



Conceptual Art

by Ian Wilson

The difference between conceptual art and poetry, literature, and philosophy is that conceptual art takes the principles of visual abstraction, founded in the visual arts, and applies them to language. When it does that a nonvisual abstraction occurs.

Nonvisual abstraction is more difficult to grasp than visual abstraction. Although it occurs in all forms of language, it is never focused on.

Nonvisual abstraction is difficult to grasp because we continue to look for something. This tendency of looking for visual meaning, or trying to use the visual faculty, causes meaninglessness to occur.

Nonvisual abstraction is difficult to appreciate because it deals with the most difficult objective to comprehend. It endeavors to inspire a consciousness of being which is formless.

Nonvisual abstraction is at the heart of conceptual art.

Nonvisual abstraction is formless.

There still is content in visual abstraction, but nonvisual abstraction has no content.

A concept without a content is formless.

True conceptual art does not compromise itself by re-entering the traditional context of the visual arts. No matter how nonvisual or abstract a work may be, when it is put on a gallery wall language becomes an object to be looked at and not read. Print becomes a visual object to the extent it is physically removed from the reader.

Conceptual art presented in a typeface larger than 12 points causes a reference to a place other than the consciousness of the reader.

When consciousness is related to place and time it is limited in place and time.

Consciousness withdrawn from external references is beyond space and time.

Conceptual art is beyond space and time.

Space and time have nothing to do with the nature of consciousness. They are superimposed upon it.

True conceptual art shows a reality without dimension, without form.

At the outset it was misunderstood that conceptual art meant any art that was involved in ideas, or that had an idea involved in its construction, be it a photograph, painting, or sculpture. This is not so.

Conceptual art is not about ideas. It is about the degree of abstraction of ideas.

The idea "car" is not as appropriate as the idea "infinity". It is not as abstract.

Abstraction is concerned with the present.

The true present is without references of space and time.

The conceptual artist is someone who has been trained rigorously in visual abstraction and brings this into the area of language.

The conceptual artist raises the consciousness of abstraction in language.

The conceptual artist points to abstraction as an expression of the evolving consciousness. By removing all social and political references this evolving consciousness searches for a means to see through an opaque language.

The nature of abstraction is so obscure that it had to be discovered by a primary research such as the visual arts. Poetry, literature and philosophy have used abstraction but it was never focused on for itself. Once the principles of abstraction were understood, the only way they could be further developed was for the artist to move into language.

The artist is forced to go beyond visual abstraction and enter language the better to express an evolving ability to grasp a nonvisual world.

Sol LeWitt's statements about conceptual art are important. They are, however, general enough to include physical execution of ideas.

Joseph Kosuth's writings on conceptual art go further. Although still concerned with the visual presentation of ideas, he shows the essential nature of an idea to be removed from its physical execution. However, we must move further into a more precise definition of the nonvisual and formless nature of conceptual art.

True conceptual art moves beyond visual and physical execution of ideas no matter how abstract, beyond figurative and inanimate ideas: true conceptual art is found within the formless abstractions of language.

The development of art is the development of abstraction, and the development of abstraction is the movement into a formless language.

Language is the most formless means of expression. Its capacity to describe concepts without physical or visual references carries us into an advanced state of abstraction.

Conceptual art is concerned with the internal, intellectual nature of a concept. The more re-

moved from external references, the stronger the concept.

The nature of concepts is antithetical to sensual reality. Conceptual art, when it is taken seriously, separates consciousness from the exterior world.

Concepts are, however, involved in our every day. A person in the street is a concept. We are always associating concepts with physical reality. Good conceptual art isolates the concept. Everyday thought is composed of both concepts and the relationship of concepts to the external world. There is a clear distinction between the two. Conceptual art makes this distinction. Art that has visual aspects is concerned with references exterior to the concept as well as the concept. Good conceptual art is concerned with just the concept.

When a concept is made strong, that is, removed from external references, consciousness is cut off from the physical world. The awareness of consciousness removed from external objects is an awareness of energy, an awareness of being: the conscious mind aware of itself.

Consciousness of a person or an inanimate object is not the heart of consciousness. The heart of consciousness is a state of being which is formless.

That which is neither known nor unknown is without form. What is grasped is an awareness of being.

Being is the awareness of consciousness.

Reality is the formless heart of consciousness.

Consciousness focused into the present becomes conscious of itself.

At the moment consciousness becomes aware of itself it withdraws. Withdrawn from the concept, consciousness itself is the object.

Visual art presents an exterior point for the viewer to focus on. Good conceptual art leaves nothing. The reader is suspended, and it is from this vacuum that true consciousness emerges. Normally consciousness is related to forms. Abstraction reduces that relationship. Nonvisual abstraction reduces it further.

Language is made transparent by abstraction.

The heart of consciousness is shown by a transparent language.

A nonvisual abstraction such as "that which is neither known nor unknown" reduces logical thought totally and in this way allows intuitive insight to occur.

Thought without an object of thought is a formless concept.

The nature of the inspired state is shown as a formless concept.

When consciousness becomes aware of itself it becomes inspired.

The inherent potential of a universal concept is a means of expression whose physical existence does not compete or eclipse the subtle consciousness involved in comprehending a formless concept.

The concept of infinity is a very beautiful concept. Although unseen it provokes us to try to comprehend it, forcing us to enter the inspired state. The inspired state being that state in which reality is understood.

Formless and without content, the structure of a universal concept approaches the structure of the inspired state.

Nonvisual abstraction allows an appreciation of the inspired state that figurative art doesn't. It articulates the formless nature of the inspired state.

Nonvisual abstraction shows the inspired state to exist independently of the physical world.

Physical objects may raise consciousness to the inspired state, but it exists independently of these objects.

Good conceptual art realizes the force of its own reality.

True conceptual art is aware of the force of the moment in which it exists. For example:

Ruptured (Lawrence Weiner, 1969). It is persistent, unique, allusive, harmonious . . . (Robert Barry, 1970); meaning . . . = that which exists in the mind (Joseph Kosuth, 1968);  $1 = 1$  and  $1 + 1 = 2$  is  $1\ 2$  . . . (Hanne Darboven, 1971).

In the best conceptual art only very pure concepts are used.

Passing toward the center of conceptual art, idea-oriented figurative writing, photography, and painting are on the remote periphery. Passing the visual realm of color and natural form we pass closer to the center. We have already passed idea-oriented performance and social and political writing. We have passed abstract color painting. We pass black and white abstract painting. Approaching the limit of visual abstraction we pass from three to two dimension and into language descriptions of abstract physical objects and events. Passing beyond metaphor, beyond criticism, beyond art, beyond space and time, we come upon the formless abstractions of language. Infinite and formless what is presented is neither known nor unknown.

This is the center. This is the heart of conceptual art.

Ian Wilson's text was originally published in Artforum, 22:6, 1994: 60-61. It is printed here by kind permission of the artist.

Technology and Production

By Pierre Bismuth  
14/12/2009

Today, human activity seems to consist essentially of working to build and maintain the economy: work on the one hand and the acquisition of products (goods and services) on the other.

Work and acquiring products are in fact one and the same thing that is basically contributing to the flow of production. The term "consumption" is no longer appropriate for this system because the acquisition phase is now an integral part of work. In this sense, free time is also an integral part of work.

We are no longer slaves of any other individual, as the existence of all men, without distinction, is driven by one and the same thing: production and the flow of production.

Contributing to the flow of production should be considered as the most advanced contemporary form of work. We are experiencing what is no doubt the most evolved phase of democracy in that no class, or social group, is exempted from this task.

It would be a mistake to think that the unemployed do not work. All men work if they have the means to contribute to the flow of production.

Unemployment benefit is the state's indirect contribution to the flow of the economy. It helps the young to join the flow of production and the most disadvantaged not to leave it. Recipients of this benefit have a debt to society in that everyone should be capable of working autonomously to sustain the flow of production.

The economy is based on production, and this is driven by technological progress.

Technology does not free man from labour. It augments the field of labour for each individual and makes us increasingly autonomous with regard to others.

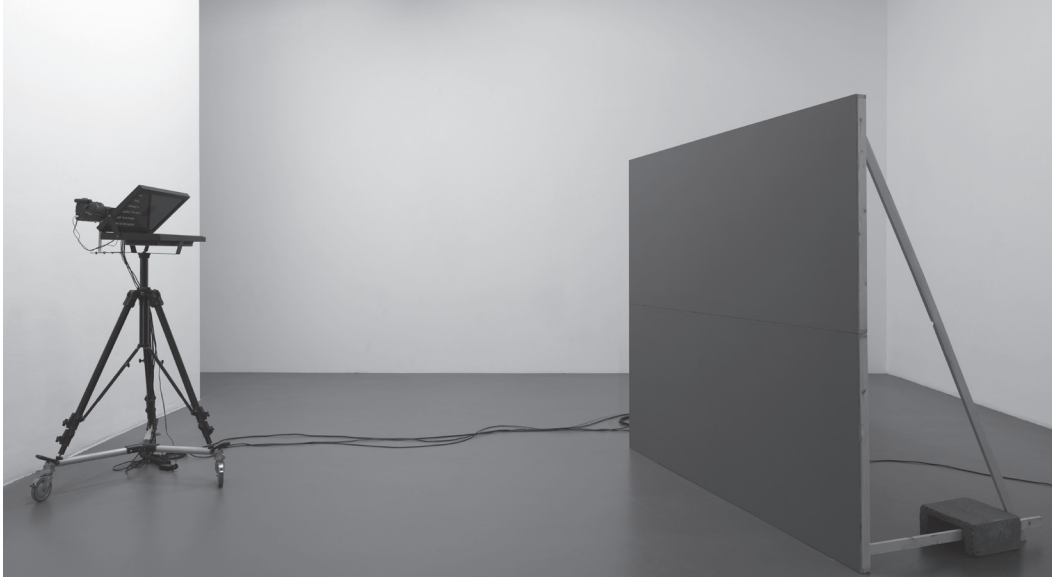
Autonomy created by technology is considered freedom.

Technological research is a speculative system whose motivation is the very possibility of technological progress. Technological innovations are developed well before their application is conceived. It is only once technological innovations are operational that applications are sought.

Technology is not there to solve problems but to create potential for exploitation and capitalisation.

Technology has become in the end the model for life as we impose to our own existence the imperative of constant improvement and development inherent in technological production. Technological development is for the time being mankind's only future.

This text is part of Pierre Bismuth's installation Technological Development is for the Time Being Mankind's Only Future, Part I, 2011, first shown at Witte de With, Rotterdam as part of the show The End of Money, 2011. The last sentence appears as an aphorism in the edition Bismuth recently produced with More Publishers, Ghent.



• **Pierre Bismuth**, *Technological Development is for the Time Being Mankind's Only Future, Part I*, 2011, Installation view, *The End of Money*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (NL), 2011

Porte literary festival. It was here that I was... it was Claude Tarnay that put me in touch...unities where desire for life's necessities

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Much of the conceptualist legacy. Indeed, a civil disobedience that might foster... telephone. This was a malicious



My Approach to Work in 1968

By David Lamelas  
Buenos Aires - London 1968

Introduction to the work.

I WILL ENUMERATE THE PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERLIE MY WORKS FROM 1 TO 10:

1. They are not focused on artistic production.
2. They set forth defined objectives.
3. The work is not assimilated by contemplation.
4. They are not art objects, rather products.
5. They take on meaning from the time they come into existence, whether they are understood or not.
6. They do not exist as final products, because they never reach completion.
7. They are not to be judged.
8. They do not address intellectual or sociological problems.
9. I produce them based on intuitive projects.
10. They are unimaginable within the sphere of aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

1. Idea taken from Raúl Escari's prologue on my work presented at the 34th Venice Biennial (catalogue of Argentine representation).

The present text, originally titled "Mi sistema de trabajo en 1968.", was published in Katzenstein, Inés (ed.). Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde. New York: Museum of Modern Art. 2004: 247 (translation Eileen Brockbank) and is printed with the kind permission of the artist.

# In Brief

**Tris Vonna-Michell** was nominated for the Hugo Boss Prize 2012. Laureates of past editions of the prize include Douglas Gordon (1998), Pierre Huyghe (2002), Tacita Dean (2006) and Hans-Peter Feldmann (2010). The winner will be chosen and announced in fall 2012.

**Sven Augustijnen's** artist book *Spectres*, published on the occasion of the exhibition of the same name at Wiels, Brussels, won the Prix Fernand Baudin.

On March 11, More Publishers, Ghent published an edition by **Pierre Bismuth**, *Aphorisms from 1999 and 2011*. The edition is available on <http://www.morepublishers.be/>.

The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, acquired *I Promise Every Time*, 2008, a sound piece by **Mario Garcia Torres**.

**Ian Wilson's** *Chalk Circle on the Floor*, 1968 entered the collection of FRAC Lorraine, Metz.

The film *My Frontier Is an Endless Wall of Points (After the Mescaline Drawings of Henri Michaux)*, 2007 by **Joachim Koester** was acquired by Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

**Joachim Koester's** recently concluded exhibition at IAC Villeurbanne / Rhône-Alpes will be followed by solo shows at MIT

List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Mass. (from May 10 to July 8, 2012), Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen and SMAK - Ghent. A publication will accompany this exhibition cycle.

After producing a solo show of **David Lamelas** in 2009, Centro José Guerrero, Granada published *David Lamelas: In Place of Film*, which includes an extensive catalogue of the artist's film and video work, as well as essays by Eric de Bruyn, Pamela M. Lee and Inés Katzenstein.

*Qu'est-ce que le curating?* was recently published by Manuella Editions, Paris. The volume contains the proceedings of a panel with Elie During, **Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster** and Hans-Ulrich Obrist held at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris in 2009.

**Ian Wilson's** show at the gallery will be preceded by Discussions on the topic *The Pure Awareness of the Absolute in Art* on March 27 and 28. Wilson will also hold a Discussion organized by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and supported by Massimo Minini at Villa Reale, Milan on April 1 and continue his series of Discussions about *The Pure Awareness of the Absolute* at DIA Beacon, Beacon on April 7. An interview by Hans-Ulrich Obrist with the artist has been published on issue #31 of Mousse.

For the seventh time, the gallery will participate in the Art Galleries section of Art Basel, which will take place from June 14 to 17. At Art Unlimited, the gallery will present a new film by **Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster** and Tristan Bera, *Belle comme le jour*, 2012.

# Agenda

**Sven Augustijnen**  
*Masterpieces in the MAS. Five centuries of images in Antwerp*, MAS, Antwerp (BE), 17/05 - 30/12; *Contour on tour*, De Locketten, Brussels (BE), 21/03 - 11/06; *Spectres*, Hantologie des colonies, Università di Gorizia, Gorizia (IT), 28/03 (screening); *Spectres*, Festival International du Film Policier, Liège (BE), 19/04 - 22/04 (screening); *Auguste Orts for ING*, Art Brussels, Brussels, 19/04 - 22/04; *Spectres*, IndieLisboa, Lisbon, 26/04 - 05/05 (screening); TRACK, Ghent (BE), 12/05 - 16/09.

**Pierre Bismuth**  
*A Corral around Your Idea*, Jan Mot, Brussels, 28/01 - 31/03; *Neon - Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?*, La Maison Rouge, Paris, 17/02 - 20/05; *The Artists' Postcard Show*, Spike Island, Bristol (UK), 06/04 - 17/06; *Berlin Biennale*, Berlin, 27/04 - 21/07; *The Art of Cooking*, Royal T, Los Angeles (US), 27/04 - 01/08; *Graphology*, Drawing Room, London, 09/05 - *An Incomplete History of Incomplete Works of Art*, Francesca Mimini, Milan (IT), from 10/05; *Trait papier. Essai sur le dessin contemporain*, Musée des beaux-arts de La Chaix-de-Fonds (FR), 13/05 - 12/08; Jan Mot, Brussels, 02/06 - 14/07 (solo).

**Manon de Boer**  
*Think about Wood, Think about Metal*, AV Festival 12, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, 01/03 - 31/03; *Im Gespräch - 8 Untersuchungen zum subjektiven Wissen - Part 1*, Heidelberg Kunstverein, Heidelberg (DE), 09/03 - 15/04; *L'Eincelle qui met feu à la plaine. Conditions d'émergence et d'existence de l'art*, Fundación Centro Ecuatoriano de Arte Contemporáneo, Quito (EC), 10/03 - 14/04; *Several Silences*, Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville (US), 16/03 - 20/05; *Dissonant*, SensoProject, Paris, 30/03 (screening); *Auguste Orts for ING*, Art Brussels, Brussels, 19/04 - 22/04; John Cage and... - *John Cage as Visual Artist*, Museum der Moderne Mönchsberg, Salzburg (AT), 14/07 - 07/10; *Silence*, The Menil Collection, Houston (US), 27/07 - 21/10.

**Rineke Dijkstra**  
*Why I never Became a Dancer: Goetz Collection in Haus der Kunst*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (DE), 29/09 - 01/04; *Istanbul Eindhoven-SALT Van Abbe*, SALT Beyoglu, Istanbul (TR), 27/01 - 06/04; *Zoet en Zout*,

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*Water en de Nederlanders*, Kunsthall Rotterdam, Rotterdam (NL), 14/02 - 10/06; *Rineke Dijkstra: A Retrospective*, SFMOMA, San Francisco (US), 18/02 - 28/05 (solo); *Der Mensch und seine Objekte*, Museum Folkwang, Essen (DE), 25/02 - 29/04; *Colapso. Un Ensayo Sobre El Fracaso Y la Ruptura*, Sala Exposiciones Fonseca, Salamanca (ES), 02/03 - 06/05; *The Great Workshop*, MAC Grand-Hornu, Hornu (BE), 05/03 - 03/06; *Passions - Art and Emotions through Five Centuries*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 08/03 - 12/08; *Arte torna arte*, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence (IT), 08/05 - 04/11; *Megacoal 4.0. Youth and Art*, Künstlerhaus k/haus, Vienna, 14/06 - 30/09; *Rineke Dijkstra: A Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 29/06 - 03/10 (solo).

### Mario Garcia Torres

*A Corral around Your Idea*, Jan Mot, Brussels, 28/01 - 31/03; *Dallas Biennale*, Dallas (US), 13/04 - 19/08; *An Incomplete History of Incomplete Works of Art*, Francesca Minini, Milan (IT), from 10/05.

### Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

Pavillon d'argent, Jan Mot, Mexico City, 30/08 - 14/07 (solo); *Belle comme le jour*, Art Unlimited, Basel, 14/06 - 17/06.

### Douglas Gordon

*The Art of Deceleration*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg (DE), 12/11 - 09/04; *Douglas Gordon*, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt/Main (DE), 19/11 - 25/03 (solo); *A Trip to the Moon. Before and After Film*, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, 08/02 - 08/04; *The Sports Show: Minnesota*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis (US), 16/02 - 02/09; *Art and Press*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 23/03 - 24/06; *Sculpture in the Gardens*, Waddeston Manor, Aylesbury (UK), 26/03 - 28/10; *Found Footage*, Eye Film Institute, Amsterdam, 05/04 - 03/06; *Miroslaw Balka and Douglas Gordon*, Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv, from 14/04 (solo); *ALICE - In the Wonderland of Art*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Berlin, 22/06 - 30/09.

### Joachim Koester

*Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, Jan Mot, Mexico City, 19/11 - 14/07 (solo); *A Corral around Your Idea*, Jan Mot, Brussels, 28/01 - 31/03; *Ritual without Myth*, Royal College of Art Galleries, 08/03 - 25/03; *Spring Exhibitions and Projects*, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson (US), 18/03 - 15/04; *Sound + Vision*, Plug In ICA, Winnipeg (CA), 13/04 - 16/06; *To Navigate, in a Genuine Way, in the Unknown...*, MIT List Visual Arts Center,

Cambridge, Mass. (US), 10/05 - 08/07 (solo); *A Blind Spot*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 31/05 - 01/07.

### David Lamelas

*Formes brèves, autres*, 25, FRAC Lorraine, Metz (FR), 27/01 - 08/04; *Shiver in the Shift*, Parra & Romero, Madrid, 24/03-05/05; *Zona Maco Sur*, Zona Maco, Mexico City, 18/04 - 22/04; Jan Mot, Mexico City, 21/04 - 14/07 (solo).

### Sharon Lockhart

*Sharon Lockhart / Noa Eshkol*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 13/12 - 30/04 (solo); *Sharon Lockhart*, Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Castellón de la Plana (ES), 18/02 - 29/04 (solo); *More American Photographs*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (US), 01/03 - 03/06; *Chasing Shadows: Santu Mokofeng. Thirty Years of Photographic Essays*, Extra City, Antwerp (BE), 04/05 - 29/07; *Sharon Lockhart / Noa Eshkol*, LACMA, Los Angeles (US), 02/06 - 09/09 (solo).

### Tino Sehgal

*Danser sa vie*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 23/11 - 02/04; *Photo*, Musée de la danse / St. Melaine, Rennes (FR), EESAB, Rennes (FR), 05/03 - 31/03; Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 17/07 - 28/10 (solo).

### Tris Vonna-Michell

*Never odd or even - A text spaced exhibition*, Museum of Contemporary Art Roskilde, Roskilde (DK), 13/01 - 08/04; *Descriptive Acts*, SFMOMA, San Francisco (US), 18/02 - 17/06.

### Ian Wilson

*Discussion*, Villa Reale, Milan (IT), 01/04; *Discussion*, DIA Beacon, Beacon (US), 07/04; *Ian Wilson*, Jan Mot, Brussels Mot, Brussels, 07/04 - 26/05 (solo).

### Colophon

*Publisher* Jan Mot, Brussels  
*Concept Design* Maureen Mooren & Daniël van der Velden  
*Graphic Design* Maureen Mooren, Amsterdam  
*Printing* Cultura, Wetteren

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