

## The Case for Conceptualism

I would like to state the obvious. There is an expression in English that I recently saw mis-expressed in an English translation of Russian, a translation of a Moscow Conceptualist text, though I could not tell whether it was an intentional mis-expression, such as a pun, or a more honest mistake. The American idiom is “price is no object.” The English mis-expression was “price is no obstacle.” The former is superior, of course, because price is no object, though it may be objectionable, and price is always an obstacle insofar as it is either a hindrance or something to be used in show jumping. For some time, I have been thinking about conceptualism relative to the whatever it is that we are now in, and it occurs to me not finally that it *is* what we are now in, that is to say that what has not yet been said is the obvious proposition that this is the conceptualist period. By which I mean to say that just as postmodernism was definitionally and historically a reaction to modernism, conceptualism is a historical response to postmodernism, and a response is, as a categorical matter, *next*.

For his part, Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as a disinclination toward what he posited as the two great metanarratives of modernism—emancipation and idealism, as respectively signified by the French and German humanist houses. Houses subdivide, the grandfather gives rise to some number of grandsons, and petit histoires are spun. The critique, of course, has been that given enough fistfuls of little narratives, a grand one is bound to be cobbled together, for the sake of the children if nothing else, and there is always something else. In this case, epistemological efficiency and salvation of the representative soul. For inasmuch as postmodernism snuffed out the author, it kept the text, that is to say the reader, very much front and center, and not just any reader, but the right reader, the meta-conscious reader, the reader who was attuned, acutely so, to the various phlegmatic calls to which the text demanded a clear collectivized response. If deconstruction taught us anything, it taught us anything. That would be the discourse of the university.

Take three propositions on the postmodern case:

Lyotard: *there is no metanarrative.*

Lacan: *there is no metalanguage.*

Wittgenstein: *there is no metamathematics.*

It is easy enough to spot the tripartite commonality: each negation presupposes application of an extant positive, a given discourse. And, of course, to say there is no meta means a meta very much exists that one may then, like Derrida, debunk without erasing. Or, like Rauschenberg, erase without effacing. For, like God, one cannot kill without first creating. It is worth noting that this disavowal not unexpectedly took the form of an excess subjectivity, of subject *cum* object, of meta-subjectivity, that is to say, of a self so infused with self-consciousness (from which this meta-self sprung, Athena-like from the Cartesian *cogito*) that it hovered over itself, checking

itself, pulling itself up and letting itself go, in a teathered orgy of ebb and flow, as in the fictions of Gass and Robbe-Grillet, or excreting itself teaspoon by teaspoon, as in the poems of Creeley and Olson, or playing cards with Time, as in Roubaud or Eco, or setting the board for the language game itself, as in Oulipo. Later and still, there was and is *écriture féminine* and a general preference for polyphony, that parliament of fowls which always follows a lead bird. Which we learned again in the ethics of Langpo. And again again in the identities of post-identity poetics. In other words, whether the houses previously mentioned were being shown to be made of mirrors or merely words, they were still home to something, for somewhere lurking was Heidegger's claim that *Language is the house of the truth of Being*. Or Mallarmé's statement that *it is language which speaks*, an argument that has proven more popular. But language does not speak. Today's text is as dead as its writer. Put another way, there is no meta-grammar, and price is no object.

Put still another way, if Heidegger was right, or at least complementary, in that the project of the modernist was to situate man in relation to being or the Being, and that man exists through corresponding to being or the Being, an argument also borne by Benjamin, at least in terms of a nostalgic (if fictive) sense of having-been, and if Lyotard was right, or at least complementary, in that the project of the postmodernist was to situate man in relation to beings and the discursive variations thereof, an argument also borne by Foucault, at least in terms of a contingent sense of happens-to-be, then we are now in the project of the conceptualist, in which there is no situation. By this, I mean to say that there is no given orientation, that *being* is neither essential nor exponential, not constitutive, that is, in any meaningful sense, but is simply the indeterminate *not not being*.

(To put it algebraically, it is the case that:

M:  $s \equiv b \equiv B$

PM:  $s \equiv b^2 \equiv (\sim \square)B$  {though there lurks  $b^2 \triangleleft B$ }

C:  $s \equiv \sim (\sim b)$

(Where Lyotard identified Being as announcing itself *in the imperative*, in the command, "Be," Žižek identifies this as the more contemporary injunctive, "Enjoy." As will be seen, I believe the more accurate imperative is now "become," a Sisyphean loop of endless performativity—I am because and as my facebook friends know me.)

This comports with my earlier proposition that all poetry *is* is that which is not not poetry. (As it should, for all poetry *is* is mimesis, involving more or less equivalencies. Thus, the question: Is there still a practical distinction between metaphor and metonym?) There may be a bit more on that later, but for the moment, let us consider, while we are in the beginnings of these negations, the trajectory of the not-said. What Lyotard called the unrepresentable, dividing between the modernist not-saying of the unrepresentable via the conventional text (James) and the

postmodernist representation of the unrepresentable via formal innovation (Joyce). Note that the unrepresentable is always represented, the not-said being not-said, but not *unsaid*, just as a shadow always confirms a presence. It is in this way that the repressive function of the unrepresentable becomes the return of the repressed in its representation. Thus Lyotard's call to wage total war on totality, to witness the unrepresentable, to *activate the differences and save the honor of the name* is a totalizing call. This—and there is no difference between this and Baudrillard's sorrowful call to inaction, for any sense of totality, even a false one, cuts both ways—this puts me in mind of Emerson: *The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is the poet.* To which the Moscow conceptualists Komar and Melamid noted: *And even Emerson, you see, he cannot help himself; he has to bring in the poet, the special soul.*

What is this special soul? What an obscenity.

In the face of what we now call history, the poetry of the precious snowflake is obscene, as is its fractal variation, and the horizon on which it lands. For there is now nothing that is not presented because everything is now represented. There is nothing not-said, which is to say, nothing not repeated. Not in the sense of the reproduced, for things just are. Here we could productively revisit Baudrillard's use of the World Trade Center to illustrate the postmodern condition of reproduction, in which he pointed out how the two things mirrored each other, already digitized/copied as the very model of a New York skyscraper, their obliteration being then a reproduction of the fate of global capital and our ordered desire for disorder. But the towers are still here. As I write this—on and about September 11, 2011—their images are everywhere and more is made of them in this reality than in some other instantiation. For there is no simulacrum, just symbolism. As it turns out, Baudrillard was not right enough, for the final stage (not to say that this is the final stage, but it is the *next* stage) of the image is not pure simulacrum but the (symbolized) real. Buckets of the stuff. The virtual *is*, its reality being no different than that of non-virtual, as can be elegantly demonstrated by a cyber-attack. So we see how presence lies in absence and the Towers reveal themselves more truly in their truly deconstructed state. For, like the bodies of saints, all parts of America as American exist equally in image and bits of material and the site of the corporeal demise and the profusion of faith eternal occasioned by denial and decay. It is medieval, this concordance of properties, all embodied in the thing that is equally not the thing, but its veneration. Faith first, doubt afterward. More accurately, one must have an official discourse of doubt if one intends to spread the faith.

In short, there may very well be the inadmissible, and that's where I come in, but it's all quite articulated, quite organic. Narratives are given and made, a million times a minute, by everyone with web access, or anyone standing near anyone with web access, which is everyone else. The medium is no longer the message, the message is no longer the message, there is no special honor in witnessing what simply is. Whether one chooses to pay attention or not is another

question, the answer to which may or may not matter. The conceptualist gesture is that of Wittgenstein who observes the language game without regard to communication, or with regard to communication in its most site-specific sense, where language disguises thought even as it is its outermost limit, which is to say, Wittgenstein via Smithson, who noted that *to be in the Spiral Jetty is to be out of it*. By “thought,” of course, I mean “thinking.”

In this sense, Derrida is no longer correct, for the sign is no longer functional but situational. (*I.e.*, it may act “like” a sign in the case of a sign: *e.g.*, “=“.) Our world, if I can say such a thing without blinking, is a world in which there is no point to me, or you, for that matter, or this. No property, no horizon, no integration, no simulacrum, no Miller, Locke or Manning, no narrative accounting of our screen-shot reality. And it is this very pointlessness that is our only grace. Put another way, our only genuine use value lies in our uselessness. For finally, we understand that one must not tell the dancer from the dance, the poet from the poetry. (Put another way, genocide is not genocide because it happens to the not-guilty.) For all that we don’t matter, here we all are. Talking, not talking, writing, not writing. Segregate, and yet often facing the same direction. No longer in the realm of the ontological aria, the voice differentiated from its others, or the polyvocal synthesized into some sort of pleasant cacophony contrapuntally set, again, to a decent workingman’s chorus, for we are no longer of any world in which one could say, as Lyotard said, *No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent*. Powerless is precisely what we are, and so what? We send and receive all the same, and happily, for our markets are fully niche, like our desires. Polyglottal we are, and this is a statement of fact, not *bona fide* or spiritual condition. So how do we ontic beings be?

As it happens, the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of Constantinople is very important in the history of conceptualism as it will be written because it was at the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of Constantinople (the 8<sup>th</sup> General Council), which opened on October 5, 869, in which the image of Christ was required to have veneration equal to that of the Gospel, and the veneration of Mary, angels, and saints was also encouraged. Word  $\equiv$  Image(s). It also is worth noting that this was the first council rejected entirely and retroactively by both the Protestants and the Byzantine Orthodoxy, for obvious reasons. This is the birth of allegory. And one cannot have allegory and literality, or an allegory of literality—there can be no other narrative beyond the Word itself—or at least that was the objection. Or, as later put by Valéry, *how can one be what one is?* Of course, the answer is simple, mathematical, and grammatical: one is not being. Badiou says as much, that one is always more than one, as does Lacan, though for other reasons. Put another way, beyond the Word is the Word itself. And its conjugations. Recently I argued a pimping case before the California Supreme Court: my client had been convicted of pandering, of encouraging someone “to become” a prostitute. My argument was he could not be convicted of encouraging someone “to become” a prostitute because he believed the woman he approached was a prostitute. Asking her to change management was not asking her to become anything she was not already. I lost. Legally, in the State of California, “to become” is “to be,” “to be,” “to become.” Put another way, if we

literalize the metaphor of the Trinity, a metaphor which was only ever literalized, then the thing-itself is always multiple as it instantiates only contextually, *i.e.*, which is to say never fully, never finally, only as it is constantly coming into being and having been. Like desire. Context is thus as structural as content, as capable of repetition and as incapable of duplication. More accurately, the two cannot be segregated, like the post-Cartesian *cogito*, or the conceptual subject, like becoming a woman, or being a man. Content is context, context content. To put it algebraically, context  $\equiv$  content.

To this end, Marjorie Perloff has applied Wittgenstein's proposition that *poetry is given in the language of information but is not information* directly to conceptual poetry. This is most easily demonstrated in a work such as Kenneth Goldsmith's *Traffic*, a year's worth of traffic reports. They are not information insofar as they are useless: you can't get there from here with these. The very reason for their being thus subsumed in the context of their becoming. Similarly, my *Statement of Facts* will persuade no one of any thing to any juridical end—no one will swing or be set free. These are thus purely rhetorical gestures, that is to say language for its own sake, purposed, not purposeful. Thus, poetry. In an *a priori* sense. And thus, language (if by language we understand something that is designed to communicate something symbolically) is lost. And when you lose language, what does meaning convey? I'll give you a hint—it has only to do with the building you're in (or building) at the moment. (Including the building of "you.") Put another way, again by Wittgenstein: *You have to give the explanation that is accepted. This is the whole point of the explanation.* So while more always remains to be explained, it is useful in this way to consider Lacan's pun in his seminar titled *Le Non-Dupes errent* ("the undeceived are mistaken"); Lacan's lecture has to do with the knotted structure of deception, how truth reveals itself in the simultaneous disavowal and embrace of context, which is always tripartite—and so Fredric Jameson is absolutely wrong when he says that this has nothing to do with the pun on *le nom du père* (*\*non du père*), but that is perhaps because Jameson forgets that he is a postmodernist critic, a Marxist, and a man—for what is global capitalism if not a master narrative? And thus the critic must act as if the text says something that it is not saying, *as if* it is not his authority that is the new authorship. As I am now acting.<sup>i</sup>

When I say the text is dead I mean the internments and excavations of Barthes and Foucault were set against a modernist hermeticism. The author's death and ascension of the text cracked the windows, but kept the corpse by way of the corpus. I'm keeping the mausoleum. The big box, the context in which we encounter not just the inert, but inertia itself. My *a fortiori* argument is that the conceptual text does not have the capacity to rise up and reveal itself under the monastic attentions of either a single reader or a symposium or repeated applications of various forms of criticality, for the conceptual text is a mute container. Dumb. Dead, as we say, as a doornail. Read it once, read it a thousand times, don't read it at all. Each will reveal something about, well, you. Put another way, the text says nothing but what is fed through it. It is a mirror, mirror as computer screen, not just *of* you, but *for* you, and thus, you for it. Again, I am insofar and as my facebook friends know me. And my facebook friends are very becoming. My book *Die*

*Dichtkunst* consists of a single letter, “U,” repeated over 383 pages. For 11 pages in the very middle of the book, there is a startling turn of events, and the “U” is stricken through—Ū. This is work that cannot be read but simply gotten through, work which provides no narrative pleasure except the extra-narrative pleasures of allegory. A form of translation, or at least interpretation, the happy futility of which is demonstrated by the book itself, for in German, “U” is an abbreviation for *und*, whereas in working English it is the homophone for, well, you. In this way, perhaps the letter does not reach its destination so much as its sound does. As Lacan notes, the phoneme is one of the partial-objects, those things that have *no specular image*, the there where I am-and I-am-not. Lacan also says, *There has never been a you anywhere else than where one says “you.” For once one truly says you: “I abolish myself.”* *Die Dichtkunst* means “the art of lyric poetry,” and what is lyric poetry but not a fetish of you, and what is art if not the ongoing “und” and what am I if I am not, ongoing only insofar as I constantly and incompletely call to you? So in the face of the drone, or bourdon, of single-note texts, lies the metronome of our conceptual existence. Our current case.

Here are two propositions on the case by Wittgenstein:

*The world is everything that is the case.*

*For the totality of the facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case.*

Let us consider case as in container (valise), case as in contingency (just in case), case as in argument (to make the case), and case as in “the joint.” Like law, we can use the case to expand upon our conceptual condition, the case of the paradox. Whereas the Hegelian paradox proved too tempting for postmodernists, who would insist on synthesis, however local (then note that to act locally meant that one was thinking globally), I am interested in dialethism—where the sentence and its negation are both true, or the sentence is both true and false, where there are true contradictions, in the sense of things said. Any insistence on consistency is thus a categorical error, one of derivation rather than logic. A case of mistaken identity. ( $1 + 1 \neq 2$ , *see*, drops of water.) Put another way, we can no longer use film as a metaphor. Film was the beloved postmodern medium because it was so very dialectical—it moved and but could seem still, it contained its fragments in a patently constructed reproducible form, and it kept us together in the dark, united as we were all mostly facing the same way, consuming something that could be called a narrative, or anti-narrative, a reel, or set of cells, inherently singular and serial. (Ergo the “de” as in “of” of *deconstruction*.) Thus Rosalind Kraus made a fatal error in interpreting Marclay’s 2010 work *The Clock* (a 24-hour, single-channel video work consisting of thousands of film & TV clips featuring timepieces that plays in real time) in postmodern terms, speaking of a distinction between the “reel” and the “real,” or, more appropriately, the *reel* and the *réel*. But digital reproduction is static. It exists simultaneously as a multiple, based not on time or space as such, but on code, the *a priori* category Kant forgot. Too, *The Clock* is a clock. You can set your watch by it. And the concordant clips are individually narratively driven, though driven by the context, which can only be (intermittently) supplied by the viewer. A context which proves as

narratively driven as one might argue we all are, at least in retrospect, which is the streaming state of the conceptualist *subjonctif*, as opposed to the postmodernist's optimistic *futur anterior*. Thus bringing to mind Wittgenstein's: *How does it happen that every fact of experience can be brought into a relationship with what is shown by a clock?* That is to say, there is no real apart from the represented—again, virtual  $\equiv$  reality. Art is an event. An event is that which can only may have happened (or was happening) as art. A state of maybe having been becoming being.

Paradox in this sense is opposition, simply and permanently put. The medieval paradox was that matter is mutable, and mutability jeopardized salvation. But matter is also the precise site of salvation, and salvation manifest via mutability. As Hegel himself said, *Spirit is bone*. Matter matters. So too the matter of a book, a text, a writing. Made to burn, perhaps.

In his recent *Uncreative Writing*—his book of essays on conceptualism, to be distinguished from his recent anthology *Against Expression*, co-edited with Craig Dworkin, you see how these works are titled as negations—Kenneth Goldsmith makes some predicate arguments for conceptualism as the writing of the digital age, where the ephemerality of language is part of its liquid beauty. But this is only half of that, for our excess of text reveals text as both ephemeral and incorruptible—it is a brittle literalization of the Word as Image as Word as such. An object capable of consumption, capable of mutation, capable of a content insofar and because it is a context, a mutable container that represents stasis. Žižek nearly got it right when he wrote about the *material inertia, the dysfunctional bare presence, of the objects around us*, for if all art is is the representation of the real as a means of infusing it with meaning, then what we mean to do is put the problem squarely before us. Put another way, the nature of matter is an ontological problem—what matters depends on who makes matter matter—and how.

Derrida asserts that the text, like the law, has a set of axiomatic beliefs, the first of which is that every text has its own identity, singularity and unity. That there is an original, that each text has an author. And that—though he does not separate these two concepts—the author is the signatory of the text. For its part, the singularity of the text, like the singularity of the case, *must come into contact with the general or universal essence of the law without ever being able to do so*. He says that *the law as such should never give rise to any story*, that to have *categorical authority*, it can't be sourced. He notices then that law and story come from the same source, and he is right in the sense that both are acts of rhetoric, both based on some assertion of fact, primarily the fact of telling a story. However, whereas Derrida sees the law as its own author, and an author of some originary violence, and he is not wrong about that, he also is working within French law, within a primarily inquisitional juridical system—one in which the law is designed to extract a principle of the law, such as truth or justice, from the singularity of the case. If we consider this in the context of a wholly adversarial system such as the American, which is more or less akin to our version of football—then the law is not this forcible squeezing of principles from cases, the failure of which leads to a rough re-imposition of law as fundamentally unjust (whether by being formulaic or baseless), but rather is the product of what is understood to be a contest. A story-telling contest. With little girls in red hoods and

grandmothers meant for eating. The source of the case, then, is the witness as teller of the tale. But, and this is an important but, the signatory is not the source, for the signatory is the *source* of its reception. The *context* in which the story has symbolic significance, becomes a story of rape rather than sex, of murder, not killing. The witness is the source, the law is the signatory.

Thus, in the conceptual age, interpellation is reversed—it is the turning of the person to the police that establishes law enforcement as the enforcement of “the law” as such. Put another way, the signatory is the context. God exists because I hear the voice of God, and I am the only witness to God that can attest to his Presence. I am an author not by virtue of having written anything, but by virtue of that law’s recognition of me as signatory. As the law of the (or that) case, in the (or this) case. Once I was invited to participate in a group reading held by one of my publishers. The other readers read exemplary excerpts from their books—sections they thought demonstrated both the proficiencies of their style and the compelling nature of their content to the large audience, who would presumably be then moved to buy their book. I read the publishing information page: the ISBN number, the copyright, who and where had cast it in type, and the type of type in which it had been cast, in terms of both font, genre, and, finally, author. The signatory was manifest by the publishing information page itself, the page that made me the source. Coupled with, I should say, the audience that recognized the publishing information page as such. Similarly, my *Factory* series consists of a series of chapbooks, each of which is a work of appropriation by an artist or writer that I have in turn appropriated—each book is “by Vanessa Place.” It is more Warholian than Warhol, for I make no attempt to make the work seem like a work by me, as I am not the source, only the signatory.

Kosuth once said that *artistic activity consists of cultural fluidity*, a dialectic between the artist and the culture affecting the artist that the artist affects. Kosuth is currently on the wrong side of the one-way mirror. Artistic activity now consists of providing an encounter with the real. The problem with applying postmodern precepts to today’s avant garde aesthetics is that postmodernism still wanted to talk about the artist, even when it talked about the audience. Similarly, the error of Relational Aesthetics was in inverting the modernist dialectic, serving up culture for re-consumption—a Happy Meal in a bento box. The gesture remains the same, the irony’s just spread a bit thicker. This is why it would be a mistake to shift the aesthetic gesture from the author as artist to the author as curator, as we invite reification of another kind of artist’s stroke, a type of aesthetic *deus ex machina*. But there is another possibility, a critical opportunity that it is critical to take. Because the relationship which is now at issue, the subjectivity, so to speak, now joined, is that of the individual encountering herself via the aesthetic object. For as it turns out, the Other of the Other is myself.

If I appropriate, it is because “I” am an appropriation. If I intervene, it is because “I” am an intervention. (*Je m’appelle....*) Wittgenstein dreamed of a theater in which one watched life as it was, a man doing what a man does. Lacan said that life is this theater, performative, that is, which is what Warhol did, what all our efforts at capturing image and creating language are. What the conceptual age does is put us back to square one, as they say, to the making of meaning

that makes sense to us—don't you agree? After all, it's not trauma that makes us, it's us what makes trauma. There is this participation, there is always this participation. As Wittgenstein put it, there is an institution for punishing criminals, *and so punishments are carried out.*

And yet—you see how I sneak hope in under a carapace—there is a sublime. Here are two complementary considerations on the sublime:

Longinus noted that from the sublime springs a lot of reflection.

Lacan noted that the sublime was a void.

In medieval iconography, the thing was not supposed to be “like” the thing but was supposed to be of the same kind, to have the material attributes of the thing—wood, paper, gold. A statue of the Christ made of gold showed His radiance, one of wood, his mortal form; rubies stood for the red of blood and the precious nature of the blood of the venerated as well as its eternal facets and the transubstantiative potential of all material. This may be considered in conjunction with the doctrine of concomitance—the part is whole, the bone fragment or bit of cross represents and is the divinity, because and although the divinity cannot be parsed. Like a sentence. In one of her essays on Christian materialism, Caroline Walker Bynum points to a particular German pieta (Die Fritzlärer Pieta), noting how the gore coming out of Christ's perforated side is coagulated in balls of bright red. The lividity of the blood, according to Bynum, was to demonstrate that Christ lived even in death. What I noticed was that the small red balls most resembled a bursting pomegranate, which is itself a medieval symbol of the fullness of Christ's suffering and resurrection. As well as being a multiple singularity. There was an item in *The New York Times* about a man arrested for selling counterfeits in Chinatown; the fakes included illegal copies of Louis Vuitton and Burberry handbags. The objects, all made of paper, were to be used as symbolic gifts for the dead at Chinese funerals. There were paper mansions, flat-screen televisions, \$10,000-dollar bills, sports cars, bricks of gold bullion, i-pads, and cell phones. The items are meant to be burnt. The article stressed the intentionality of the falsification as a way of condemning the arrest. But can it not be said that the arrest was entirely legitimate? That not only the letter of the local law—which prohibits making or selling goods that bear a counterfeit trademark—but also its symbolic affect—the prohibition against fabrication of false icons—that was violated? We don't require our icons to be practically functional—that the pieta raise the dead or that an i-pad work (or work any better than an i-phone)—but rather that they function symbolically—that the power of Christ resides in His image, as does the power of a sports car, and the latest i-tech. Word  $\equiv$  Image. Gold bullion is worth whatever we make of it, and often what we make of it is a pile of paper. To be burnt, that is, to be consumed. The act of consumption, as we know, is always the re-enactment of the multiple as singularity—the many-in-one which led medieval clerics to debate whether the meat one ate would be resurrected along with the meat one was, which was, after all, the mirror-image of the meat one ate. Put another way, I am a piece of shit.

And thus, the void of reflection, the void witnessed by the mirror, which is a multiple image of me consumed as such by me, categorized by me as me, yet it is not me, yet it is my very image. After all, it looks *like me*.

This is the sublimity of conceptualism, a categorical sublimity. Not a Kantian transcendent interface between man and thing, or Burkean shiver at the same, not a Lyotardian immanence, a property of a thing, to be plumbed, parsed or pathologized, but simply a category imposed on an affect. A hash-tag. Where the postmodernist believes there are these pockets of correspondence between objects and object of desire, the conceptualist believes there is just desire, seeking an object. (*See, Parse as Mad-lib.*) I recently attended a talk in which a theory of critical aesthetics was advanced that sought to examine the “artist *or* viewer’s” relation to the art object; in this same talk, a current desire for a “poetic moment” in art was noted, a desire set in hot opposition to the cooler conceptual gesture. I believe that the nostalgic desire represented by the former is a product of the disjunctive “*or*” in the critic’s aesthetics, that when the relation to the art object is considered purely from the position of the viewer—not judged by its affect, or lack thereof, and this is a small trap that we can spring from the side, but in terms of its capacity as a conceptual subject—then we can mark the spot of art, which is the spot of poetry. The spot of failure. Put another way, what is art but the failure of representation? And the greatest failure of representation is the thing that is the closest thing to the thing it is not.

Conceptualist works are such things: *The Clock* is clock, and yet not, and yet it tocks along; *Traffic* reports our circulation, and yet cannot be circulated, and yet circulates in another realm; *Statement of Facts* is a legal brief, and yet not, and yet persuades you of something, has some juridical effect, even if it’s only you noting how very necessary is the call of law, each to each. Which has nothing to do with justice, but everything to do with poetry. I could say the *infra-thin* of poetry, and I would not be wrong about that. It is worth noting that Moscow conceptualism delighted in puns—if price is no obstacle it may be because only objects are capable of beauty. And beauty always has a price. In one of her discussions of medieval Christian materiality, Caroline Walker Bynum remarks on an image of Christ in which the blood from his side runs down beneath his feet, into a wine press, congealing into grapes which he is crushing into the wine of the Eucharist. The paradox of this material is that which cannot be destroyed (the divine body) is being destroyed to transmit the essence of that which cannot be destroyed to that which must be destroyed (the mortal body). For his part, Wittgenstein noted that time and truth functions “taste” different: *One tastes like content, the other like a form of representation*. Truth lies in representation; there is no real but in material—as Shklovksy more or less said, art is what makes the stone stony. *Repetita iuvant* (repetitions are useful). In conceptualism, this is the case.

Here are three final propositions:

*We alone was the face of our Time.* {1917}

Vanessa Place

Paris; 29 September 2011

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<sup>i</sup> I am very fond of the apparatus of the source note, it permits discursiveness upon a platform of authority, that is to say, it not only (as I've noted elsewhere) literalizes and effaces the spot of castration (the author's lack of authority), but allows the author to make even less supportable claims under its egis. It should be noted that this is the single source note for this text, which provides no sources, as the text itself fails to provide support for its presumptively original assertions and for its quotations, for this entire tissue of citation. Leaving aside the easy capacity of anyone with an internet connection to source-check, does it matter? To put it in the smallest possible terms of which I am familiar, what counts is not whether it's true, but whether it could be true. There is a saying in American business, I tried to find its origin, only to be returned to it again and again as a saying about a saying, which is how I present it to you—"We've all heard the saying, 'What gets counted gets done.'" To put it idiotically, murder in the name of the Father requires neither proof of paternity nor precedent. Why should this paper provide more?