may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare’ (Sartre 1950: 14). Prose ‘utilizes’ words as signs: ‘the ambiguity of the sign’, he suggests, ‘implies that one can penetrate it at will like a pane of glass and pursue the thing signified, or turn one’s gaze towards its *reality* and consider it as an object’ (Sartre 1950: 5). In contrast, the forms of painting, sculpture, music and poetry exist as things and, as such, have a density of their own which ‘withdraws’ the audience from the human condition (Sartre 1950: 10):

The writer can guide you and, if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation. The painter is mute. He presents you with *a* hovel, that’s all. You are free to see in it what you like. That attic window will never be the symbol of misery; for that, it would have to be a sign, whereas it is a thing. The bad painter looks for the type. He paints the Arab, the Child, the Woman; the good one knows that neither the Arab nor the proletarian exists either in reality or on his canvas. He offers a workman, a certain workman. And what are we to think about a workman? An infinity of contradictory things. All thoughts and feelings are there, adhering to the canvas in a state of profound undifferentiation. It is up to you to choose.

(Sartre 1950: 3–4; *original emphasis*)

The painter, Sartre reasons, in serving up another portion of material reality, is not taking a stance, is not contributing to moral discussion. After experiencing a painting, you are no better off than you were before. You are left with the same uninformed choice. His objection to the materiality of art is that it means a work

sets up its own internal, substantive world: ‘the significance of a melody – if one can still speak of significance – is nothing outside the melody itself’ (Sartre 1950: 3). The contrast, I suggest, is once again Heidegger’s *Zuhandenheit-Vorhandenheit* distinction (Heidegger 1962: 95–107). Poetry, painting and music represent experiences as things present-at-hand, like broken implements, incapable of facilitating action in the world, whereas prose represents events in a way which carries a sense of ‘ready-to-hand’ engagement. Prose, for Sartre, organizes experience in a manner which does not draw attention to itself as an external or extra-experiential form of organization. It is ‘committed’ art that points to the world, in contrast to art that is pre-occupied with itself, ‘art for art’s sake’, and that fails to provide moral commentary.

Needless to say, my stance in this chapter is opposed to the Sartre we find in *What is Literature?*. I don’t accept his claim that an artwork presents ‘an infinity of contradictory things’, leaving ‘all thoughts and feelings... adhering to the canvas in a state of profound undifferentiation’. This is akin to the objection raised above, that meanings can simply be projected on to a work of art. In adopting this position, Sartre is effectively contradicting his earlier self, from *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*. Shifts in philosophical position can occur over time, but what is more important to note is the character of the shift. The ‘thing’ as it is understood in *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness* is not the same ‘thing’ which appears in *What is Literature?*. In the latter, the thing exists isolated and opposed to any notion of engagement with consciousness. However, in *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, the opacity of objects is the texture or pressure in virtue of which we have consciousness. The object is ‘an immanence which cannot realize itself’, and it is in the gap left by the object never fully disclosing itself that awareness occurs (Sartre 1958: xli). As Roquentin concludes, the complete description of experience is an impossibility and *it is the undecidability of description* which is ‘the key to [his] Existence, the key to [his] Nausea’ (Sartre 1963: 185). Thus, the later Sartre forgets the moral contract he creates between the object and consciousness. In *What is Literature?*, the ‘It is up to you to choose’ is an expression of despair at the lack of commitment displayed by the material arts. In contrast, with the earlier Sartre, it is precisely because you have *to choose* the next word to describe the artwork that confirms the importance of description for artistic research. Whatever is described will stand out, will create a rupture, and in the opening that is revealed, concepts will emerge that suggest novel directions to pursue through interpretation and further material production.

## Note

- 1 I am following Sartre in his use of ‘Nothingness’ with an upper case ‘N’ and ‘nothingness’ with a lower case ‘n’. The former refers to Nothingness in itself or a complete absence, whereas the latter is the nothingness experienced by consciousness as it detaches itself from the causal order of the world. See ‘The Problem of Nothingness’ in Sartre 1958: 3–70, especially 22–23.

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# 5

## INSIGHTS FROM THE METAPHORICAL DIMENSION OF MAKING

In a recent study within visual sociology, individuals working with Lego bricks were encouraged to build forms that could act as metaphors for aspects of their lives, e.g. a dog as an expression of loyalty (Gauntlett 2007). When describing the forms, the individuals made novel and insightful comments about their lives that, according to David Gauntlett, the sociologist leading the study, would not have been expressed in the absence of any Lego play (Gauntlett 2007: 115). A conclusion drawn by him was that the making process enabled a freedom of construction and formation, where the metaphorical, playful aspect of the results called for descriptions, including further metaphors, that brought surprising and revealing perspectives to bear on the individuals' lives (Gauntlett 2007: 37, 70).

What intrigues me about Gauntlett's study is the idea that working with materials, with one's hands, allows for the creation of forms and effects that, through description, bring new concepts to bear on the forms, their material and their context. Working with materials, it would seem, requires an attention to the recalcitrance of matter and process that throws up detail and particularity that, rather than resisting insight and conceptual reappraisal, actually stimulates it. I want to explore the idea that working with materials can generate novelty through metaphor, and that these metaphors can provide new epistemological resources for artistic research. At present within the visual arts, material is largely understood either as a vehicle for self-expression or as the means to achieve certain kinds of effect. Equally, there is the concern, held by many practitioners and opponents to artistic research, that the significance of the research is located in the conceptual or theoretical framework that surrounds the making, rather than in the making itself. I hope this study will be an initial step towards demonstrating that the manipulation of materials in art has a metaphorical nature that can be the basis for epistemic enquiry. I set out Gauntlett's sociological work on metaphor and making, but go beyond his study by (1) showing how the generative aspect of making can be attributed to the

metaphorical nature of material, and (2) developing themes of ‘collision’ and ‘demand’ from Max Black’s and Paul Ricœur’s theories of metaphor to illuminate the process whereby the manipulation of material in art produces novelty (Black 1954–1955, 1993; Ricœur 1978a, 1978b). One piece of art will be discussed at length: the charcoal drawing *Night Sky #19* (1998) by Vija Celmins.

### **Making as metaphor in visual sociology**

The idea that making has a metaphorical dimension that can lead to insights is offered by David Gauntlett as part of his visual sociology. First identified as a field in the 1990s, visual sociology uses visual materials, typically photographs and videos, often made by the researcher, as the basis for discussions or interviews with participants whose experience is the subject of the study. Gauntlett’s interest is in ‘finding new ways of generating knowledge about the social world’ and, in particular, to determine whether ‘new ways of capturing people’s expressive reflections on their own lived existence ... can meaningfully contribute to social understanding’ (Gauntlett 2007: 37, 70). Recent studies in visual sociology on identity have invited the participants (in contrast to the researchers) to produce the visual materials, e.g. drawings, collages and videos, and then to reflect upon how their materials expressed their identities and lives (Gauntlett 2007: 92–127). The pattern of activity–followed–by–reflection generates information which, according to the researchers (in Gauntlett’s words), ‘would not have been revealed by other means’ (Gauntlett 2007: 115). As far as Gauntlett is concerned, these studies display two important properties: (1) the use of visual materials gives the participants the opportunity to express thoughts that might not otherwise be expressed, and (2) the visual materials are able to stimulate novel expressions of participants’ identities on the basis of the metaphorical meanings found when interpreting the drawings, collages and videos, etc. This leads him to conduct a study in which participants are invited to build identities in metaphors using Lego bricks, yielding new expressions of identity along the following lines:

On the left there is ‘a skeleton adrift next to my boat’, which represents ‘a foreboding sense of time’ passing in [Katie’s] life. The goal posts ahead of her represent ‘striving to achieve happiness’, but these are ‘beyond a line I have to cross’. The archway of goals includes a dog, representing her partner (in a good way – loyal and reliable) ...

*(Gauntlett 2007: 172–173)*

The use of Lego bricks is significant. It is based on Lego Serious Play, a method developed in the late 1990s by the Danish construction–toy manufacturer initially ‘to unlock imagination and innovation within the company’ but now offered as a consultancy and facilitation process ‘to enhance innovation and business performance’ (Lego 2015). As Gauntlett notes, the method is based on the constructivism of Jean Piaget and the concept of ‘flow’ coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

(Gauntlett 2007: 130–131). Piaget’s constructivism asserts that knowledge is neither a copy of its object nor the imposition of concepts on the world, but instead is ‘a perpetual construction made by exchanges between the organism and the environment, from the biological point of view, and between thought and its object, from the cognitive point of view’ (Piaget, quoted in Gauntlett 2007: 130). Flow, for Csikszentmihalyi, is a state of immersion in an activity where the sense of self and world as opposites drops away to be replaced by ‘a sense of participation’; it is a state ‘in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 4). As far as Lego Serious Play is concerned, constructivism and flow work together through the ‘invitational’ nature of Lego bricks, or what might be described as their affordance-rich nature – they invite being picked up and joined together to create something – and the state of immersion that results once one becomes lost in exploring the possibilities of what can be built, with the outcome that the player creates a form that would not have come about through pen and paper or imagination alone. Metaphors are created when the player begins to describe the form in conversation, to assign verbal meaning to it or to relate it to an area of their life (Schulz and Geithner 2011: 2). Thus, there are two acts of meaning-creation: the constructivist flow of playing with Lego bricks to produce an object, and the ascription of meaning to the created object by locating in relation to a life story.

What I think is valuable here in regards to artistic research is the idea that engagement with physical materials – e.g. collage, drawing tools, video equipment, Lego bricks – can be the occasion for the generation of new meaning. The sociological studies by Gauntlett and his predecessors show how interacting with materials creates a state of play in which connections or forms made possible by the materials, in their interactions with the participants, are allowed to come into being. The key phrase here is ‘made possible by the materials, in their interactions with the participants’. The materials, together with the situation in which they are set – e.g. workshop, studio, seminar room – have qualities that invite hands-on interaction from participants in an immersive, playful, flow-like way that produces new, significant forms or configurations. The suggestion is that materials, when placed in a conducive environment, one that encourages play and interpretation, possess an articulatory capacity, a capacity for being arranged, worked, transformed, to produce forms that are rich, determinate and complex, that invite or demand description. The ‘invite or demand’ signals that the novel forms are produced in a context *where new meaning is sought*, as in the sociological studies that are exploring the meanings that the created objects might depict in the participants’ lives. In other words, perception is sensitive to the signifying potential of the manipulated material. In this regard, the Lego brick is an exemplary material: not only does it encourage play and connection but also, with its studs that can plug into any and every other socket-bearing brick (or other Lego item), it exemplifies the articulatory whereby a material is able to flex, shift and change its state in the interest of generating forms with signifying potential.



Given that my focus is the capacity of artistic manipulation of materials to create new knowledge, it is important to clarify the role played by materials in the generation of meaning. In the visual sociology studies reported by Gauntlett, there are two acts of meaning-generation: (1) the constructivist flow of playing, for example, with Lego bricks, to produce an object, and (2) the ascription of meaning to the created object by locating it in relation to a life story, for example, ‘there is “a skeleton adrift next to my boat”, which represents “a foreboding sense of time” passing in [Katie’s] life’ (Gauntlett 2007: 172–173). Metaphor is only recognized to enter the process at the point when the created object is described, in keeping with the traditional view of metaphor, as a verbal operation. It is possible to distinguish between the two acts of meaning, with metaphor occupying the second act, because the sociological research does not dwell on the properties of the materials; the materials are there simply because they have the potential to expand the narrative resources of the participants. But this is to be expected. As Gauntlett declares, his sociological interest lies less in what academics or experts do with visual materials (he is quite scathing of much academic work done under the heading of ‘visual culture’) and more in ‘actual research regarding the use that people do, or can, make of images and the visual in everyday life’ (Gauntlett 2007: 119). But in the context of artistic research, where I think expert knowledge is expected, more can be said about the capacity of materials to generate meaning (as it is known by the artist), and metaphor will be active in the process, both in *and prior to* the act of interpreting the created object.

### Material as metaphor in visual art

How is metaphor present in a visual artist’s manipulation of material prior to the act of interpreting the created object? Materials, technologies, found objects and situations have properties *of their own*, and a significant part of the pleasure in making is exploring *what these properties can do, where they can lead, what they can open on to, what they can evoke and what they make possible*. The metaphorical dimension lies in the idea that materials have properties *of their own* and that manipulating the materials artistically can take their properties *somewhere else*, have them *evoke or become other properties*. Strictly speaking, this could be seen as metaphorical in two ways. (1) My descriptions are metaphorical. I attribute the idea of ownership to an inert substance, and present the effects of material manipulation as movement, an act of ‘giving voice to something’, and a change of identity. The fact that I adopt – or that I cannot avoid adopting – metaphorical language is not the main point. The omnipresence or unavoidable of metaphor is well documented in philosophy and cognitive linguistics (Cazeaux 2007). (2) It is the second way in which metaphor is active that is of greater interest. To claim that materials have properties *of their own* and that manipulating them artistically can take their properties *somewhere else*, is to assert that the action of moving properties from one domain to another, *normally attributed to metaphor*, functions here as an ontological structure, as something that affects our understanding of how properties are attached to objects in the world.

This happens in virtue of the fact that the material has the capacity to become something else through being handled or transformed by the artist, and through coming into contact with other materials.

Let's take charcoal as an example. In terms of its own properties, it is black, dry to touch, brittle and easy to crumble. But to describe these qualities as *charcoal's own* is arguably to run into difficulties straight away, because all of them involve perception and therefore determinations introduced by the perceiver, e.g. colour that is perceived as black, dry according to my sense of touch. It could be claimed that these qualities belong not to the material but are instead the results of interactions between the material and the perceiver. This is the distinction between perception-independent, primary qualities, and the perception-dependent secondary qualities introduced by Democritus but formulated in modern philosophy in the seventeenth century by John Locke.<sup>1</sup> Primary qualities include solidity, extension and shape, and are held to belong to their objects, whereas secondary qualities, such as colour, smell and taste, are the results of powers within objects to produce effects in us. The primary–secondary quality distinction is challenged by George Berkeley in the early eighteenth century on the grounds that any attempt to attribute qualities to an object that are independent of perception, and therefore supposedly primary, overlooks the fact that these qualities are still being perceived in the mind of the person who is maintaining the distinction, and so the requirement of perception-independence does not hold (Berkeley 1988: §23, 61). It just so happens that the qualities of charcoal I described – black, dry to touch, brittle and easy to crumble – are secondary qualities. But then most of charcoal's qualities are secondary, qualities that will change dependent upon the conditions in which they are perceived, because it is a material that undergoes transformation into other forms very easily upon contact with handlers (artists) and other objects. It is possibly a characteristic of materials used in an art context that they will be ones with an abundance of qualities that can change upon contact and manipulation, i.e. ones that are rich in secondary qualities, since it is this abundance that the artist wants to explore in their practice.

This is not the place to tackle the primary–secondary qualities distinction in depth, but it does raise what could be said to be the first metaphorical aspect of material and its manipulation. The aspect I have in mind is not one that is commonly attributed to metaphor, but it is a feature noted by some authors nonetheless. It is the observation that metaphor occurs because all concepts have within themselves the potential to be applied beyond their customary domain. On this basis, metaphor is not a deviation from the correct, literal usage of a concept, as it has been theorized historically, but a function of the flexibility that is necessary *for terms to become concepts in the first place*. Thomas Kuhn makes this point as part of his discussion with Richard Boyd over the status of metaphor in the construction of scientific theories:

Until the referents of 'game' and of other terms which might be juxtaposed with it in metaphor [e.g. 'war'] have been established, metaphor itself cannot begin ... [yet it is] the metaphorical juxtaposition of the terms 'game' and

'war' [e.g. in the metaphors 'War is a game', 'professional football is war'] [which] highlights other features, *ones whose salience had to be reached* in order that actual games and wars could constitute separate natural families.

(Kuhn 1993: 537, *emphasis added*)

Kuhn's observation amounts to the claim that it is only in contrast to the new, 'quirky' salience suggested by a metaphor that its component expressions are general 'family' terms. A similar view is offered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson from the perspective of cognitive linguistics (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor takes place in the body. Most metaphors, they argue, involve conceptualizing a subjective experience in terms of bodily, sensorimotor experience, e.g. understanding an idea (subjective experience) in terms of grasping an object (sensorimotor experience) (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45). This happens, Lakoff and Johnson affirm, when neural connections between parts of the brain dedicated to sensorimotor experience and parts dedicated to subjective experience are coactivated. From the point of view of the concepts involved, the inferences flow in one direction only, from the sensorimotor source domain (e.g. grasping an object) to the subjective target domain (understanding an idea) on the grounds that sensorimotor experience possesses a 'greater inferential complexity' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 57). This complexity, they explain, comes from the fact that, as beings immersed in the sensory world, the relationships we perceive between everyday objects are the principal, if not the only, source of connections and orientations which can be applied to subjective, abstract, less phenomenal or tangible relationships. 'What makes concepts concepts', they assert, 'is their inferential capacity, their ability to be bound together in ways that yield inferences. *An embodied concept is a neural structure that is actually part of, or makes use of, the sensorimotor system of our brains*' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 20, original emphasis). Thus, for Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor *is embodied* in the sense that metaphor is the 'openness' or 'inferential potential' (my phrases) of the neural structure that is part of the sensorimotor system of our brains; that is to say, the conceptual cross-domain mappings performed by metaphor are extensions of the neural processes employed by the body in coping with its environment.

From Kuhn and Lakoff and Johnson, we get the claim that the formation of concepts, ideas about what we take to belong to something, occurs hand-in-hand with the propensity for those concepts to be applied to things which they do not belong. In relation to the metaphorical nature of manipulated material, including charcoal, the difficulty of describing charcoal's 'own' qualities without resorting to determinations introduced by the perceiver – e.g. colour that is perceived as black, dry according to my sense of touch – can now be presented as an instance of the belong–not-belong relationship identified by Kuhn and Lakoff and Johnson. I know what charcoal is, I have a sense of what it can do, and there will be different kinds that I can buy, e.g. different degrees of hardness. But as soon as I come into physical contact with it or apply it to a surface, an entirely new set of qualities becomes possible.

## Articulating charcoal

Charcoal can demonstrate the metaphorical nature of manipulated material in other respects. There is the scope of mark-making itself, and the surface upon which the marks will be made. If the metaphorical aspect just noted acknowledges that any notion of ownership or belonging is merely a preface to application or transformation, then the next metaphorical aspect is the realization of the transformation. The behaviour of charcoal on smooth paper is different from its behaviour on textured paper. Smooth paper will encourage the charcoal to glide across the surface, enabling cleaner, continuous lines, sharper edges and longer, finer smudges, whereas textured paper will try to grip the charcoal, slow it down, break it up, interrupt any attempt at fine, continuous lines, and seek to claim its dust for the pore-like surface. There is nothing to say that the paper has to remain as a flat surface. It might be scrunched into a ball with pieces of charcoal inside, and shaken or kicked or sat on or flattened by a steam-roller. Here is the second metaphor: charcoal and paper are intersecting domains, the properties of one made to interact with the properties of the other through the actions of the artist to create a range of different kinds of mark with various qualities that cannot be attributed to either the charcoal or the paper. An objection might be that I am assigning too much agency to the materials, and overlooking the intention of the artist; it is not the materials that achieve these qualities, it could be argued, but rather their careful application in order to realize specific qualities as planned in advance by the artist. It is true that an artist *familiar* with the mark-making possibilities of charcoal on paper might be able to exercise such knowledge in advance, but they *would have had to learn what was possible* from earlier interactions between charcoal and paper, so there would have been a time when they were equal partners, co-authors. But I offer the example in the context of a chapter on the insights that might be gleaned from *working with* materials in the interests of generating novelty, so the model of the artist directing their materials in such a way that all outcome qualities are known in advance is arguably not applicable here. ‘Working with’ is emphasized because I am pursuing the thesis that materials worked upon by the artist are active in introducing qualities and meanings to a work above and beyond any intention held by the artist.

Charcoal also leaves a mark on whatever surface it comes into contact with. Holding a stick of charcoal in your hand (1) dirties your hand, but also (2) leaves you in no doubt whatsoever that wherever your hand goes, a mark will be left. As a result, it can work back through your body and make you think about the posture you want to adopt in preparation for making a mark. Charcoal is a substance that makes its holder aware that all points of contact from now on will leave a trace, that the holder’s relationship to their environment is now one of ‘mark-maker’. Here is the third metaphor: by holding a stick of charcoal in one’s hand, a person is shifted from one set of possible responses to an environment to an entirely different set: I might hold my body in a different way, approach objects (to make a mark) that I wouldn’t have approached before and carry out actions I wouldn’t have otherwise conceived, e.g. stamping my feet, to crush the charcoal.

The metaphorical nature of material has been demonstrated so far just by talking about the materials themselves and what arises from their manipulation by the artist. This would be work that might be considered abstract (non-figurative or non-representational), performative (a work that displays its own production) or indexical (after Peirce, a sign that is a trace of its cause, e.g. smoke signifying a fire). But a further metaphorical nature of material can be found if we look at representational art. Here, there will be the question of what the medium says about the represented object. It will not be a merely imitative process, in which a point-to-point correspondence between object and drawing is sought, and *cannot be one*, for, as we have seen, the material and its manipulations make their own demands and so cannot meekly adhere to every detail of the represented object. The drawing will instead be an entire series of negotiations whereby (to continue with the same example) the qualities of charcoal and paper address or ‘speak about’ their subject matter. While the qualities of charcoal and paper are certain in some respects, e.g. certain enough to be identified, purchased, graded for quality, etc., they are far from certain in others because of the many interactions and forms that they permit through manipulation. So there will have to be a thinking and working through of how the many behaviours of charcoal and paper provide ways of addressing the subject matter. Again, ‘ways of addressing’ does not refer to representation conceived as imitation or isomorphism, but to the ways in which the many interactions and forms that are possible via the manipulation of charcoal and paper might suggest a kind of notation or framework that refers to and stimulates our appreciation of the subject. How will tone – black, white and shades of grey – be used? What kinds of marks will be made? Will a hard or soft, crumbly charcoal be selected? What stance will be taken with regard to erasure, for the removal of marks in the interest of ... Choose your interest: a ‘clean’ image; an emphasis on chiaroscuro; an image that promotes the unity of the object over the expressiveness of line, where expressiveness might obscure the object; or where addition, subtraction or palimpsest are governing themes?

As an example, we might look at one of the charcoal drawings in Vija Celmins’s *Night Sky* series of works. Reproductions of many drawings, aquatints and photo-etchings in the series are freely available to view online, for example, on the UK Tate gallery’s website (Celmins 1997–2010). These are depictions of night skies, based on photographs in astronomy books, newspapers and magazines, and tonally very subtle. At first glance, given the resemblance between drawing and photograph, it might seem as if these works are in fact exemplars of mimetic art, which would surely run against my line of argumentation. But it is the behaviours of the charcoal, paper and erasure process that make the difference. In *Night Sky #19* (Figure 5.1), as critic Stephanie Strain notes, the charcoal is ‘rubbed deep into the paper in a slow, accumulative process’ (Strain 2010). An electric eraser is then used to burrow ‘through these many layers of dusty charcoal to create starry pinpricks of light as a kind of negative drawing – a process that moves backwards towards the original colour and surface of the paper’ (Strain 2010). The effect is the production of a range of fine greyscale variations between the black of the charcoal and the



**FIGURE 5.1** Vija Celmins, *Night Sky #19*, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 57.0 x 67.3 cm. © Vija Celmins. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photograph © Tate, London 2016.

white of the paper that becomes the basis for a relationship between charcoal dust and the emission of light from distant galaxies. This might seem to be not the most inventive relationship. Doesn't it just amount to saying 'more charcoal' equals 'less light' which could easily be achieved through careful shading with a charcoal stick? No, because the slow, accumulative rubbing of the charcoal into the paper and the precise, delicate acts of erasure, to the point where Celmins is working with charcoal as specks of dust, create senses of the calibrated and the particulate that interact with ideas of the celestial and the astronomical more strongly than any simple, repeated act of shading. Here we can see how the articulacy of material and metaphor work in tandem: the manipulation of materials, carried out in response to a photograph of a night sky, creates particular effects – subtle shifts in tone, specks of charcoal dust, spots of intense white – that call for description, and concepts are drawn from the field of associations surrounding the night sky.

In summary, in relation to art, the articulacy of material can be shown to implicate or draw upon metaphor in four ways: (1) the difficulty of describing a material's own qualities without referring to the interaction with a perceiver or other object corresponds to the mutually defining nature of metaphor and the inferential openness of concepts; (2) the mutually defining relationship between belonging and interaction from (1) is exercised artistically so that the properties of one material are made to interact with the properties of another to create a range of qualities that cannot be attributed to either; (3) in handling the material,

the handler is also, if not equally, acted upon, so that their actions are moved from one kind of comportment to another; and (4) in representational art, the manipulation of materials creates particular effects that call for description in terms drawn from associations surrounding the subject. I shall refer to this four-fold articulacy as the 'metaphoricity' of material.

## Metaphor as the generator of knowledge

The relevance of these considerations to artistic research is that metaphor is widely regarded to be a generator of knowledge. If the artistic manipulation of materials functions metaphorically, then maybe this manipulation can be understood as a contribution to knowledge. To underpin the cognitive, life-illuminating dimension of Lego Serious Play, Gauntlett draws upon epistemologies of metaphor from Paul Ricœur and Lakoff and Johnson. The principles he takes from them are that metaphor is central to human experience, and operates not just linguistically but conceptually, 'structur[ing] how we think about our experience of the world' (Gauntlett 2007: 149). I also want to draw upon Ricœur and one of his influences, Max Black, for this reason, but more importantly because they emphasize the novelty of metaphor. Central to both Black's and Ricœur's theories is the claim that, when two concepts meet in a metaphor, there is an interaction between them: a process that stimulates association between the two concepts and looks for previously unrecognized perspectives whereby one informs the other. Black terms this an implication complex (Black 1993: 28). The two subjects in a metaphor are complexes of implication: systems of association shared by the linguistic community that determine all the various ways in which their subjects might be perceived and understood. In a metaphor, the two complexes interact and mutually sieve the implications that they have for one another to create a third implicative complex, a new way of seeing the metaphor's primary subject, together with new implications for the secondary subject, neither of which were available prior to the metaphor (Black 1993: 28).

Ricœur also presents metaphor as an interaction, but one that occurs between poetic and speculative discourse (Ricœur 1978a). Poetic discourse is the domain in which new expressions are created but not conceptualized or translated. Concepts that do not normally go together are collided, and all the surprising or nonsensical associations generated by the collision are left in the air, in a state of free play. Speculative discourse is the domain of the concept and, furthermore, the domain in which the concept can be predicated of an object. It is this discourse which focuses the play of meanings thrown up by metaphor into a proposition which revivifies our perception of the world. As intersecting discourses, the poetic creates the utterance 'A is B' together with all the 'nonsensical' possibilities that it implies, and through its encounter with the speculative, the play of possibilities is resolved and A's B-like nature is conceptualized. Metaphor 'is living', Ricœur proclaims, 'by virtue of the fact that it introduces the spark of imagination into a "thinking more" at the conceptual [speculative] level' (Ricœur 1978a: 303). Although the interactions

in Black's and Ricœur's accounts are different – a mutual sieving between terms with Black, and the contrast between the poetic and the cognitive with Ricœur – they nevertheless reinforce one another as contrasting accounts of the dual aspects of metaphor's potency: an association-generating collision (first aspect) that illuminates and expands the concepts involved (second aspect). There is an impulse towards new meaning in metaphor that works its way through the possibilities thrown up by the unconventional pairing of concepts to arrive at forms that are simultaneously poetic and claim-making.

Thus, with Black and Ricœur, I am interested in the emergence of something new: new perspectives on or expanded concepts of the metaphor's subject terms. The epistemological value is twofold: (1) we witness how the collision between concepts turns the meanings that are said *to belong* to concepts into *associations*, so that they interact to produce a novel third term (a new implication complex or a state of tension); I shall refer to this as 'novelty by collision'; and (2) the novelty of this new interaction or tension is defined by the fact that *it is sustained*; each concept makes a demand upon the other that isn't answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no', but rather involves the extended working through or sieving of possibilities. This is the element that Black emphasizes with notions of 'implication' and 'complex', and that Ricœur promotes with his model of tension between discourses. I shall call this 'novelty by demand', as I think, of all the words used so far, 'demand' best conveys the notion of one concept drawing upon and seeking benefit or expansion from another. The process is epistemological in that the map of human concepts, and their carving up of the world, is revised. The tension and the implication are sustained by all the various ways in which one concept can be stretched, its predicates turning to associations, to become about the other and, in so doing, stretching what the other can be. It corresponds to what the cognitive theories (for example, Gibbs 1994, Lakoff and Johnson 1999) refer to as conceptual mapping between source and target domains, but with Black and Ricœur, there is more emphasis on this being a creative process.

### **The manipulation of material as the basis of new meaning: Celmins's *Night Sky #19***

How might these epistemological aspects of metaphor apply to artistic research? Let's work through the multiplication of materiality and novelty in relation to Celmins's *Night Sky* charcoal drawings, with *Night Sky #19* (Figure 5.1) as the focus. The drawings have not been produced as part of an academic research project, but the lack of a formal or institutional research dimension at this point is not a problem as far as the initial setting out of an epistemology is concerned. The intention is to demonstrate how *the metaphors active in their production* can be sources of insight that could be recognized as contributions to knowledge within an academic research project. As we saw with Gauntlett and with the metaphorical nature of material manipulation, the understanding is that we are working in an environment that is interested in *and wants to describe* the changes brought about by transforming



materials. The recognition of what material properties can *do*, where they can *lead*, what they can *open on to*, rests upon the changes being located in a context *that is looking for meaning*. The point is that Celmins's drawings will be the occasion for descriptions that could inform a research project, as I shall indicate. Furthermore, starting from them as drawings will show how research questions can arise from a body of artistic practice.

In terms of 'novelty by collision', part of the delight of Celmins's night sky drawings is that they create the tensile state of charcoal-on-paper-as-night-sky. Initially, these drawings might not seem the best examples to demonstrate the novelty of what can emerge through playing with materials, since their form appears to be governed, if not restricted, by the original photographs. These seem to be works of representation rather than play. The works correspond immediately to the category of 'drawing', and we can understand immediately that they are drawings of night skies or drawings of photographs of night skies, as we are told by prominent gallery and catalogue texts. The danger is the one that Plato calls attention to in the *Republic*: we mistake the drawings for being copies of photographs that just happen to be made out of charcoal – full stop; that's all (Plato 1987: 595a–608b). The fact that charcoal, paper and an eraser can be combined in this way is all too easily overlooked or dismissed because, with the drawings in front us, or represented on a page or screen, it seems to be just that: *a fact*. But it is an entirely different fact that is remarkable: namely, that charcoal on paper *can do this*. What is lost in the simple, factual interpretation are all the various material-on-material collisions that are sustaining the tensile state of charcoal-on-paper-as-night-sky. It is in these collisions where the play happens.

In *Night Sky #19*, a black stick held in the fingers becomes an expanse. What is commonly and readily applied to make a line is instead, on this occasion, used to form a continuous field. Different surfaces are achieved: smooth where the charcoal has been applied uniformly, and bumpy, either from the paper or from layers of charcoal. It becomes the ground for a spectrum of intensity, from the deepest black to a brilliant, pinprick white, with an array of greys in between with as many differentiations as can be achieved by adding or erasing layers. Then there are the white dots or circles or specks. I am not sure what to call them. Some are very close to being circular, others less so. Some are pure paper, others contain specks or layers of charcoal. I am struck by how charcoal-on-paper becomes the platform for several hundred unique, delicate acts of erasure.

Because the paper and the rubbing of charcoal allow an expanse to form, there is also the question of what to do with the edge of the drawing. The original photographs are not present in the exhibition or even locatable, so it is not clear what role they might have played in determining the charcoal edges in the drawings. Paintings in the *Night Sky* series, e.g. *Night Sky #17* (2000–01), do not include a border; the paint, signifying sky, continues up to the edge of the canvas (Celmins 2001). In principle, it would have been possible to achieve the same to-the-edge effect on paper, possibly even cutting the edge of the paper if its edges from production were too ragged. So it is possible that the white border in the charcoal

drawings is not the border of the photograph, and the edge of the charcoal is *simply* the point at which it ceases its representational duty. Although the edge is far from simple. Looking at the edges of *Night Sky #19*, one sees a different kind of transition from dark to light from that used with the stars. With the stars, there is the pin-prick precision of the white dot and the shades of grey carefully contained around them, whereas, with the edges, the fade-to-white is less contained, is more gradual and wavers. The action, removed from the certainty of the star-form, feels uncertain, but this might also be a decision. The difference in approach to the dark–light transition between star and drawing’s edge in effect lets us see side-by-side charcoal-as-night-sky and ... I was going to say ‘charcoal-as-itself’, but it would be more precise to say ‘charcoal as it comes to the end of its representational function on a sheet of paper’. What would the drawings have looked like if the dark–light transition had been the same for both stars and the drawings’ edges? The edges in the preceding drawing, *Night Sky #18* (Figure 5.2), are different (Celmins 1998). *Night Sky #18* is darker than its successor: the black is more solid throughout, and the edges are crisper, more defined. However, they still fade in a manner that is more gradual than the dark-to-light transitions of the stars, so the difference in approach persists. The fact that we see two approaches to dark–light transition side-by-side – edge and stars, the gradual and the contained or precise – means we get to see charcoal and paper colliding as materials, revealing how they begin to act upon one another,



**FIGURE 5.2** Vija Celmins, *Night Sky #18*, 1998. Charcoal on paper, 48.5 x 58.5 cm. © Vija Celmins. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Photograph © Tate, London 2016.

and are reminded that the night sky before us is the result of a series of material-upon-material interactions or demands. The drawing, in effect, lets us see *in the same space* how ‘metaphoricity of material’ point (2) – the meeting of charcoal and paper when it is worked out how they start and finish their representational roles – becomes the ground for ‘metaphoricity of material’ point (4), the manipulation of materials to create particular effects that call for description in terms drawn from associations surrounding the subject.

This, then, is an example of the epistemology of novelty by collision. It’s not the case that we only have two perceptions to choose from: one moment, we are focused on charcoal, the next on the night sky. Rather, any notion that charcoal, paper and night sky are simple, homogeneous objects is exploded through the different effects that are achieved when they are brought to bear upon one another. The problem is that everyday perception in terms of objects, and representational thinking which sees one thing as the representation of another, bundle properties into localized units, that we call objects, and so it is all too easy to resort to perceiving Celmins’s drawings in the two-term form of charcoal depictions of night skies. It will be the job of another paper or book to explore how the tension between belonging and interaction within metaphor theory might become the basis for an ontology that can avoid the binaries and isolationism of representational thought.

We must not forget what are arguably the two most prominent metaphors in Celmins’s *Night Sky* drawings: the night sky is charcoal, and charcoal is the night sky. I say ‘charcoal’ in both cases, when, to be more specific, I should say ‘charcoal-on-paper’ or ‘charcoal-on-paper-rubbed-accumulatively’ or ... As is apparent, the metaphorical, collided nature of material means it can never be referred to in isolation. To write ‘charcoal’ is to imply all the interactions and transformations it might undergo in its contact with handlers and surfaces. Also, I think we are free to find two metaphors in the drawings, to allow both terms (night sky and charcoal) to act as primary subjects (in Black’s idiom) or tenors (in Richard’s terminology): (1) because a drawing does not have the strict ‘A is B’ predicative structure of a sentence; and (2) because it would grant representation too strong a role to insist upon the night sky being the primary subject of the drawings, and prevent material from receiving equal attention. Furthermore, on the model of metaphor adopted here from Black, the interaction in the implicative complex created between the two concepts works in both directions; both concepts are affected (something that is not acknowledged in Richard’s tenor–vehicle terminology, where metaphor is a one-way process of ascription from vehicle to tenor; Richards 1936: 96). Forming two metaphors simply makes explicit the two-way interaction. Ricœur is less explicit on what happens to the concepts in a metaphor, but the fact that his account rests upon a worldview of things existing in a constant ‘interplay of attractions and repulsions’ implies he is open to the idea of both concepts being changed in a metaphor (Ricœur 1978a: 302).

There is the question of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of charcoal for the subject matter. Charcoal is the black, amorphous type of carbon obtained as a

residue when wood or other organic matter is heated in the absence of air. The abundance of carbon as an element in the universe, its importance for the generation of life (as in 'carbon-based life'), and the creation of charcoal 'in the absence of air' are three strong associations between astronomy and charcoal. As such, they suggest that charcoal is actually entirely appropriate to depicting the night sky, but at the expense of cancelling 'the night sky is charcoal' and 'charcoal is the night sky' as metaphors, since metaphor requires distance and dissonance between its concepts. But this would be to allow 'carbon' and 'absence of air' to dominate all that charcoal can be and can mean when, as I have argued, charcoal *as a material* entertains a wide range of forms and manipulations. These ensure that the differences and conceptual dissonance associated with metaphor remain.

As I have already suggested, Celmins's slow, accumulative rubbing of the charcoal into the paper and the precise, delicate acts of erasure, bring her to the point where she is working with charcoal as specks of dust, creating senses of the calibrated and the particulate that interact with ideas of the celestial and the astronomical. Let us examine these more closely. The actions of collision and demand performed by metaphor begin as soon as we start to think through what a photograph of the night sky and charcoal on paper become in relation to one another. In this relationship, there is no one, single thing as 'a photograph of the night sky' because the photograph is now a series of aspects and possibilities that is going to be extended and transformed by the aspects and possibilities afforded by charcoal on paper. Here 'charcoal on paper' exerts a demand upon the photograph on account of the fact that it cannot be the exact same photographic grey. Charcoal and paper will present properties based on their own interactions and the considerations that come from them, for example, the degree to which tone can be varied, the modes by which tone can be varied (stepped by marks and flecks or gradually through rubbing and smearing), and the shapes that emerge when one begins to create a fade from dark to light or vice versa around the stars and at the edges of the drawing. An expanse of dark grey on the photographic paper that denotes empty night sky becomes a region of dense, accumulated charcoal rubbing, but not so dense that the texture of the paper doesn't show through as extremely fine speckles. This is almost certainly a result of not every dimple in the paper's body receiving the same quantity of charcoal. An area of the night sky that is depicted as empty here, on paper, becomes a matter of the particulate. And not just particles of charcoal, but also the surface of the paper that we begin to inspect for texture much in the same way that we might scan a photograph of a planet's surface, looking for salient markings.

Then there is the knowledge, from the category 'charcoal drawing', that an expanse of dark grey with specks of light that was originally produced mechanically, by telescopic and chemical means, has been created by a substance that has been worked on physically. All the subtle shifts in tone and all the white dots with their various diameters and fade-outs that were created in the photograph causally, as a result of instrument design, process design and chemical sensitivity, are here the result of the articulation of a substance, or what I have termed the 'metaphoricity' of a substance, the idea that the nature of a substance inheres not in itself but in its

capacity to interact with and impact upon others, including human beings. The layering of tones, the layering that either obscures the paper's surface or allows it to remain visible, the subtlety in tone, the capacity for contrast (greater than with graphite), the specks of perfect white, and the various diameters of light–dark transition that surround them: through these interactions, astronomical distance, celestial bodies and the technological transformation of light are extracted from charcoal, paper and eraser. Working with charcoal becomes the construction of scientific, astronomic imaging.

## Conclusion

In setting out how metaphors can be found in the collisions and demands created by materials acting upon one another, it could be argued that all I have done is simply identify metaphors. How does this help artistic research? It does so by showing how material has a fluency or articulacy – which, I have argued is a metaphoricality – that becomes the occasion for new themes or associations, for example (to recall three): (1) a black stick of charcoal held in the fingers becomes an expanse; (2) a drawing lets us see its own metaphoricality, its own history of production (as a result of the fade-outs at the edges); and (3) an area of the night sky that is depicted as empty becomes a matter of the particulate. A key feature of the interactionist theory of metaphor is that the interaction generates a novel, middle term – an implication complex, in Black's idiom – that neither of the two terms in isolation could have signified and that is cognitively rich and significant. It is this epistemological dimension that I want to highlight as being available for artistic research. The novelties in the three examples recounted briefly here that could go on to be the basis of an artistic research project are: (1) charcoal as an expression of space; (2) drawing notation that displays its own logic or condition of production; and (3) how the particulate properties of charcoal might address astronomical or scientific imaging. The themes and questions have arisen from details revealed through the metaphoricality of material, the capacity of material-upon-material interaction to produce effects that, through description, summon concepts not immediately or obviously present and, in so doing, open up new ways of approaching the work at hand. These in turn will inform critical reflection on the artwork, and might suggest new lines of development. The playful suggestiveness of construction was identified by Gauntlett at the outset, but the idea that has been advanced here is that materials themselves possess an articulacy, a metaphoricality, that can generate new meanings and associations.

It is also worth addressing the value judgment implicit in the charge that '*all I have done is simply identify metaphors*'. It assumes that metaphor is merely a rhetorical or poetic device, and that no epistemological work has been done in identifying individual instances. This overlooks the epistemological and ontological weight given to metaphor by, among others, Nietzsche, Black, Ricœur and Hausman (Cazeaux 2007). In summary, and at the risk of extreme generalization, metaphor is epistemological because it affects notions of essence and relevance,

ideas of what belongs and does not belong to a concept, and the possibility that concepts should not be regarded as ‘insides’ or ‘containers’ at all. The benefit of this dimension of metaphor to artistic research is that the artistic manipulation of material, seeing what it can become and what concepts are introduced in the description of the manipulation, emerges as an exemplary form of metaphor generation and, therefore, movements between ideas that promise to revise or expand what belongs and does not belong to one or more concepts. The present, dominant frameworks for understanding material within the visual arts are as forms of self-expression and as the means to achieve certain kinds of effect. Emphasizing the metaphoricity of material would turn material practice into what could be described as an ‘inter-conceptual’ epistemology: the transformation of material in the interests of revisions to concepts and their boundaries. The problem remains that everyday perception in terms of objects, and representational thinking which sees one thing as the representation of another, bundle properties into localized units that we call objects. As a consequence, artworks are all too easily reduced to objects with properties, rather than being recognized as sites of materially induced conceptual collision and demand. The shift in perception needed, from representational to relational or ecological, is the topic of further study, and one to which artistic research might contribute.

## Note

- 1 The most famous fragment in which Democritus makes the primary–secondary quality distinction is: ‘By convention sweet and by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention colour; but in reality atoms and void’, frequently cited as Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII.135. The fragment, with commentary, can be found at Taylor 1999: D16, p. 9. The distinction is reasserted by Locke in 1690 (Locke 1997: II.viii.9–10). For further discussion of the primary–secondary quality distinction in Democritus, Locke and the history of philosophy, see Nolan 2011.

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# 6

## DOES 'ART DOCTORED' EQUAL 'ART NEUTERED'?

A worry that is often raised in relation to artistic research is that the art itself is not very good. The requirement to produce a body of artwork in relation to a programme of research has somehow resulted in the creation of works which, in having to respond not just to artistic initiatives but also to cognitive or epistemic demands, are judged to be lesser works of art. The worry is not just about *not* meeting a traditional standard of aesthetic quality from the history of art, e.g. in terms of beauty or significant form, but also of not fulfilling the best possible outcome as a work of art, i.e. a work that achieves or even stretches the concepts and frames of reference that are used in contemporary art. On this account, it is recognized that the form and content of art after conceptual art or the death of art are continuously open to discussion and revision, and so the flexibility to pursue ideas and outcomes that can extend the discussion is desired. However, the concern is that in having to adhere to the terms of the research question or the logic of prescribed research methods, some of this flexibility is lost, and the ability to produce art that can fulfil the potential of an idea on *purely artistic terms* is reduced.

The issue can apply to cases where artistic research is valued *instrumentally* for the benefit it brings to society or to the economy, for example, art projects that claim to promote healthcare and well-being. In order for an artistic research project to demonstrate its benefit, a scientifically-recognized research methodology has to be in place to identify, capture and evaluate the changes that are produced. The combination of art practice and scientific method explains some of the growth of interest in recent years in art–science projects. However, each scientific method leaves its mark: a combination of approaches and concepts that influences which aspects of the artwork or, more importantly (for some), the effect of the artwork as a source of change, are important – are data – and which are not. So artworks or art events produced within the project are not considered on their own terms (or might not even be addressed directly at all since it is their effect that is of research



interest) but according to the categories introduced by the research methods. In this respect, as Busch has suggested, artistic research is in danger of making art complicit in the 'knowledge economy': qualifications and funding opportunities for artists that have the effect of transforming what historically has maintained an opposition to and a critical distance from mechanisms of administration, into one more mechanism among others (Busch 2011). Another consequence might be that certain kinds of artistic gesture are shown in one study to lead to an increase in beneficial outcomes. It is possible that the artist might be tempted or obliged to conduct more of the same in the next iteration of the work for a study to see if an even greater benefit results, where 'more of the same' might not necessarily be what *the artwork itself requires*. This is one of the tensions posed by artistic research. On the one hand, there is the understanding that an artwork is an autonomous thing, with intentions (from the artist) and material properties that influence or determine what works or is judged successful artistically (according to criteria that are not always clear, and to which I have yet to attend). On the other, there are concepts introduced by the requirement to make a contribution to knowledge, or to demonstrate a societal or economic benefit, that exert their own influence and direct attention in predetermined ways. It is understandable that the latter might be seen to interfere with and diminish the former.

The demonstration of benefit plays a central role in the acquisition of research funding, where governments and funding councils are keen to be able to show that the work they support has a positive effect on the world. A funding application that builds upon research where it was shown that certain people's lives were improved in specific ways following an engagement with art, as demonstrated by a scientifically recognized research methodology, is likely to have a head-start over applications that cannot make a similar claim. In the United Kingdom, since the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (a process of research evaluation), a significant part of the financial reward for 'excellent research' given to university departments by the government was based upon the extent to which the research conducted could be shown to have had 'impact', to have had a demonstrable effect on life outside academia, typically in terms of the economy, well-being and human flourishing. In the Netherlands, there is still some uncertainty over the validity of artistic research, as Schwab and Borgdorff note, and so arts-based research projects in higher education 'are only eligible for funding when they address societal needs and contribute to social welfare and economic growth' (Schwab and Borgdorff 2014: 12). On the one hand, it could be argued that the fact that art is acknowledged to be capable of these effects, and that funding councils are open to funding 'art with benefits' projects, means that there is recognition of the power of art, and more situations are available in which artists can locate and develop their work, and get paid for it. However, on the other, it could be claimed that it is the societal benefit and not the art that is valued, that the so-called power of art is one that has been harnessed, directed and, therefore, narrowed, and that this value structure is operating in a space that could be occupied by another, where the power of art is understood to be more fundamental, e.g. one that affects human being as a whole and not just specific illnesses or spreadsheet columns.

It could also be the case that artistic research is an entirely new form midway between art and science or the humanities or other established knowledge-generating practices. In which case, it is unfair or inappropriate to judge works of artistic research as *works of art*, as the criteria of assessment in art (whatever they might be) would not strictly apply. Artistic research, on this understanding, is a hybrid of artistic and research activity whose quality needs to be assessed in terms that go beyond the criteria that might be drawn from art history. More appropriate criteria might be a combination of categories gathered from art history and, perhaps, from recent research assessment exercises, such as those initiated in the UK. Although the criteria borrowed from both sides would be contentious, a combination would be possible. Similar sets of criteria are already being applied by the editorial committees of journals and edited collections devoted to artistic research, e.g. *The Journal of Artistic Research*, *The Journal of Visual Art Practice*, *Art and Artistic Research* (Caduff *et al.* 2009). Interesting though this possibility is, however, I think it amounts to either a concession to the critic that 'art doctored' *does equal* 'art neutered' or a detour that leaves us back where we started. With the former, to defend artistic research by claiming it is a hybrid practice that is distinct from 'art pure' is to concede to the critic that, in *becoming distinct from art*, it has surrendered some of the properties that make art *art*, and therefore is weakened or compromised as a result. With the latter, the point is not that research makes artistic research distinct from art, but that art and research interact in ways that have yet to be determined, and this is the point at issue: do art and research interact in ways that diminish the quality of art?

The worry over quality is anecdotal, overheard in seminars and at conferences on artistic research. I do not have any examples to offer of works quoted from a research setting where they have been criticized for being weak works of art or works that have been diluted through their development being guided by concepts that score the biggest impact according to methodological criteria. That would be a difficult letter of invitation to write: 'I write to ask if I might cite your artworks, with illustrations, in a book on art and research, as examples of art that could be regarded as weak'. But judgments about the quality of artworks are made all the time, e.g. in art criticism and art education, so why be shy here? Because these contexts are different. In art criticism, it is understood that a review of an exhibition might include a value judgment; artwork is exhibited in the expectation of a response. In contrast, to include examples in this chapter would be to declare publicly that my *initial* or *principal* interest in the work was because it was arguably weak. 'This body of artistic research is here, on public display via illustration, *first and foremost* because it could be seen as poor art' is a very different scenario from an exhibition review.

The difficulty in making the request is not just a matter of etiquette or reputation, but also of the question of what counts as a good or powerful work of art. Even though judgments are made in art criticism and education, the question remains as to what criteria are being exercised, and whose interests or positions they represent. Asking about 'the good' philosophically gets us very quickly into metaphysics, the possibility that things can be known in themselves, independently of any particular, e.g. sensory, local, empirical, point of view. Is 'the good' an ideal universal above

and beyond any particular exemplars that a community might hold as its standards, to which any community or culture is eventually bound to recognize on account of its universality, or a set of criteria that have been formed historically by the interests of that community, and to which another community might not subscribe because the qualities they hold to be paramount are different? The question of what counts as a good art is complicated further now that it has to be asked after conceptual art, i.e. now that traditional notions of quality in terms of form, style and technique no longer apply. Various responses have been given to the problem of the definition of contemporary art, as I explain in chapter 8.

Even though I cannot offer any examples, I think the topic is worth pursuing in general terms, since these are terms that are central to some of the anxieties surrounding artistic research. The question in the title asks about the relationship between art and knowledge, and expresses the concern that the former has intrinsic properties, especially freedoms, that are in danger of being restricted by the requirements of the latter. The key to the question, I think, lies in probing how the concepts of autonomy and 'own-ness', as in 'on its own terms', are understood. One of the principles underlying modern art, especially as an *avant-garde*, is its autonomy: its capacity to work independently of, and thereby offer critical resistance to, any orthodoxy, whether cultural, political or economic. It is very easy to picture these concepts as isolated, self-contained domains, each with its own contents, and with the domain of art at risk of being overtaken or overlaid by the domain of (the requirements of) knowledge. However, closer inspection of the relationship between aesthetics and epistemology reveals that the situation is not so straightforward, and that the latter draws upon the former in a way that can be highly productive for a potent (and not in any way neutered) concept of artistic research. Two philosophers strongly associated with the autonomy of art are Immanuel Kant and Theodor W. Adorno. Both might be construed as presenting a concept of autonomy that operates 'between the cracks' of established ways of knowing. The value of Kant's and Adorno's theories for artistic research, and for the concern over the loss of autonomy, is that they formulate art's autonomy as a matter of its engagement with already-active ways of knowing and its capacity to affect those ways of knowing. As such, they offer a perspective from which the antagonism between art and research might be understood as a productive rather than an unproductive force.

### **An unproductive antagonism between research and the work the artist wants to produce**

The suggestion in the chapter title is that pursuit of an epistemological interest somehow undermines the artistic power or aesthetic quality of an artwork. How might this happen? One possibility is that in having to attend to concepts contained within the research question or methods determined by the research design, requirements are introduced that are not in the best interests of the work itself. But what counts as 'the best interests of the work itself'? One suggestion is that a certain set of properties intrinsic to art, for example, materials, technologies, the intention

of the artist, when left to their own devices, can interact with a freedom and a fecundity that result in one of the best possible outcomes in artistic terms. If attention also has to be paid to concepts from the research question or methods from the research design, then these are going to restrict, influence or govern the routes that can be taken. On this understanding, 'the best interests of the work' is the idea that the interaction or dialogue that occurs between materials, technologies and intention should be allowed to happen without interference from epistemological considerations. I shall refer to this as the 'interaction view'.

Another interpretation might be that 'the best interests of the work itself' is in actual fact a metonym for the freedom of the artist to do whatever they want, where 'metonym' is understood as a part-whole relationship, in this case with 'artwork' as the part standing for the whole of 'the activity of the artist'. This draws upon the idea of the autonomy of art inherited from a romantic notion of the artist-genius and the romantically driven, modernist notion of art for art's sake, in which judgments formed in the making of art produce insights that are unattainable through classical, rational or procedural methods of enquiry. As Kjørup has argued, the idiosyncratic dimension of art practice is one of the most valuable sources of novelty in artistic research because it can produce forms that display unconventional modes of thinking (Kjørup 2010). If the artist is not allowed to follow their own intuition in the production of a work, no matter how idiosyncratic their judgments might be, but has to adhere to meanings or methods set by a research programme, then it is highly likely that decisions will have to be made that plot an uneasy compromise between intuition and epistemology, with the result being a work that does not display to the full the artist's vision. On this view, 'the best interests of the work' is the idea that artistic intuition or freedom should be allowed to determine the form of an artwork without interference from epistemological considerations. I shall refer to this as the 'intuition view'.

Present in both the interaction and the intuition views is the idea that any requirement introduced by the research context is an interference that detracts from what might be attained artistically through interaction or intuition. Two assumptions are active here:

1. that research concepts or methods, on the one hand, and interaction and intuition, on the other, are qualitatively distinct domains in the first place; and
2. that the way in which research concepts or methods affect the work the artist wants to produce (through interaction or intuition) is necessarily unproductive, i.e. it is a form of interference.

'Qualitatively' in assumption (1) suggests that art and research are distinct *in nature*, in terms of the qualities they possess, not just in number. But two objects can be distinct in number, one here and one over there, but similar in kind and so still capable of interaction. In the art-research debate, the assumption is that the two don't sit well together because of their antagonistic natures. Of the two assumptions, the second is arguably more fundamental, since it expresses the

antagonism that is central to art and research being perceived as qualitatively incompatible. In response, it could be claimed that enquiry *requires* one to be open to questions or concerns from a subject territory that *oblige* you to take on challenges, methods or technologies that move you *beyond* your conventional or preferred working practices. The italicized words indicate the presence of a demand that might be construed as the unwelcome element that distinguishes work-in-relation-to-enquiry from art, on this view. These are extra demands introduced into what, it could be claimed, is already a complex array of possibilities constituted by the artist's motivations and intentions, and preferred materials and technologies. The question is whether or not these so-called extra demands are welcome or deemed to be interference. Reasons for regarding them as interference and, therefore, for keeping them apart might be that they are simply perceived as being of a different kind with different priorities (assumption 1) or that, if it is accepted that they can intermingle, that research requirements do not possess the same degree of freedom or poetic power that is achievable through artistic intuition or interaction, and so might hamper the artistic process.

Against this, if an interaction between art and the requirements of research were encouraged, then this could mean that a wider range of concerns are confronted, and factors beyond a personal aesthetic might inform some decisions, which could be construed as the enquiry and the subject territory having some say in the development of the work. This is not dissimilar from an original idea or intention in the art-making process having to adapt in response to the possibilities and limitations that are presented by materials and technologies. Whether one is working with a research question or with materials, both introduce ideas and properties to the project as the work proceeds, on account of the fact that new facets are brought to light, either through enquiry or material manipulation. The issue here is what the artist-researcher chooses to allow into the artistic research process, and what they decide to exclude on the grounds that it is not part of the art. In response to the critic who asserts that enquiry itself is antagonistic to art practice, I would say that the matter hinges upon the extent to which the artist wants their art practice to be open to the challenges, methods and technologies that take the artist *beyond* their conventional or preferred working practices. A lack of openness is driven primarily by assumption (2): that whatever research methods introduce will be antithetical to the artistic process or not up to the poetic possibilities that it can generate. But this can be challenged.

The way to open it up is to consider the concepts of art and research that are prompting us to regard the latter as being detrimental to the former, and to discover whether those concepts can be challenged and whether other formulations of art and research are possible that put them in a position of mutual stimulation. One idea that is responsible is the notion that art is a domain of its own with its own autonomous power and capacity to act purely on its own terms, the notion at the heart of assumption (1). As I argue in chapter 1, the idea is modernist in origin, e.g. the thesis of art for art's sake. Much of the worry over whether 'art doctored' equals 'art neutered' is, I think, caused by this concept of art. It conveys the image

of something free and independent having to adhere to the categories and claims set by an external research question or method and, in the process, losing the freedom to act in whatever way is judged best for the art. The idea that art is a domain of its own with its own essential properties is difficult to sustain. After conceptual art and the ready-made, art can now draw upon every conceivable practice and context, with the result that it is constituted by an intermingling of sources and approaches, so that ideas of the identity, meaning and power of art now need to draw upon different conceptual vocabularies rather than a single, definitive art history or theory. I develop this point in chapter 8.

Another opposition that contributes to the art–research antagonism is the theory–practice or art–writing divide. The belief is that theory and practice, or art and writing, are two self-contained operations, with the visual and the practical having an immediacy and a vivacity that either cannot be accommodated by or is threatened by the generalities of verbal description. As I demonstrate in chapter 4, this relies upon a model of language in which the generality of words is opposed to the particularity of experience. In contrast, an alternative, more phenomenologically inclined model of language is available that presents words as disclosures or interruptions in the flow of experience, with the result that new aspects of experience, including the experience of making or interpreting an artwork, are brought to light. Thus, what is initially perceived as an irreconcilable difference becomes a relationship in which language creatively carves out new facets of experience.

However, an understanding of the word–object distinction that does need to be addressed here is the possibility that an artist might feel obliged either to make works or focus on aspects of their work that *correspond* to the concepts in which the research design or evaluation methods are expressed. How might 'correspondence' be understood here? The danger is that verbal expression is given priority and that work is produced in a way that tries to 'fit' with or sustain some 'immediate' connection with the vocabulary, in the belief that this ensures the epistemic status of the practice. As several commentators on artistic research have observed (Biggs and Büchler 2010; Slager 2015; Sullivan 2005), there is the worry that science is taken as the paradigm of knowledge. On this understanding, the likelihood is that art's contribution to knowledge will be demonstrated by viewing it from the perspective of verification. Do you think the artwork displays property P? I agree strongly. I agree mildly. I disagree mildly. Or I disagree strongly. The problem with this is that all the properties associated with aesthetics, e.g. multiple meanings, the particularity of the senses, ambiguity and disruption, are ignored in an attempt to lock one aspect of the work on to the terms of the question. This is a loss as a response to a work of art, because it means all the divergent implications created by ambiguity and the senses do not make it into the research process to expand the discussion. Furthermore, there is the possibility that a single perspective, along the lines of the artwork displaying property P, enters the artist's thinking midway through the production of the work. This might lead to a 'restricted palette' in the sense that forms or gestures known or guessed to correspond to the research concepts are adhered to in the production of the work, instead of a wider range of the

more playful or subversive actions that it was hoped artistic input might generate in the first place. Not only is this 'restricted' in terms of the development of the artwork, but ironically it could be 'restrictive' for the research. In keeping to forms that it is anticipated will ensure correspondence, the possibility that the more playful or subversive actions might produce a different, though nonetheless significant, result – possibly weaker, possibly stronger, possibly significant in other ways – is denied.

The appeal to correspondence is understandable if it is assumed that the only way art can contribute to knowledge is through the production of forms that *can be shown* to fit or to comply with one or more categories, where the categories are the terms that have to be *evidenced* or *displayed* in order for the claim of a contribution to knowledge to be sustained. The emphasized terms – 'can be shown', 'evidenced', 'displayed' – are all synonyms for 'correspondence', and indicate that it is an essentially binary or verificationist attitude to categories – your answer can either be placed on this scale or it can't – that governs understanding of how art can impact upon the categories that define the research question. If one assumes that the only way art can contribute to knowledge is through correspondence, then it is equally understandable why the interactions that occur in the art-making process or the impulses that direct artistic intuition are judged to be of a different order than the concepts that structure a research programme. Interaction and impulse want to be free to pursue the connections or leaps that come, by their nature, from interaction and impulse, including ideas that are suggested by the diversity of sensory experience. The idea that there must be adherence to a set of concepts from a research context would seem to be completely at odds with artistic process. I should point out that there are qualitative research methods that can be used to capture observations that have not been anticipated by the principal criteria for assessment, for example, grounded theory (Charmaz 2006: 44–47, 86–89), so observations that do not fit positively or negatively with the assessment criteria can be recorded. But this results in a two-tier outcome with an implied value distinction between the principal and the supplementary, and without any explanation of the mechanism through which the remarks gathered from qualitative research can address the central concerns of the project.

The oppositions between art and research considered so far have assumed that the two are distinct domains, where the latter is understood to impose requirements on the former that limit its autonomy or poetic power. What this arrangement does is treat autonomy and power as forces that can only thrive if they are *pure*, and not intermingled with elements that ostensibly 'come from the outside', e.g. research culture. While it might be acknowledged that art after conceptual art displays an openness that makes operation 'on its own terms' a problematic notion, there is nevertheless the worry that the freedom that is characteristic of art is lost in having to accommodate the methodological demands of another practice. An unfortunate consequence of this stance, however, is that a defensive attitude emerges on the side of the arts: the perception is that a set of methods that originates 'on the outside' and interacts with artistic practice can only have a detrimental effect on the art, and so must be resisted and kept on the outside in order to preserve the autonomy of art.

I want to take issue with the notion that art can only be autonomous and forceful if it is *pure*, and the associated defensiveness that perceives research requirements as an 'outside' that needs to be kept at bay. The understanding appears to be that purity is needed for autonomy (or freedom), and autonomy is needed to ensure that art can achieve its most powerful effects, in artistic or poetic or whatever terms are understood to be the context of the artwork. The active idea here is that autonomy and the capacity to have an effect require the agent to be something that is singular, uniform and sealed against any external influence. There are two problems with this. (1) The idea of an agent that is singular, uniform and sealed against any external influence is difficult to defend, both in the case where the agent is art, and more widely in ontology, the branch of philosophy that deals with the basic form of entities. With art, such hermeticism is undermined by all the identities that art has undergone throughout its history and that are now open to it after conceptual art. In ontology, no matter how minimal and essential one tries to make the element at the foundation of one's scheme, it is arguably the case that it requires a relationship with another for its own existence, e.g. a perceiver, a background against which the element can be individuated, or the things it might transform itself into, and therefore, because of this dependency, cannot be regarded as singular, uniform and sealed against any external influence in the first place. (2) The second problem is that, if one has defined the agent as singular, uniform and sealed against influence, then this makes it difficult to explain the capacity for effect, the power to have an impact on others, that one wants the agent to have. It could be argued that, in the case of art, this is not a problem: art can have an effect through shock or surprise or novelty. However, all these reactions indicate the existence of an adjacent or surrounding set of concerns that are active in defining and evaluating what is produced in the name of art, and so once again point to a weakness in the idea of autonomy and power through purity.

### **The autonomy of art in Kant and Adorno**

I want to propose an alternative way of configuring autonomy and power, one that is rooted in ideas of relationship and interaction. My thinking here is informed by two philosophers well known for theses on the autonomy of art: Immanuel Kant and Theodor W. Adorno. They argue not from the position of purity or 'art for art's sake' but instead from the perspective that autonomy manifests itself 'between the cracks' of established ways of knowing. There are differences and similarities between the two thinkers' philosophies of art. Kant is a transcendental idealist writing at the end of the eighteenth century, trying to overcome the oppositions and cul-de-sacs created between the competing philosophies of rationalism and empiricism and, in the process, drawing on art and judgments of taste as experiences that might allow him to demonstrate the necessary interrelationship of mind and nature. Adorno is a critical theorist and second-generation member of the Frankfurt School working in the middle of the twentieth century. His writings cover philosophy, social theory, cultural theory and aesthetics, with an underlying



commitment to demonstrating the relationship between reason, power and suffering. Although Adorno praises Kant for being the first to recognize that 'aesthetic comportment is free from immediate desire', otherwise known as the principle of disinterest (Adorno 1997: 10), his stance towards Kant's aesthetics is largely critical, on the grounds that it attends to formal considerations over historical ones in the interests of a philosophical system. Despite this, Adorno nevertheless finds in Kant a model of art as the occasion for judgments, called 'reflective' or 'aesthetic judgments', that can elicit possibilities other than those exercised by conventional, epistemic or truth-seeking judgment. Kant's theory of knowledge is also extremely influential for Adorno. He devotes a lecture course to it at the University of Frankfurt in 1957–8 (Adorno 1973a) and describes the last chapter of his *Negative Dialectics*, published in 1966, as giving an 'axial turn' to Kant's Copernican revolution (Adorno 1973b: xx). I explain the significance of this below.

The key shift in thinking that Kant and Adorno make is with regard to the place of concepts in experience. I have already introduced this aspect of Kant's philosophy in chapter 3, so my account here will be brief. Experience is understood by Kant to be the determination of intuitions by concepts (Kant 1929). 'Intuition' is the understandable but potentially misleading translation by Kemp Smith of the German *Anschauung* (misleading because of the strong association that 'intuition' has come to have with 'instinct' in English). A more accurate translation might be 'receptivity', 'outlook' or 'openness'; it is the idea that part of the nature of being human is to be a sensory being, rooted in and in receipt of an environment through certain modalities or sensitivities. Concepts are the elements that inform and organize what we receive via the senses. I can discriminate between tea and coffee because I have gained the concepts 'tea' and 'coffee' through experience and these now inform my sensory receptors. Concepts are, so to speak, the chunks of experience, the organization – making into organs, a systematic whole – that allows experience to be experience, rather than a confusion and, therefore, ultimately nothing.

However, art and aesthetic experience pose a problem for Kant's theory because they don't conform to the model of concepts determining intuitions. Judgments of taste and interpretation are open to dispute in ways that determinative judgments, judgments of identity or recognition, are not. We might recognize an artwork to be made of certain materials and belong to a certain genre, in other words, these concepts can be applied relatively straightforwardly. But when it comes to enjoying the artwork *as art*, to going beyond it in forming associations or an interpretation, or to assessing its strengths, then Kant's model of concepts determining intuitions appears not to apply. It can account for judgments such as 'This is oil paint on canvas' or 'These sculptures are made of a bronze alloy of copper and tin, stand between 150 and 156 cm tall, and are similar in form to human beings'; these are determinative and empirically verifiable. But evaluative, interpretive, aesthetic judgments, such as 'This painting expresses horror' or 'The emphasis on tone at the expense of colour displays the conflict and loss of life experienced in war', go beyond what is given and verifiable.

The problem of aesthetic judgment not involving a concept is in fact a preface to a solution that helps Kant to complete his theory of judgment, and to formulate the autonomy of art in the process. Fine art is autonomous, he writes, because it creates forms that 'prompt much thought, but to which no determinate concept can be adequate' (Kant 1987: 314). In these states, while no *determinate* concept is adequate, Kant proposes that a *reflective* concept is available. This is a concept that is not determining the intuition before it but reflecting on the capacity of human faculties to form a judgment at all in this moment. The reflective concept is nature's subjective purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), the idea that the world appears to us *as if* it had been designed for our awareness. Purposiveness, Kant writes, is:

a principle by which judgment prescribes, not to nature (which would be autonomy) but to itself (which is heautonomy), a law for its reflection on nature ... [W]e must think nature, as regards its merely empirical laws, as containing the possibility of an endless diversity of empirical laws that [despite being laws] are nonetheless contingent as far as we can see ... And yet we must necessarily presuppose and assume [the] unity [of nature], since otherwise our empirical cognition could not thoroughly cohere to [form] a whole of experience ...

(Kant 1987: 183–186)

A unified, organized natural world and unified, organized experience of that world are mutually dependent for Kant (1987: 183). Nature contains a diversity of forms, but the concept of nature's subjective purposiveness effectively grants judgment the agility to find unity and organization within it and, therefore, produce unified, organized experience. The experience of beauty in art or of being stumped by a work are occasions when judgment meets a similar challenge. Judgment cannot find a concept but recognizes reflectively that there is a necessary ground of harmony between object and our cognitive powers to ensure that judgment and, therefore, human experience as a whole is possible. Purposiveness is effectively the action of looking for concepts that allows judgment to occur, to mesh with nature. We might struggle to come to terms with an artwork, to know how to approach it or to interpret it, but this is a state, in Kantian terms, in which our capacity to judge, to apply concepts to experience, is tested.

Judgments about art, aesthetic judgments, are often metaphorical, often import concepts from other subject domains or realms of experience. This 'carriage across' is a good illustration of judgment reflecting on its own capacities and looking for a concept to summon and apply. In calling a painting 'powerful', we are not determining it as a power source but reflecting upon the capacity to draw upon another experience, in this case, one involving force or strength, as a way of coming to terms with the work, of making sense of our experience of it (Cazeaux 2007: 35–55). Because purposiveness, the concept that asserts that judgment must look for concepts, is the concept that completes Kant's account of aesthetic

judgment, it means the autonomy of art in his theory becomes the capacity of art to challenge judgment to the extent that it (judgment) has to reflect on how it meshes with nature in the first place. Art is autonomous, therefore, in that it challenges the attempts that are made to conceptualize it, and impels the imagination to find alternative concepts with which to approach it. These won't be applied determinatively; the work won't be pinned down conceptually. Rather, as part of an aesthetic judgment, the concepts remain in a state of free play, as alternatives, as an expression of the capacity of art to 'prompt much thought' without being equal or reduced to a single concept.

Adorno's position on the autonomy of art bears some similarities with Kant's. 'Autonomy' has a more specific meaning for Adorno in relation to modern art, referring to its resistance to being incorporated into the network of commodity production and its calling attention to the destructive effects capitalism has on the human spirit. However, the mechanism by which art achieves this is developed with reference to Kant. Although Adorno is largely critical of Kant's aesthetics, on the grounds that it attends to formal, systematic considerations over historical ones, he nevertheless finds in Kant a model of how art, through reflective judgment, can find possibilities in concepts that go beyond the intuition-determining role they perform in determinative judgment. Working within the Marxian, materialist conception of history, Adorno maintains that Enlightenment thought is governed by the binary, epistemological model of the knowing subject and the perceived object. Knowledge is idealized as the subject consuming, mastering or identifying himself with the object; in other words, the subject arranging his categories so that they 'capture' the object. This is manifest in the commodity fetishism of capitalism whereby we equate ourselves with the items we buy; objects acquire an allure and an independence of their own, removed from the labour behind them, which has to be possessed.

Modern art works against this because of its enigmaticalness (*Rätselcharakter*), a fundamental incomprehensibility borne of the fact that a work will be a configuration of ideas, materials and technologies, all of which are rooted in social, historical conventions whose capacity for meaning goes beyond any single, explicit intention held by the artist (Adorno 1997: 118–136). The result, in a single work, is a set of elements that, far from cohering to form an easily understandable whole, sit as rough-edged fragments torn from a context, rubbing against each other incompatibly, and resisting conceptual understanding. 'Artworks are enigmatic', Adorno writes, 'in that they are the physiognomy of an objective spirit that is never transparent to itself in the moment in which it happens' (Adorno 1997: 128). 'Spirit is never transparent to itself' in the sense that, although artistic intention has an aim or an intention, it will be formed of ideas and manifest through media whose meaningfulness is drawn from historical and cultural contexts that can never be identical with, or entirely in the service of, that intention. In other words, any expression will include the soil and sediment that allowed it to arise in the first place. However, it is precisely because expression is constituted by sedimentary fragments with their own refractory power that art is true, for

Adorno. 'Ultimately', he continues, 'artworks are enigmatic in terms not of their composition but of their truth content' (Adorno 1997: 127). This is not truth as correspondence, the artwork corresponding to a state of affairs, but truth as 'constellation', the concept introduced by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, published in 1966, to which *Aesthetic Theory* was intended as a companion volume (Boucher 2013: 94). 'Constellation' [*Konstellation*] is the gathering of concepts around an object in a fashion that shows that the object cannot be reduced to or known completely by any one concept (Adorno 1973b: 162). There is always more to an object than what can be perceived or conceptualized, what Adorno calls the 'preponderance' of the object [*Vorrang des Objekts* or *Präponderanz des Objekts*] (Adorno 1973b: 183–194).

The 'preponderance' of the object is indicative of the 'axial turn' that Adorno gives Kant's epistemology. Whereas Kant constructs his theory from the perspective of the human subject, seeking to establish the conditions that have to be in place to enable concepts to apply to intuitions, Adorno approaches the question of application from the perspective of the object. What is important in Kant's epistemology for Adorno is the difficulty it faces in explaining how concepts mesh with intuitions in the production of objects. The problem appears in Kant's first *Critique*, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), as the question of how a set of structural concepts that are 'pure', i.e. prior to experience, called 'categories', can engage with the particular detail in sensible intuition and prepare it for being organized by empirical concepts, i.e. concepts that refer to items and events within experience. A third, mediating stage, called the 'schematism', is proposed by Kant to bridge the incongruity between the pure and the empirical, but considering that he describes it as 'an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover' (Kant 1929: A141, B180–B181), it is unsatisfactory as a solution. The problem reappears as the central project of the third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in the form of the question of how the supersensible substrate of freedom, those aspects of human thought that lie beyond the causal, deterministic forces of nature, can interact with the supersensible substrate of nature, i.e. reality in itself. At the centre of Kant's solution on this occasion is the concept of nature's subjective purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) which, as I explain above, is the action of looking for concepts that allows judgment to mesh with nature. It is this sense of difficulty, of objects never being wholly identical with their concepts and always inviting further, alternative judgment, that Adorno draws from Kant and attributes to the object as its preponderance. Perception occurs through concepts, but no one concept 'gives us' the object whole. Additional, alternative judgments do not coalesce around the object and unite to form a complete picture of it, as they do in Hegel's dialectic. Rather, the preponderance of the object calls for a clustering of partial, perspectival, competing concepts. A constellation is produced by enquiry into the nature of an object when it realizes that there is no progression of concepts towards a higher, more adequate concept, meaning the particular cannot be captured in the universal.

The truth content of the work of art is that its sensory form, as a combination of material elements, reveals the constellational nature of knowledge by displaying the tensions between competing concepts in a constellation. This is the point where Adorno's interest in Kant's theory of reflective judgment is at its strongest: a model of knowledge whose foundation is the principle that an object cannot be determined by a single concept, but requires a number of concepts, none of which achieve identity with the object or, in Kantian terms, a judgment without a concept that has to reflect on the concept of its own freedom to offer concepts that can mesh with nature. In an artwork, for Adorno, it is because elements are gathered together in order to express a truth *that in the end does not get expressed as intended*, because of the competing, fragmented meanings held by the elements, *that art is true as a constellation*, as a display of the rootedness of expression in historical conditions that will always go beyond the expression:

History in artworks is not something made, and history alone frees the work from being merely something posited or manufactured: Truth content is not external to history but rather its crystallization in the works. Their unposited truth content is their name.

In artworks the name is, however, strictly negative. Artworks say what is more than the existing, and they do this exclusively by making a constellation of how it is, 'Comment c'est'. The metaphysics of art requires its complete separation from the religion in which art originated. Artworks are not the absolute, nor is the absolute immediately present in them. For their methexis in the absolute they are punished with a blindness that in the same instant obscures their language, which is a language of truth: Artworks have the absolute and they do not have it.

*(Adorno 1997: 133)*

'Artworks have the absolute' or 'participate' in it (a translation of 'methexis', one of the terms Plato uses to explain how a particular object relates to or participates in its perfect Form) through the historical dimension of the ideas and materials that they contain, but 'do not have the absolute' because they are constituted by fragments whose meanings rub together in ways that promote the contingent, perspectival nature of judgment.

Two metaphors stand out in Adorno's account of the autonomy of art: artworks 'are the *physiognomy* [*Physiognomik*] of an objective spirit that is never transparent to itself in the moment in which it happens'; and 'truth content is not external to history but rather its *crystallization* [*Kristallisation*] in the works' (Adorno 1997: 128, 133; emphases added). Both 'physiognomy' and 'crystallization' imply that the physical form adopted by an artwork is significant. This might sound like a statement of the obvious (surely an artwork is nothing but the material form it takes), or an appeal to Clive Bell's notion of significant form (Bell 1987). The former is not the case, because it is a specific aspect of the artwork's physical manifestation to which I am calling attention, and the latter is the very opposite of the point here, given that Bell's significant form was the promotion of sensory qualities removed from any sense of what they refer to in life. It is avant-garde, modernist works that

Adorno has in mind, on account of their destruction of classical aesthetic conventions, e.g. beauty, harmony, symmetry, etc., and the critical stance taken against art historical values and hierarchies through the use of new, 'everyday' technologies, e.g. print, photography, film (Wolin 1979: 111). I think there's something specifically physiognomic and crystalline about these. The suggestion is that the artwork is regarded as a series of interlocking facets, as in a face or crystal, where the process of interlocking discloses something more or other than a complete form. The various material and technological properties of the work bear upon one another as a network of differences or tensions that reveals the constructed, contingent nature of representation. On this understanding, attention is called to the artwork as a set of elements that: (a) draws on the sediment that is the ground of the elements' own possibility, i.e. materials, technologies and their histories, and (b) gathers this material around an object in ways that display the impossibility of coming to terms with it wholly or through imitation and, in so doing, exhibit the potential for creating new perspectives on the object through interactions between fragments. This might sound like 'we cannot know the object in itself, so we should just make do with creating inventive appearances', a predicament that is often attributed to Kant's epistemology. But the object is not an unreachable item behind appearances for Adorno. The tradition in which he is working, after Marx and, in turn, after Hegel, regards conceptual judgment as a part of the constitution of the object, within a dialectical process, in which the conceptual judgment is always negated by the object, preventing the two from collapsing into one another. It is because of the conceptual constitution of the object that the artistic display of the constellational nature of judgment is so important for demonstrating the possibility of alternative, emancipatory forms of thinking and perception.

What Kant and Adorno give us, I maintain, are theories in which art is shown to be autonomous on account of its being (with Kant) the occasion that prompts thought beyond what is available in regular, determinative judgment, and (with Adorno) an arrangement of sensory, technological forms to which no concept is equal but around which a constellation of concepts gathers. Although their aesthetic theories have very different contexts – Kant's is an attempt to complete a philosophical system that can reconcile concepts of freedom and nature, while Adorno's seeks to show how art contributes to the negative dialectic that resists the identification of concept and object – they are nonetheless alike in positioning art as a form of expression that acts upon concepts that are already part of established ways of knowing, finding within concepts the capacity for movement or intersection. It is this capacity that ensures that art is not reduced to any single artwork–concept correspondence and, therefore, that confirms the autonomy of art, its power to think beyond the conceptual through the resources of the conceptual. This is a very different notion of autonomy from the one considered so far. Whereas the hermetic view required the problematic notion of a 'pure' art in order to formulate a notion of artistic agency, Kant's and Adorno's theories understand autonomy as the capacity for a constructive difference or resistance to arise from any concept or resource that might be drawn upon in the production or interpretation of the

work. Instead of the possibility of power residing in a single concept of 'art' or 'arthood', it rests with Kant and Adorno in the nature of the contact between concept and object. Concepts exist to be applied but their application does not contain an object or provide complete knowledge of it. Rather, it is an act in which there is always more to be seen or known or encountered, in which one concept might suggest another, and where the power of art is felt through the way in which its fragments, sediments and juxtapositions make demands on the concepts that can be applied, and force them into constellations. It is the contrast and conflict in the constellations that exemplify the tension between concept and object in Kant's and Adorno's epistemologies.

### The place of concepts in artistic research

As far as autonomy in relation to research is concerned, this philosophical work promises the benefit of the autonomy of art being felt in conceptual terms, i.e. terms that can be readily assimilated in a research or an epistemic context. This is not to come full circle, and arrive at a philosophical position which amounts to art being assimilated by and, therefore, reduced to knowledge. Rather, it is a position which rejects the 'container' or 'domain' logic that holds art and knowledge as antitheses, and presents the artistic as that which is always already active in the concepts that construct knowledge.

The key points here are the meaning of 'concept', and the place of concepts in the production of artistic research. The term is heavily loaded and carries different meanings for different philosophers. There is the question of whether the word has the same meaning and value in Kant and in Adorno. The contexts in which the word is used are different. As we saw in chapter 3, 'concept' plays a specific role in Kant's demonstration of the conditions that are required for experience to be possible. In contrast, with Adorno, constellations of concepts are performed through his paratactic writing style – paragraphs and reflections with little or no indication of the thesis or argument which binds them together – in order to highlight the preponderance of any object of study. More could be said on the meaning and value of 'concept' in Kant and in Adorno, but this is not the place for it to happen. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that both Kant and Adorno are coming to terms with historical and philosophical traditions in which distinctions or oppositions are drawn between ideas of the mental or universal or ideal, on the one hand, and the physical or particular or sensory, on the other. Whereas Hegel, a respondent to Kant and a key figure for Adorno, argues that the sensory and the particular eventually become the universal and the ideal, both Kant and Adorno are interested in how concepts organize – make into organs, form into a meaningful, systematic whole – what is received via the senses *without containing, consuming or reducing it*. This is a dialectic between the conceptual and the sensory without unity as an endpoint or telos. To organize sensations into a meaningful, systematic whole is neither to decide nor to limit their nature, but rather to afford a grasp that will go on to reveal more detail. One thesis that can be extracted from both

philosophers' epistemologies without smoothing over too many differences is that the concept is the element responsible for individuating elements in experience, enabling objects to stand out from a background as objects, while allowing aspects of the object to remain or to emerge as the occasion for other concepts to be summoned, so that the object is never experienced as (reduced to) one thing and is recognized as an item that both challenges and sustains conceptualization.

The emphasis on concepts is helpful for artistic research because it begins to challenge the dualism into which artistic research debates so readily fall, between the objective discourse of research and subjective, aesthetic experience. This is the dualism underlying assumption (1): the idea that research concepts, on the one hand, and artistic interaction or intuition, on the other, are distinct domains. If it is accepted that all experience is conceptually organized, then it means there is no fundamental division preventing research concepts and experiential concepts from interacting. On this understanding, all art is conceptual, and not just conceptual art. *Whatever concepts are used in the perception or interpretation of an artwork* can impinge upon the concepts that appear in the research question. The list will be extensive on account of the complex or particular or unconventional nature of the forms that are presented in an artwork. These will be concepts that refer to the work's form and appearance, the signifiers or recognizable elements contained in, for example, paintings, sculptures, videos, and any metaphors motivated by appearances that are surprising or difficult to describe, such as the forms made through the thick application of paint, a video that blends one street corner with another, the qualities we try to find in the lips of a newsreader that appear in enlarged, slowed-down footage with sound removed. Ordinarily, these would be features that are ascribed to objects in the world, which might seem to be a statement of the obvious. But much of the concern over the power of art in research is to explain how such objects and their properties can address a research question or can be described in ways that transform art into artistic research.

The power of art in research lies in its being the presentation of forms that are complex or particular or perplexing and that, as a result, stimulate concepts that extend or pose a challenge to those that frame the research context. There will be a meshing of associations between the terms that frame the research interest and the concepts that are present in or evoked by the artwork. In terms of the autonomy of art proposed by Kant and Adorno, it is the way in which the work of art can both be approached through concepts yet nonetheless pose a challenge to conceptualization that needs to be considered. The recommendation from Kant is that 'no determinate concept can be adequate' to art so others from remote or unrelated regions of thought must be summoned, while Adorno presents the artwork at the centre of a constellational cluster of concepts, arranged so that their perspectives conflict and multiply rather than becoming identical with or adequate to the work. Even though I have drawn upon both Kant and Adorno, I shall refer to the approach to concepts that I am adopting as 'constellational'. This is not to say that my stance has more sympathies with Adorno than with Kant. I just think that the metaphor is a more vivid signifier of the attitude that I am recommending towards concepts



than Kant's terminology, primarily because his neologisms are usually more indicative of their technical role within his philosophical system, e.g. purposiveness, schematism, rather than being compact, metaphorical images of the actions they perform.

I announced at the start of the chapter that finding a piece of artistic research as an example for discussion around the 'doctored–neutered' contrast would not be easy, since the letter of invitation could be taken to imply that I thought the artwork was weak. I am pleased to say that we are no longer in this predicament. My focus now is not so much on the 'doctored–neutered' contrast itself, but more on how attention to concepts can avoid the dualism in the first place, and can present the art–research relation as a force that enlivens the work and its epistemic impact, as opposed to one that neuters it. Let us turn now to look at an example. It will be introduced and studied in detail in the next chapter.

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# 7

## DRAWING WITH MERLEAU-PONTY: A STUDY IN THE CONSTELLATION OF CONCEPTS

The prospect of drawing with Merleau-Ponty is offered as an example of how the emphasis placed on concepts by Kant and Adorno, set out in the previous chapter, can situate the production of art as an autonomous force in a research context. The idea for the example has its origin in ‘The Taste of Tree?’, an artistic research project by Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon, under the collective pseudonym ‘*humhyphenum*’ (always italicized in the exposition of their work), that explores the role drawing can play in evoking synaesthetic or multisensory experience (*humhyphenum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012). I outline and assess the project in terms of how its concepts constellate or bear upon one another, and indicate how the focus on concepts could lead to related, alternative artworks that are autonomous in terms inspired by Kant and Adorno.

For Kant and Adorno, the autonomy of art lies in the way in which the work of art can both be approached through concepts yet nonetheless pose a challenge to conceptualization. With Kant, ‘no determinate concept can be adequate’ to art so others from remote or unrelated regions of thought must be summoned, while Adorno places the artwork at the centre of a constellation of concepts, arranged so that their perspectives conflict and multiply rather than becoming identical with or an adequate expression of the work. In more practical terms, these principles manifest themselves by resisting the dualism between the objective research discourse and subjective, aesthetic experience into which debates on artistic research so readily fall. Instead of being regarded as a wholly subjective operation, the application of concepts to an artwork is understood as a process in which new concepts join those already in operation, to create an interplay of comparison and contrast that demonstrates the power of art to stimulate thought. Kant’s and Adorno’s joint insistence on concepts never being adequate to the work is found in the recognition that any claim made with regard to the nature of the work will be made not in the interests of being adequate to it but of stimulating the constellation that surrounds it. Furthermore, there is the Kantian principle that every concept

requires sensory application (or its intuition, in Kantian terms) that can be translated here as the idea that every concept creates or requires some form of aesthetic expression, that in turn will invite more concepts. Let's move now from talk of concepts in general to examples of concepts in the particular.

### Layering, data and play in 'The Taste of Tree?'

Harty and Sawdon's study of synaesthetic drawing is inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his writings on the work of Paul Cézanne (Merleau-Ponty 1993a, 1993b, 1993c). Synaesthesia is an integral part of Merleau-Ponty's account of the embodied nature of perception. This is 'synaesthesia' in its original Greek meaning, i.e. the fusion of or communication between the senses, and not necessarily the neurological condition that it has become in modern psychology. The body, Merleau-Ponty argues, is not a thing but a set of relations through which human being in the world is coordinated and organized (which he terms a 'schema'), and one sense finding a correlation in another is one of the coordinating relationships through which the body becomes experience-of-a-world. This coordination is evident in perception, as the following passage from Merleau-Ponty, quoted by *humhyphenum*, illustrates:

Honey is a particular way the world has of acting on me and my body. And this is why its various attributes do not simply stand side by side but are identical insofar as they all reveal the same way of being or behaving on the part of honey. The unity of the object does not lie behind its qualities, but is reaffirmed by each one of them: each of its qualities is the whole. Cézanne said that you should be able to paint the smell of trees.

(Merleau-Ponty 2004: 62; quoted in *humhyphenum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012)

Honey is singled out by Merleau-Ponty because there is a correspondence between its look and its feel; the sensations do not occur as remote or wholly distinct qualities. Cézanne is important for Merleau-Ponty because the paint on his canvases does not just sit as the appearance of the objects depicted but instead, according to Merleau-Ponty, acquires a recalcitrance of its own that speaks of how bodies (Cézanne's and ours) and technologies (paint, canvas and brushes) interlock in an intersubjective experience of environments (mountainside and gallery). When Cézanne says you should be able to paint the smell of trees, this is taken by Merleau-Ponty as an expression of the idea that Cézanne's paintings do not represent the world from afar but rather make tangible or give material form to the body schema as a network of relations, including synaesthesia. It is the extent to which this recalcitrance, and its capacity to bring to the fore the fundamentally synaesthetic nature of experience, that *humhyphenum* wants to explore through drawing. As the artists declare: 'Informed by the notion of Cézanne's that it is possible "to paint the smell of trees", [we] questioned whether it would be possible to draw the taste of tree?' (*humhyphenum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012).

This piece of artistic research has been chosen as an example because its context and, therefore, the subject to which it wishes to contribute – the relationship between drawing and phenomenology – are clear, and because the published account includes reproductions of a large number of the drawings and extended commentary on methods and evaluation of the works. Therefore, with the means to compare context, practice and commentary, I should be able to identify how the concepts operating in the artistic research might or might not be acting upon one another. The drawings take a variety of forms: lists of words reproduced on screen arising from discussion ‘to uncover whether there were common elements within [the artists’] collective memories of the experience of tree and to develop a collective experience through a shared encounter’ (*humhyphenhum* (Harty and Sawdon) 2012); a series of video stills from recordings of marks made on paper, and of the tree itself, including shadows cast presumably by Harty and Sawdon; and a series of black and white digital prints in which elements from the first two sets of works (text and video stills of drawings and the tree) are layered together. Interestingly, *humhyphenhum*’s exposition of the project does not distinguish between ‘art’ and ‘research’, but simply provides one-word headings covering the various stages undertaken: ‘introduction’, ‘context’, ‘approach’, ‘process’ and ‘summary’. I am not suggesting that the art–research distinction needs to be drawn. I make the point purely with regard to evaluating whether or not there are any traces of the ‘doctored–neutered’ concern in the project. The possibility that research methods or theory might constrain practice is addressed by Harty and Sawdon here:

The research proposes drawing as phenomenology rather than a collaborative critique of phenomenology per se. ‘The Taste of Tree?’ adopts Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and/or Cézanne’s statement, as points and prompts for departure. Therefore, through dialogue and ... meaningful play, [we] inevitably pervert the original starting point by responding to discoveries during the process. The research does not attempt to illustrate or critique either Merleau-Ponty’s or Cézanne’s position concerning the connection of the senses. However, it does take as a point of interest the possibility that we may all experience synaesthesia. ‘The Taste of Tree?’ provides a critical commentary of the practice as research.  
(*humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012)

The artists’ methods are phenomenology and play. The artists’ concept of phenomenology is manifest in their claim that their drawings contain ‘phenomenological data’ which constitute ‘recordings’ of ‘the experience of tree’. The final series of drawings, made by layering together the previous works, is understood to be the collation of ‘the phenomenological experiences of tree recorded in the various drawings’. This is reminiscent of the work of Edmund Husserl, and his procedure (called the *epoché*) of bracketing experience from the world in order to describe the first-person point-of-view of experience rather than the objects in the world that are experienced. Alongside this desire to capture data is an additional commitment to a method of play as ‘perversion’ or ‘distortion’. ‘Meaningful play’ is when ‘the

process of drawing commences through openness and responsiveness to discovery, and a willingness to “play” with marks, media and concepts’ (*humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012). The project ‘adopts Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and/or Cézanne’s statement, as points and prompts *for departure*’, and embraces the fact that the processes of dialogue and meaningful play will ‘inevitably *pervert* the original starting point’ (*humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012; emphases added). It is in the new forms or appearances created by these ‘perversions’ where discoveries might lie.

Phenomenology and play are combined in the following way by *humhyphenhum*. First, ‘phenomenological data’ are gathered through the production of drawings of a tree (recorded on video) and text-drawings (or notes) on the memory of trees. Then, the two sets of data are layered together (in some cases using video stills) to create a series of final images that stand as ‘multi-sensory perceptual drawings of the experience of tree’ (*humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012). The working assumptions are that ‘the phenomenological data [from the earlier stages of drawing the tree and describing memories of trees] are embedded in selected drawings’, and that the layering process is a matter of ‘select[ing] the phenomenological data considered to have the most potential to record the experience of tree’. Although it is not stated as such, the implication is that the layering of the ‘phenomenological data’, assumed to be embedded in each drawing, will promote finished works that display or promote synaesthesia. However, at the final stage, the focus is on identifying the sensory modalities that are present or implied in the final drawings based on the ‘data’ gathered during the first stage, rather than in what might have been evoked or achieved by the second, layering process. There are comments to the effect that ‘the senses of sight (hollow, glimpse, peep, etc.), sound (screaming, rasping, silence, etc.), touch (scaly, dry, rough, etc.) and smell (musty, damp) were considered to be present in the equivalent marks (text)’ in one of the early text-drawings, to give one example. It is also noted that the taste of trees did not emerge.

The final, digitally layered drawings are considered briefly in *humhyphenhum*’s exposition of the work. They are acknowledged as being a collation that ‘bring[s] together through the equivalent marks, created during the various drawings, the connected senses of sight, sound, touch and smell’, but what happens through the act of bringing-together is not addressed. This is a pity, since some potentially very interesting transformations occur through their combination of drawing and text. In *Layer 3 Digital Drawing 2* (Figure 7.1), larger text has been layered over smaller text several times. Some words obscure others, and a foreground–background effect is created. With a series of indistinct areas of light and dark in the far background, the text forms a pulsing, cascading effect that evokes arteries and swaying foliage. This is not to say that the text becomes tree-like; the effect is not one of representation. Rather, it is the movement from text as verbal signifier to text as a visual signifier, as a form that is suggestive of an embodied, sensory encounter. Even the concealment of one word by another puts one in a position of wanting to reach in and recover the prior meaning, when one’s customary relationship with a text is to follow the line. These effects do not necessarily move in the



**FIGURE 7.1** *humhyphenhum* (Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon), *The Taste of Tree? Layer 3* *Digital Drawing 2*, 2011. © Deborah Harty and Phil Sawdon. Courtesy the artists.

direction of taste, but they are nevertheless exemplifications of the inter-sensory or inter-modal shifts that constitute the body schema in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

### 'Points and prompts for departure'

How does 'The Taste of Tree?' help to demonstrate the emphasis placed on concepts by Kant and Adorno? In more specific terms, how can we understand *humhyphenhum*'s drawings as a contribution to ideas of art and synaesthesia as inspired by the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne, where the always, already active nature of concepts



at work in the art–research relation become a force that potentially enlivens the art practice? This is where the focus on concepts makes a difference. What is available to us in the proposal that drawing might be able to evoke a synaesthetic experience of a tree? This is going to be potentially all that can be considered to belong to the concepts of ‘drawing’, ‘synaesthesia’ and ‘tree’. Talking in terms of concepts obliges us to consider that an idea or an object or anything we reach for in theory or practice is not a singular thing with a single identity but something with a history that can be viewed from a number of perspectives and can occur as a field of possibilities. When put in this way, reviewing the concepts of ‘drawing’ and ‘synaesthesia’ might sound a lot, and too much to take on, given the history of drawing, the various forms drawing can take, and the extent of the psychological literature on synaesthesia. Fortunately, the question asks how the former might play a role in the latter, so it is not both concepts in isolation that have to be considered, but how they might bear upon one another. Another source of good fortune is that *humhyphenhum* has already identified the field of enquiry relating to synaesthesia that is of interest: the style of painting practised by Cézanne, and the relevance it has for Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetics. This then is the context against which we can begin to explore the possibilities offered by the concept of drawing. The role of context is, in one sense, to limit the possibilities of drawing. However, the limit arises not through a simple, across-the-board restriction but through an examination of how the possibilities within drawing might advance, extend or challenge the ideas from Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne on synaesthesia. What the concept ‘tree’, including the individual tree that is selected, adds to this process will also affect the play of ideas. This is the difference that the emphasis on concepts makes: reframing an arrangement that looks as if one concept might be confining another, so that it becomes a process of interaction in which all concepts stimulate one another.

Given that our focus is on the potential that all or any concepts bring to the art–research relation, one approach, I suggest, would be to consider the concepts that Merleau-Ponty brings to painting, and to identify which of these in turn might be fruitful when applied to drawing, as a way of showing how drawing can extend his thesis on the synaesthetic nature of embodiment. The exposition given by *humhyphenhum* suggests the artists did not do this. It is acknowledged that ‘drawing is a phenomenological process’ but this is interpreted to mean that drawing is ‘capable of documenting the process of drawing and the thoughts of the drawer’, which is not Merleau-Ponty’s understanding. Does the absence of deeper engagement with Merleau-Ponty matter? To argue that *humhyphenhum* is obliged to adopt Merleau-Ponty’s concept of painting or mark-making could be seen as another instance where the research process limits the freedom of the artist. But I am not saying that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of painting has to be adopted. Rather, it and surrounding concepts deserve to be considered as a way of identifying what is present within them that might be taken up and adapted or exercised by *humhyphenhum* to form their approach to drawing. This would require there to be some engagement with his writing, and commentaries by secondary authors for amplification and interpretation. Again, this is not to extract material to be followed, but to expand the

artists' repertoire of approaches. There might be reluctance to do this, as the artists might have their own ideas about how synaesthesia can be evoked through drawing.

In fairness to *humhyphenhum*, they do state that 'The Taste of Tree?' 'adopts Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and/or Cézanne's statement, as points and prompts for *departure*' (*humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012; emphasis added). Is this 'departure' as in 'we are moving to a different domain and leaving Merleau-Ponty behind', or as in 'a starting point that nevertheless frames and informs the discoveries that are made'? I think it is more of the former than the latter. The evocation of synaesthesia is identified with the action of layering, and phenomenology and becomes a belief in the capacity of mark-making to capture phenomenological data. This means an understanding of the evocation of synaesthesia enters the project which does not refer to the theory proposed by Merleau-Ponty, and so means the artists are now working in a fashion that is removed from the concepts present in the territory at the start of the project. This is not a problem as far as *humhyphenhum* is concerned. They move on to exercise concepts of 'data', 'layering' and 'play' in their work. As my study of *Layer 3 Digital Drawing 2* shows (Figure 7.1), themes of 'light and dark', 'reveal and conceal', 'artery', 'foliage', and the interplay between verbal and visual signification emerge, and there is probably more to be said on the relationship between the initial and the emergent concepts. The idea that the drawings might be regarded as palimpsests is particularly evocative, given the artists' interest in memory. So there is scope for a constellation of concepts to be formed here. It is just that *humhyphenhum*'s focus on 'data', 'layering' and 'play' moves the potential constellation away from the initial ideas of embodiment and synaesthesia in Merleau-Ponty, towards notions of 'memory', 'revelation', 'concealment' and 'text as image'.

What is useful about *humhyphenhum*'s 'departure' in 'The Taste of Tree?' is that it shows how my method requires there to be a relationship between the concepts in the research question and in the practice. The model of the autonomy of art in research that I am proposing makes the relationship between concepts *across all sources* – theory, practice, research context, research question, etc. – central, for it is the impact that the concepts *seen as being closest to the practice* have on the others that demonstrates the autonomy of art in research. It is not a question of finding the right practice for the project but of being attentive to the constellation that forms between the concepts in the practice and its context or enquiry. I want to remain with the terms of *humhyphenhum*'s project, as they contain all the elements necessary to demonstrate the autonomy of art in research, although the direction I take will depart from the choices made by Harty and Sawdon.

Let us review the concepts that Merleau-Ponty brings to painting, in order to identify one that might be fruitful when applied to drawing. There are several to consider. In his essay 'Cézanne's Doubt', emphasis is placed on painting as *expression*, where 'expression' is offered as the presentation of the 'viscous, equivocal appearances' that occupy perception, rather than the immediate perception of objects themselves (Merleau-Ponty 1993a: 68). Alternatively, there is the idea of painting *as writing* that is explored in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' and, in particular, the *hesitancy* of Matisse, waiting to find the mark that would 'evoke some of the

[marks] that might have taken its place and were rejected', where the making of marks is likened to the finding of words (Merleau-Ponty 1993b: 83). There is also the claim, in 'Eye and Mind', that Cézanne's painting 'relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all "autofigurative"', that is to say, painting, which conventionally records already existing objects, in this instance *figures itself*; it is a record of *its own coming-into-being* (Merleau-Ponty 1993c: 141). It is one of the quandaries of any enquiry, at the level of study or research: which avenue(s) should I pursue when faced with several possibilities? The conceptual model I have drawn from Kant and Adorno offers guidance that is not too dissimilar from what might be given generally: which direction(s) have concepts bearing upon one another in the most fruitful or contentious or compelling way, where each of these properties can be understood as occasions in which concepts are colliding with one another? There cannot be a single, right answer, because we are examining how one concept, 'drawing', might contribute to or expand a topic that is populated by many concepts.

### Autofiguration

I propose we delve deeper into 'autofiguration'. It occurs only once, in the essay 'Eye and mind', but it appears to be significant because it introduces the idea that a painting can have a double nature: it can be a depiction of a scene while also being a display of its own material properties as a painting. It seems to share the property that Merleau-Ponty makes central to the body schema of being simultaneously about the world and in the world, seer and seen, toucher and touched. A concept that applies to both art-making and the body looks promising. However, to follow this path, we need to get a fuller sense of what it means to be autofigurative. The concept is introduced in the passage below. Although Cézanne and Klee are the artists who are discussed most often in this section of Merleau-Ponty's essay, no one painter is identified as the subject in this section. Klee is mentioned, although it is the work of Cézanne, specifically his late watercolours, that is addressed in the preceding paragraph. Here is the passage:

The painter's vision is not a view upon the *outside*, a merely 'physical-optical' relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible. Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all 'autofigurative.' It is a spectacle of something only by being a 'spectacle of nothing,' by breaking the 'skin of things' to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world. Apollinaire said that in a poem there are phrases which do not appear to have been *created*, which seem to have *shaped themselves*. And Henri Michaux said that sometimes Klee's colours seem to have been born slowly upon the canvas, to have emanated from some primordial ground, 'exhaled at the right spot' like a patina or a mold.

(Merleau-Ponty 1993c: 141–142; original emphases)

'Autofigurative' is a difficult notion. At least two concepts of painting are presented: a 'merely "physical-optical"' depiction of an 'outside', which is rejected, and a 'coming-to-itself of the visible' that is achieved by a 'concentration' created by 'the things of the world'. The latter notion is informed by observations from Apollinaire and Michaux to the effect that some phrases in a poem and some colours on a canvas respectively seem to have appeared autonomously, without having been created. Further clarification is given in a footnote immediately after the word 'autofigurative' containing a translator's comment: 'The spectacle is first of all a spectacle of itself before it is a spectacle of something outside of it'. The importance of working through these complexities is that an idea is present concerning the autonomous power things have to reveal insights into the nature of vision as it is understood in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. The suggestion is that, as well as being the depiction of a scene, some paintings also display their own production, not in the sense of being documentary evidence of a past event but as an ever-present interlocking or 'concentration' of elements that allows the work to function as depiction in the first place. Writing from the point of view of a person who draws, I wonder how this autonomous power of things might be applied to produce drawings of a tree, after *humhyphenhum*, that can bring new forms and, therefore, new concepts to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, including the role played by synaesthesia within it.

From a philosophical perspective, there is an important relationship between autofiguration and the synaesthetic nature of embodied perception that first inspired *humhyphenhum*. Communication between the senses is one of the coordinating relationships through which the body becomes experience-of-a-world, for Merleau-Ponty. In his philosophy, the body is a schema: a set of relations through which human being in the world is coordinated and organized, on account of the fact that it is seer and seen, toucher and touched, and where sight and touch open on to one another (to give just one example of synaesthesia). One sense opens on to another because intersensory communication is part of the same orientation process as that exercised by the-hand-which-touches being part of the-world-to-be-touched. *What is seen* is held in place and contextualized by a body *in space surrounded by objects that are heavy, light, smooth or immovable*. On this understanding, sensation is not just receptivity, as it is conceived by modern empiricism. For a stimulus to be a stimulus, there has to be the necessary and appropriate conditions of receptivity within the human subject in order to translate the wealth of possible experiential information around her into the kind of material that can become stimuli in the first place, that is to say, *that can become meaningful for her*. Receptivity is therefore always already *organized*, where the organization is provided by the body being an organism located in the world.

The significance of this for painting and drawing, I think, is that the technologies used in art-making, insofar as they have a relationship with the body, become part of this process of mutual, synaesthetic coordination. In an autofigurative work, the claim is that we don't just get to see the scene depicted but also get to see the technologies at work as objects in the world, e.g. canvas, paint, brushes, as a result

of their interlocking with a body schema, *going beyond themselves as objects in the world* to reach a point where they enable depiction. A dab of paint is not merely the appearance of a region of mountainside according to its position in a grid on a canvas, but also an expression of paint's capacity to become thick or thin, to be smeared, to become an expanse, to hold its colour or have it blended, to rest on a surface with a variety of thicknesses and densities, and to leave a mark that can be an extension of a gesture from the brutal to the intimate. Equally, it is because paint on a canvas can be articulated by a body to be thick, thin, smeared, lumped, etc., i.e. because its properties display the push and the pull of body–paint–canvas interaction, that paint on a canvas can be viewed as a painter wrestling with the physical demands of depicting a mountainside. Properties are not bound up within themselves in the body schema but are pregnant with inclinations towards other aspects or regions or articulations in the schema. It is this capacity for a property to move beyond itself that Merleau-Ponty is seeking to express through his references to synaesthesia, seer–seen relationships and autofiguration. The concept of autofiguration is therefore valuable for drawing because it places emphasis on materials as objects in the world whose status as such is waiting to be explored in conjunction with an artist's reflection on their body as an object in the world, with a view to exploring what the interlocking capacities and resistances of object and body reveal of themselves and what they depict or display beyond themselves.

### **The articulatory of materials and indexical drawing**

My intention here is to show how the attention paid to concepts contained in 'The Taste of Tree?' can create interactions that generate both artistic and research possibilities, which is to say that the latter is not at the expense of the former. I shall not actually undertake a new drawing project based on 'The Taste of Tree?', but instead shall indicate what I think would be the principal questions for an artist–researcher who wanted to conduct drawing of a tree in relation to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. These will be questions that demonstrate how ideas about drawing and preparations for drawing respond to the concept of autofiguration, not in a reactive, subservient manner, but as concepts that bring meanings and possibilities to the enquiry.

Two questions that would have to be confronted in the initial stages, I think, are: (1) which materials are to be used?; and (2) are any clues regarding the choice of materials given by the fact that these should be materials whose properties, in conjunction with the artist's body, lead to interlocking capacities and resistances that speak about themselves and what lies beyond themselves? The latter question effectively asks about the articulatory of materials, where the double meaning of 'articulatory' – flexibility of bodily movement, and fluency of expression – is entirely appropriate. One of the properties of artists' materials is their capacity to be manipulated, since the abundance of qualities and effects that arises from their manipulation is arguably what many artists want to explore in their practice. However, if, in delving into the concept of autofiguration, we find that a

new relationship is opened up around the articulacy of materials, between the properties of a material and how those properties can express ideas or forms beyond themselves, *and* that this relationship is central to the phenomenology of the body that inspired the project, *then the choice of material becomes vital*, becomes an issue in itself that warrants attention in the research. Autofiguration, taken literally, means a work *that figures itself*: the technologies and materials of production are not in the service of a planned or predetermined image but are agents in the process of production, acting on and with the artist's body and leaving traces of their interaction with the body on the canvas or recording surface. The focus on autofiguration makes the question of the choice of material vital because how the selected material flexes and flows, i.e. the effects it is capable of achieving, will influence or codetermine, with the artist's body, the range of interactions that are possible and the marks that are made.

Question (2) asks if articulacy gives any clues as to which material might be used. As an artist embarking upon a drawing project that engages with autofiguration, do I go with the already flexible, i.e. established, drawing materials, such as charcoal, graphite, pastel and paint (that have been developed to get them to the point where they are highly articulate) or with unconventional materials, whose capacity for expression has not been exercised frequently before? The history of drawing confirms that the choice of materials is an important question. The use of unconventional materials is itself now conventional, for example, Cornelia Parker's *Explosion Drawing* (2001) made using charcoal, sulphur and saltpetre,<sup>1</sup> Richard Long's *River Avon Mud Drawings, Ten Mud-Dipped Papers* (1988),<sup>2</sup> and the gunpowder-on-paper drawings by Cai Guo-Qiang from 1991.<sup>3</sup> A more complex example is *This Earth* (2007) by Daro Montag: a series of enlarged microscopic slides, backlit on projection boxes, showing light, dark, and brightly-coloured, crystal-like shapes, where the shapes are the result of microbes eating into the specially treated film after it has been buried in soil and then retrieved after one month (Montag 2007).

These are instances of what might be called 'indexical drawing': drawings that do not aim to create a representational likeness between image and object or rely upon the eye-governed hand of the artist, but instead manipulate the capacity for the causal interactions between objects to create marks. 'Index' in this context is one of the three terms C.S. Peirce uses to classify signification: *icons* signify through resemblance, e.g. photographs; *symbols* through convention, e.g. 'red' for 'stop'; and *indices* through causal interactions, e.g. smoke as an indicator of fire (Peirce 1982: 53–56). Of course, unconventional materials can be used to create representational drawings, e.g. the likeness of a chocolate-lover drawn on paper in chocolate. In such cases, an important factor in the drawing process will be the degree to which the material can be manipulated by the human hand in the interests of achieving a resemblance. However, in the case of indexical drawing, interest lies not in the pliability of the material in the service of representation but in its capacity to have an effect on the materials or conditions that surround it, where the effect is any mark or form or display left as the trace of the causal interaction between materials. This capacity for effect is arguably another definition of the articulacy of material.

It is not a surprise, therefore, that the materials adopted by the artists above – sulphur, gunpowder, treated film – are ones which are heavily pregnant with affect, the capacity to have an effect. With these examples in mind, the range of materials that might be used includes all those with the capacity to leave a mark, where the mark will be significant – i.e. it'll signify, it will stand for something – because it will have been made by an object in the world with properties that are articulated to create forms with associations that reach far beyond what the object is customarily understood to be.

Focusing on autfiguration has brought us to an appreciation of the articulation of materials, but this carries complexities of its own. Whether or not we open them up for further enquiry could be decided by the extent to which concepts drawn from reflection on articulation mesh in an inviting or challenging way with those in the question of how drawing might play a role in synaesthetic or multisensory experience, as indicated by Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne. In this instance, the relationship between the articulation of material and synaesthesia looks very promising indeed. This is not surprising, and possibly to be expected, given that the account of articulation presented here has been extracted from a metaphysics that rests upon the principle of one modality speaking to another. Here is a short section from the paragraph where Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea that synaesthesia is fundamental to perception:

The form of objects is not their geometrical shape: it stands in a certain relation to their specific nature, and appeals to all other senses as well as sight. The form of a fold in linen or cotton shows us the resilience or dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material... One sees the weight of a block of cast-iron which sinks in the sand, the fluidity of water and the viscosity of syrup. In the same way, I hear the hardness and unevenness of cobbles in the rattle of a carriage, and we speak appropriately of a 'soft', 'dull', or 'sharp' sound.

*(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 229–230)*

The fact that a fold in linen can suggest dryness or temperature, for Merleau-Ponty, is an expression of the body schema's status as a network of interlocking or corresponding modalities. For an artist-researcher interested in how the articulation of materials might be put to work in extending the importance given to synaesthesia by Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne, the above passage could be read as an invitation to consider how any material, not just linen, iron or syrup, might be articulated in relation to other materials in order to display the schematic principle of one facet or modality expressing itself in another. As an exercise in the mining of a concept, the articulation of materials had been extracted from Merleau-Ponty's notion of autfiguration via indexicality, and defined as the capacity of one material to leave a mark on another, where the significance of the mark is attributable to the fact that the material-on-material interaction has properties that reach far beyond what the materials are understood to be in isolation.

## Resemblance and 'aboutness'

One question posed by the articulacy of materials is whether or not a drawing should bear some resemblance to its object. Up until now, I have been emphasizing the 'auto' in autofigurative, stressing the trace-element nature of the drawing as a record of its own production. But there is also the 'figurative' part of the word. The works of Cézanne, Giacometti and Matisse studied by Merleau-Ponty, for example, *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (c. 1900), *Portrait d'Aimé Maeght* (1960) and *Baigneuse aux Cheveux Longs* (1942) (to name one work for each artist respectively; Johnson 1993: 153–156), are figurative or representational. But, it could be argued, the appearance of a mountain needs to endure to tell us that *some seeing has been done by the body* (a body that 'sees and is seen') whose marks, brushstrokes and distributions of colour fill the canvas. If, in contrast to this, emphasis is put on the articulacy of materials and a drawing is produced indexically, that is, without a component of visual resemblance, then the danger is that the physical nature of the material has been detached from any sense of what it might mean *to see* with that material. This implies that indexicality and the articulacy of materials might not be appropriate lines of enquiry for a study exploring the forms drawing might take when pursuing the claims made for synaesthesia by Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne.

The question of whether or not the drawings should bear some resemblance to their object can be answered in two ways: either on its own terms, drawing out what is meant by 'resemblance', or in relation to the main research question. Although, on this occasion, the two routes become one, as my response to the first makes the connection with synaesthesia, from the research question, explicit. Focusing on 'resemblance', I suggest above that it needs to be present to sustain the relationship between the seer and the seen. But, in isolating this relationship, there is the danger that vision gets abstracted as the principal formulation of the body schema, when Merleau-Ponty defines the body as a cross-modal network of sensors, the sensed and the situated. The point is not whether an emphasis on resemblance ties us to the sense of sight. Although resemblance is more often than not regarded as a visual concept, it applies to other senses as well, for example, one sound can resemble another, and one texture can resemble another. Rather, the difficulty is whether concentration on resemblance makes us assume that perception can only occur through *being like* the object perceived. One of the central claims of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is that perception is not an act of duplication but a state of being in the world, with the body as a series of in-the-world coordinations and cross-referrals that become *about* the world. This is a key difference: perception as duplication versus perception as 'aboutness'. Phenomenologists call 'aboutness' intentionality. It is the idea that experience is experience *of something*, and a central project of phenomenology is to show how the structure of experience (one thing) is such that it constitutes experience *of a world* (two things).<sup>4</sup> The structure of experience in Merleau-Ponty's case is the body schema.

'Aboutness' is not as straightforward a notion as 'resemblance', although some might argue that what it means for one thing to resemble another is far from straightforward. But an observation from Merleau-Ponty can help:



A woman passing by is not first and foremost a corporeal contour for me, a coloured mannequin, or a spectacle; she is 'an individual, sentimental, sexual expression'. She is a certain manner of being flesh which is given entirely in her walk or even in the simple click of her heel on the ground, just as the tension of the bow is present in each fibre of wood ... If I am also a painter ... there will be in the painting not just 'a woman' or 'an unhappy woman' or 'a hatmaker'. There will also be an emblem of a way of inhabiting the world, of treating it, and of interpreting it by her face, by clothing, the agility of the gesture and the interior of the body – in short, the emblems of a certain relationship with being.

(Merleau-Ponty 1993b: 91)

The 'simple click of her heel' does not resemble the woman passing by but is *about* her in that 'her way of inhabiting the world' is distributed through all the bodily actions and material expressions that constitute her world. The passage is from Merleau-Ponty's essay, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', on style in painting. 'Autofigurative' does not appear in the essay, but his thoughts on style are effectively preparation for the concept. Although we might think of style as an object, a signature, a way of being that we are in charge of and can reproduce at will, it operates ontologically for Merleau-Ponty as the way entities – not just humans, for 'the tension of the bow is present in each fibre of wood' – carry themselves in the world, with all the properties and manners they exhibit and actions they conduct occurring as elements signifying their comportment towards other things. An object and a technology can be said to *have a style* in as much as they lend themselves to certain ways of being. The key phrase is 'lend themselves': the nature of an object or tool is not bundled up within itself but expressed through the relations and exchanges it offers to embodied beings. My worry was that I had emphasized the 'auto' in 'autofigurative' at the expense of the 'figurative' part. What this observation does is show the 'auto' is automatically 'figurative': any application or employment of a material by an artist will be *about that action* because the mark that is made will be an index (or causal trace) of the interaction between material, the surface it meets, and the artist's body, where the interaction is part of the schema that constitutes bodily being in the world. 'Aboutness' is ensured on the grounds that any index will be the expression of an interaction between bodies and objects that is the basis of perception understood in Merleau-Pontian terms as one thing inclining towards another.

There is one other concept that warrants articulation: the concept of 'tree'. A tree is selected as the object of study by *humhyphenhum* because of Merleau-Ponty's remark that 'Cézanne said that you should be able to paint the smell of trees' (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 62; quoted in *humhyphenhum* [Harty and Sawdon] 2012). 'Tree' deserves attention firstly on account of the importance attached to concepts by Kant and Adorno. It cannot be taken as a simple, straightforward reference to a particular object but needs to be regarded as part of the cluster of concepts that make up the research question and, on the theory of knowledge presented here, as

a contributor to the generation of possibilities undertaken by the cluster. It also warrants attention because of the nature of Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics, and the significance that objects and their representation acquire in a philosophy where all things are understood as articulations of a body schema. The object to be depicted does not sit behind a screen or grid but is one of the 'limbs' in the autofigurative process. The slopes of Montagne Sainte-Victoire are *spaces that incline a paintbrush-wielding body in front of a canvas to pause and place a dab of paint before they are surfaces that are being imitated*.

Similarly, a tree makes a range of bodily orientations possible to the artist. Is it drawn up close or at a distance? Are root, trunk and branch covered, or one particular aspect? Does one focus on the object or the environment of which it is a part, e.g. the ground around its roots, or the spaces visible between its branches and twigs? Does one stand still and record one side, or exploit the fact that it is an object one can walk around and draw whilst moving? Then there are the possibilities to be considered if an indexical approach is adopted. The ambition will not be to adhere to appearance through resemblance but to explore the tree as a series of mark-making or trace-making possibilities, with interest in how the tree as a network of materials and joints can be prompted by the artist to leave marks that are somehow about the artist's presence before the tree. Is the trunk wrapped with paper and then unwrapped, to collect scuffs from the bark and the moss that might become expressions of the force with which the tree was wrapped? Might pencils be hung from branches so that lines are made across sheets of paper underneath as the wind blows? Merleau-Ponty refers to honey as a substance whose properties work across each other synaesthetically. Given the viscosity shared by honey, tree sap, maple syrup and olive oil, might one of these be adopted as a medium? Could the leaves that gather under a tree in autumn become the source of a trace, possibly via footsteps made through them or their tendency to turn to mulch over time?

## Concepts and the autonomy of art in research

The focus of my exploration has moved from synaesthesia to autofiguration and then to the choice of material in the light of autofiguration, which has in turn led to the possibility of adopting an indexical way of working. To get to the point where indexicality is recognized as an approach to drawing that can be articulated in Merleau-Pontian terms, and where his philosophy provides a way of thinking through how a medium can be both about itself and what lies beyond itself, is already a significant conclusion. The fact that it would most likely take the form of a chapter like this, and has been reached without producing any drawings, might be judged unfortunate, especially given the ambition of demonstrating the power of art practice. But such a response would have to assume that the careful thinking through of the possibilities prior to picking up a piece of charcoal, a twig or jar of honey is not part of an artist's practice. Because of the importance assigned by the concepts of autofiguration and indexicality to material, the selection of material and the anticipation of how it might be articulated in relation to the object of study are

vital. There will be many ways in which the material can be exercised, each one introducing new elements and, therefore, new concepts that will begin to act on those already present. Let us adopt olive oil, one of the viscous liquids named above, as an example. On first hearing the idea – using olive oil to draw a tree – it sounds bizarre, but this is not a reason against it. We are secure on the premise that this is an investigation into the potential that lies between a material and an object, set against the tradition of indexical drawing and a philosophy of embodiment in which the inclination of one physical property towards another is understood to be the framework for a theory of embodied being.

All the possibilities for interaction between the oil and the tree are available. I shall consider two. (1) Is a species of tree selected that has deeply-ridged bark, so that lines of olive oil can be run from a high-point on the trunk, with the oil and all the debris that comes with it collected in a vessel at the bottom? Is the collected oil then poured down a sheet of paper that is the same height as the point from which oil was poured on the bark? The resulting drawing might consist of a translucent line (the effect of oil on paper) with specks of bark or trunk debris at various points. Or (2) the movement of the olive oil as it moves across the bark might itself become the main interest, the viscosity of the liquid evident in the speed with which the oil meets a ridge on or a hollow in the bark and then covers or fills it. Each detail on the bark would be seen in terms of the way it either resisted or welcomed the line of oil moving down the trunk. The movement might be recorded on film, where attention is paid to the lighting and the speed of the film recording so that they are sympathetic to the contrast between viscous liquid and tree surface. This might be judged as introducing a mechanical form of representation that lies outside the body schema. But all technologies and their components have a style, have a way of impinging upon one another. Some arrangements of film technologies will participate in and accentuate the liquid–surface contrast; others will do nothing for it.

Both (1) and (2) have their own effects and consequences which, on this epistemology, are also concepts that intersect with ‘synaesthesia’, ‘drawing’, ‘autofiguration’, ‘material(s)’, ‘indexicality’ and ‘tree’. They include, for example: a translucent olive oil line on paper, the lighting that brings out the translucency, the line made by the edge of the oil as it bleeds across the paper, the qualities in the edge of the olive oil as it moves across the bark’s surface, and the differences in the shifts between light and dark on bare bark and the bark consumed by the oil. I shall concentrate upon (2). The ‘movement recorded on film’ example would offer the prospect of dwelling upon how the edge of the oil down the bark makes shapes as it swells around and then consumes the ridges, troughs and growths. Much of the history and theory of drawing focuses on line, usually a line drawn by hand. Now we could add to this the line of olive oil down a tree surface. Marks are not made in the traditional sense, by hand or human expression, but instead shapes would be made as ridges and troughs are covered and filled respectively. The concept of ‘line’ (although it is not on my list above, it is implicit as an aspect of drawing) would be expanded to include the line made by a slowly descending liquid that flexes itself as the liquid meets each ridge

and indentation in the bark. This way of working might not seem indexical. It would appear not via a trace on a surface, but through a film, a representation.

However, it's the causal interaction between olive oil and bark surface that would be of principal interest. The oil does not resemble the tree, and does not signify it by convention. Instead, viscosity would allow us to see the effect of one object meeting another through the shapes it makes as it moves down the bark, swelling around or over ridges and filling troughs. Indexicality would not simply occur as the trace of an encounter but would be witnessed as an event through the properties of the olive oil, and the lighting and speed of the film arranged to draw out the properties. Thus, more concepts are made proximate: the combination of tree and viscous fluid allows us to understand indexicality not just as a trace but also as an event. Furthermore, one of the illustrations of the body schema given by Merleau-Ponty and identified by *humhyphenhum* as being emblematic of synaesthesia, honey, has been adapted and reimagined to get us to the point where viscous liquid becomes a drawing material. Phenomenology is brought closer to drawing.

## Conclusion

The description above is based on a hypothetical study. No film has been made. I poured some olive oil down a length of discarded bark to get a sense of what would happen and, as a result, made the observations regarding 'swelling', 'filling', the flexing line and the formation of shapes. But it shows how, when viewed through an epistemology that attends to the role of concepts, the elements that constitute a work of art, i.e. materials, technologies and the effects they produce, *themselves offer further concepts* that can add to those that frame the research question. The worry in the previous chapter was that the research process might restrain art practice. Here I have shown that attention to the elements that surround and constitute a work, including context and intention, leads to the formation of a constellation of concepts, where concepts are made to open on to objects and ideas not normally associated with them.

I can foresee some objections, however. The account I have given does not constitute a contribution to knowledge, it could be argued; it is just a series of observations based on first-person, subjective association. But the 'just' assumes that a series of observations based on first-person, subjective association does not amount to very much, and certainly not to a knowledge claim. They are taken to be merely thoughts that occurred to an individual at a particular time, with no epistemic significance or sticking power beyond that moment. But such a view makes its own assumption regarding the epistemological significance of association, equating it with the fleeting and the personal. To regard association as a wholly subjective process, undeserving of the status of 'knowledge', is to limit oneself to pre-Kantian epistemology and the concept of mind as an isolated arranger of impressions. What is overlooked are Kantian and post-Kantian epistemologies in which mind, sensation and experience are shown to rest upon more fundamental or broader structures that encompass subject and world, and which seek either to demonstrate

the necessary interrelationship between subject and world or purposefully challenge the distinction altogether.

This is the context in which we are working with Kant and Adorno. Their theories are not the same and neither has an explicit theory of association, but they share a commitment to the notion that concepts structure experience for a subject. Both regard concepts as being prior to a human subject's experience, and having an effect on the reality that the subject experiences, as opposed to being private events or episodes within experience. Assertions as to how one concept might relate to or associate with another, therefore, are not referring to events within a private, subjective space, but are instead addressing the scope and meaning of the concepts involved as they might apply to anyone who shares or exercises the concepts. What makes these assertions objective, or stops them being willy-nilly, is the coherence between concepts. Again, a concept on this model is not an isolated datum in an individual's head but a mode of structuring experience of the world. The veracity or rightness of that structuring is not confirmed by checking the world *directly*, since we can only access the world through concepts on this model. 'Directly' here effectively means 'independently of any concept' and assumes pure, unmediated contact with reality as it is in itself, but such a notion is highly problematic, and has no place in a model where concepts are the elements that determine the kinds of access we have to reality. Instead, confirmation is provided by other parts of the structuring process, i.e. by other experiences in as much as they will involve, for example, neighbouring concepts or concepts that cohere with one another, or concepts that don't cohere but have been brought into contact through a surprising or unconventional event, like suggesting that pouring olive oil down the trunk of a tree might constitute a drawing. Although what I proposed is odd and bizarre – poured olive oil as a drawing of a tree – there is sufficient coherence around the concepts of 'drawing', 'autofiguration', 'index', 'bark', 'ridge', 'hollow', 'line', 'viscosity', 'swell', 'consume' and 'shape' to convey how the terms interlock in a familiar fashion, while articulating proximities that are novel and unfamiliar.

Another objection that might be made to this study is that it sets out an approach that involves paying careful, if not intense, attention to the concepts that feature in the research question – i.e. synaesthesia, phenomenology, autofiguration, the properties of the materials employed – and that this has been promoted at the expense of ideas coming from *the artist's own practice*. This would seem to be a drawback, especially as the study is intended to illustrate an epistemology, based on ideas from Kant and Adorno, that asserts the power of art in research. A tension arises if 'the artist's own practice' is taken to mean the artist 'doing their own thing': a set of established, pre-determined processes that is not reflected upon, reconsidered or adapted with a view to the ways in which its concepts might mesh with those in the research question. This is not a criticism of *humhyphenhum*; the artists do not use the 'own practice' phrase or anything similar in their exposition of 'A Taste of Tree?'. It is simply me anticipating an objection based on the view that the model I propose lies beyond what might be incorporated into an artist's practice. Why shouldn't paying careful or intense attention to the concepts in the research

question, and pursuing one thread (autofiguration) in the text of Merleau-Ponty, be part of an artist's practice? The example given in this chapter has arrived at a medium, olive oil, following clues contained in Merleau-Ponty's writing. However, other media could have been chosen. The question is not a matter of finding the right medium for the topic. Running olive oil down tree bark is, after all, not the most appropriate or conventional of arrangements. It is more a question of the potential for constellation or interaction between the concepts (or elements) within an artist's practice and the concepts in the research question. Metaphor, the description of one thing as something else, highlights the different ways in which an object can be perceived, and so resists, alongside the motif of constellation, the tendency to fix an object with the right or proper description. On this basis, there is the potential for any form of practice, no matter how remote it might seem from the research topic, to open on to and interact with that topic.

The issue is over how the research project and the artist's own practice are conceived as domains, and whether or not the domains overlap, or have hermetic or porous edges. The problem lies with the word 'own', and cognate notions of 'ownership', 'belonging' and 'property'. The danger is that it turns the idea of 'the artist's own practice' into the belief that the practice is an established, pre-determined, hermetic set of operations that 'does its own thing' and so does not address or respond to the concepts or concerns in the research question. It becomes inflexible and unresponsive, and is denied the articulation or jointedness that would allow it to hook on to other concepts or concerns. The model of the autonomy of art in research presented here makes the relationship between concepts *across all sources* – theory, practice, research context, research question, etc. – central, for it is the way in which the concepts *seen as being closest to the practice* adapt and respond to the others that demonstrates the autonomy of art in research. Without there being some meshing, constellation or interaction between concepts, then the autonomy of art in research presented in this and the previous chapter cannot arise.

Both Kant and Adorno present theories of knowledge that are pre- or sub-personal. By that, I mean they explore the conditions that, with Kant, have to be in place to allow experience and, therefore, the subjective encounter of an objective world to occur, and, with Adorno, display the contingency and particularity necessary for resisting any dominating or totalizing force, including the idea of a 'subject' or 'I' as a consciousness that is independent of and distinct from its social, material context. In drawing upon their theories, I am therefore allying myself with models of thought that do not accept notions of qualities *inhering in* or *belonging to* or *being owned by* a self, in this case, an artist. The idea that 'an artist's own practice' might denote a predetermined, hermetic set of operations is treated with suspicion as it relies upon the idea of a set of operations *inhering in* or *belonging to* an individual, the artist, when Kant and Adorno are presenting theories in which individuality is the product of more fundamental operations. In Kant's case, this is a framework of categories and concepts organizing what is received by sensibility, and with Adorno, it is a series of conceptual perspectives on objects made continuous through constellation. This means that, in turning to Kant and Adorno for

epistemologies that can restore the autonomy of art to research, the autonomy comes with a condition attached: we gain the idea that all concepts can be acted upon, extended and placed in relation to new concepts by art, but have to surrender the idea that an artist can simply ‘do their own thing’, if this means they remove themselves from the constellation of concepts that allows the autonomy of art to be exercised.

Whether one refers to the model of artistic autonomy in terms of concepts presented here, or the broader notion of research as a contribution to a subject, there is in both an underlying commitment to the value or significance of a piece of research being realized in terms that can, in principle, be recognized by others, for example, the way certain concepts are brought into relation, or the way in which a series of artworks might be compared and contrasted with a certain tradition. However, the ‘own’ is a powerful concept, with a tendency to draw all major qualities to a centre, and to isolate that centre from whatever is outside or distinct from itself. It is nourished by: (1) a sense of self drawn from Cartesian, mind–body dualism, and congruent doctrines of the soul; (2) the modern notion of the genius as a source of insight; (3) theoretical models that pursue and celebrate idiosyncrasy; and (4) the alienating effect of capitalism that encourages artists to think of themselves and their work as objects for commodification, as ‘product’. These histories and ways of thinking are active in contemporary artistic thought. Their commitment to the idea that what flows from one’s own practice is inherently valuable *in its own terms, without reflection or critique* might be defensible within the arts, but it is at odds with the more discursive, communal nature of research.

## Notes

- 1 Cornelia Parker’s *Explosion Drawing* (2001) is reproduced in Downs *et al.* 2007: 70–71.
- 2 Richard Long’s *Avon Mud Drawings, Ten Mud-Dipped Papers* can be viewed on the UK Tate gallery’s website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-river-avon-mud-drawings-ten-mud-dipped-papers-ar00616> (accessed 11 March 2016).
- 3 For a selection of gunpowder-on-paper drawings by Cai Guo-Qiang, see Dexter 2005: 48–51.
- 4 ‘Intentionality’ is a key concept in early phenomenology. Previous philosophies, it is argued, have divided experience into subjects and objects, and lost the sense of a lived point of contact between mind and reality. Thus the endeavour is to find new perspectives on experience that take neither mind nor reality as their foundations, but instead approach experience ‘on its own terms’. According to the German philosopher Franz Brentano, in *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), experience is necessarily ‘intentional’, that is to say, it is always object-directed, always experience *of something*. Experience is such that there will always be some content or other of which we are aware, no matter how unprepared we are for describing what is before us. From the basic, intentional structure of experience, whereby one thing (experience) opens out to become two things (experience *of something*), phenomenology sets out to redescribe appearances. See Brentano (1973).

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# 8

## THE AESTHETICS OF RESEARCH AFTER THE END OF ART

Art has come to an end. The ‘end of art’ (sometimes called the ‘death of art’) thesis asserts that art has come to an end as a series of practices that can be clearly defined in terms of their material condition, e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking, or the modes of signification they offer, e.g. representation or expression. The thesis is elaborated by the American philosophers Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie, but has its origins in the nineteenth-century German idealism of G.W.F. Hegel. Since the transition in the twentieth century from the ready-made, through happenings and conceptual art, to socially engaged art practice and institutional critique, there is no longer a set of clearly defined actions or properties which belong exclusively to art practice. The concept of ‘art’ has had any hope of definition, essence or necessary and sufficient conditions replaced by theoretical disputes, institutional forces and divergent practices that outwardly have very little to do with what is customarily judged to be art.

What are the consequences of this state of affairs for artistic research? Most theoretical studies of artistic research rely upon a concept of art, as if art has some specific, determinate meanings and values of its own, e.g. autonomy, expression, self-reflection or visualization. There are countless references to ‘practice’ as if what an artist does is an established, agreed set of activities. But all of these accounts are arguably just forms of nostalgia or head-in-the-sand thinking that do not want to acknowledge what has happened to Western art in the twentieth century. In this chapter, I consider the implications of the death of art for artistic research, and suggest that, in the absence of a definition of art, the concept of research itself might be the source of an aesthetic. I set out the history of the ‘end of art’ thesis, and consider recent responses to it. I build upon Osborne’s notion of ‘postconceptual’ art to construct what I call an ‘epistemology of interconceptuality’. The consequence for artistic research is the proposal of a method that takes seriously the idea that anything can be art, and obliges the artist-researcher to recognize

that all the elements that might become their practice are concepts that are ripe for transformation.

## The end of art

The 'end of art' thesis has a number of origins. It is most readily identified with the introduction of the ready-made, an object taken from everyday life and 'baptized' as art. The first artwork of its kind (regarded as the first piece of conceptual art by Joseph Kosuth; Kosuth 1992: 844) was the urinal exhibited in 1917 under the title *Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp as a protest against gallery selection procedures. This is seen as an end in that there is nothing intrinsically artistic about the urinal or its production; it has simply been selected from the array of manufactured objects that could have been chosen, and exhibited. The thesis is associated with Danto and Dickie, but originates in Hegel. Danto and Dickie assert that the nature of art can be no longer found in its sensory form. They argue, independently, that art is now a matter of *an artworld*, with 'artworldliness' attributed by Danto (in 1964) to historical and theoretical context, and by Dickie (in 1974) to recognition from people in power. As Danto writes, 'to see something as art *requires something the eye cannot descry* – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld' (Danto 1992: 429–430, emphasis added), while, for Dickie, an artwork is 'a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of *candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution* (the artworld)' (Dickie 1992: 438, emphasis added).

The idea that art will cease to be rooted in its sensory, material form and instead be something decided by theoretical or discursive interests is anticipated by Hegel in his lectures on fine art in the 1820s. Art plays a vital role in Hegel's idealist metaphysics in that it is held by him to be the sensuous manifestation of thought, and it serves metaphysics by being a material form that can point the way to ever-higher thoughts, and ultimately to the realization that thought and reality are one and the same thing. However, in order to do this, art must shed its material form and become philosophy. 'Precisely, at this highest stage', Hegel writes, 'art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of a reconciled embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought' (Hegel 1975: 89). Hegel predicts this shedding of form as the dialectical progression from architecture, through sculpture and painting, to music and poetry, the sensuous component diminishing with each form. Although extremely simplistic as a history of art, the dialectic does nevertheless predict the gradual dematerialization of the work of visual art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the shifts from realism through romantic dissolution of the figure and abstract expression to the denial of the art object in conceptual art.

An immediate objection to the 'end of art' thesis is that *art still persists*, so it cannot have come to an end. Furthermore, in the last fifteen to twenty years, with the rise in biennales and international art fairs, it could be argued that art has never been in ruder health. Two responses can be given to this. The first is to say that art

has ended in the sense that the traditional form of art *as object* or *as commodity* is no longer the sole, exclusive form taken by visual works of art. This thesis was central to conceptual art. Emerging fully in the 1960s and 1970s, conceptual art questioned art's definition, its institutional setting and its ontology, that is, its status in the world as an entity, for example, whether it is an object or a relationship, whether it is fundamentally spatial or temporal. Forms other than objects were produced – instructions, performances, processes, systems, texts, appropriations and interventions – in order to present ideas rather than appearances, and to challenge conventions governing the production and commodification of art.

More recently, this anti-object, anti-commodity standpoint has been acknowledged by Rosalind Krauss's concepts of 'sculpture in the expanded field' and, latterly, the 'post-medium condition', and extended by Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. Krauss's 'expanded field' seeks to accommodate the expansion in the form of sculpture from an object to interventions in landscape and architecture, for example, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and Christo and Jean-Claude's *Running Fence* (1976). The 'post-medium condition' goes further. It signals 'the termination of the individual arts as medium-specific' (Krauss 1999: 12), and highlights the emergence of 'hybrid' or 'intermedia' practices with a complex or 'layered' nature, involving a number of objects and technologies, such as installation, film and video, that 'make a simple, unitary identification of the work's physical support impossible' (Krauss 2006: 56). The anti-art-object perspective also motivates Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. The occurrence of installations, encounters and sites of sociability as art, he suggests, is a consequence of the collapse of the aristocratic concept of an artwork as a possession that distinguishes the owner from the crowd (Bourriaud 2002: 15). On both Krauss's and Bourriaud's accounts, art thrives, but through interactions that make any appraisal in terms of the traditional concepts of art – such as medium, form, style, representation and expression – impossible.

The second response is to reassert that art has come to an end in the sense that it can no longer be recognized as belonging to a continuous, linear development within modern art. This is what the later Danto, writing in 1997, calls 'post-historical art' (Danto 2014: 12). The relation between modernism and postmodernism in the development of art, he observes, is not one of smooth transition, as one might expect, but a series of ruptures and disjunctions that presents 'no identifiable style' (Danto 2014: 12). The mark of contemporary art, 'of the visual arts since the end of modernism', he declares, is 'the lack of a stylistic unity, or at least the kind of stylistic unity which can be elevated into a criterion and used as a basis for developing a recognitional capacity, and there is in consequence no possibility of a narrative direction' (Danto 2014: 12). So art lives – there is contemporary art – but it is 'too pluralistic in intention and realization to allow itself to be captured along a single dimension' (Danto 2014: 17). This, in turn, calls for a pluralistic art criticism

which is not dependent upon an exclusionary historical narrative, and which takes each work up on its own terms, in terms of its causes, its meanings, its

references, and how these are materially embodied and how they are to be understood.

(Danto 2014: 150)

Here is not the place to discuss in detail how Danto's 'post-historical' thesis from 1997 squares with his 'artworld' thesis from 1964. On the one hand, independence from 'exclusionary historical narratives' could be taken as a departure from his 1964 suggestion that ready-mades and works of conceptual art require 'an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art' to be recognized as art (Danto 1992: 429–430). On the other, the causes, meanings and references of an artwork are very much what one would expect to constitute 'an atmosphere of artistic theory'. But the idea that an artwork has 'its own terms' is far from straightforward. It is the lack of a set of defining properties, of what is proper to art, that has put us in this position of uncertainty. To suggest that contemporary art can be understood as a matrix of causes, meanings, references, material embodiment and 'the work's own terms' arguably amounts to leaving us with some of the broadest questions in the history and theory of cultural expression and meaning. In defence of Danto, it might be argued that drawing on art history and art institutions means we can still talk about art having properties of its own; we are not having to look outside the artworld. However, externalities are introduced through the range of objects that are offered as contender artworks, and through historical and theoretical terms that need not originate within art history and theory, for example, conceptual art's reliance on philosophy, bioart's engagement with biotechnology, and socially engaged art's interaction with various professions. On this account, art persists as a series of forms – objects, events, conversations, commissions, publications, etc. – that is too pluralistic to be placed in a narrative or to be brought under a concept as a clearly defined set of practices.

It could be argued that the 'end of art' thesis is the product of a conservative approach to contemporary art *and its philosophy*. The approach might run as follows: art should be of a particular kind; art's not of that kind; therefore art is dead. In terms of philosophy, the approach might run: a philosophy of art should be able to define art conceptually; attempts to bring art under a single concept or definition have failed; therefore, art is dead. Osborne makes the point, and asserts that the more pressing issue is the inability of the recent philosophy of art 'to grasp contemporary art philosophically in its contemporaneity and hence in its decisive difference from art of the past' (Osborne 2013: 8). Instead of art being at an end, Osborne maintains that a theory of the 'contemporary' nature of art is possible that accommodates the lack of definition posed by its plural, post-medium forms. Contemporary art, he argues, is 'postconceptual' in the sense that any work of contemporary art demands to be addressed as *a specific work* and not as a specific *kind of work* (Osborne 2013: 6–7, 48). The idea that artworks might be *of a kind*, where that kind is described by traditional art historical and art critical concepts, such as medium, form, style, representation and expression, he argues, has passed. Contemporary art continues, and continues to involve drawing upon and engaging critically with historical concepts

of art, but it is just that, now, none of the concepts fit. There is instead transcategoriality: a movement across or between categories as a range of concepts are summoned and brought into contact with one another – some from art history, others from external domains – as they struggle to come to terms with the ‘expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art’, where the ‘expansion to infinity’ is the original cause of the problem of definition (Osborne 2013: 48).

Unfortunately, the idea that art is approached on the basis of each work being ‘a specific work’ suffers from the same difficulty as Danto’s appeal to a work being understood on ‘its own terms’. It begs the question of what a ‘work’ is understood to be. A work of what exactly? To single it out as an object for special attention is implicitly to draw upon the very concept that is at issue. However, one factor that salvages Osborne’s account, and gives it an advantage over Danto’s, is the suggestion that in the absence of a clear concept of art, the interpretation and evaluation of art should take the lack of definition *as its defining condition*, and look to the interaction between the concepts that are summoned and brought into contact with one another by the work. For Osborne, postconceptual art is a matter of ‘transcategoriality’, a movement across categories, some from art history, others from external domains, made in the attempt to come to terms with the ‘expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art’ (Osborne 2013: 48). Movement between categories, especially where one domain is brought into contact with another, is also a form of poetic expression, especially when the movement is made through metaphor, the description of one thing as something else. Osborne alludes to this when he declares that ‘postconceptual art articulates a post-aesthetic poetics’, where ‘post-aesthetic’ signifies that the poetics are to be found in inter-categorical exchanges rather than in aesthetic attention that conventionally focuses on matters of medium, form, style, etc. (Osborne 2013: 33). This means his position relies more upon the idea that movements between concepts triggered by categorical uncertainty are never far away from poetic or (unconventionally) aesthetic concerns, than upon the problematic notion of what a work is.

However, the nature of such transcategorial movements – what they look like and what their implications might be – is not set out by Osborne, beyond the suggestion, via brief references to Heidegger and Adorno, that the power of some works of postconceptual art lies in their generation of possibilities (Osborne 2013: 171–172). Examples of artworks that are ‘emblematic’ or ‘symptomatic’ of post-conceptuality (Osborne’s preferred words for the art–philosophy relationship; Osborne 2013: 28, 99, 117, 195) include Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), because it is ‘a complex distribution of artistic [and non-artistic] materials, across a multiplicity of material forms and practices, the unity of which constitutes a singular, though internally multitudinous work’ (Osborne 2013: 110), and the installation *We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask* (2006) by The Atlas Group (a pseudonym for the Lebanese–American artist Walid Raad), on account of its combination of philosophical critique, fictionalized narrative, video, split screens and multiple soundtracks (Osborne 2013: 200). But the accounts of the works are

merely verifiable descriptions of the various elements that they contain. We are not given an account of transcategoriality in operation.

'Art', therefore, can be said to have come to an end in the sense that it is now a word whose meaning and application cannot be contained in a single concept. It could be said that contemporary art is art *after the end of art*, in the sense that it is art produced without the stability provided by the traditional, modern definitions of medium, form, style, representation, expression, objecthood, etc. As a result of (1) the loss of these key concepts, (2) a single narrative turning into a plurality, (3) an infinity of possible forms (art can be anything), and (not discussed above but included here to acknowledge the point) (4) the collisions between definitions brought by the globalization of culture, the idea that there is anything singular or unique or determinate to art – a necessary or sufficient condition for something being art – has to be surrendered.

### An epistemology of interconceptuality

What are the consequences of this state of affairs for artistic research? Where does this leave the artist-researcher? If it is the case that art no longer has any sensory or material or formal properties that it can call its own, how do you make a contribution to the subject? I want to explore the possibility of a relationship between transcategoriality and the theory of knowledge. Even though Danto, Krauss and Osborne do not pursue respectively the implications of multiplicity, post-medium interaction and transcategoriality, the idea of movement between categories is nevertheless not far away from being the basis of a theory of knowledge. This is on the understanding that to move from one concept to another is not simply for one set of associations to be replaced with another set *with all trace of the former forgotten or erased*, but rather for the two (or more) sets to interact, *and to interact productively*. Interaction is explicit in Krauss's account of layered, post-medium practice, and implicit in Danto's multiple perspectives and Osborne's transcategoriality: 'multiplicity' and 'transcategoriality' have no meaning if the various perspectives or categories are not impinging upon one another; otherwise, there would only be a series of individual concepts without a unifying ground or principle of coordination for them to be recognized as competing, alternative perspectives. But what is the nature of the impingement?

A relevant theory of knowledge in this regard is given by Paul Ricœur (1978). It is an account of the relation between metaphors and concepts, set within the contest between the artistic or poetic generation of meaning and referential, claim-making judgment. Metaphor, as already noted, is the description of one thing as something else, e.g. the brain is a computer, time is a river. While it is customarily regarded as a literary device or a decorative novelty within language, recent studies in cognitive linguistics and philosophy show that it has more fundamental significance (Cazeaux 2007). For Ricœur, metaphor is constitutive of our capacity to describe at all. To understand it, he argues, we have to take the widest view of language possible, where language is active, in operation, and where it has an interest; in other words, language as discourse. He formulates metaphor as the intersection of metaphorical and speculative discourse. Metaphorical discourse is

the domain in which new expressions are created but not conceptualized or translated; it is where inventive metaphors receive their first outing. Instances of the discourse might be a poem, a narrative or an essay. Speculative discourse is the domain of the concept and, furthermore, the domain in which the concept can be predicated of an object. It is this discourse which focuses the play of meanings thrown up by metaphor into a proposition which revivifies our perception of the world. As intersecting discourses, the metaphorical creates the utterance '*A is B*' together with all the 'nonsensical' possibilities that it implies, and through its encounter with the speculative, the play of possibilities is resolved and *A*'s *B*-like nature is conceptualized.

The model for the metaphorical–speculative contrast is the distinction drawn by Gottlob Frege in 1892 between 'sense' and 'reference' (Frege 1952). Frege makes the distinction to show that words with the same reference can nevertheless have different senses, for example, 'Venus', 'Morning Star' and 'Evening Star' all refer to the same celestial object, but their senses – the qualities that might prompt a writer to choose one over the others, such as association, mood, character – are very different. However, for Ricœur, there is a dynamic interplay between sense and reference. The site of the interplay is predication: the creation of a sentence by attaching a verb or a verb-phrase to a noun, as in 'the cat sleeps', 'the electron orbits the nucleus'. 'In ordinary language', he explains,

we master the predicative use of abstract meanings only by relating them to objects, which we designate in the referential mode. This is possible because the predicate is such that it performs its characteristic function only in the context of the sentence, when it targets this or that relatively isolatable aspect within a determined referent ... So we master meaning by varying the conditions of use in relation to different referents. Conversely, we investigate new referents only by describing them as precisely as possible. Thus the referential field can extend beyond the things we are able to show, and even beyond visible, perceptible things. Language lends itself to this by allowing the construction of complex referential expressions using abstract terms that are already understood, i.e., definite descriptions in Russell's sense. In this way, predication and reference lend support to one another, whether we relate new predicates to familiar referents, or whether, in order to explore a referential field that is not directly accessible, we use predicative expressions whose sense has already been mastered.

*(Ricœur 1978: 297–298)*

The *sense* of a word, how we understand it in the abstract as a concept and the possible uses to which it might be put, is made apparent through the objects which the word can be used to describe and, reciprocally, the *reference* of a word, the object which a word can be used to describe, is conveyed through a description which uses words, the senses of which we understand. For Ricœur, sense and reference are not just complementary terms which happen to form a partnership



but elements which are fused together in a 'continuing Odyssey' (Ricoeur 1978: 298): established referents help to determine sense, and established senses help to determine referents. The application of this interplay to metaphorical and speculative discourse, the prime movers in this Odyssey, is evident in the final sentence of the quotation: the two discourses sustain one another through relating new predicates to familiar referents (the formation of concepts in speculative discourse), or by using predicative expressions whose sense has already been mastered to open up a new referential field (the unconventional but generative combination of terms in metaphorical discourse).

The significance of this as far as we are concerned is that metaphorical discourse is shown to be *the condition of possibility of speculative discourse*. That is to say, world-directed, claim-making speculative discourse can only get underway within the play of possibilities created when a concept from one frame of reference is applied to another in metaphorical discourse. As Ricoeur makes the point:

On the one hand, speculative discourse has its *condition of possibility* in the semantic dynamism of metaphorical utterance, [while] on the other hand, speculative discourse has its *necessity* in itself, in putting the resources of conceptual articulation to work.

*(Ricoeur 1978: 295–296)*

Speculative discourse 'has its *necessity* in itself', according to Ricoeur, in the sense that the resources of conceptual articulation 'belong to the mind itself ... are the mind itself reflecting upon itself' (Ricoeur 1978: 296). The operation of speculative discourse ultimately proceeds, he claims, 'from the very structures of the mind, which it is the task of transcendental philosophy to articulate' (Ricoeur 1978: 300). Interestingly enough, if the link to Kant's transcendental philosophy is pursued, one can find Kant relying upon analogy and metaphor in order to complete his account of the conceptual articulation performed by the mind. The most important place in his system where this happens is his account of purposiveness in the *Critique of Judgment*, discussed in this book in chapters 3 and 6 (and to a greater degree in Cazeaux 2007: 35–55). Purposiveness is the concept that is summoned when all other concepts are thrown into free play by an intuition which cannot be brought under a concept, i.e. which cannot be determined as being a particular kind of thing. It sustains experience not by finding one concept or another but by offering the playful movement between concepts that might or could apply, an operation exemplified by analogy and metaphor. What is of greater interest to this study is the fact that Ricoeur presents an account of the concept in which the capacity of a concept to be a concept, to apply to the things it does in a familiar, referential way, *is conditional upon its capacity to be stretched and extended on to other things*. Speculative discourse, the domain of the concept and claim-making, has metaphorical discourse as its condition of possibility because it is the field of possible meanings generated by metaphorical discourse that provides the ground whereupon a concept can set to work as a concept, showing how some of these meanings can be drawn upon to form a novel, insightful claim about the world.

The value of Ricœur's theory of metaphor for the artist-researcher after the end of art is that it presents transcategoriality *as its own epistemology*. That is to say, the state of being 'beyond categories' signalled by the postconceptual condition of art puts us in a position where the movement between concepts becomes significant. Movement between concepts is important for the construction of knowledge because, as is evident from metaphor theory, it tests and stretches concepts used in objective, claim-making discourse. Of course, not all unconventional pairings of concepts create metaphors. But if the movement across or between concepts is to be significant, is to stand out as something more than 'we've moved from one concept to another', then there has to be some sense in which one concept engages with or is about the other, where the engagement requires appraisal of how two seemingly incompatible concepts can open on to one another. Similarly, not all movements between concepts involve the transition between conventionally incompatible terms found in metaphor. But again, if the movement across or between concepts is to be significant, then the contact that occurs between the concepts has to be such that it stimulates appraisal of what one brings to or adds to the other.

To put it concisely and technically, and in a way that I hope will clarify terminology: the postconceptual and the transcategorial lead to an epistemology of (what is best described as) interconceptuality. In terms of the difference between 'category' and 'concept', I am treating the two as synonymous. Although the former is sometimes reserved for a fundamental series of concepts – e.g. with Aristotle and Kant – in our present discussion, they are both used to signify a class or a grouping or a kind. Is it the case that the distinction is intended to mark a contrast between categories as art historical genres of art, on the one hand, and concepts in general, on the other? No, because the postconceptual signifies that there is nothing left to distinguish art from other kinds. It is the manner in which concepts are applied to a thing in the particular, and the tensions that occur between concepts as they gather about the particular, that becomes the source of meaning and understanding now that the straightforward, singular concept–object determination of art is no longer possible. In regards to the prefixes, both 'post' and 'trans' denote 'going beyond', but are also subtly distinct in that 'post' can signify 'after' and 'critical reflection', whereas 'trans' can denote 'across', 'all', 'through' and 'transcendence'. The combined senses of 'after' and 'transcendence' could be taken to mean that, in 'going beyond' concepts, the meaning that they supply is left behind or no longer relied upon. However, this is not the case, since conceptual determination is still required. (It has to apply in order for some grasp of the particular to be possible.) Instead, the meanings from the prefixes that are intended are notions of 'across', 'all', 'through' and 'critical reflection', on the grounds that it is the critical contest *between concepts*, as opposed to a singular, concept–object relation, that now provides meaning. Because the act of 'going beyond' concepts entails attending to them as they work *upon* and *between* one another, I think the prefix 'inter', meaning 'between', 'among', 'reciprocal', is appropriate. This is not to cast doubt on the 'transcategorial' and the 'post-conceptual', but simply to affirm that the thesis on the position of concepts in relation to art contained in the 'trans' and the 'post' culminates in an 'inter'.

Underlying both transcategoriality and Ricœur's theory of metaphor is the notion of the potency of concepts: the idea that concepts are things that can be collided because they contain within themselves funds of possibility, application and implication that are brought to light through impact. In the history of philosophy, concepts are traditionally understood as principles of unity or generality: forms or domains that offer identity and commonality with regard to what would otherwise be a bundle of diverse, inchoate particulars or features. To give two examples, from Plato and Locke, introduced in chapter 1: In Plato's idealist metaphysics, concepts appear as Forms (with an upper case 'F'): perfect, singular entities existing in a higher, transcendent realm that are the original templates of every kind of physical and abstract object or state in our world, e.g. the Form of a horse, the Form of happiness. For the seventeenth-century empiricist John Locke, the mind is a sheet of 'white paper void of all characters' at birth, and we accumulate knowledge through experience by objects impressing themselves on our senses and creating in us simple ideas, such as 'whiteness' and 'hardness', or complex ideas (combinations of simple ideas), such as 'person', 'elephant' and 'drunkenness' (Locke 1997: II.i.1; II.xii.1). In the cases of Plato and Locke, concepts or ideas are entities with a uniform, singular nature that correspond to diverse, particular objects, although the question of how something uniform and singular can correspond to an indefinite series of qualitatively distinct particulars is a millennia-old philosophical problem. In Ricœur's theory, the concept still confers identity and commonality upon a group of diverse particulars, except that it nevertheless remains open to being applied to other, distinct groups. In other words, the concept has tentacles and is always reaching out to or waiting to make contact with other concepts.

### The concept as the basic unit of artistic research

This means the predicament facing contemporary artists, working after the end of art, becomes a research situation. The overwhelming number of material and virtual possibilities, interactive technologies, and historical and theoretical contexts means the choices which an artist makes are crucial. These are not going to be choices that will be pinned down to matters of medium, form, style, for that would suggest a modern sensibility at work. Rather, at best, the choices will be described as 'concepts', in the sense that certain *aspects of* or *objects from* or *attitudes towards* life are identified and described as the things which the artist reaches for or to which they are committed. Some might find the word 'concept' ambiguous. Is there an association with conceptual art? Is a distinction implied between concept and image, or between concept and object? The answer to all three questions is 'no'. I am using 'concept' in a general sense to refer to 'any meaningful thing', where 'thing' in turn is taken in its broadest possible sense to denote any kind of object (physical or abstract) or event, and 'meaningful' to indicate that the concept is public or is understood by a community. It is also the same sense of concepts that I have just claimed has tentacles. It is in keeping with the Kantian philosophical tradition of taking the organized, intelligible nature of reality – the fact that it comes to us in

the form of meaningful, graspable things – to be the result of concepts creating structure within existence. I am using ‘concept’ in this sense in recognition of the infinite material possibilities available to contemporary artists. An artist attentive to the possibilities open to them after the end of art will nevertheless be working with *something* or *some things*, and ‘concept’ allows me to refer to these things with as little metaphysical commitment as possible, to minimize any assumptions regarding the kinds of thing that the artist is using.

Given the wholly general sense that is desired, I could also possibly adopt the word ‘object’, but it has too many associations with the idea of a ‘physical thing’ and so is not helpful in the context of contemporary art. What Ricœur’s metaphor theory shows is that concepts are not fixed but tentacled: open to being stretched and creatively misapplied. Adopting ‘concept’ as the basic unit available to the artist who wishes to confront the end of art means their work becomes the practice of creating conceptual collisions in the interests of stretching what is covered by the concepts involved.

It might seem ironic, if not confusing, that I am presenting ‘concept’ as the basic unit of *postconceptual* art, to take Osborne’s term. But it is entirely appropriate. Osborne coins the term ‘postconceptual’ because, in his view, contemporary art is such that it cannot be defined by a single concept; art has to be addressed as *a specific work* and not as a specific *kind of work*. But art always involves concepts in the sense defined above because it involves things, events, materials, technologies, etc. ‘Art is constituted by concepts’, Osborne writes, ‘their relations and their instantiation in practices of discrimination’ (Osborne 2013: 48). The way an artwork embodies or exercises or instantiates its concepts, and is the occasion for relations between concepts, therefore becomes the principal means whereby art is discussed *as art*. This is not to fall back upon a prior or undefended concept of art, but simply to be consistent with the theories presented here (primarily from Osborne but consistent also to some extent with Danto and Krauss) that emphasize contemporary art’s postconceptual nature. From the point of view of research, my interest lies in how concepts operate in art, what they lead to, how they interact with one another and what they become when they are expressed. This is on the understanding that the movement between categories involves interplay or interaction between them and, as a part of the interplay, each category is expanded as it acquires meanings and associations from the other category. In other words, interconceptuality is an occasion for ‘thinking more’. It will therefore be useful to have ‘concept’ as the basic constituent of art in order to plot these movements. In the discussion of the example that follows, the things that the contemporary artist works with (taking ‘things’ in the broadest sense possible) are, first and foremost, concepts that can interact with, open on to, and ‘become about’ other concepts.

The fact that all things can be referred to as concepts forces us to tackle head on the idea that *anything* can be art: any aspect of life we care to individuate – which I am calling a concept, in the philosophical tradition from Kant, in that it is something which can be identified and located within experience – can be the foundation of a visual arts project, on the grounds that it will collide with other concepts to expand

the range of *some or all* of those involved, with its cognitive or epistemic or research content being the new conceptual understanding created through the collisions. But the danger of 'anything' is that it can be overwhelming: if any concept can be selected, where does one start? This is the existential and ethical question that any truly postconceptual practice – any practice that is not drawing upon a *kind* or *genre* from the history of art that offers a set of materials, forms and contexts to work with or against – has to face. The question is 'existential' and 'ethical' (in senses that are close to Sartre's philosophy) because it refers to a situation where there appears to be no initial concept or determination that will indicate the direction in which we might proceed, yet we are required, as artists-researchers, to proceed, to act. The question gets its power from the apparent lack of an initial concept. But the lack is only an apparent one for, on the Kantian model of the concept with which I am working, *concepts will always be in operation*, i.e. there will always be an ordered, informed awareness of the situation in which I find myself, since concepts are the basic units that confer identity, recognition and ultimately order in experience. In other words, the situation is not one of an isolated, disembodied 'I' searching around for a starting concept, but an agent located in the world, surrounded by a series of concerns, one or more of which might be chosen as the basis of an arts research project, where the intention is for these aspects of life to be enlarged or expanded through the collisions of an interconceptual research practice.

Perhaps the most important point here is whether or not these choices can be called 'choices' at all. Some might be concepts to which the artist is committed; these can reasonably be called 'choices'. However, others might be concepts that are simply reached for, that are to hand, that local conditions make available. These are arguably not choices but social and environmental elements that are constitutive of the artist being an artist in the first place, for example, reliance on a particular technology, knowledge of art history, knowledge of what an artwork can be, and possibly extending to their being a human agent capable of action, for example, a language, a culture, a body.

The contrast between commitment and availability rests upon the ontological question of how the human being is positioned in the world and, in particular, upon the relationship they have with their environment. To what extent are my properties and actions *mine* or aspects of the environment in which I find myself and which gives rise to my being? Now is not the time to answer the question, but I raise it because the fact that *all things* are in principle available to the artist means that the act of making a choice becomes highly significant, especially in a research context. It asserts that this particular set of concerns, forms, objects, etc., has been identified as one that is rich in possibilities. It is likely to open on to a series of questions or suggest lines of development, all of which will be offering concepts that might instigate a poetic or transformative effect on the initial concepts. The value of making the concept the basic unit of postconceptual art in a research context is that it turns 'I want to work in this area' into the identification of a series of concepts that can be mined as the initial, if not principal, source of associative possibility. It also means that elements that ordinarily go unnoticed because they

are rooted invisibly in a situation might surprisingly find a voice if they are recognized as domains in their own right, with properties that are customarily overlooked now seen as sources of meaning. The very fact that a choice has to be made in order for the work to come into being in a physical form – ‘I am working with this process rather than that one’, or ‘I choose to address this context rather than that one’ – means that attention will have to be paid to the distinguishing features that prompt one decision rather than another and, therefore, to what these features as concepts introduce to the other meanings at play.

So far, I have given two reasons for making ‘concepts’ the basic units of post-conceptual art: (1) it takes seriously the prospect that *anything* can be the basis of the work and, in so doing, encourages us to see all elements as having the same signifying power, i.e. it works against any art historical commitment to a particular form, representation or technology being the dominant signifier in a work; and (2) it attaches importance to the choice made by the artist in deciding where they want to situate their artistic research project, since it will be an orientation that implicitly or explicitly identifies a range of concepts as being pregnant with associative possibilities.

One more reason can be given: (3) Whatever interest or intention an artist has, it will have to be shown, it will have to be formed through media or technologies – for example, a natural language, typography, page layout, surface, mark-making or colour-supplying material, and a technology for distributing that material on a surface – and so the media or technologies are to some extent active in shaping or enabling what can be realized. The fact that a text is written will affect what is said (think of the subtle differences between written and spoken language); the layout on the page will affect the rhythm and structure of the text. The meaningfulness of an illustration, for example, a piece of data visualization, will be a result of interactions between the categories that determine what is measured, the relationships between categories that are the focus of the study, the use of colour to show volume or identity or character, and spatial arrangement to determine priority or prominence. In other words, the material manifestation of the work introduces *a range of* concepts. I emphasize ‘range’ because the nature of sensory perception is such that it cannot be contained in a single concept but, at every instant, requires an array of concepts to be available. If we try to consider something simple, such as a sheet of white A4 paper, I notice: the colour; the fact that it is not pure – there are different shades caused by blemishes and lighting conditions; as a relatively clear, clean surface, it draws my attention to the variety of objects, colours and textures that surround it; from there, I begin to look at the room in which it is set and to consider what objects, if any, might start a ‘dialogue’ with the sheet; there are the sharp lines and corners formed by the paper against its background, my desk. All the referring expressions in this list are concepts that could be developed as themes in the interests of interactions that result in novel forms or relationships between forms and, in research terms, expand the concepts involved.

It might be argued that this ascribes too much agency to media and technologies, and underplays the extent to which an artist has a prior meaning or guiding

intention in their mind that they wish to express and that determines which media or technologies are adopted. In reply, the so-called ‘prior meaning’ or ‘guiding intention’, it could be argued, in actual fact rests upon the artist’s knowledge of what can be expressed through certain media or technologies. To use language as an analogy, and to make the point in a style reminiscent of Wittgenstein, but which can also be found in phenomenology and poststructuralism: we can only speak with the words that are available to us. New words can be formed, but their meaningfulness presupposes the context and confirmation provided by existing vocabulary and frames of reference. This suggests a limitation: the idea that expression is somehow tied to the possibilities made available by media and technologies implies that artistic and intellectual autonomy and creativity are constrained by the physical means at their disposal. But this assumes a simplistic image of what it means to be autonomous and creative and to have free expression. It effectively equates autonomy and creativity with being unfettered and free to act in whatever way one desires, and relies upon them being sources that feed a mind directly, with no recourse to the environment or society in which the mind is situated. It interprets ‘constraint’ as a wholly antagonistic property, when there is scope for seeing it as a force of possibility. This is on the grounds that a form of resistance will not be wholly antagonistic but have properties that can be redirected so as to enable expression.

On this view, the idea that an artist is set within an environment and a society is important, for, in any situation of constraint, it is the environmental, social setting that provides the resources that can be mobilized in working with or through the constraint. As Kant writes of the dove in flight: she feels the resistance of the thin air and ‘might imagine that her movements would be far more free and rapid in airless space’, but the air that is felt as resistance is also the air under her wings that sustains her flight (Kant 1929: A5, B8). That which restricts also enables. In the analogy with language above, where I assert that we can only speak with the words that are available to us, the sense of possibility-within-constraint is present in the ideas of ‘speaking’ and ‘words’: ‘to speak’ is never just to regurgitate old words, and ‘words’ are never merely tokens whose meaning or referential value has been spent. Rather, the combination of words in sentences and the presentation of those sentences in a situation can find new meaning in or between the words, and can change the situation through the meaning that the words give to it. In short, to judge something as a constraint is to dismiss the possibility that there are properties within the thing, perhaps as yet unrecognized, that can be drawn out in the interests of novel expression.

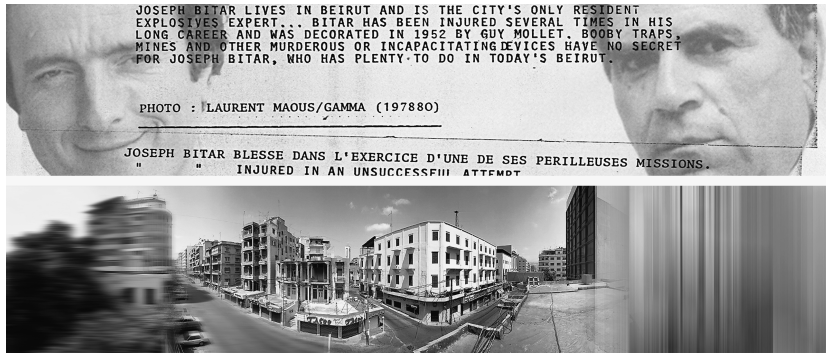
The most basic decisions made by the artist will have epistemological significance because, on the epistemology of interconceptuality presented here, all elements exist as concepts with the potential for novel expansion, including those from surrounding environmental factors to which one would not normally ascribe agency. This applies at the start of a project, when the artist considers the territory – the ideas, the concerns, the participants or audience members, the technologies – in which they want to work, and at the end, when the work is given public form. Whatever creative work is undertaken, *it has to take a form*. This might seem a wholly obvious

thing to say and, therefore, to offer nothing novel or significant. But the point of stating it is that the process of taking a form contains the idea of *transformation*, the transition from one state to another. In other words, more concepts are at work and in a state of collision, with the possibility of being stretched or expanded. Once again, any statement or illustration will be formed through media or technologies, with those media or technologies enabling and shaping what can be said. This might seem to give too much importance to the presentation of an artwork, but presentation is everything for contemporary art. One of the challenges of postconceptual art is that the convenient notion of an art object can no longer be relied upon to determine the area to which aesthetic appreciation should be directed; there is no enduring rule which says ‘this is the artwork to be appreciated; everything else is preparation or surrounding space that can be ignored’. Because the work of contemporary art can adopt an unbounded variety of forms, i.e. it can draw upon and redirect any number of concepts, careful attention needs to be paid to the manner in which it sits in the world and greets its audience. To assume that the media and technologies of art exhibition cannot be equal partners with the conceptual collisions that define a work, or the principal conceptual collisions in a work – whether they are the instruments of gallery installation or the paper and typography used in the production of a public document – is to close down prematurely the possibilities that might issue from concepts of gallery installation, paper and typography.

### **The Atlas Group (Walid Raad), *We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask***

This language is very abstract. It is time to make this proposed epistemology of interconceptuality more concrete by looking at an example. I shall consider further one of the works discussed by Osborne in his account of postconceptual art: the video installation *We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask* (2006; hereafter *We Can Make Rain*; Figure 8.1), ostensibly by The Atlas Group but actually the work of the artist Walid Raad. The work has not been formally presented as a piece of artistic research, but this is the point. My thesis is that the transcategorical nature of contemporary art means a potential research structure is built into the artworks from the outset. The emphasis on concepts means we have to tread carefully from the very moment we begin to consider the work, for each and every concept is going to affect what we take the work to be and how we interpret it. Even reliance on the notion of ‘the work’, as if the piece were a clearly delineated object existing in time and space with a definite beginning and end, has to be treated with caution. This is for two related reasons: (1) the contemporary artwork does not sit within the category of ‘object’ but is something that might be an event or a series of linked instantiations; and (2) since conceptual art’s relationship with philosophy and contemporary art’s reliance upon theoretical context (emphasized by Danto), a clear demarcation between a work and its interpretation cannot be assumed. All this might make the process of coming to terms with the art sound like hard work,





**FIGURE 8.1** Walid Raad/The Atlas Group, still from *We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask*, 2003/2006. DVD projection, colour, 18 minutes. © Walid Raad. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

but why should that be a problem? If it is accepted that the power of contemporary art lies in the fact that it cannot be easily pigeonholed into traditional aesthetic categories, but instead is something that puts into question all the concepts that are used in making and interpreting a work, then a consequence is that time and care will be needed in addressing it.

Osborne cites *We Can Make Rain* as an example of contemporary art on the grounds that what appears to be documentary video footage from a first-person perspective gathered by a collective (The Atlas Group) is in fact a fictional narrative produced by an individual artist (Walid Raad), and because it combines different media – video, split screens and multiple soundtracks – to produce ‘a de-bordering of the arts as mediums’ (Osborne 2013: 28). Here is a gallery text introducing the work:

This video documents a possible collaboration between Yusef Bitar, the Lebanese state’s leading ammunitions expert and chief investigator of all car bomb detonations, and George Semerdjian, a respected and fearless photo-journalist and videographer who, until his violent death in 1990, tirelessly chronicled the Lebanese wars of the past three decades. The video focuses on diagrams, notes, videos and photographs produced by Bitar and Semerdjian about a detonation in Furn Ech Chubak (Beirut) on 21 January 1986.

(*FACT 2005*)

The fictional element is important for Osborne because it is one of the transcategorical movements that takes the work away from the conventional categories of artist-as-author and documentary practice that is assumed to be objective. The ‘contemporary’ in art is fictional, he argues, in the sense that it does not denote a particular form or style but is, instead, the foregrounding of identities, e.g. the artist, a collective, a global transnational, *as constructed and expressed* through art. The fiction also contrasts with the Atlas Group’s stated aims: ‘to locate, preserve, study,

and produce audio, visual, literary and other artefacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon' (Raad 2007). Other concepts are present in addition to 'fiction' and 'documentary': 'video', 'narrative layering' in the form of split screens and rhythmic soundtracks, and concepts denoting items that appear in the video, for example, 'a panoramic view of a Beirut suburb', 'traffic', 'a portrait (that we assume to be) of Yusef Bitar, the Lebanese state's leading ammunitions expert and chief investigator of all car bomb detonations' and 'the quality of the voices and words spoken on the soundtrack'. Osborne's interest lies largely in the fact that the work *consists of various elements* such as these and, therefore, is emblematic of his thesis that identities are constructed and expressed through art.

But what about the transcategorical, interconceptual movements between the elements? Which clusters or continuities emerge within *We Can Make Rain*? Which relations between which concepts are contenders for themes that begin to show how this piece might function as artistic research, according to the epistemology I am presenting? As Osborne indicates, 'layering', through the use of split screens, is one of the work's distinctive features, as 'a device to ground visual representations in a more embodied perceptual experience – be it traumatic or "everyday"', although it's not clear what 'a more embodied perceptual experience' might mean in this case (Osborne 2013: 200). Comparable motifs of 'blending' and 'shifting' are offered by Mark Beasley in his review of the piece:

The footage appears largely innocuous: street corners blend into each other, and unknown figures loom large as digital architecture twists and slides across the screen. This is video document as digital wallpaper, an endless shifting surface that expresses slight unease.

(Beasley 2006)

My claim is that the intersection of concepts has the effect of expanding their reference, stretching their tentacles. It might happen as follows. There is movement and distortion. A street corner looms out, as seen through a fish-eye lens. Different parts start to loom, but at the sides the scene is starting to dissolve. A building and a tree on the left blurs, but the building on the right is lost as the image is stretched vertically. We know from the introductory text and from the words on the screen below that conflict and car bomb detonation frame what is being seen and heard. Should this digital, screen-effect 'loss' be taken as 'loss' in another sense? The sound of traffic could belong to the street scene, but the speed of the screen transitions and the combination of other acoustic elements, e.g. voices that don't fit the scene, discourage any sense that the playback corresponds to an original recording of the street. Below are two faces. We don't know who they are, but they are displaying different emotions. They might be the people named on screen, Bitar and Mollet, but that would assume a relation of correspondence that everything else is working against. These images are also subject to distortion, with the dark–light relationship of text on background being inverted, creating pale text on a dark background, and waves of darker tone moving across the image. Is there another doubling of

meaning taking place here: detonation, de-tonation? There is 'unease' because these are elements that, given the subject matter, one feels *ought to refer* to events in the world, but instead they have been combined to create effects in which meanings are multiplied and, initially, we are lost, overwhelmed by the possibilities.

These are readings that emerge if we linger, if we hold on to a particular sequence. There is also the speed of the combinations to consider, which is possibly another source of Beasley's unease and more than likely the basis for his assertion that the screens offer 'digital wallpaper'. The layerings appear at a rate that gives the impression the moving images are merely patterns, representations derived from sites of conflict manipulated in such a way that any meaning attached to the original events is subdued in favour of constant movement, ever-changing combinations, and a rate of exchange that informs us we don't have to spend too much time with each particular scene.

At one level, it might seem as if these readings are just conceptual associations reached by spending time with the work and two brief commentaries on it, and reflecting upon some of the connections that form between concepts. If, as I have suggested, concepts have tentacles and, therefore, are connection-hungry or connection-ready, then it is surely not a significant or ground-breaking display to show that concepts connect. But we need to be careful of the value judgment contained in the phrase 'just conceptual associations'. Why '*just*'? The danger is that we give these associations no more significance than mind-games within an individual, subjective psyche. It comes from the fact that, in a capitalist, mind-body dualistic and highly individualized society, we are quick to locate mental events 'in the head' of a person and to regard ideas as 'private property'. My reading of *We Can Make Rain* has, in one sense, come from me, guided by observations from Osborne and Beasley. But in another, greater sense, it is enmeshed in language, in the study of an artwork, and in attending to how elements present in the work reach beyond themselves to arrive at concepts that are not obviously or immediately present, where 'arrival' is not just the popping-up of an idea in my head but a *working out* of how what's on the screen *connects* and *coheres* with the new concept. The emphases – '*working out*', '*connects*', '*coheres*' – affirm that the actions have occurred not just because they can happen or were waiting to happen but because it has taken time and judgment to establish how a set of publically viewable objects points us in conceptual directions that have to be acknowledged publically, by others.

What my reading of *We Can Make Rain* has done is focus upon the work and examine the concepts operating within it and arising from it. The value of seeing every element within the work as a concept worthy of exploration that can expand or stretch its meaning through cross-fertilization with other concepts, is that new concepts emerge through metaphor or the clustering of perceived effects. In this way, a work of postconceptual art is shown to have a structure of novelty-generation that would allow it to be seen as a form of research. The concept with which *We Can Make Rain* is frequently introduced is 'documentary video': the Atlas Group Archive website introduces the aim of the project as being 'to locate, preserve, study, and produce audio, visual, literary and other artefacts that shed light on the

contemporary history of Lebanon' (Raad 2007), Beasley describes the work as 'a critique of documentary video' (Beasley 2006), and Osborne approaches the work through the contrast between fiction and documentary (Osborne 2013: 28). Focusing on the video installation, the prominence given to the layering and multiplication of effects make it likely that the work can only ever be seen as one that is focused on the construction, if not the obstruction, of representation, as opposed to representation conceived simply as the telling of a story. But equally prominent in the work is its connection with Lebanon, and a series of histories that one is obliged to feel should be told. Thus, from the comparison of concepts at work in *We Can Make Rain*, we reach the observation that it is an installation that undermines a narrative or descriptive reading of the history of conflict, yet where the theme remains to become formally distorted and overlaid, creating a range of responses from the appreciation of rhythm, to poetic association, to the loss of meaning.

If *We Can Make Rain* were to be offered as part of a research project, say, into a critique of documentary video, then it could be claimed to be using the layering of images to make ambiguous the mode of signification at work in the video, from a poetic meditation on death to a cancellation of the video's own representational power, where ambiguity is seen as an affirmation of the importance of being attentive to the alternative or subtextual meanings that are possible within representation. On the epistemology of interconceptuality presented here, this could be taken as an expansion of what is signified by 'video': to recognize it as a practice that generates or allows for the introduction of concepts, e.g. 'layering', 'reveal-conceal', 'bodily sensation', that can deepen its effect, while also taking it to the opposite extreme, e.g. 'wallpaper' (from Beasley). It could be argued that my focusing on the formal effects, e.g. the layering and the distortion, is misguided because it ignores the political, historical setting, but this, I maintain, is to prejudice the effects as *purely* formal, i.e. in the modernist sense of referring only to their own nature, and not to entertain the possibility that the work is exploring how rhythm, tone, blur, distortion, when interlaced across the duration of the installation, refer beyond themselves to surrounding or remote contexts. It should also be noted that this conclusion has arisen from just a small number of observations. There remains the possibility that further engagement with the work would offer additional conceptual clusters and themes that might extend or contradict the account just given, where either outcome would be valuable in research terms as a demonstration of the complexity of the concepts involved in coming to terms with what appears to be a documentary video offered as an art installation after the end of art.

## Conclusion

Art after the end of art has, in virtue of its own predicament, a research structure, and a structure that is 'aesthetic' in two senses of the word. Art after the end of art is postconceptual in that it can adopt any form whatsoever and does not have to correspond to any single art historical genre. Instead, it has to be addressed in the

particular, in terms of the concepts and the interaction between concepts that it presents. The first of the two senses of 'aesthetic' that I am claiming arises from the fact that whatever interest or intention an artist-researcher has, it will have to appear in some form or other, it will have to be manifest materially, whether as sound, as ink on a page, as an invitation to an event, as an array of objects on a floor, etc. This presentation will not be an isolated, self-contained particular, but will already be pregnant with concerns and associations. It follows the original Greek meaning of *aisthesis* as a reference to sensory knowledge, although I am not trying to import any epistemological value based upon Greek etymology. The second sense of 'aesthetic' stems from the interaction that occurs between the concepts involved, after Ricœur's theory of metaphor in which the play of possibilities generated by metaphorical discourse is the condition of possibility of conceptual thought, although this could also be considered a 'poetics' of research.

Supporting the idea of an aesthetics of research is what I have called an epistemology of interconceptuality. My recommendation is that whatever form or content is offered for consideration as an exploration of the postconceptual in an artistic research context, it should be regarded as a series of concepts. This is for four reasons: (1) A vocabulary of concepts instils the idea that all elements – whether object, technology or material – can signify equally, i.e. it doesn't assume a hierarchy. (2) It promotes recognition that any one form or kind or thing is not locked into itself but has a potential for association that wants to reach out and interact with other concepts, where the interaction stretches understanding of what the concepts cover.

(3) The third reason for a vocabulary of concepts is that whatever interest or intention an artist has, it will have to appear in some form or other, it will have to be manifest materially, whether as sound, as ink on a page, as an invitation to an event, as an array of objects on a floor, etc. Even works of conceptual art have to be typeset or installed or described so that they can be imagined. However, whatever is shown or selected or offered for consideration in an art context will not be isolated or singular but will always already be introducing a wide range of concepts in virtue of the fact that any sensory encounter cannot be reduced to a single concept but will offer a number of details to be conceptualized. Recall the example of a sheet of white A4 paper: its blemishes, the different colours caused by the lighting conditions, the sharp lines and corners formed by the paper against its background (my desk), and the fact that it draws my attention to the variety of objects that surround it. All of these are concepts that could form the basis of an enquiry into how one concept opens on to others, demonstrating that whatever object or situation is reached for brings with it a variety of forms, all of which have further associative potential.

(4) Finally, the value of treating whatever is chosen as the basis of an artistic research project *as a concept* is that it emphasizes that *it has been chosen*, a selection has been made. Of all the possible gestures, forms or settings that could have been selected, this region, this series of concepts, has arisen as significant and as a potential for exploration. This sense of significance might ordinarily be captured in the phrase 'selected for a reason', and there will be a reason, not as a justification,

but as a sense that these forms or settings are already opening on to a set of concerns and have the potential to be arranged, articulated and developed so that they illuminate those concerns. In other words, selecting specific gestures, forms or settings is already to display an awareness of their ability to function as concepts that are reaching outwards to other concepts.

Discussion has been primarily in terms of concepts and the postconceptual because the focus has been on art after the end of art, and the vocabulary needed to build an appropriate epistemology. Since traditional art categories cannot be used as definitions or criteria, it has necessitated the use of terminology that calls attention to the place of concepts in the determination of art, the stance that is to be taken towards them, and how they themselves offer interactions that display the capacity of concepts to be stretched, where these interactions are generated by aesthetics and poetics. This has been the course taken to arrive at the epistemology of interconceptuality in philosophical terms. As something to be applied, the epistemology has consequences that are immediate and tangible. Its relevance for artistic research lies in its showing how exploration of art's postconceptual nature puts the artist in a position where each and every object and context has the potential to generate concepts that are hungry for the cross-conceptual movements that generate knowledge. An arrangement of objects or events that defies easy classification but nevertheless exploits interactions between concepts in the interests of 'thinking more' and creating new conceptual associations will be both a form of postconceptual practice, and the basis for a research project.

A further consequence is that additional importance is given to the interests and objects that emerge as salient for the artist-researcher in the absence of art's traditional categories. What enquiries or concerns does the artist-researcher wish to make manifest? Which concepts have been active in shaping their judgment? In some contexts, this might be referred to as the artist-researcher's inclination towards certain questions or contexts. Either way, there will be a series of words or conversations or images or objects (ready-made or artist-produced) or situations or events. These will be concepts in the sense that they are the result of judgments or selections or orderings or groupings. However, every judgment or selection or grouping has the potential to be the starting point for a series of conceptual interactions that forms the focus of an artistic research project. This presents the artist-researcher with a vast array of possibilities that could be overwhelming. How does one respond to this? More often than not, there will be a long-standing, background set of concerns that provides a set of concepts as filters, but once these are made manifest in physical form, it is likely that concepts from the physical form will multiply with the concepts from the filters, thereby increasing rather than decreasing the number of possibilities.

One approach might be to recognize the importance of sensitivity in identifying and assessing the conceptual interactions that are the most fruitful, the ones that are suggestive of further development. This might be thought of as a poetic sensibility or a facility for forming and assessing metaphors. Such sensitivity is not easy to

cultivate, especially if one is used to following an intention-heavy model of art practice in which an artist's plan dominates at the expense of being sensitive to the properties and associations that are generated by the objects, technologies and situations involved. A large part of developing such a sensibility will come down to close-looking, -listening or -sensing in the face of whatever material, object or situation has emerged as paramount, and to paying attention to the concepts that are introduced by the judgments and metaphors that are formed in response. In one sense, these will be subjective judgments, uttered by a subject, but in another sense they will be articulated in concepts drawn from a public language and shared sensory modalities, whose power to interact with and stretch other concepts comes from the associations they maintain as public, shared expressions. On this basis, investigation of the nature of postconceptual art is taken to rest heavily on sensory, embodied experience.

What might help the cultivation of this sensibility is recognition of the tentacled nature of concepts, the fact that they are *predisposed* to meet up. This conclusion is drawn from the dynamic interplay between sense and reference that Ricœur finds in Frege: new realms of sense are possible because the concepts in question can refer to familiar referents, and new referential fields are possible because concepts are available whose sense has already been mastered. The idea of concepts as 'tentacled' is intended to capture Frege's interplay between sense and reference in one image, to emphasize that a concept does not remain applied only to its 'home' territory but is always available to describe new objects in 'alien' referential fields. The advantage of this aspect of concepts with regard to the vast array of possibilities is that, when two concepts intertwine to create a new metaphor, the interaction *stands out*, the interplay of associations becomes *salient*, because the fact that two remote concepts can intertwine in a productive way is surprising. Who would have thought simply focusing on a sheet of white A4 paper and becoming aware of its edges would direct attention towards the objects around it? A surface that is customarily written on, then filed or discarded, becomes space, selection, inventory and ultimately interior architecture. I begin to consider how the paper interacts with my body and with the objects surrounding it to see how it might begin to articulate further some of these concepts. So the predisposition of concepts to connect might help the process of feeling one's way through the array of possibilities by making certain connections more prominent than others.

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# CONCLUSION

The value of artistic research is that it introduces a category in which practices can explore the relation between aesthetics and epistemology. The forces at work in the oppositions that conventionally resist the idea of art becoming knowledge, e.g. theory–practice, art–writing, general–particular, are reconfigured away from being antitheses to being the flexing of joints or tentacles (to continue the metaphor from chapter 8) between one concept and another. Underlying this is a particular understanding of ‘concept’: it is not a container that seeks to generalize experience or reduce it to one property, but the segmentation of experience into meaningful chunks, each of which is inclined towards other chunks. Art is knowledge in the sense that it is the production of forms that call for novel or surprising changes in the way we apply concepts. While it is admitted that artistic research has its origins largely in research audit culture, it does not follow that the idea that results is *wholly* determined by that culture. As I observe in the ‘Introduction’, this understanding reduces the process of development to an overly simplistic cause-and-effect relationship. It forgets that any development occurs within an environment, of objects or ideas or both, and that other qualities will be drawn in from the environment as the idea grows. The key question that this leaves us with is: Which other ideas are drawn upon?

This conclusion has been reached by approaching the concept ‘artistic research’ in terms of its philosophical counterpart, ‘aesthetic epistemology’, on the grounds that it is the dialogue between aesthetics and epistemology that has the conceptual resources to rethink the relationship between art and knowledge. The aesthetics–epistemology exchange that has been the foundation for this book is Immanuel Kant’s philosophy. This is because of the position that experience occupies in his critical system, the role that he assigns to concepts within experience, and the status of art as a practice that forces us to assess the concepts that might apply to the object in front of us. Because of the importance that Kant assigns to art, and because his system starts from experience, rather than a binary,

subject–object division, much of his thinking is in conversation with twentieth-century and contemporary philosophy. These connections are evident in my application of Sartre (chapter 4), Ricœur (chapters 5 and 8), Adorno (chapter 6) and Merleau-Ponty (chapter 7). I am sure there are many who would disagree with my reading of Kant, and want to classify him as a thinker who reinforces subject–object division, on account of the elaborate faculty structure he assigns to the human mind. But this would be a point of emphasis that overlooks the transcendental basis of his philosophy: an enquiry into the conditions of possibility of experience that culminates in a study of judgment, the mechanism that creates experience.

The concept of knowledge that results is one that asserts that the nature and status of knowledge are always in question. This is not a denial of the possibility of knowledge but a philosophical stance that calls attention to the constructed nature of knowledge. We know the world not purely or directly, as it is in itself, but always in the form created by enabling, mediating structures, such as sensory faculties, technologies of detection and cultural beliefs. In the vocabulary of this book, knowledge, including experience, is shaped by concepts: what emerges or chunks for us as real is informed, or formed, by the concepts which determine our openness to the world. This is ‘knowledge’ in the Kantian sense that there has to be a concept in operation to hold a sequence of experience together as an experience, where another concept might create a different kind of experience. Kant is often identified as a constructionist or relativist on the grounds of the determinative role that he gives to concepts. Understandably, there is some hostility to this standpoint. A recent example is the ‘science wars’: scientists, cultural theorists, sociologists and philosophers in dispute over whether science presents a disinterested reflection of the world as it really is or a discourse whose findings are heavily influenced by the interests and prejudices of those who work within it (Collins and Pinch 1993; Franklin 1996; Levins 1996; Rose 1996; Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Sokal 1996). The standpoints of Ihde and Rheinberger from chapter 3, two philosophers who affirm the technology-dependent nature of the entities ‘discovered’ by science, are versions of this constructionism.

If there is one claim to extract from my Kantian approach that holds the book together, it is the importance of attending to the role that concepts play in experience. The value of this approach is that it calls attention to the potential for any element within experience to reach out and open up another part of experience, where the ‘opening-up’ action will be an occasion where new concepts have to be found or coined. This constitutes knowledge, I have argued, on the understanding that experience is not a resource from which facts are extracted but a state of being that is constructed, and that can adopt novel and surprising forms according to the concepts at play. This will not just be an event or a benefit for the individual experiencer; this would be to fall back upon a Cartesian, homunculus-centred picture of experience. Rather, it is to recognize that the creation of novel and surprising forms within experience pulls upon concepts that are already in use and understandable by others, and places those concepts in a new relationship that might

affect how other people use and understand them. For example, in relation to Karla Black's *Pleaser* from chapter 3, approaching the sculpture as if it were a network of traces opens up the splatters, splotches and lines into a series of new realms of association that display the articulation of matter. There are smears of paint with clean edges and with rough edges, implying different kinds of treatment, and lines of light from folds and buckles that pay the splatter-patterns no heed, as if the installation wants to challenge its own status as a record of traces made. The articulation of matter is also demonstrated by Vija Celmins's *Night Sky #19* drawing from chapter 5. The capacity of charcoal to make marks is exploited to produce a range of effects that allows 'charcoal' to open on to ideas of the 'astronomical'. Different surfaces are achieved: smooth where the charcoal has been applied uniformly, and bumpy, either from the paper or from layers of charcoal. With the white 'star' dots achieved by erasure, some are pure paper, while others contain specks or layers of charcoal. The drawing ceases to be just representational and becomes a conceptual tentacle linking the particulate with the celestial.

If I had to anticipate one *mis*interpretation to which I think the book might be prone, it would be the emphasis I place on concepts. I imagine that I might be accused of subjecting the vitality and otherness of aesthetic experience to the hegemony of the rational and the verbal. But this would be a reaction that falls back on the concept-sensation dualism from modern and pre-modern metaphysics. Kant's critical system is a response to this dualism. In the course of his philosophy, the 'concept' is moved from being a principle above or beyond experience, to being a shaping principle within it. Experience is chunked, elements stand out according to the interests with which it is approached. As I demonstrated in chapter 3, this is consistent with recent claims within phenomenology and embodiment theory that refer to experience having a conceptual structure, with some theories attributing the chunking capacity to the body. Thus, in making the 'concept' the unit of my aesthetic epistemology, I am not subjecting experience to the structures imposed by idealism, rationalism or language, but showing how any element within experience has the potential to be raised up and made the basis of artistic research.

Furthermore, the process of chunking is not an act of isolation but a precursor for the formation of connections. As soon as an item is called to attention, it doesn't remain static but starts to make connections with neighbouring objects and ideas, that is to say, other chunks are formed. Recall the sheet of white A4 paper from chapter 8. I notice its colour, the fact that there are different shades caused by blemishes and lighting conditions, the fact that it draws my attention to the variety of objects, colours and textures that surround it. The idea that concepts are not static containers but elements that are open to comparison and connection is encouraged by Kant in two ways: his stipulation that concepts necessarily open on to intuition, which means they have to possess sufficient flexibility to accommodate what is received through sensibility; and the thesis from the *Critique of Judgment* that the experience of art induces a state of conceptual free play in which there is reflection upon the concepts that might apply (Kant 1987: 281–291, 304–351). In addition, Ricœur shows that concepts are not fixed but 'tentacled' (my term): a

concept is only a concept if it is predisposed to connect with others, and open to being stretched and creatively misapplied. Although this puts the emphasis on a philosophical line running through Kant, Frege and Ricœur, a similar point can be found in embodiment theory, in which concepts possess the potential to be applied in new or alien contexts on account of the status of the body as a structure that orients itself through a diverse range of objects and settings, for example, Lakoff and Johnson's definition of a concept as a neural structure that employs 'the sensorimotor system of our brains' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 20).

The tendency to picture concepts as containers that either confine life or reduce it to generalities is strong. It is inspired by Plato's analogy of knowledge as an aviary in the *Theaetetus* (Plato 1987: 197b–199e) and Aristotle's metaphor of predicates as containers in *Prior Analytics* (Aristotle 1987: 24b). The 'containment' metaphor is reinforced in 1880 by the English logician John Venn who introduces the convention of representing concepts as circles in order to allow syllogistic arguments to be represented as diagrams (known as Venn diagrams; Venn 1880). Against this, I recommend depicting or diagramming the concept as an octopus or jellyfish or echinoderm (one variety of which is the starfish): any creature with a central body, to signify that something particular is being chunked, but surrounded by tentacles that reach out to make contact with other creatures or conditions. Visually, jellyfish and some echinoderms are probably better suited to displaying a centre with radial tentacles, but I think the notion of an 'octopus concept' is more potent, if only because of its 'oct'–'con' assonance, and the rhythm of its consonance.

An aesthetic epistemology that focuses on concepts, therefore, points us directly towards aesthetic experience and the way in which it opens on to wider concerns. On the model presented here, the epistemic credentials of artistic research lie in its capacity to stretch and flex the tentacles that constitute the connections between concepts. This sounds a little bit like the concept of 'rhizome' developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3–25). The comparison really needs to be the subject of another paper, but I think the difference between 'octopus' and 'rhizome' can be set out briefly here. Thought in the history of philosophy, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is 'tree-like': individuals are attached to a concept, or ideas are attached to a central thesis, like branches to a trunk. In contrast, they propose a conception of thought based on the rhizome: an underground stem that grows horizontally and pushes up lateral shoots; claims are linked not by continuous, vertical progression, but through leaps of association and the relation of seemingly unconnected ideas. However, whereas Deleuze and Guattari separate out the tendency to focus on the (tree-like) singular from the tendency to focus on the multiple and diverse, I see the two, via Frege and Ricœur, as being mutually defining forces (see chapter 8). In addition, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish rhizomic connection from metaphor. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, they dismiss metaphor on the grounds that it is restricted to making connections between a proper meaning and a figurative meaning. This refers to a model of metaphor in the spirit of I.A. Richards in which it is understood to be a one-way process of ascription, borrowing properties from an object, the 'vehicle',

and applying them figuratively to a subject, the 'tenor' (Richards 1936: 96). Rather than a landscape of proper and figurative meanings, Deleuze and Guattari seek an ontology of metamorphosis in which everything is in a state of becoming or transformation (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 22). Unfortunately, their interpretation of metaphor is narrow, and overlooks the fact that established, conceptual meaning is already part of a dynamic that includes poetic or transformative meaning. Thus, my 'octopus concept' is distinct from Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' because it regards 'centred' and 'tentacled' meaning as mutually-defining terms in the interplay that allows there to be things, where those things by definition can speak of other things. In contrast, the 'rhizome' is a mechanism of continuous connection and transformation.

If you were an artist considering artistic research, how would my call to stretch and flex the tentacles that constitute the connections between concepts work in practice? Firstly, the desire to consider artistic research would not occur in isolation. There would be a commitment to a kind of practice, and some sense of the surrounding interests or concerns that might frame the project. This already means there are several concepts in operation. How might your practice be described, not in empirical, verifiable terms, as in its size or the nature of the materials, but in the metaphors it evokes? Is there a set of technologies, processes or materials common to your previous works that you want to make the basis of your research project? How are they used by you? How are they used by others? What meanings do they bring to the ideas that initiated the work? Which other artists' work indicates that there might be grounds for a dialogue between your practice and the enquiry you want to build around it? On the one hand, this might sound like a lot of description, and therefore imply once again that my emphasis on concepts is simply another affirmation of the priority of writing. But on the other, there is also a lot of looking: at your work, at the work of others, at what the technologies and materials make possible, and at the basis for thinking that there might be grounds for conceptual interaction between your work and a particular enquiry.

It is possible to find texts on artistic research, and doctoral theses within artistic research, where close attention is not paid to the artwork, where looking doesn't happen, as if the artwork is an afterthought. It is as if there is a reluctance to look at the work. The reasons are not clear. It might be (1) a worry that aesthetic judgment throws us into the realm of the verbal, or that (2) such judgments can only ever be expressions of personal opinion, and so have no cognitive value. Another explanation might be that (3) there is a preference to talk about the intention of the artist, rather than the finished work, since intention is easier to express verbally than trying to come to terms with the many lines of interpretation and criticism that follow once the work is addressed. I have argued against the first two ideas. In chapter 4, I affirmed that description does affect experience, but not in a way that generalizes it or saps its force. Instead, it contributes to the chunking process (introduced in chapter 3) of making particular features become prominent for further consideration. While such judgments might be expressions of personal opinion, they will also be framed in terms of shared, linguistic concepts. If the combination

of concepts contained in a judgment is metaphorical, then it may be an instance of the action where one concept reaches out to another and, therefore, indicative of the epistemic power of the work.

As regards (3), I have not addressed the point explicitly, but there are threads that can be woven here into a reply. While artistic intention is necessary and valuable in providing direction, it is equally if not more important to attend to the work so that interpretation is not governed by knowledge of the intention. For, as we have seen with the examples from Black, Celmins, *humhyphenum* and Raad, the technologies, processes and materials, *through their own articulacy*, introduce concepts that intersect with others arising from the work, or from the subject context, where the intersection displays the capacity of the work to have an epistemic effect. In this regard, my position is close to the new materialism or agential realism which ascribes autonomous, expressive power to matter. The clearest points of correspondence are in my account of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's concept of the 'experimental system' in chapter 3 (which bears a strong resemblance to the concept of 'intra-action' in Karen Barad's agential realism; Barad 2007: 132–185; Rheinberger 1997: 28), and where indexical expression figures in my interpretation of the works by Black, Celmins, and *humhyphenum* in chapters 3, 5 and 7. An index is a sign that denotes its object not through resemblance or by convention, but through causal connection, e.g. smoke signifying fire (Peirce 1982: 53–56). The value of indexical expression for my account of artistic research is that it is where technologies and materials generate effects that go beyond any anticipated resemblance or conventional response, thereby producing objects that challenge conceptualization and draw new concepts into the work. There is a broader, ecological or phenomenological thesis at work here: a desire for technologies, processes and materials to be acknowledged effectively as co-authors in the research process, and not to over-emphasize the importance of intention in case it imposes a meaning that prevents recognition of the conceptual interactions that are occurring in the work.

Once one starts looking at one's own work in such a way that concepts drawn from looking are placed alongside others collected from studies of relevant artists' work, subject literature and the intention that is guiding the enquiry, there is the danger that the matrix of concepts becomes overwhelming. The state where so many contexts, sources and ideas are opening up and demanding attention, saying 'look further into this well of possibilities', seems to me to be one of the most frequent aspects of research. But this is precisely the kind of overwhelming, and possibly unsettling, experience that Kant's philosophy is so good at addressing. *Something will be chunked*, a handhold will present itself, with a tentacle reaching out to another part of the subject territory, since, in order for the enquiry to make any sense at all, there has to be a concept, a grasping, that holds it together. It may only be provisional, and might be replaced once a stronger network of concepts forms, but the very fact that the judgment can be made – 'this way, not that' – means that concepts will have arrived that can guide the research, and that the transition from 'provisional' to 'stronger' concepts might itself be significant for the project.

The wider implications of my approach to artistic research, I think, will be through ongoing discussion of the ways in which art and aesthetic experience make demands upon conceptual judgment, and the various forms and contexts in which that judgment is expressed. It is easy to fall back into thinking that the domain for art appreciation is personal, subjective experience, when I have argued that placing the emphasis on concepts situates the aesthetic as an experience which is drawing in and making connections between concepts that do not apply just to one person. On the theory I have presented in this book, concepts are not private possessions within an individual's experience but chunking agents rooted in language, the body and the environment or, more broadly conceived, a framework which represents the conditions of possibility of experience. The experience in question is not just a possibility for one being but for all beings who share that mode of experience. All of the conceptual movements stimulated by the artworks in this book have been metaphors; the original Greek *metaphora*, after all, does have at its root the concept of 'carrying over' or 'transportation' (Derrida 1982: 231; 1998: 102–103). Again, it is easy to dismiss this as just poetics. But what is 'just' doing in the last sentence? The metaphorical is not a private act of play but a conjunction formed through one concept opening another, and itself, in surprising ways, as a result of the fact that concepts are principles of world-organization, otherwise referred to as chunking agents or embodied articulations.

It is possibly the image of experience as something which is simply *had* or *received*, a film that is watched by our own private homunculus, that works against my thesis. It resists the notion of experience as something with a structure that can flex and have new identities created within it. One way of resisting the homunculus and holding on to the notion of experience as a site of creation is to recall the image of a chunking process from chapter 3: the bringing into being of objects that were potential but which needed appropriately attuned concepts to draw them out; the detail in the music, the phenomenon disclosed through scientific visualization. We might add indexical expression to the list, since it is the bringing into being of *diverse* appearances through the conjunction of objects, i.e. appearances that *do not conform to established, iconic or symbolic concepts*. At the foundation of my use of concepts is Kant's model of concepts determining sensory intuition. The beauty of the model is that it puts concepts in a position where they are constantly having to adjust themselves in order to accommodate what can be disclosed within intuition. In philosophy and in science, the senses as modes of access to the world are always understood through a theoretical lens. The senses change depending on which epistemology is adopted. As soon as an instrument or definition or theory is applied, a commitment is made, a particular slice of reality is made manifest, placed in a frame and given meaning and value, and everything outside that frame is subordinated or dismissed. On the plus side, it means that the study served by the frame can go ahead. On the minus side, a lot of reality is excluded which, given a different frame, could have had a bearing, if not on the study in question, then on a related one. Kant's concept–intuition model already includes the idea that the senses can present themselves differently depending upon the theory applied, but



there is still further work to be done on the ways in which the aesthetic can present itself to epistemology.

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# INDEX

- aboutness 141–2  
abstract art 98, 152  
academy 2–3, 12, 29, 33, 39–40, 44, 110  
Addison, J. 20  
aesthetic: definition 17, 170; emotion 13; experience 6, 15–16, 71, 125, 177–8, 181; expression 4, 34, 39, 130; idea (Kant) 21, 71–3; judgment 72, 74, 85, 87, 179; property or quality 8, 27, 64, 85, 109, 112, 114; research as source 8, 155–60, 163–72  
aesthetics 13–17, 20, 33–4, 115; Adorno 117–18, 120–3; in contrast to epistemology 3–6, 25, 27–9, 40, 46–7, 51, 59, 73, 112, 123, 125, 175, 178, 181–2; Kant 20–1, 51, 59, 62, 71–3, 85, 117–20, 123; Merleau-Ponty 84, 135–43; Sartre 80–3, 87–8  
agency of matter 58, 62, 67, 85, 97, 139, 163–4, 180  
*aisthesis* 17, 170  
Alexander, T.M. 16  
*Anschauung* (intuition; Kant) 59–63, 67, 71–4, 79, 118–21, 130, 158, 177, 181  
Apollinaire, G. 136–7  
appearance 3, 18, 22–4, 29, 55, 73, 82, 125, 130, 132, 135, 138, 141, 143, 181  
appearance–reality distinction 12–13, 22–4, 29, 73, 123  
a priori 59, 79  
Aristotle 20, 27, 74, 159, 178  
art: for art's sake 12, 88, 113–14, 117; death or end 8, 34, 36, 38–9, 109, 151–6; definition *see* art: death or end  
art history: changing nature of art 117; component in artistic research 2, 17, 115; end of art 152–5, 159–60, 162–3, 169–70; manifest in art 120, 122–3, 148, 160, 162–3, 169–70; source of criteria of assessment 3–4, 109, 111; as way of knowing art 36; *see also* history  
articulacy: of matter 70–1, 85, 93, 98–100, 105–6, 138–41, 177, 180; of the world 64, 84, 140–3  
artistic research: definition 1–4, 33–47, 72–4; key statements on 69–71, 109–12, 124–6, 160–5, 169–72, 175–81  
artist–researcher 8, 77, 114, 138, 140, 151–2, 156, 159, 170–1  
art–language opposition 5–6, 33, 39, 56, 78, 115, 177  
art–research opposition 4–6, 11–30, 33, 73, 77–8, 109–17  
Arts and Humanities Research Council 2, 77  
art–science 14–15, 40, 109  
art world 2, 39  
artworld (Danto) 152, 154  
Atlas Group, The (Raad, W.) 8, 155, 165–9, 180  
attunement 53–5, 181  
audit culture 1, 3, 175  
autofigurative 136–44, 146–7

- autonomy: Adorno on art 112, 117–18, 120–5, 129; art 3, 7, 12, 14, 110, 113–14, 116–17, 151, 164; constellational 129, 135, 137, 147–8; Kant on art 112, 117–25, 129; matter 164, 180
- avant-garde 2, 7, 12, 15, 112, 122–3
- Baldessari, J. 2, 12, 39
- Barad, K. 180
- Barthes, R. 75n1
- Baumgarten, A.G. 17, 27, 29–30, 52
- Beardsley, M.C. 75n1
- Beasley, M. 167–9
- beauty 17, 73; in art: 20–1, 109, 119, 123
- begreifen* (to grasp) 52, 62
- Begriff* (concept) 52
- being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*; Sartre) 81–2
- being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*; Sartre) 81–2
- Bell, C. 12–14, 16–17, 122–3
- belonging 55, 63, 95–7, 99, 101, 104, 107, 147
- Berkeley, G. 52, 86, 95
- beyond *see* 'going beyond'
- Biggs, M. 5, 115
- binary or dualistic thinking 5–7, 11–12, 37–8, 67, 86, 116
- Bitar, Y. 166–7
- Black, K. 8, 56–9, 67–9, 85, 177, 180
- Black, M. 4, 7, 91–2, 100–1, 104, 106
- Boden, M. 6, 34, 43, 67
- body 24, 37, 42, 62–4, 66–7, 97, 172; metaphor 91–4, 96; schema 63–4, 84, 130–47, 177–8, 181
- Bolt, B. 4, 36
- Borgdorff, H. 1, 5, 26, 37–8, 44, 51, 110
- Boucher, G. 121
- Bourriaud, N. 153
- Brentano, F. 148n4
- bring into being 37–8, 54–5, 68, 78, 83, 87, 93, 181
- Büchler, D. 5, 115
- Busch, K. 2, 4–5, 35–6, 39, 44–5, 47, 66, 74, 110
- Caduff, C. 121
- Candlin, F. 2, 12, 18, 33, 39, 77
- capitalism 15, 25, 35, 120, 148, 168
- Carnap, R. 26, 28
- Carter, P. 37
- Cartesian: philosophy 24–5, 39, 79, 148, 176; theatre 24–5
- categorization 2, 29, 35, 44–5, 47, 68, 78, 82, 109–11, 115–16, 120, 156, 159, 161, 163, 171; *see also* category (Kant); classification; interconceptuality; transcategoriality
- category (Kant) 60–1, 121, 147, 159
- causality 20, 27–8, 52, 60, 80, 105, 121; as index 54, 68–9, 139, 142, 145, 180
- Cazeaux, C. 94, 106, 119, 156
- Celmins, V. 92, 98–9, 101–5, 177, 180
- Cézanne, P. 130–6, 140–2
- charcoal 92, 95–9, 101–6, 139, 177
- Charmaz, K.C. 116
- 'chime' metaphor (Ihde) 54–5
- choice: existential 87, 162–3; of material 138–9, 143, 160, 162–3
- chunking (role of concepts) 6, 53–6, 59–60, 63–8, 71, 73–4, 83–5, 87, 118, 175–81
- Clarke, D.M. 24
- classification 5–6, 17, 35–6, 38, 40, 45–6, 81, 171
- clear and distinct idea (Descartes) 52, 74
- Cobussen, M. 51
- Coessens, K. 4, 36–7
- cogito 23
- cognition 37; sensible 17, 27–30
- cognitive: bedrock 26; demand 7, 109; framework 6, 51; linguistics 42, 64, 94, 96, 101, 156; play 100; power 14, 64, 119; purchase 45; representation 38; significance of art 6, 34, 59, 161–2; value 106, 179
- coherence between concepts 146, 168
- Coldstream Report 2
- collage 92–3
- Collini, S. 15
- Collins, H. 176
- 'collision' metaphor 7, 92, 100–2, 104–7, 161, 162, 165
- commodity 120, 148, 153
- communication 16, 33, 38, 84
- Comte, A. 26, 28
- concept: in artistic research 35–6, 38–9, 44–7, 56–9, 66–74, 112–13, 115–26, 129–48, 151–2, 160–72, 175–82; in autonomy of art 117–26, 129–48; basic unit of artistic research 160–5; corporeal 52, 62–4, 67; definition 52, 64, 124, 160–1, 175, 178; opposed to art or experience 21–6, 77, 109, 115, 125, 177; as principle of novelty and connection 66–71, 88, 91, 95–6, 99–107, 122–4, 129–48, 156–60, 165–72, 177–82; shaper of experience 6–9, 15–16, 18–21, 42–7, 51–74, 78–9, 88, 100, 118–21, 124–5, 146–8, 129–30, 175–7
- concept–intuition relation 59–62, 72, 181
- concept–object relation 159

- concept–sensation relation 55, 177  
 conceptual art 8, 34, 57–8, 109, 112,  
 115–17, 125, 151–5, 165, 170; *see also*  
 postconceptual art  
 conditions of possibility 29, 60, 158, 170,  
 176, 181  
 consciousness 19, 24–5, 28, 62, 65–6,  
 79–82, 86, 88, 147; stream of 44  
 constellation 7–8, 121–5, 129, 135, 139,  
 145, 147–8  
 constructionism 74, 176  
 constructivism 37, 92–4  
 ‘container’ logic 58, 74, 107, 124, 175,  
 177–8  
 continuity (of experience) 6, 61–2, 65–6,  
 73, 79, 119  
 contribution to knowledge *see* knowledge  
 Copernican revolution 59, 65, 118  
 copy 54, 81; *see also* imitation  
 correspondence theory: art 98, 121, 123,  
 167; knowledge or truth 27–8, 115–16,  
 121; *see also* imitation  
 Costello, D. 73  
 Craig–Martin, M. 2, 12, 39–40  
 creativity 20, 27–8, 41, 43, 101, 115, 161,  
 164–5, 178; Boden 6, 34, 43, 66–7  
 ‘crevice’ metaphor 79, 82  
 Crispin, D. 36  
 critical: absence 40, 148; commentary or  
 reflection 12, 77, 106, 131, 159, 179;  
 contest between concepts 159; dimension  
 of art 7, 14, 16, 36–7, 110, 112, 154–5,  
 169; dimension of creativity 43  
 critical theory 112, 117–18, 120–6, 159  
 criticism: art 111, 153–4; immanent 14, 16  
 critique (Kantian) 45, 59–63, 65–7, 72–3,  
 117–26, 159, 175, 177  
*Critique of Judgment* (Kant) 20–1, 46, 71–2,  
 74, 119, 158, 177  
*Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant) 14, 20, 45,  
 59–62, 65, 118, 121, 164  
 cross-domain mapping 96; *see also* domains,  
 intersecting  
 Cruz, A. de la 16  
 crystallization (Adorno) 122  
 Csikszentmihalyi, M. 92–3  
 dada 44  
 Danto, A.C. 151–6, 161, 165  
 data: phenomenological (*humhyphenhum*)  
 131–2, 135; scientific 54, 109; sense  
 18–19  
 death of art 8, 34, 36, 38–9, 109, 151–6  
 death of the author 74n1  
 deductive model of explanation 27  
 Deleuze, G. 4, 36, 178–9  
 ‘demand’ metaphor 7, 92–3, 101, 104–7  
 Dennett, D. 24–5  
 Derrida, J. 181  
 Descartes, R. 17, 23–4, 26–7, 52, 60, 65,  
 74, 79  
 description: art beyond 16, 18, 115;  
 contribution to artistic research 25, 42,  
 78, 80–8, 94, 102, 104, 106–7, 179;  
 distorting effect 25, 55–6; invited by  
 experience 91, 93–4, 99–100; loses  
 particularity 78, 115; Sartre’s theory  
 80–8; stimulated by art 8, 102, 104,  
 106–7  
 deterritorialization 4, 36–7  
 Dewey, J. 12, 15–17  
 dialogue: between materials 113, 163;  
 between practice and enquiry 179; as  
 method (*humhyphenhum*) 131–2  
 Dickie, G. 151–2  
 Dilthey, W. 28–9, 40  
 disciplinarity 14–15; in art 12, 14–15, 17, 39  
 disclosure (epistemological): Heidegger 36;  
 Kant 59, 181; Rheinberger 37–8; Sartre  
 82, 88, 115  
 discourse: cognitive or research 2, 4–5, 34,  
 125, 129; Foucault 14; metaphorical  
 (Ricoeur) 100–1, 156–9, 170; scientific  
 68, 71, 176; speculative (Ricoeur) 100–1,  
 156–9  
 disinterest 118, 176  
 doctoral 39, 77, 179  
 ‘doctored–neutered’ contrast 44, 109–26, 131  
 ‘domain’ logic 4–8, 12, 14, 16–17, 45,  
 112–16, 124–5, 147, 160, 181  
 domains, intersecting 74, 85, 94–7, 101,  
 119, 155–8, 181  
 Douglas, A. 36  
 dove (Kant) 164  
 drawing 7, 92–3, 98, 101–6, 129–47, 177  
 Dronsfield, J. 77  
 dualism: art–research 125–6, 129; binary or  
 dualistic thinking 5–7, 11–12, 37–8, 67,  
 86, 116; philosophical 67, 84, 120, 148,  
 168, 175–7  
 Edgerton, Jr., S.Y. 14–15, 54  
 education 1–2, 12, 22, 44, 110–11  
 Elkins, J. 14–15, 26  
 embodiment: 42, 45–6, 86; Kant 62–4, 67,  
 70–1, 73–4; Merleau-Ponty 63–4, 84,  
 130–47; theory of concepts 62–4, 67,  
 70–1, 73–4, 96  
 Emlyn Jones, T. 26  
 emotion: 53, 167; aesthetic (Bell) 13, 17

- empiricism 15, 17–20, 26, 37, 52, 56, 137, 160  
 end of art 8, 34, 36, 38–9, 109, 151–6  
 enigmaticalness (*Rätselcharakter*; Adorno) 120  
 Enlightenment 26, 120  
 environment 42, 45, 64, 84, 93, 96–7, 101, 118, 130, 143, 162, 164, 175, 181  
 epistemic thing (Rheinberger) 37–8, 67–9  
 epistemology 8, 181; Adorno 121, 123–5, 144–8; aesthetic 47, 51, 175, 177–8; against art and aesthetics 3–6, 12, 25–7, 29, 73–4, 79, 112–13, 120; for artistic research 34–6, 44, 73–4, 79, 144–8; of interconceptuality 107, 151, 156–60, 164–5, 167, 169–71; Kant 45–7, 51, 59–66, 73–4, 121, 123–5, 144–8, 175; of metaphor 100–1, 104, 106–7, 156–60  
 erasure 98–9, 102, 105–6, 177  
 essence: of art 13, 34, 36, 115, 151; challenge to concept of 78–80, 106–7, 117; of experience 3, 25; Platonic 22–4, 79; reality 23  
 ethics 162  
*être-en-soi* (being-in-itself; Sartre) 81–2  
*être-pour-soi* (being-for-itself; Sartre) 81–2  
 existentialism 78–83, 162  
 experience: aesthetic 6, 13, 15–16, 25, 29, 71–2, 96, 167, 172, 177–8; versus description or knowledge 5–8, 12, 77–8, 81–3, 179; intentionality of 141, 148n4; as knowledge 45–6, 65–74, 161–2, 175–8, 180–1; private 24–6, 28–9, 181; reflective (Dilthey) 28–9; sensory 3, 5, 12, 17–19, 23–7, 29, 52–5, 116, 160, 167, 172; structure of 4, 6, 8, 14, 20–1, 25, 46, 51–74, 78–84, 86–8, 100, 115, 117–19, 121, 124–5, 129, 145–7, 175–6, 181; synaesthetic 129–34, 137, 140  
 experience–language opposition 5–6, 39, 56, 78, 115, 177  
 experimental system (Rheinberger) 37, 56, 67–8, 85, 180  
 expression 4, 7–8, 20–1, 29, 34, 42–3, 91, 123, 129–30, 151–4, 156; embodied 135, 138–40, 142–4; indexical 67–70, 138–40, 142–4, 180–1; through material 58, 85, 92, 106, 120–2, 138–40, 142–4, 164  
  
 family resemblance 34  
 flow (Csikszentmihalyi) 66, 92–4  
 Fontana, L. 16  
 Form (Plato) 21–3, 122, 160  
 formalism 12–13, 17  
 formal properties 8, 169  
 Foucault, M. 14, 35  
  
 fragment (in constellation) 120–4  
 Frankfurt School 117–18  
 Franklin, S. 176  
 Frascati Manual 41, 43, 47n1  
 Frayling, C. 3, 33  
 freedom: artistic 3, 7, 39, 112–17, 134; of construction 91; of reason 20, 45, 72, 121–3; supersensible substrate (Kant) 121–3  
 free play, conceptual: Kant 51, 72, 120, 129, 158, 176–7; Ricœur 100, 102, 104, 157–8, 161, 170–2, 179, 181  
 Frege, G. 157, 172, 178  
 funding: council 2, 40, 77, 110; research 1–2, 40, 44, 110  
  
 Galison, P. 15  
 Gauntlett, D. 91–4, 100–1, 106  
 Geithner, S. 93  
 generality: of concepts 160, 178; of words 3, 18, 56, 77, 81–4, 115  
 general–particular relation 3, 18–19, 25, 56, 65, 77–83, 86, 91, 111–12, 121, 124–5, 154–5, 159–60, 169–70, 175  
 genius 5, 19–21, 29, 71, 73, 113, 148  
 Giacometti, A. 141  
 Gibbs, R.W. 42, 101  
 Giudici, P. 51  
 ‘going beyond’: artistic expression or intention 120, 122; art through interpretation 118, 168–9; body 137–8; concept 21, 123, 159; customary domain 95; disciplinary boundary 44; experience 14, 26, 177; intuition 65, 71, 118, 123; modern art 8, 12–13, 16; object 137–40; properties in artwork 137–40, 143, 168–9, 180; reason 20; science 20, 73; scope of art practice 146; sensation 54, 71; subject criteria 111–12, 114, 159  
 Graham, G. 28  
 Greenberg, C. 12–17, 19, 65, 73  
 grounded theory 116  
 Guattari, F. 2, 4, 178–9  
 Guba, E.G. 37  
 Guo-Qiang, C. 139  
 Guyer, P. 17, 27–8  
  
 Habermas, J. 37  
 Hahn, H. 26  
 Hanfling, O. 34  
 Hannula, M. 77  
 Harty, D. (*humhyphenum*) 7, 129–35, 137, 142, 145–6, 180  
 Hegel, G.W.F. 40, 121, 123–4, 151–2  
 Heidegger, M. 4, 36, 40, 82–3, 88, 155

- Hempel, C. 28  
 hermeneutic circle 29  
 hermeneutics 28–9, 37; *see also* Ricœur  
 hermeticism 14, 117, 123, 147  
 history: danger of being ignored in art  
 interpretation 169; foundation for human  
 being (Dilthey) 28–9, 40; materialist  
 conception (Adorno) 120, 122–3; as  
 source of meaning 74n1; *see also* art  
 history  
 Holdridge, L. 18, 77  
 Holert, T. 5, 40  
 homunculus 23–6, 176, 181; fallacy 24  
 human science 28–9  
 Hume, D. 20, 26, 52  
*humhyphenum* 7, 129–35, 137, 142,  
 145–6, 180  
 Husserl, E. 131  
 hybridity 14, 111, 153  
 Hyman, J. 28
- icon (Peirce) 54, 68, 139, 181  
 idea: aesthetic (Kant) 21, 71–3; clear and  
 distinct (Descartes) 52, 74; simple (Locke)  
 17–18, 160  
 idealism 20, 45, 56, 62, 69, 86, 177; Hegel  
 151–2; Plato 160; transcendental 117  
 idiosyncrasy 113  
 Ihde, D. 54–5, 68, 176  
 image 5–6, 20, 22, 24, 37–8, 78, 94, 98,  
 139, 160, 167–9; scientific 53–4, 68  
 imagination 19–21, 40, 71–2, 92–3, 100,  
 120, 152  
 imitation 16, 20–3, 98, 123, 143  
 immanence 15, 82, 88  
 immanent: to art 39; criticism 14  
 index (Peirce) 54, 68–9, 98  
 indexical: drawing 138–46; expression  
 69–70, 180–1  
 individuation 64, 117, 125, 161  
 in-itself: art 36; artwork 86; being-in-itself  
 (*être-en-soi*; Sartre) 81–2; in contrast to  
 appearance 62, 123, 146, 176; Form  
 (Plato) 22–3; necessity of discourse  
 (Ricœur) 158; reality or thing 79, 86,  
 121, 123, 142; substance 105–6  
 inside–outside distinction 5, 86; *see also*  
 mind–body distinction; subject–object  
 distinction  
 installation 42, 153, 155, 165, 169, 177  
 institutional: critique 8, 34–6, 151; forces 2,  
 4, 11–12, 34, 39–43, 45; theory of art  
 (Dickie) 152  
 intentional fallacy 74n1  
 intentionality 141, 148n4  
 intention of the artist 58, 68–9, 97, 110,  
 112–14, 120, 145, 163–4, 170–2, 179–80  
 interaction: basis for novelty in artistic  
 research 36–7, 67–8, 70, 93, 97–100,  
 104–6, 123, 125, 134, 138–40, 142,  
 144–5, 147, 180; as method 41–3;  
 postconceptual 155–6, 161, 163, 170–2;  
 theory of metaphor 100–1, 106;  
 viewpoint on art contra-research 111–14,  
 116, 125  
 interconceptuality 107, 151, 156–60, 164–5,  
 167, 169–71  
 interdisciplinarity 6, 35–8, 44–5, 47  
 interference, of research methods in art 110,  
 113–14  
 intermediary zone (Busch) 35–6, 44–5,  
 47, 66  
 interpretation: after the end of art 155; in  
 contrast to artistic intention 69, 74n1,  
 179–80; in contrast to empirical  
 description 71, 85, 102, 118; as  
 contribution to artwork 86–8, 115,  
 165–6; resistance to 123–4; role in artistic  
 research 33, 36–7, 41–2, 45, 58, 69–71,  
 86–8, 92–4, 115, 118–19, 125, 165–6  
 intuition: *Anschauung* (Kant) 59–63, 67,  
 71–4, 79, 118–21, 130, 158, 177, 181; as  
 ‘not knowing’ 40; view (in contrast to  
 interaction view on art contra-research)  
 113–14, 116, 125
- Johnson, G.A. 141  
 Johnson, M. 42, 51, 64, 96, 100–1, 178  
 judgment 46, 122–3, 156, 176, 180–1;  
 aesthetic 71–2, 74, 85, 111, 113, 117–23,  
 171–2, 179–81; determinative 60, 71–2,  
 74, 85, 118–23; in Kant 60, 71–2, 74, 85,  
 118–23, 176–7, 180; reflective 71–2, 74,  
 118–23; of taste *see* judgment: aesthetic
- Kant, I. 4–8, 14–15, 40, 45–7, 51–3, 56–7,  
 112, 129–30, 133, 136, 142, 145–7,  
 158–62, 164; aesthetic idea 21, 71–3;  
 aesthetic judgment 72, 74, 85, 118–20;  
 autonomy of art 117–26; concepts  
 organizing experience 59–63, 65–7,  
 69–71, 73–4, 78–9, 175–8, 180–1;  
*Critique of Judgment* 20–1, 46, 71–2, 74,  
 119, 158, 177; *Critique of Pure Reason* 14,  
 20, 45, 59–62, 65, 118, 121, 164;  
 determinative judgment 72, 85, 118, 120,  
 123, 176; genius 20–1, 73; reflective  
 judgment 72, 120, 122
- Kenny, A. 24  
 Kjørup, S. 113

- knowledge: art as 4–6, 33–47, 51–74, 92–4,  
 100–7, 124–6, 145–8, 165–72, 175–82;  
 contribution to 2–4, 43, 110, 116, 131,  
 133, 135–6, 145–8, 156; economy 2–3,  
 110; experience as 45–6, 65–74, 161–2,  
 175–8, 180–1; from metaphor 100–7;  
 theory of 3–5, 11–30, 33–47, 51–74,  
 100–1, 117–24, 156–60; ‘wild’  
 (Busch) 44–5
- Kosuth, J. 152
- Krauss, R. 153, 156, 161
- Kuhn, T. 95–6
- Lakoff, G. 42, 64, 96, 100–1, 178
- language 6, 16, 68, 81, 156–7; inadequacy  
 of 5, 21, 71; observation (positivism)  
 27–8; opposition to art or experience  
 5–6, 33, 39, 56, 78, 115, 177; shared  
 foundation for meaning 19, 40, 42, 52,  
 63, 162–5, 168, 172, 181; theoretical  
 (positivism) 27–8
- layering 102, 106, 130–3, 135, 153, 156,  
 167–9, 177
- Lego 91–4; Serious Play 92–3, 100
- Levins, R. 176
- Lincoln, Y.S. 37
- linguistic imperialism (Thompson) 2,  
 6, 77
- Locke, J. 17–19, 25, 52, 65, 95, 107n1, 160
- logic 27, 29, 74, 109, 124, 178; of practice  
 8, 16, 36, 106
- logical positivism 26; *see also* positivism
- Long, R. 139, 148n2
- Longuenesse, B. 61
- Lynch, M. 15, 54
- Mach, E. 26
- Macleod, K. 18, 77
- Makkreel, R. 28–9
- mark-making 97, 134–5, 143, 163
- Marx, K. 25, 123
- material: expression through 58, 85, 92,  
 106, 120–2, 138–40, 142–4, 164;  
 indexicality 67–70, 138–40, 142–4,  
 180–1; metaphoricity 100–7
- materialism: Marxian 120; new 68, 180
- Matisse, H. 135, 141
- Mauss, M. 35, 44, 66
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 63–4, 84, 129–47
- Messer-Davidow, E. 14
- metaphor: in art 42, 59, 68–70, 85–7,  
 94–107, 119, 125, 179–81; distinct from  
 rhizome 4, 178–9; embodied 91–4, 96;  
 Kant 21, 71; Nietzsche 79; as principle of  
 novelty and connection 4, 7, 71, 91–107,  
 147, 155–61, 168, 170, 172, 179–81;  
 sensitivity to 171–2
- metaphorical discourse (Ricoeur) 100–1,  
 156–9
- metaphoricity of material *see* material
- metaphysics 5, 15, 26, 56, 111–12, 140,  
 152, 161, 177; Kant 59–60, 65; Plato  
 21–3, 160; Sartre 79, 84
- methexis 122
- method 14, 44, 92; artistic research 37,  
 44, 131, 135, 151; of doubt  
 (Descartes) 24; as restriction 109–116,  
 131; scientific research 14, 23, 26, 28,  
 35, 40, 53, 109
- Michaux, H. 136–7
- mimesis* (imitation) 16, 20–3, 98, 123, 143
- mind: behaviourist theory 28;  
 Cartesian theory 24; empiricist theory  
 17–18, 145, 160; idealist theory 62,  
 95; Kantian theory 158, 176; romantic  
 theory 20
- mind–body distinction 5, 24, 56, 67,  
 148, 168
- mind–reality relation 20, 52, 54–6, 59–62,  
 65, 117, 121, 146, 148n4, 152
- Mitchell, W.J.T. 11
- modernism 5, 7–8, 12–14, 20, 28–9,  
 73, 112–14, 120, 122–3, 148, 153, 156,  
 160, 169
- modernity 40
- Montag, D. 139
- Morgan, M.J. 24
- Murray, P. 19
- music 1, 53–5, 58, 87–8, 152, 181
- Nagel, E. 27
- nature 16, 20–1, 26–9, 45, 55, 68, 72, 78,  
 119–21, 123
- Nausea* (the novel) 81–3, 88
- negation 79–80, 118, 121–3
- Neurath, O. 26
- Nietzsche, F. 40, 78–9, 106
- Night Sky #17* (Celmins) 102
- Night Sky #18* (Celmins) 103
- Night Sky #19* (Celmins) 92, 98–9,  
 101–3, 177
- nihilism 79
- Noë, A. 52–3
- Nolan, L. 107n1
- non-conceptual 44–5
- nothing (Sartre) 80–2, 88
- nothingness (experienced by consciousness;  
 Sartre) 80, 84, 88n1; Nothingness (in  
 itself; Sartre) 80, 88n1
- not knowing 40

- novelty 6–7, 33–4, 43, 51, 66–71, 83, 91–2,  
97, 100–2, 104, 113, 117, 168
- numbskull 24
- Nunez, T. 61
- object: preponderance of (Adorno) 121,  
124; technical (Rheinberger) 37–8, 67–8
- objectivity 16, 54–5, 73, 82, 120, 122, 125,  
146–7, 159, 166
- observation: language (as counterpart to  
theoretical language) 27; statement (as  
counterpart to theoretical statement) 3,  
27, 29, 74
- ‘octopus’ metaphor for concepts 178–9
- Old Master 13
- olive oil 143–7
- ontology 94, 104, 106, 117, 142, 153,  
162, 179
- open up (epistemologically) 8–9, 21, 87,  
106, 158, 176–7
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation  
and Development (OECD) 41, 47n1
- Osborne, P. 8, 151, 154–6, 161, 165–7, 169
- overwhelmed, state of being 73, 160, 162,  
171, 180
- own-ness or on own terms 4, 7–8, 12–17,  
22, 25, 36, 40, 44, 60, 67, 87–8, 94–9,  
105–6, 109–10, 112–16, 130, 135–7,  
141, 146–8, 148n1, 151, 153–6, 159,  
163, 169, 180
- painting 13–17, 22–3, 35, 42, 87–8, 102,  
119, 125, 130, 134–8, 142–3, 152
- paper 97–9, 102–6, 131, 139, 143–4, 148n3,  
163, 165, 170, 172, 177
- Parker, C. 139, 148n1
- particularity: 15, 22, 147, 160; artwork 3, 6,  
25, 85–6, 99–100, 115, 121–2; 124–5,  
154–5, 159, 169–70; experience 18–19,  
25, 56, 65, 77–83, 86, 115, 121
- Peirce, C.S. 54, 68, 98, 139, 180
- performance 1, 6, 41, 153
- performativity: of art 37–8, 98; of  
knowledge 35, 38
- Perini, L. 54
- phenomenology 45, 66–7, 73, 145,  
148n4, 164, 177, 180; Heidegger 4, 36;  
*humhyphenum* 130–5, 146; Merleau-  
Ponty 63, 84, 137–41; Sartre 82, 84, 115
- photography 92, 98–99, 102–3, 105,  
123, 166
- physiognomy (Adorno) 120, 122–3
- Piaget, J. 92–3
- pilot in the ship (Descartes) 24
- Pinch, T. 176
- Pippin, R.B. 61
- Plato 5, 21–6, 60, 65, 74, 79, 102, 122,  
160, 178
- play: concepts in indexical expression  
69–70; in contrast to research 116;  
*humhyphenum* 130–2, 135; Lego 91–3,  
100; material 93–4, 102, 106; *see also* free  
play, conceptual
- Pleaser* (Black) 56–9, 67, 69–70, 85, 177
- poetics: of art 25, 27, 29, 44, 59, 74n1, 114,  
116–17; of knowledge 6, 35–6, 38, 47,  
74; post-aesthetic 155–6, 162, 169–72; of  
research 6, 169–72, 181
- poetry 38, 78, 87–8, 152
- positivism 26–9, 40, 74; logical 26
- postconceptual 151, 154–5, 159, 161–3,  
165, 168–72; art 161–3, 165, 168, 172
- post-historical (Danto) 153–4
- post-medium (Krauss) 153–4, 156
- postmodernism 40, 153
- poststructuralism 75n1, 164
- predication 78, 83, 100–1, 104, 157–8, 178
- preponderance of the object (*Präponderanz  
des Objekts, Vorrang des Objekts*; Adorno)  
121, 124
- presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*; Heidegger)  
82–3, 88
- Price, H.H. 18–19
- primary–secondary quality distinction 86,  
95, 107n1
- primary subject (metaphor) 100–1, 104
- pure concepts (Kant) 60–1, 121
- purity 12, 14–16, 18–19, 29, 111, 116–17,  
123, 146, 169
- purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*; Kant) 20, 72,  
119, 121, 126, 158
- qualia 19, 25
- Raad, W. (The Atlas Group) 8, 155,  
165–9, 180
- Rancière, J. 4, 33–4
- rationalism 17, 20, 23, 45, 52, 56, 69, 86,  
117, 177
- Rätselcharakter* (enigmaticalness; Adorno) 120
- readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*; Heidegger)  
82, 88
- ready-made 34, 115, 151–2, 154, 171
- realism 152; agential (Barad) 180
- reality: absolute or essential 22–3, 26, 121,  
146, 152; appearance versus 22–3, 26,  
54–6, 107n1; common-sense view 60; in  
contrast to art 16, 23; in contrast to  
human freedom 20, 121; insight into 20;  
intelligible nature 119, 161; made



- manifest 67–8, 83, 87, 181;  
 socio-historical 28–9, 40  
 recalcitrance of matter 58, 67–8, 85, 91, 130  
 reference 164, 167; Frege 157–8, 172; Kuhn  
 95; Ricœur 156–8, 172  
 relativism 74, 176  
 religion 15, 122  
 representation: constructed nature of 123,  
 169; in contrast to expression 13, 21, 98,  
 132, 136, 139, 141, 143–5; property of  
 art 34–5, 69, 87, 100, 102–4, 151, 153–4,  
 156, 163, 177; of reality 22–3, 38, 54, 68,  
 87, 100, 167–8; in thought 107  
 research: assessment 1–2, 4, 41–2,  
 110–11; council 2, 40, 77, 110;  
 definition 38–45; funding 1–2, 40, 44,  
 110; into-through-for art distinction  
 (Frayling) 3, 33; method (artistic) 37,  
 44, 131, 135, 151; method (scientific) 14,  
 23, 26, 28, 35, 40, 53, 109; *see also* artistic  
 research  
 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 1–2;  
*see also* research: assessment  
 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 41,  
 43, 110; *see also* research: assessment  
 Research Selectivity Exercise 1  
 Rheinberger, H.-G. 37–8, 67–71, 85,  
 176, 180  
 rhizome 178–9  
 Richards, I.A. 20, 104, 178–9  
 Ricœur, P. 4, 7, 37, 92, 100–1, 104, 106,  
 156–61, 170, 172, 176–8  
 Roberts, G. 2  
 Rolleston, Marquis de 81  
 romanticism 19–20, 40, 113, 152  
 Roquentin, A. 81–3, 88  
 Rose, H. 176  
 rupture (writing) 79–80, 83–8  
 Russell, B. 157
- salience 53–4, 57, 64, 68–9, 80, 83, 96, 105,  
 171–2  
 Sartre, J.-P. 7, 78–88, 162, 176  
 Saussure, F. de 42  
 Sawdon, P. (*humhyphenhum*) 7, 129–35, 137,  
 142, 145–6, 180  
 Schaffer, S. 176  
 schema, body (Merleau-Ponty) 63–4, 130,  
 133, 136–8, 140–5  
 schematism (Kant) 121, 126  
 Schopenhauer, A. 77, 81  
 Schulz, K.-P. 93  
 Schwab, M. 1, 37–8, 44, 110  
 science: as access to the world 53–5, 67–8,  
 181; art– 35–7, 40, 111; distinct from art  
 1, 5, 15, 20, 23, 27–9, 36, 40, 73; human  
 28–9; natural 28–9; paradigm of  
 knowledge 14, 26, 40–1, 43–4, 115;  
 philosophy of 5, 26–9, 45, 55, 67–8, 74,  
 95–6; as reduction 15; ‘wars’ 176  
 scientific: method 15, 19, 35, 41, 43, 47n1,  
 67–8, 110–11; visualization 53–5, 106,  
 181; worldview 15, 19, 26–9  
 Scrivener, S. 4, 33–4  
 sculpture 16, 56–9, 67–72, 85, 87, 152,  
 153, 177  
 secondary quality 86, 95, 107n1  
 secondary subject (metaphor) 100–1, 104  
 self–expression 7; in flow 93; theories of  
 human 23–6, 52, 59–61, 78–83  
 self-containment: model of concepts 112,  
 115; modernist 3, 5, 12–14, 16–17, 73;  
*see also* ‘container’ logic  
 sensation: challenge to thought 8, 46–7, 71,  
 73, 115, 181–2; conceptualized (Kant)  
 52–3, 55–6, 59–60, 71, 118, 124, 181;  
 distinct from reason 11–12, 23–5, 26, 46,  
 160, 177; empiricism 17–19, 26–8, 160;  
 as interaction 95; as metaphor 96;  
 particularity 17–19; phenomenology  
 63–4, 86, 129–38, 140–1, 143–6;  
 possession 25; pure 19  
 sense (Frege) 157–8, 172  
 sense datum 18–19  
 sensibility 20, 34, 60, 62, 147, 171–2, 177  
 sensorimotor system 64, 96, 178  
 Shapin, S. 176  
 shaping: effect of material on thought 163,  
 165; of experience by concepts 6, 15, 46,  
 52–6, 59, 65–6, 72–4, 171, 176–7; of  
 experience by writing 78–9, 81, 83; of  
 reality by Forms 22  
 Sheets-Johnstone, M. 63  
 Shumway, D.R. 14  
 significant form 13–14, 93, 109, 122  
 signifier 125, 132, 163  
 sign system 42  
 simple idea (Locke) 17–18, 160  
 Slager, H. 1, 4, 36, 115  
 slicing, by description 78, 83  
 Smith, G. 4  
 Smithsonian, R. 153, 155  
 Snow, C.P. 40  
 sociology 176; visual 91–4  
 Sokal, A.D. 176  
 sound 53–5, 125, 132, 140–1, 155,  
 166–7, 170  
 speculative discourse (Ricœur) 100–1,  
 156–9  
 Strain, S. 98

- subject: experiencing 6, 25, 29, 61, 65, 120–1, 137, 146–7; human 78, 80, 84, 121, 137, 146
- subject community 43–4, 66
- subjective–objective distinction 3, 5, 55, 82, 125, 129, 147
- subjectivity 3, 5, 20, 27–8, 39, 42, 55, 65, 82–3, 85, 96, 129, 145–7, 168, 172, 181
- subject–object distinction 5, 28, 55, 67, 84, 120, 125, 129, 145–7, 148n4, 176
- subject–predicate relation 78, 83, 100–1, 104, 157–8, 178
- subject term (in metaphor) 100–1, 104
- Sullivan, G. 37, 115
- supersensible 121
- surface: painting 13, 138–9, 142–3; paper 96–8, 102, 104–6, 163, 172, 177; tree 144–5
- surprise: Boden 6, 34, 43; emergence from concepts 125, 146, 162–3, 172, 175–6; Kant 45–6, 51, 60, 67, 73; metaphor 91, 100, 125, 181
- surrealism 42, 44
- symbol 16, 20, 54, 68–9, 87; Peirce 68, 139, 181
- synaesthesia 7, 129–38, 140–1, 143–6
- Taste of Tree? Layer 3 Digital Drawing 2, The (humhyphenum)* 132–3, 135
- ‘Taste of Tree?, The’ (*humhyphenum*) 129–35, 138, 146
- Taylor, C.C.W. 107n1
- technical object (Rheinberger) 37–8, 67–8
- technology: autofigurative 137–9, 142, 144–5; choice in postconceptual practice 160–5, 179; embedded in history 112–14, 120, 123; enabling expression 8, 33, 36, 42, 46, 51, 170, 172; indexical expression 130, 137, 139, 142, 144–5, 180; metaphorical dimension 38, 94, 106; modernity 12, 40; post–medium 153; scientific imaging 53–5
- tenor (Richards) 104, 179
- ‘tentacle’ metaphor for concepts 160–1, 167–8, 172, 175, 177–80
- texture 62, 88, 105, 141, 163, 177
- theoretical: language (as counterpart to observation language) 27; statement (as counterpart to observation statement) 3, 27, 29, 74
- theory–practice distinction 3, 5, 7–8, 12, 17, 36, 77, 91, 115, 175
- Thompson, J. 2, 6, 12, 18, 33, 77
- topography 78–80, 82, 84
- trace 68–72, 97–8, 139, 141–3, 145, 177
- transcategoriality 8, 155–6, 159–60, 165–7
- transcendental (Kant) 60–1, 65, 158, 176; idealism 117
- transcognition (Sullivan) 37
- transformation 3, 15; in art 4, 33–6, 51, 85, 132; of concepts 162, 165; of material 51, 93, 95, 97, 101–2, 104–7
- tree: *humhyphenum* 129–35, 137; indexical expression of 138, 142–7; –root (Sartre) 82–3, 86
- truth 52, 79, 118; absolute 15, 22–4; construct 15, 79; content of art (Adorno) 121–2; empirical (verifiable) 26
- vehicle (Richards) 104, 178–9
- Venn, J. 178
- verification 26, 29, 64, 85, 115–16, 118, 155–6
- video 42, 92–3, 125, 131–2, 153, 155, 165–9
- Vienna Circle 26, 28
- visualization 14–15, 20, 37, 53–5, 58, 68, 163, 181
- ‘voice’ metaphor (Ihde) 54–5, 68
- Vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand; Heidegger) 82–3, 88
- Vorrang des Objekts* (preponderance of the object; Adorno) 121, 124
- Wall, J. 39
- We Can Make Rain But No One Came to Ask* (Walid Raad/The Atlas Group) 155, 165–9
- Wimsatt, Jr., W.K. 75n1
- Wittgenstein, L. 19, 42, 164
- Witzgall, S. 65, 58, 67–70, 85
- Wolin, R. 123
- word–image distinction 5, 11, 19, 56, 77–8
- working with 91, 97, 99, 105–6, 114, 161, 163–4
- writing 3, 6–7, 15, 17, 38, 77–88, 115, 135–6, 179
- Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand; Heidegger) 82, 88
- Zweckmäßigkeit* (purposiveness; Kant) 20, 72, 119, 121, 126, 158



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