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Aritsts' Text and Poetical Intricacies:

Matthew Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck — Everything Has a Name"

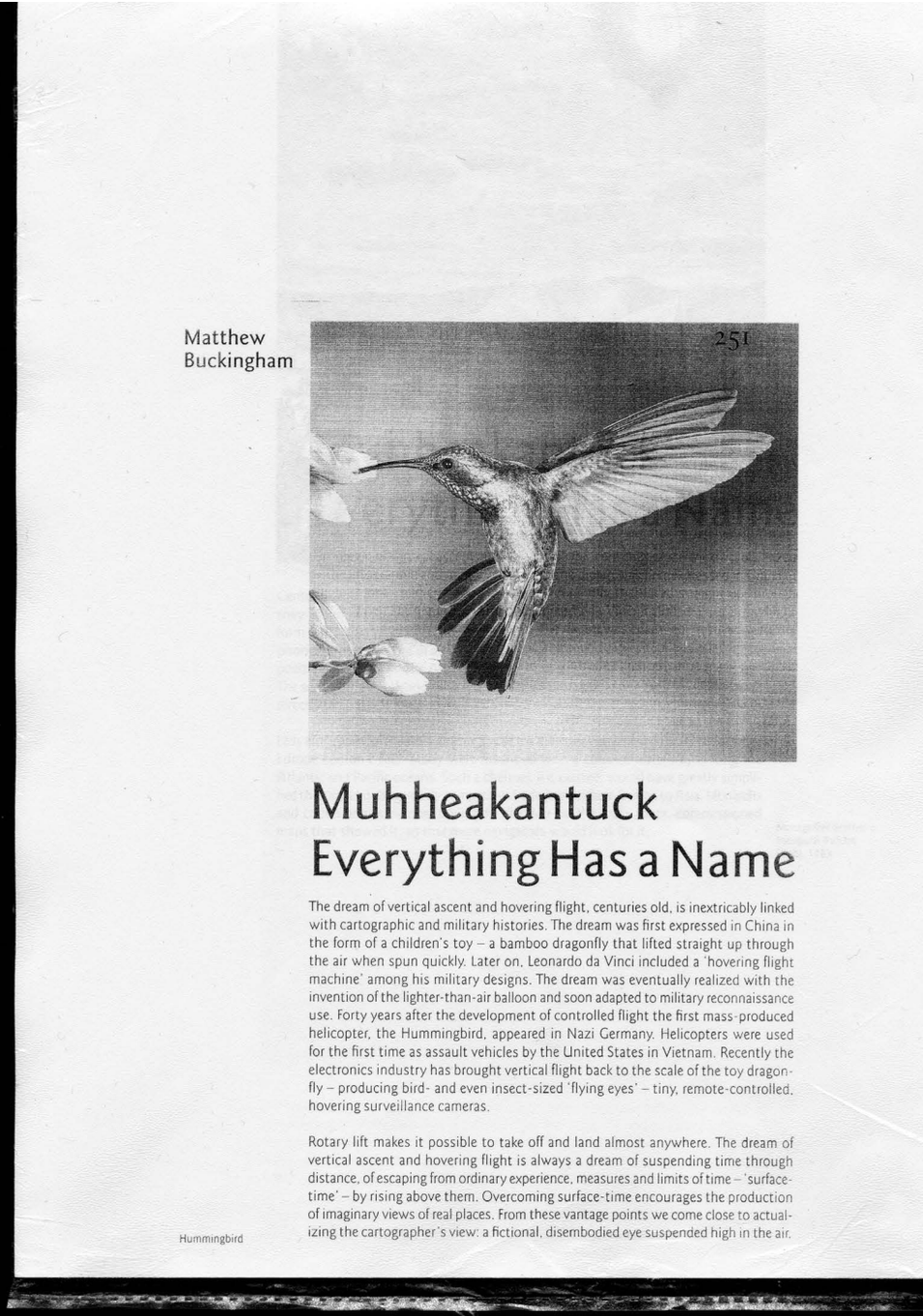

fig 4.1
Matthew Buckingham, "Muhheankantuck – Everything Has a Name," 2005, 2007, 2008. Covers.

Introduction

Phrases are punctuated with details based on historical facts, connecting the text to an outside world the unusual spacing and delineation of the material seems to deny, and which reciprocates the intransivity of language. In the last essay of the booklet in which "Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name" figures, critic and curator Simon Sheikh reminds us that "There is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice".[290] Earlier editions of "Muhheakantuck" consist of radically different textual designs, begging the question: what does the artists' writing want to communicate? If the text is born of complicity with an editorial board and the design of a publication, to what extent is it dictated by them? To what degree does the artists' text influence and affect its context? The current chapter scrutinizes, probes, and elaborates on the structure in artists' writing. Textual borders prove permeable in Josef Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S* enumerated in the last chapter, allowing for a passage between text and its context. The structure of the artists' writing is more contested the further the artist takes it; so how can interactions between text and the external environment be understood once its contents surpass the traditional boundaries of the publication? Several contemporary artists experiment with the limits of writing and text: publishing in cyclical fashion, in different venues, with alternative forms that often verge on poetry, understood within the framework of this research as an inherent questioning and continuous search of (its) form. Matthew Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name" is just one such a work.

Literary critic Marjorie Perloff discussing poetry in a digitized age has termed a "text existing in various states (e.g., print and digital, or print and recorded voice) without any variant being *the* authoritative text" as "differential".[291] This is a reaction to a globalized world in which different idiolects, dialects, and speech registers meet. The "differential" responds not only to globalization but also to changes in contemporary culture: modes of distribution caused by what Perloff calls the "digital revolution". [292] Questioning the role of technology in shaping poetry's language differential writing echoes the rhizomatic structure of a digitized world. It borrows textual strategies inherent in this structure—citation, appropriation, copying, and montage—and is concerned with the status of information (versus referentiality) provided by the unstoppable digital machine. It does not necessarily want to stipulate *that* a procedure like citation permeates poetry, it is rather interested in *how* textual strategies in poetry evolve.

For my research on contemporary artists' texts, differential writing and the more recent extension of the concept, conceptual writing, are of interest. The differential seems to respond to questions of the text's distribution, not only economical but in terms of its sensibility in a world that seems to have grown more technologically and politically entangled. While the artists' writing seeks ways to cope with an abundance of "information," the increased traffic of input/output in a digitized world defined by quantity rather than quality, it also demonstrates attempts to find alternative forms that correspond to an extremely demanding and changed world order, without succumbing to it. Conceptual writing explicitly refers to the reliance of poetry that came into existence with "the rise of the Web"[293] on "visual" Conceptual Art as its foundation, "a way both to signal literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art and to indicate the use of text in conceptual practices".[294] Conceptual writing has several definitions. I will use Perloff's formulation, which is more specific than Dworkin's. Reflecting on poet Kenneth Goldsmith's work, Perloff states that what is at issue in conceptual writing "is to relate the stated conceptual germ . . . to the text itself".[295] While conceptual writing continues to think through the consequences of digital revolutions for poetry, (mainly) its production, it finds solace in Conceptual Art. Thus Goldsmith, at the fore of conceptual writing, explicitly models his thoughts after Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Concpetual Art" (1967) and "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969) stipulating that "ideas alone can be works of art." For Goldsmith, "by swapping LeWitt's visual concerns for literary ones, we can adopt 'Paragraphs' and 'Sentences' as roadmaps and guidelines for conceptual or uncreative writing".[296]

While the differential offers an apt perspective on what in relation to Dora García's work especially could be called a tentacular writing, fragmented both *as* a work and the text atomized from within, the question arises as to whether the artists' text, Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck" as case study here, can be approached as conceptual writing. While the multiplicity within the artists' text betrays a quest for form, artists' writing seems grounded not so much in Conceptual Art per se, as with conceptual writing, but in the *crisis* between 1960s and 1970s poetry and visual art. Unlike conceptual writing and its immanent unrelenting trust in Conceptual Art, "Muhheakantuck" is more critical. It chooses its precursors as strategically as conceptual writers, but without reducing itself to one period. "Muhheakantuck" analyzes the "things" that are said or made, connecting them with the discourse that embeds those *énoncés* in the context in which they were uttered: the archive is read under an archeological method that tries to dismantle *énoncés* and their contexts. The search for the status of matter vis-à-vis language and writing, or the question of language *as* matter is not unusual in relation to the contemporary artists' text. It defines its situational sensibility, and is the

basis for the crisis between poetry and Conceptual Art, differentiating the treatment of the subject in each.

My choice of Buckingham's work is motivated by writing being a constituent part of his practice, as with my previous case study subjects. It is also inspired by the artists' text's staggered release over the course of four years, and my initial surprise at the variation among the phases in publications: "Muhheankantuck" figured in a compilation of texts resulting from an educational project, in an academic journal, and in a small anthology gathering writings concentrating on knowledge production. This left me asking: how do the different contexts correlate with or otherwise affect Buckingham's texts? How does the writing inspire and restructure its surroundings? With "Muhheakantuck" (or its three versions), Buckingham, a visual artist pursuing a PhD, broached the question of the status of writing within artistic research. The ongoing debate over the artists' text's supplementary status and the conditions that have to be met for its acknowledgment, observing academic standards that is, have been deemed essential from the perspectives of the institutions involved (art schools, post-academic institutions, universities). I wondered how they transpired in the text as a text, how the textuality of the text complies with the reflexivity it seeks, and in what way the text and writing find, *through the very process of writing, in writing*, a rhythm, sensing the freedom to experiment and deploy thoughts.

It could be argued that an (art) historical awareness is implicitly or explicitly immanent in the artists' work. Familiar with Michel Foucault's archival research, for instance, the various modes for "*les mots*" to refer to "*les choses*," contemporary artists are conscious of variants of meaning historically contained in "just one word." Acquainted with different readings of images versus texts, the question arose how artists would put this knowledge to work. Or to reframe the argument, hadn't the earlier mentioned digital revolution led to a breakdown of the boundary, not only between "verse" and "prose," but also between "creator" and "critic"?[297] And if so, how did contemporary artists' writings discover and profit from an opened rhetorical field?

Studying the text as text, retracing the textual strategies in Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck" the artists' writing is read with poetry: the artists' text's very formal intricacies (spacing and delineation, or the handling of what in relation to modern poetry, starting with Stéphane Mallarmé's utilization of the space of the page in his poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* (A throw of the dice will never abolish chance, 1897) has been called the blanks and the blacks), urges compared analysis. A juxtaposition of Buckingham's work with poetry allows me to look closely at the artists' text's various versions—their implications and effects. How do they affect the reader? Later editions given over to the formal considerations, while earlier ones seem less concerned by them? How is the space of the page used as a graphic and signifying agent? And how can the weight of the images in "Muhheakantuck's" various editions be understood in relation to these formal choices, given a traditional predominance of the image in poetry since Ezra Pound had defined it the essence of the poetic in 1913, an image being "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant in time," a "radiant node or cluster … from which, and through which, and into which, Ideas are constantly rushing"?[299]

In delving into the operative force of the artists' text by wedding it to poetry, this chapter touches on a recent upsurge in poetry in the context of contemporary art.[300] How can the artists' text be situated within this advance in poetry, and conceptual writing specifically? Magazines more or less explicitly dealing with poetry proliferate,[301] while events are organized assembling poetical endeavors in the museum.[302] Examining the functioning of Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck" I try to (re)trace and formulate the relationship between a changing face of poetry vis-à-vis visual art. I am interested not so much in "Muhheakantuck's" syntactical constructions, but the functioning and status of the single word. Concentrating on the word I suggest a nuanced approach to the contemporary artists' writing, differing from the syntagmatic predilection immanent in Conceptual Artists' work largely due to convergences with post-structuralist thought. Witness its preference for serial presentations and sequential constructions (LeWitt's aforementioned "Paragraphs" and "Sentences," for instance). What is generally imagined as the intimate liaison between contemporary artists' writings and Conceptual Art, and its profuse use of language, is put to a test.

Engaging in the crisis between poetry and visual Conceptual Art, I examine the work of poet Francis Ponge who prolonged the study of the word, his writings simultaneously being an overture to what I think of as the dynamics of the artists' text. His understanding of poetry and what he termed his *descriptions-définitions-objets d'art littéraire* offers a rich perspective on prevalent comprehensions of the materiality of the word; articulating the word's materiality as an intellectual reconfiguration, Ponge's poetical endeavor proposes a different address to the status of the artists' text.

I begin discussions of the crisis between poetry and 1960s and 1970s Conceptual Art, in an attempt to position the artists' writing in relation to conceptual writing and the distribution of the text. I then take up the

archival *travail* immanent in the artists' writing, explaining the formal particularities of "Muhheakantuck" as a historiographical method,[303] though I prefer to regard this as a poetical undertaking as well, instigated by an interest in historiography. Understanding "Muhheakantuck's" formal specificities as poetical decisions enables a nuanced perspective of the situational sensibility of the artists' text. Finally, I try to localize the image in the artists' writing, tapping into the relationship between text and image. But before pursuing these issues, I will outline the current object of my research.

Matthew Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name" (2005, 2007, 2008) consists of three versions: as part of the publication *Experience Memory Re-enactment* (2005); in the journal for art criticism and theory *October* (2007); and integrated into the reader *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (2008). Each differs from the one before, especially in the compartmentalization of text. The different approaches to textual blanks and blacks, dealing with language and the space of the page in another manner, it is impossible to describe "it." "Muhheakantuck" cannot be pinned down as a unique, complete, and coherent work. The editions share their story, however, or the main strands of thought, the principal being about the Dutch East India Company in the Hudson River waterway and the land that surrounds it. In the early seventeenth century, at the moment of the twelve years' truce (Het Twaalfjarig Bestand, 1609–1621) agreed on by Holland and Spain after forty years of war, Henry Hudson was employed by the East India Company to look for a new passage to Asia. The corporation not only profited from peace to colonize land, it also (mostly) took advantage of the credit systems and expanded loans from the newly founded Bank of Amsterdam. No testimony of Hudson's experiences survives, Buckingham recounts. Hudson's captain's log is destroyed 200 years after the event. The explorations are known "only" through the "minor" writings of Robert Juet, one of Hudson's crewmembers. The Northwest Passage remaining undiscovered at the time, "the river that became known as the Hudson was not discovered" either, as Buckingham states in one of the 2008 text's paragraphs: "it was invented and re-invented" instead (22).[304] The Lenape or Leni-Lenapi ("meaning people, or common people, or real people," translated as "we the people" and occasionally referred to as "Americans" [22]), the land of whom was colonized by Hudson, called the river Muhheakantuck, meaning the river that flows in two directions. With the passage unfound, the Dutch became interested in the fur trade, creating the foundation of an intricate system of exchange and initial investment in the area.

The 2005 version of Buckingham's text ends here, concluding by postulating the abstraction of history and contrasting its grand narrative with the *petit récit* of particular stories. The other two editions delve deeper into the case, their "sole" difference being the way the texts are separated, their treatment of images, and the inclusion of a bibliography (in the 2008 version). In the 2007 and 2008 edition, the writing is interspersed with factual information like, "In 1656, 80,000 beaver skins were exported to Amsterdam. By that same year the Dutch estimated that 90 percent of the Lenape had died from imported disease" (28). Both narratives come to an end in the massacre of the Lenape and their neighbors under Dutch command.

The recounting of this cruel history alternates with reflections on the means with which representation is constructed. Thus each version begins with a musing on the "dreams of vertical ascent and hovering flight," which is "a dream of suspending time through distance—of cutting one's self off from ordinary measures of time—'surface time'" (17). This surface time is "arbitrary *and* systematic." It is agreed upon, and, like a line on a sheet of paper, whether drawn by the text's "me" or the first European mapmakers, it "limits our imagination, keeping this place in one spot and not another" (17). Or, "Our bodies are frameworks with which we create abstract thought and systems of categories" (33). The narrative continues its reflections on perspective, switching between thoughts on the use of the helicopter by the US army in the Vietnam War to forms of script. Like the aircraft, writing formulates a "limit of understanding," "and a limit for speaking about the past" (33). Thus "the unknown is more than an occasion for possibilities, it is a provocation that propels us on a journey, a route of unknowing, in which we experience many of the ways that we do *not* know something" (33).

The first 2005 text is the less developed of the three. The writing is shorter, its narrative less complex, interweaving fewer arguments. Its composition of distinct paragraphs as solid blocks shows up its more discursive character, each block initiating a related but slightly different subject. The accompanying images are highly illustrative: a photograph of a hummingbird symbolically indicates the "first mass-produced helicopter" of the same name, a picture of Wampun belts and strings accompanies the explanation of the Lenape's reconfiguration of beads as monetary currency. Against the 2007 version, the 2005 text is especially replete with images. The 2007 version bears the Seal of the City of New York as its only image, situated at the end of the text, a line drawing in black and white that returns in the 2008 edition. Two more images are inserted in the 2008 edition: the first shows a double-frame enlarged image from Buckingham's film of the same title; the second presents a production

still of that film. Each image occupies a full page. The 2008 images relate to the text differently from the 2005 edition in which the images break-up the narrative. This strategy is absent from the 2007 text that is presented as a continuous narrative, the only formal intervention being indented lines separating paragraphs. The 2008 edition also distinguishes itself from the other two through its strongly fragmented writing. Separate paragraphs are composed of at most four sentences, the complete text amounting to eighty-eight distinct paragraphs in total. And unlike the other two it includes a two-page bibliography.

Broodthaers, or the Crisis between Poetry and Conceptual Art

In the introduction, "Muhheakantuck" was referred to as possibly a differential writing, existing in various states without one version as "the" authentic text, and characterized as having a situational sensibility of its own, affecting and being affected by its context, acting upon its environment and being acted upon. The different versions of "Muhheakantuck," divided both in space and in time, could be perceived from yet another perspective that links the previous stances. "Muhheakantuck's" multiplicity allows it to unfold gradually over several years; the writing, *through* its very writing, seems to invent a way to catch the process in the middle. The concrete details, numbers, and figures added to the later editions exemplify this development; the statistical enumerations also more strongly articulate the axis around which the story rotates: the quest for a method to associate the words with the things they feign to designate, to link the discourse to the story it tells, and its relationship with an actual situation.

Putting to work its processual function is something Conceptual Art never succeeded in doing. Language wasn't conceived as an operation, it was a medium. LeWitt's call for the idea as work of art in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969), without a need for it to become physical, are to no avail.[305] Underlining that "35. These sentences comment on art, but are not art," shows he treats his manifesto nevertheless as art. Art historian Lucy Lippard, advocate of Conceptual Art, bitterly formulated the paradox or trap within which the projects she supported had fallen, concluding that Conceptual Art's predilection for material as "secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized'", had resulted in an alternative "informational, documentary idiom." Its vernacular had provided a vehicle for "art ideas that were encumbered and obscured by formal considerations" at the time. But Conceptual Art hadn't been able to "avoid general commercialization." Whereas "Xerox sheets" and "words spoken but not recorded," for instance, had pretended to free Conceptual artists "from the tyranny of a commodity status and market-orientation," three years later they were "selling work for substantial sums".[306]

The dismantling of materiality and its simultaneous affirmation can be ascribed to the paradox of language as both matter and not matter, and the potential for diverse textual procedures immanent in this very ambiguity: it is as if Conceptual artists were insufficiently aware of the potential of language, its implicit nuances. Whereas Conceptual Art's recurrence to forms of serialization and the presentation of works in sequences, based on syntactical structuring, had seemed an apt "linguistic" reply to both the self-reflexivity of modernist artworks and the status of the object at the time, it wasn't taken into account that this very "ephemeral" structure could function as an object in its own right, becoming "unique." The so-called fleeting word that had pretended to replace the stable, saleable object had revealed itself as not unassailable after all. "De-materialism emphasizes materiality like silence in a song". Or in the words of Buckingham, and in parallel to John Baldessari's tribute to LeWitt singing the latter's "Sentences," that had been "hidden in the pages of catalogues for too long": "In every silence there is a presence. Silence is not passive" (31).

Although comparable ambivalences and double binds can be traced in poetry of the time, concrete poetry of the 1950s and 1960s intended to retreat from an all too oppressive reality and the imposition of the image in advertisement and media; visual poetry used the graphic space as a structural agent turned into the image they criticized.[308] Conceptual Art's surrendering to the market economy is attributed to its problematic relationship with its poetical colleague in the work of once poet Marcel Broodthaers. He casted his last volumes of poetry in plaster putting them on a pedestal (*Pense-bête* [1964]). This first of Broodthaers's works as a visual artist contains the kernel of the critique of what he perceived as Conceptual Art's hypocritical neglect of art's materiality. Broodthaers commented upon his switch from poetry to visual art incorporated in *Pense-bête* stating that "I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. . . . The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. . . . What is it? In fact, only some objects".[309]

Broodthaers's artistic answer to Conceptual Art's conceit can be understood as the manifold presentation of language, allowing for multiple usages with different efficacies. Language games pervaded both art and its institution; Broodthaers borrowed his material from them. He utilized language both as instrument (in his "open letters," for instance)

and as performative action (the installment of his Museums). His remarks on art as commodity and Conceptual Art's failure to address the problematic status of the art object were polemical and direct, as he wrote in an open letter of April 1968, for example: "The language of forms must be united with that of words. There are no 'Primary Structures'". They became a speech act in what art historian Benjamin Buchloh termed Broodthaers's "Industrial Poem" *Téléphone* (1969), an embossed plaque inscribed with the sentence "Je suis fait pour enregistrer les signaux. / Je suis un signal. Je Je Je Je Je Je Je Je / Objet Métal Esprit Objet Métal Esprit." Explicating multiple levels of reading, *Téléphone* left Buchloh to rhetorically wonder: "Was this what Broodthaers meant in the 'press release' inaugurating his *Département des Aigles* of his *Musée d'Art Moderne*, promising that 'poetry and the plastic arts shine hand in hand'?"

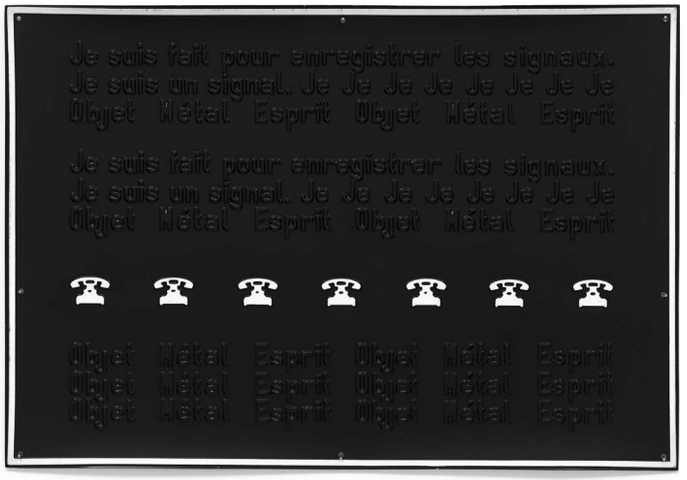

fig 4.2
Marcel Broodthaers, *Telephone (Téléphone)*, 1969.

Contemporary artists' texts are familiar with Conceptual Art's problematic relationship with materiality. Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence* bespeaks a historical awareness in writing that quite literally argues for and incorporates an attempt to circumvent the art object, much like Conceptual Art. Unlike Conceptual Art,[311] however, Strau demonstrates the boundaries between disciplines as porous, opening up to polyphony. In Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck," the multifarious contextual situation is turned inside out. What is brought to the fore, and what has been neglected in Conceptual Art, is the function of the text. "Muhheakantuck" scrutinizes and performs the potential of language as *operation*, clear in the multiple versions, rendering the function *of* language inherent in language. Derrida famously declared the end of the book as depository for institutional representative, and secondary writing.[312] His laborious overturning of what he analyzed as a logocentric Western tradition into a grammatology or science of writing in the 1960s had led artists at that time to rephrase writing's contextual restrictions, transforming them into conditions enabling aesthetic decisions. Think of Dan Graham's magazine piece *Homes for America* (1966), which combined writing and photographs that rely on mass cultural forms of publication. While the grid-like format of the artists' text embraced the common and popular reproductive means of the period, its writing, providing a critical analysis of suburban tract housing, ironically mimicked the sociological report.[313] In its stead, the contemporary artists' text initiates a conception of language that is not necessarily opposed to the tradition post-structuralism disputed. Nor does it fight against a Derridean arche-writing. It rather chooses and appropriates its ancestors (plural) in a non-linear fashion. Time and again it invents alternative forms of meeting the situation in which it finds itself. Diverging from Graham's *Homes for America*, the several versions of "Muhheakantuck" are not finalized forms. This incompleteness forces the reader into a curious position in that she cannot visualize the text "Muhheakantuck," it lacking definite and determined outlines. There is a *Muhheakantuck*-ness to it: the central theme of the story can be recounted, the places where it appeared can be pointed out, but the very serialization suggests that "it," or the research underpinning it, continues. We could potentially meet "it" elsewhere, "beyond" 2008 that is, study it as an articulated thing at another time, another place. The several publications are actualizations of ongoing research. Or they are events: the publications acting like screens that make "something issue from chaos, and *even if this something differs only slightly*" [emphasis in original].[314]

"Muhheakantuck's" method is grounded in the very paradox that language is both matter and not matter, private and public, processual and ongoing. Buckingham realizes his research repeatedly and differently each time, resulting in work for which "not all concretisms . . . are equal".[315] The awareness of these various forms of concretion is what contemporary artists' writings learned from Conceptual Art: Graham's way of using language is distinct from Joseph Kosuth's definitions and analytical propositions turned into works. Robert Smithson's documents reporting on projects taking place beyond the museum walls vary with respect to Carl André's "hylotheistic" approach to language as matter.[316] André's poetry is interesting in this context as he seems to breach the syntagmatic reign of Conceptual Art. "Not a writer of prose," his works weaken the common view of the strong interrelationship between Conceptual Art, post-structuralism and syntactical construction. André intended to arrest the reader's attention to the actual existence of the

single word, instead of the sentence ("Whole poems are made out of many single poems we call words"). A word, then, is not "dematerialized," in his view. It rather signals the political and ethical primacy of matter in a world marked by the circulation of replicas. And by an overload of advertising images designating them, persuading you to buy: submitted to a cautious visual organization, distributing them on the page, André's words solidify, forming an image that does not necessarily refer to an external reality.

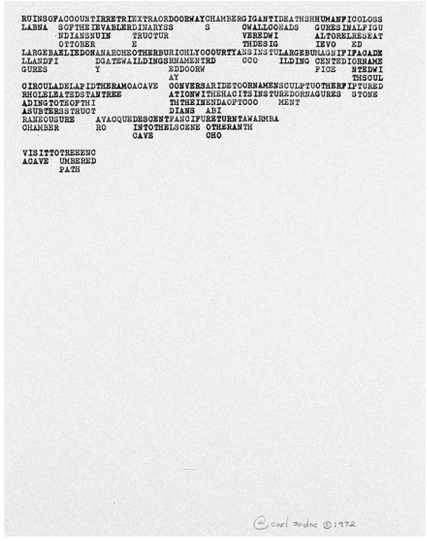

fig 4.3
Carl André, *ruinsof…*, 1975.

André's concern for the visuality and tactility of language and replacing an anthropomorphic perspective were passed over by the majority of those involved in Conceptual Art at the time (and in the context of its ultimate reception). Negating meaning through an interest in paradigmatic construction (in lieu of syntactical ordering), André's understanding and use of language are antithetical to common conceptions of language associated with Conceptual Art. His involvement with poetry, like Vito Acconci's or Graham's initial attempts, was regarded as derisive experimentation. According to Kosuth, the concrete poetry of the time was "a formalization of the artist's material"; it undermined an art that should be general, without busying itself with "aesthetic categorical gerry-mandering".[318] Or as art historian Liz Kotz wrote: "a reliance on rather quaint illustrational or pictorial modes … left much concrete poetry [of the time] out of touch with changing paradigms in the visual arts and the wider conditions of language in modernity".[319]

This so-called gap between poetry and visual art in the 1960s and 1970s is also a point of connection, however, especially once the broader context of Conceptual Art projects and poetical endeavors is taken into account. Central to poetics of the twentieth century, according to Perloff, is a Duchampian "art as a question." This is what transformed "both visual and verbal language." What should be rendered art, according to Duchamp in Perloff's view, are "the things that are art—which is to say, the realm of the mind as well as the eye, the realm of ideas and intellect as well as visual image".[320] The fact that art shouldn't be retinal, like painting, led Duchamp to exhibit "things" that weren't considered art, like the first readymade, the *Bottlerack* (1914), a household item used for drying washed jars. Perloff ranks the *Green Box* (1934), composed of notes or copies thereof and a drawing, among those works that made do with retinal art. The *Green Box* contained a series of "proto-language poems," like the following: "Identifying *To lose the possibility of recognizing 2 similar objects*—2 colors, 2 laces, 2 hats, 2 forms whatsoever to reach the Impossibility of sufficient *visual* memory, to transfer from one object to another the *memory* imprint.—Same possibility with sounds; with brain facts".[321] The abolishment of similarity and memory about which the textual shard speaks would result in a concentration on the *thisness*, on the nominalism of each thing, Perloff comments. This sheer possibility defines the artists' text "Muhheakantuck."

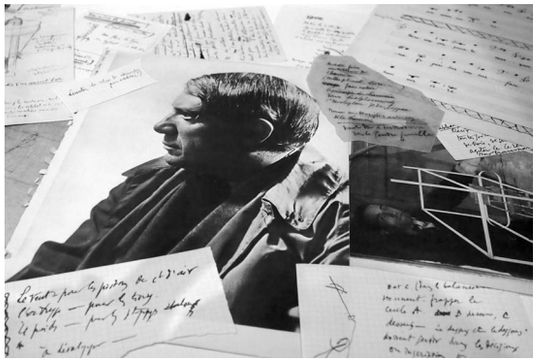

fig 2.9
Marcel Duchamp, *Green Box*, 1934. Photo: Salomé Roodenburg.

Regardless of the differing historical receptions of the period, recent empirical research has demonstrated that what Conceptual Art and poetry shared were experiments with language as material or not material. Language was ambiguous, layered, diversified from the inside, and to be looked at from the outside. These experiments with the equivocal nature and potential of language found a home in the artists' magazine. These magazines, mostly created, produced, and distributed by unofficial circuits and reacting against the institutionalized art world, were materialized encounters. Thus an artists' publication such as *0 to 9* not only invited artists and poets to contribute to the magazine, it also reflected the "shared social spaces in which they became acquainted with one another and exchanged ideas: coffeehouses on New York's Lower East Side, alternative spaces and galleries opening in SoHo." *0 to 9* was initiated by then poet Acconci and poet Bernadette Mayer and it was born out of a juncture of Conceptual Art and experimental poetry (in the words of Mayer: "we didn't want to be surrounded by 'regular' poetry," adding, "there was little reason to write poetry at the same time and not do something else, like be what they called a conceptual artist."). Named after Jasper

Johns's stencil paintings from the mid-1950s, the magazine was published six times from 1967 and 1969. A mimeographed, hand-assembled, stapled publication, *0 to 9* very much emphasized the magazine's materiality, and the materiality of language. It defined itself as a vehicle for action, relying on the magazine's spatiotemporal existence, instead of on its two dimensionality. Thus the cover of number 5 consisted of a crumbled, then flattened sheet of paper, the final jacket of number 6 was intentionally left blank, stressing its ability to register movement and time.

Reflecting on this artistic circle's social concern in the materiality of the magazine, a firm rebuttal of poetry and its interest in materialism and concreteness such as Kosuth's seems strange. What was overlooked at the time is what Duchamp formulated in his notes on the *Green Box* (1934), the assembled writings on his Large Glass: "This *plastic being* of the word / (by literal nominalism) differs / from the *plastic being* of any form . . .". [326] The contemporary artists' writing is based on this difference and the concomitant different functioning of the word vis-à-vis "any form."

Combining conceptual writing and the artists' text, "Muhheakantuck" arrives at processual writing. It doesn't rely on a conceptual kernel, from which its versions diverge, as conceptual writing does. The core of the text varies along with the development of the research. The different versions are logical consequences of this ongoing process. Alongside a poem like Goldsmith's *Traffic* (2007), for instance, the book-length twenty-four-hour transcription of New York radio station WINS's city traffic reports at ten-minute intervals on the first day of a holiday weekend,[327] "Muhheakantuck" doesn't have a defined form. The process isn't documented: it is realized in the artists' text. The contemporary artists' text *as* text thus escapes (or tries to escape, or feigns an escape, acknowledging that capitalism devours and absorbs "everything in its path—including any critique of capitalism".[328] It avoids the trap in which Conceptual artists had walked into by

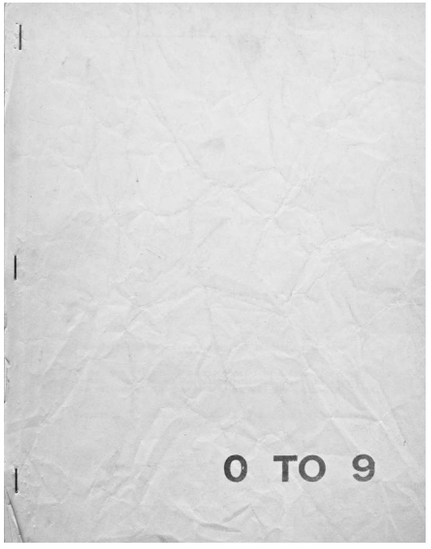

fig 4.5
Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, Cover of *0 to 9*, no.5, 1969.

using language as a medium. The question now becomes: how is this textual strategy realized in artists' writing? Or, how does it translate its acknowledgment, learned from studying the manifold use of language in Conceptual Art, that not all concretisms are alike?

The Archive and History

Reading "Muhheakantuck" in conjunction with poetry is motivated by the different forms of concreteness of the various versions of the Buckingham's text: the 2005 edition is divided into cautiously separated paragraph blocks; the 2008 edition presents a radically fragmented narrative; and the 2007 version renders that narrative continuous. The very form of the artists' text, its handling of what in relation to modern poetry has been termed the blanks and the blacks,[329] verges on what in previous chapters has been referred to as fragmentation. Whereas the form of the fragment reflects on the singularity of the artists' text (chapter 2) and on the question of the subject and of subjectivation (chapter 3), it also divulges the scission at its core: "between poetry and philosophy, between the poetic word and the word of thought".[330] The poetical fragment, exemplified by the work of the Jena Romantics, was not only born at the moment of crisis defined by the Romantics, it represented the attempt at poetry in search of knowledge and philosophy in search of representation.[331] It is precisely this balancing out of epistemological and poetical material force that is central to the artists' writing.

Alternative and alternating modes of reading are intrinsic *to* Buckingham's editions. But what springs to the eye most are the formal variations *between* the versions, instigating dissimilar approaches. The editions read differently due to the alternative rhythms imposed by their forms. The conspicuously fragmented 2008 edition, and its consequences for lineation, the text's division in blanks and in blacks, requires another type of reader's attention: the silences the text demands form the content; and likewise, the content needs a specific form. The broken down narrative shatters representation. As of Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács's writing on the novel, fractured representation has an alienating effect on the reader, due to its contrast against empirical lived reality.[332] The blanks of the artists' writing would thereby demand the reader fill up the text with her imagination, or invite her to cover the text with her own story. The fissured character of the writing urges her to construct it, the schemata created by returning themes (silence, words, language), words ("air, land, water, light"), figures, and details ("more than 23,000 Lenape died in that time. . . . During these same years 7.5 million Germans died in the Thirty Years War") paradoxically directing the reading. The narrative

effect violated and subverted undermines representation of a temporal process. Forced to combine the dissociated elements or poetic sequences in one's own manner, one tends to construct an image of "reality" not necessarily corresponding to the state of affairs. This is where the problem begins, according to Lukács. The blanks generating fragments deny historicity, affording the possibility to "escape into irrational reverence for mythic images," as art historian W. J. T. Mitchell explains elaborating on the "threat" of what could be considered as those "dangerous blanks".[333]

Historicity negated by fragmentation, reveals the continuous narrative of the 2007 version all the more. Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck" is, or rather is introduced as, the transcription of the voice-over of a 38-minute color 16 mm film projection with sound. The film was first exhibited in *Watershed: The Hudson Valley Art Project*, Dia:Beacon, New York, an exhibition curated and organized by Diane Shamash and Minetta Brook in 2002, according to a first footnote to the text. The 2007 edition appeared in the journal *October*. It was preceded by an essay titled "The Artist as Historian" written by art historian Mark Godfrey. Like the details included on the provenance of the artists' text, the dyad Godfrey-Buckingham is an interesting one. They encompass categorizations both the content of the artists' writing and its previously published version deny.

In his article Godfrey addresses the question of historical research and representation he understands as central to contemporary art. Following a short survey of the diversity of historical representations in photography and film in general, he turns to Buckingham's practice. Buckingham investigates various histories, creating his very "own language," according to Godfrey, that language based on three devices: first, the division between image and text; second, each distinct part (image or text) is internally fractured; and third, special installation methods that underscore the importance of history. In analyzing seven Buckingham works including "Muhheakantuck," Godfrey concludes the artist is also a historian. Buckingham does not research only historical subjects, but also their mediums and forms, and his work contains a methodological freedom and creativity, without sacrificing rigor. Through his work the artist critiques master narratives, distancing the work from postmodern practice coined by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard for whom deconstruction is starting point instead of result. The artist-as-historian generates new ways of thinking about the future.

Although I endorse aspects of his contentions in relation to "Muhheakantuck," Godfrey's argument has some serious drawbacks. What is curious and striking about both the art historian's account and, more interestingly, the form of Buckingham's writing, is that what is held in place is what philosopher Gotthold Lessing in *Laöcoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766) called a "bequemes Verhältnis," a convenient relation or homology between, poetry as a temporal art and painting as a spatial art.[334] Like Lessing, Godfrey divides Buckingham's work into text and image, time (reading) and space (looking), passive and active (the passive viewer that needs to be activated). The subsequent presentation of Buckingham's text as a continuous narrative is suddenly suspect: why doesn't the text demonstrate the purported "methodological freedom and creativity" of the artist-as-historian? The textual continuity, coherence, and fullness rather stress the chronological sequence proper to a historiographical record honoring the original occurrence of events. It is precisely this linearity that "Muhheakantuck" criticizes and opposes. Instead, the artists' writing is presented as a narrative that "strains to produce the effect of having filled in all the gaps," as American historian of literary criticism Hayden White would have it. It puts "an image of continuity, coherence, and meaning in place of the fantasies of emptiness, need, and frustrated desire that inhabit our nightmares about the destructive power of time."[335] If the artist is a historian free of scholarly rules and using text in his installations that shifts between registers, as Godfrey suggests, the question arises as to why he is turned into, or turns himself into, such an authoritarian figure on a textual level. The form of Buckingham's discourse seems to emphasize or illustrate the art historian's thesis: this artist is a historian, and a serious one, doing rigorous work. This idea of both the historian's and the artist-as-historian's work constructed by Godfrey, has the narrative fullness of Buckingham's writing presented as a Lukácsean "discourse of the real." It is precisely this accepted linear discourse of the real "Muhheakantuck" tests and, implicitly and explicitly, disputes. Fantasies of emptiness, desires for the unknown is the writing's driving force and central theme. Witness the quest for the Northwest Passage enabling an "easier way to sail from Europe to Asia," drawn on maps commissioned by the "courts and monarchs in Europe," and of which "no one knew whether or not it [the passage] existed" (18). Or consider the following: "One of the first steps in learning a new language is to hear the silence between the words. / Words are convenient and silence can be uncomfortable. / What feels familiar is actually unknown—because we think we already understand the things that are familiar to us" (30–31). Upholding the boundaries between text and image, time and space, active and passive voice, the artist is substituted for the historian, and the historian in the modernist tradition at that. Here Buckingham doesn't speak "his own language." He speaks Godfrey's.

Buckingham's writing can be perceived in another manner, as (re)opening and furthering the debate of the status of the artists' text. Taking my

analysis of the Buckingham-Godfrey relation one step further, the 2007 version of "Muhheakantuck" illustrates the art historian's discourse underscoring that position's argument and ideological position. The traditional hierarchical distance and distinction between framer and framed, the art historian commenting on the artwork, digging up its meaning, is reinstated. The hierarchical division among tasks implicitly undermines Godfrey's statement that deconstruction functions as the artists' writing ground. Since aren't these precisely deconstructivist strategies and textual techniques causing the difference between creator and critic to become vague? The Buckingham-Godfrey argument does not arrive at a form to validate this argument.

The categorical distinctions already prevalent in Aristotle's *Poetics* are maintained: it is the historian's task to articulate particular facts, in contrast with the poet, who expresses universal truths (1451b).[336] "Muhheakantuck" is interspersed with facts ("After 14 epidemics the number of Lenape living in what the Dutch called New Netherland was reduced from more than 24,000 to less than 3,000" [28]). The artists' writing thus rubs shoulders with a historical endeavor. But it can be compared to Conceptual Art as well, and its predilection for facts, numbers and measures, lists, definitions, and catalogues. Witness Stanley Brouwn's work, which since the 1970s took his own physical measures as starting point. But whereas Brouwn disputed the coded lengths by creating his own, Buckingham seems to try to find a new artistic procedure, mediating among institutions. The artists' writing is poetic, as Perloff formulates, poetic discourse being "that which can violate the system, which refuses the formula and the binary opposition between 1 and 2".[337]

What appears as historical research is used and mingled with textual studies, engaging with institutional requests that enact a situational sensitivity. Remember that "Muhheakantuck" was published in a critical reader produced by a smaller art institution (2008), in an academic journal (2007), and in a collection that resulted from an educational collaboration (2005). The artists' writing taking into account the paratextual conditions translating them into aesthetical decisions, it responds to the institutions. The process of transcription is a narrative process as well, however. It is *récriture*,[338] a citation that reveals the failure of designation. If the *process* of citation implies a loss of meaning, citation itself reminds the reader of the impossibility to name. Or vice versa, the repetition inherent in citation signals a desire to name. In Buckingham's writing, the very unfamiliarity of the Western reader with the word *Muhheakantuck* alludes to this dual movement of impossibility and desire. The meaning in the tongue of the Lenape is the Western translation,

a description: the river that flows in two directions. The physical impossibility implicit in the name reveals the difficulty to denote it. Or as Buckingham writes: "The river that became known as the Hudson was not discovered—it was invented and re-invented" (22).

"Muhheakantuck" demonstrates an attempt to name and the failure immanent in that same attempt, a view the transcriptions and their different versions support. The recontextualizations are textual strategies, efforts to reframe the writing's self-reflexive research. They consider the implications of writing and naming. Buckingham notes: "Everything has a name, or the potential to be named, but who does the naming when the unknown is falsely assumed not to exist?" (19) The artists' text not only traces history's blind spots, or the unbridgeable distance between the "*visible*" and the "*dicible*," the "things" and the "words" applied to them, Buckingham's is also a poetical quest to name. What thus seems at stake in the artists' text is not only what Lucy Lippard admitted as Conceptual Art's defeat: the breakdown of the barriers between the art context and "those external disciplines." Michel Foucault's argument that writing is a quest for words and things to find their common essence can be reversed: Buckingham's writing seems to acknowledge that the single word, like the single discipline, is shattered from within.

The artists' writing, its multiple versions and the ongoing research they imply a textual procedure, Godfrey's clear-cut distinction between time and space, between the passive position of the onlooker versus the active one, needs to be reconsidered as well. Or framing the artists' writing as a transcription, the text-image dichotomy is held in place. Crossing the boundaries between disciplines, underlining "Muhheakantuck's" poetical search, this text-image polarity seems invalid. As poet Vanessa Place painstakingly phrased as a historical impasse, "the problem is words are images and images are words".[339]

The Image Again

If the interest in figures and facts seeping into Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck" manifests an attempt to ground the artists' writing, an effort to "denote the real directly," signifying it, thereby expelling the signified from the tripartite structure of the sign (sign = *signifiant* + *signifié*), (Barthes "Reality Effect"), its mathematical grandeur also marks the unimaginable, the unassignable. If meaning operates and "unfolds under the sign of the 'real'",[340] the statistical details bringing about a "reality effect" are nuanced or mined by the texts' designs. The fragmented 2008 version conjures images, the blanks emphasizing a logic immanent

in text and reading *en soi*. The textual spacing also stresses the writing's interest in silence: "Whenever something is said there is also silence" (30), as Buckingham observes.

The artists' writing pivoting around questions of representation ("Our bodies are frameworks with which we create abstract thought and systems of categories" [33]), its narrative sets it apart from Conceptual Art's "informational, documentary idiom" (Lippard), or what Buchloh termed its "aesthetics of administration." Its inspiration does not rely on a need to mime "the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality in an effort to place its auto-critical investigations at the service of liquidating even the last remnant of traditional aesthetic experience." Buchloh continues: "In that process it [the aesthetics of administration] succeeded in purging itself entirely of imaginary and bodily experience, of physical substance and the space of memory, to the same extent that it effaced all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill".[341] Imagination, physical substance and memory, representation, and skill: they are not only the subject of Buckingham's writing, they decide its form. "Muhheakantuck's" numbers are an "adorable detail"[342] serving another account.

The single name, subject, or discipline dissected in the artists' text can be considered an archeological method. This conspicuous approach is expanded on in the 2005 version especially. Whereas the 2007 edition used indentation to separate sentences and stances, giving the text a staccato appearance and feel, the earliest version of "Muhheakantuck" is divided into paragraph blocks or distinct larger paragraphs that elaborate on single details. Images are provided, illustrating what the text deploys. Thus the first text block explains the "centuries old" "dream of vertical ascent and hovering flight." It meanders between Chinese toys and Leonardo da Vinci's inventions, moving from lighter-than-air balloons to helicopters. Whereas the writing moves from the historical implications of one concept (flying, hovering flight) to the sequence framed by a photograph of a hummingbird, the stratification of "just one word" is always underscored.

As stated earlier, "Muhheakantuck's" last two installments in particular sustain what in relation to Lessing's *Laöcoon* was termed a *bequemes Verhältnis*, "a convenient relation" or homology between poetry as a temporal art and painting as a spatial art. The fact that the text is a transcription (2007) and a voice-over of a film (2008) secures this pact. This information is not only a disclaimer, it separates text and image, time (reading) and space (looking), passive and active (the passive viewer that needs to be activated in his installations). However, the different uses of imagery demonstrate that they do not so much *issue from* the artists' text's status as from the voice-over. "Muhheakantuck" has to be perceived as *also* film and voice-over, or what Perloff would call a "differential" work, "in which no single version necessarily has priority".[343] The *alternate* media of "Muhheakantuck" press on this point: Perloff again, "*knowledge* is now available through different channels and by different means".[344] Knowledge is not exclusive to film or text, time as opposed to space becomes an incoherent basis for the differentiation between text and image.[345] In his study of the problem Mitchell strives for an organization of time in a *coherent* image to replace notions of spatiality regulated by systems of oppositions proposing the use of a *tectonic* "to suggest the global, symmetrical, gestalt-like image that is generally associated with so-called spatial effects." A later study replaces this with *image/text* or *imagetext*. The substitution of terms might shift the relationships between time and space, but the underlying conditions are not challenged. Existing orders are preserved.

His theory straining to respect a historical tradition, Mitchell's analysis also perpetuates structural spatiotemporal divisions. Based on a conservation of these age-old lines of demarcation, the proposition includes a possible revision of the equally age-old comparison between poetry and painting—the latter classical debate pushing off from the statement ascribed to Simonides of Ceos (6th century BCE) that painting is "mute poetry" and poetry a "speaking picture." At the other end of the spectrum, it is framed by Horace (1st century BCE) in his *Ars Poetica*: "ut pictura poesis" (as is painting, so is poetry). Horace emphasizes the correspondence between painting and poetry writing, "poetry is like painting because both have as their subjects existent reality and both are limited in their mimetic adequacy to that reality".[346] Mitchell's imagetext conceives the concept of medium (visual or verbal) as a heterogeneous field of representational practices. Imagetext as a term and concept is recommended "for its persistence as a theoretical tradition, its survival as an abiding feature of poetics, rhetoric, aesthetics and semiotics." He explains his aim as follows: "It is this [theoretical] tradition that gave us the models of interartistic comparison, and that opens the possibility of other relations between texts and visual images, and the de-disciplining between visual and verbal culture".[347] Looking for an appropriate descriptive language to analyze the function of the specific forms of heterogeneity, Mitchell proposes we delve into "the representation itself, and the institutional metalanguage—an immanent vernacular, not a disciplinary theory—of the medium to which it belongs."[348]

Although I agree with Mitchell's suggestion, it doesn't seem radical enough in relation to the contemporary artists' writing. Whereas

Mitchell's theory looks like an alternative for Horace's claim, it insufficiently takes into account Simonides's statement. Comprehended as personifications of painting and poetry, Simonides's attempt to "overreach the boundaries between one art and another" is also an attempt "to dispel (or at least mask) the boundary between art and life, between sign and thing, between writing and dialogue". Even read as a description, instead of personification, Simonides's figure (painting is "mute poetry" and poetry is a "speaking picture") investigates also the ontic mode of the subject matter of aesthetic signs, natural or arbitrary. Contrary to that, Mitchell concentrates on an "attack" of the definitions of the *genres* of poetry and painting, since, as he posits elsewhere, these definitions are marked by ideologically motivated acts of exclusion and appropriation that tend to reify some "significant other".[350]

Discussing the work of Francis Ponge in relation to the artists' writing, the next section will elaborate on ways to bridge the gap between word and world, Ponge's method serving as a possible "alternative" to Mitchell's, which tends to homogenize discourse whereas the artists' text is diffracted and diffracts. *In* and *through* its versions, "Muhheakantuck" articulates the heterogeneous, inventing a means to articulate the disparate and dispersed. Foregrounded as a process, the artists' writing is a heterogenesis. Reframing itself each time, taking the context into account, putting its medium (language) to work, formulating different strategies and techniques. A manner to gain access to the artists' writing is through a transversal approach, taking into account the different contexts that helped shaping it, be they museal (2008 version) academic (2007 version), or related to an art school (2005 version).

The image plays a role in this construction. Holding that the diffracted 2008 text elicits images isn't a way to state that they are imposed on the reader's mind from without. Framing the artists' writing as also poetic discourse, it is a manner through which to understand words as images as well, not only in the materialist sense borrowed (and proved untrustworthy) from Conceptual Art, but also in a more imagistic ("direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective")[351] formulation. This doesn't imply, I hasten to add, a return to a Poundean image poetry defining the image in 1913 as the essence of (its) poetry. A 1960s (art) world struggled with the status of the object due to commercialization and a tightening grip of the economic market, as we already saw. The image likewise revealed itself far from innocent in this spectacular world.

Poetry was challenged by a *videation* of culture.[352] As a consequence the image was deconstructed by poets, analyzed as deceptive (e.g., John Ashbery), replaced by words (e.g., Eugen Gomringer), or emphasis was placed on syntax (e.g., Gertrude Stein). Techniques were invented to relate otherwise to the poem. In *How To Read* (1931) Ezra Pound had distinguished "three kinds of poetry": "MELOPOEIA, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing of trend of that meaning. PHANOPOEIA, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination. LOGOPOEIA, the dance of the intellect among words," that is, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes into account "a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironic play. It holds the aesthetic content, which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in music or in plastic. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and dependable mode".[353] One could argue that poetry turned from phanopoeia to logopoeia, and rightly so.[354] What is of interest in relation to the artists' writing, or "Muhheankantuck," is that "plastic" or "music" aren't excluded, and are taken along in the process of writing. It is their very combination or heterogeneity that makes up the work.

Ponge, by Way of Conclusion

This is how French poet Francis Ponge forges an interconnection between "disparate but particular elements."[355] Grounded in a shared familiarity with and elementary knowledge about things, his "descriptions-definitions-objects of literary art" (*descriptions-définitions-objets d'art-littéraire*) try to circumvent prior classifications nevertheless, thereby being more sensible, more striking and enjoyable. Ponge's poems and proems, he states,

> sont donc des descriptions-définitions-objets d'art-littéraire que je prétends formuler, c'est–à-dire des définitions qui au lieu de renvoyer (par exemple pour tel végétal) à telle ou telle classification préalable entendue (admise) et en somme à une science humaine supposée connue (et également inconnue), renvoient, sinon tout à fait à l'ignorance totale, du moins à un ordre de connaissances assez communes, habituelles et élémenaires, établissent des correspondances inédites, qui dérangent les classifications habituelles, et se présentent ainsi de façon plus sensible, plus frappante, plus agréable aussi.[356]

His poems try to transform the word that names the thing in the thing named, and in the singularity it contains. Singing the singularity into being, it makes an effort to overturn prevalent modes of living, action,

and thought. This movement immanent in the poem, and "impossible"[357] poetical strategy leads to a work that seemingly resists interpretation. Ponge's writings hover between theoretical treatise and poetical play, between personal scrapbook and poème en prose. Avoiding categorization, it makes them intractable. This is also due to the "mere" daily objects they discuss rendered both too close and familiar to attain the singularity and propriety of the object (soap, a towel, a table, an orange, a fig), and judged unmanageable for a poetical and philosophical tradition striving for truth.

The "unassignability" of Ponge's poems concerns their object and subject simultaneously, they cannot be split up. The textual strategies they apply to deal with this mingling of wor(l)ds, and the acts of resistance the writings both imply and circumvent are inherent in the artists' writing as well. Both Ponge's and Buckingham's works pivot around the text-image divide, thereby violating the system, refusing the formula and the binary opposition between 1 and 2.[358] Both writers invent ways to deal with the concrete, kept at bay for too long and still seeping into writerly practices and theoretical concepts alike. Witness Mitchell's approach. The question arises as to how the unassignable is realized, and paradoxically so, since doesn't the very concept resist nomination? Ponge's entry into the unassignable might enable an understanding of the artists' writing's operative force, its dynamics.

"Muhheakantuck" is at a far remove from the clear-cut syntactical distribution of the text adhered to in post-structuralism and Conceptual Art. Signs are not what they seem ("In the Lenape language there is no article corresponding to the English word "the." Speakers of Lenape reveal the position from which they speak and express their relationship to what they speak about. Without "the," there is no way to experience our world and not become part of it." [33]). "Muhheakantuck's" reader is not so much brought to a standstill by the writing, but she firmly holds onto it due to an absence of the referent, and given the text's resistance to classified knowledge words imply ("What feels familiar is actually unknown—because we think we already understand the things that are familiar to us" [30–31]). In order to see and communicate with the unknown, Ponge argues, one should understand and teach art to resist words (*résister aux paroles*).[359] Picking up on the particularity of things, letting this leak into language, enabling transitions or passages between words and things, brings about new relationships. Unexpected meanings are revealed or discovered, reinventing both the world and the word, the latter conceived as analogous to things: "PARTI PRIS DES CHOSES *égale* COMPTE TENU DES MOTS."[360] To participate in things equates with a taking into account of words. A liaison based on analogy, it generates

textual circularity. The circular movement can be traced in the artists' text. Looking at "Muhheakantuck" more closely, one becomes conscious of the repetition of themes and phrases not only dispersed throughout the text, but also and especially in the writing's beginning and ending. Consider "Muhheakantuck's" final sentences:

> It's easy to forget that it is the eye that makes the horizon. / In the dream of vertical ascent and hovering flight we glimpse the cartographer's view: a fictional disembodied eye suspended high in the air. But as soon as we follow one line, or one river, and not another, a journey emerges, even if it's only a dream. And of course that journey unavoidably becomes a story. Spaces that have been abstracted, once more become particular places (33).

And the first:

> The dream of vertical ascent and hovering flight seems to have first materialized in China in the form of a toy—a bamboo dragonfly that lifted straight up in the air when spun quickly. / The dream of vertical ascent and hovering flight is a dream of suspending time through distance—of cutting one's self off from ordinary measures of time—"surface time" (17).

Instead of understanding the circularity immanent in Buckingham's work as a post-structuralist closed circuit, it can be apprehended as open-ended also. Due to the histories (pre-texts) it intends to reframe, "Muhheakantuck" allows for multiple readings. "New" words provide writing not only the unknown a more familiar expression could not possibly fathom, they also lend language a "strange" rhythm or flow, much like first experiences (vertical ascent and hovering flight), unexpected facts (numbers), and stories (Juet's diary). Nameless meanings can be discovered, thus disturbing and rupturing the regular course of events.[361] Relationships between words and things are not simply reversed, but redirected and redirecting, mutated and mutating, caught in the process of being reinvented. One could say that it is important not to homogenize the ecology of the artists' text; understanding the environment of the writing as an analogous relationship to the text in fact imparts continuous variation. The three versions of "Muhheakantuck" nurture this idea with their differing approaches in content and design. The title *Muhheakantuck* marks the text's heterogeneity and lack of fixity. "What unfolds in a story—what really *happens* in a story—is language," a language imbued with matter, be it situational or textual, if these can ever really be separated.