Elephants painting? Selfness and the emergence of self states as illustrated in conceptual art

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Abstract: The traditional view of the self is that of a singular entity whose ground is an inherent function of the mind. The more recent conception of the self is moving toward the social constructionist concept that its ground is the discourses of the particular culture into which one is born. These two divergent views have created an irresolvable binary of inner/outer that limits their explanatory power. To resolve this dilemma I suggest that the abstract noun 'selfness', indicating a general state, should replace the representational noun 'self', that indicates a specific state. I will propose that 'selfness' is indeed the 'ground' from which our unique self states emerge. I will illustrate this with examples from conceptual art and will discuss its relevance to analytic theory and treatment.

Abstract [conceptual] art is always a symbolic game, and it is akin to all human games; you have to get into it, risk and all, and this takes a certain act of faith. But what kind of faith? Not faith in absolutes, not a religious kind of faith. A faith in possibility, a faith not that we will know something finally, but a faith in not knowing, a faith in our ignorance, a faith in our being confounded and dumbfounded, a faith fertile with possible meaning and growth.
(Varnedoe 2006, p. 271, North American Art Critic)

Introduction

Art as a game? Varnedoe is suggesting that conceptual art is something risky, something that one plays with rather than observes from afar. Art that is initially opaque and to interpret it requires faith and not knowing. Art that calls into question Descartes' (1960) 'cogito ergo sum'—I think therefore I am—privileging instead the perspective that I am affected, therefore I am, and then I may understand. It is art that might open the possibility of meaning and growth, albeit, in ways that dumbfound us. This is art that breaks with millennia of a Eurocentric tradition that valorizes the aesthetics and the pedagogy that are created by the 'self-expression'—the rationality—of the artist.

Varnedoe is speaking of an art that is conceptual, and by virtue of its eschewal of formal aesthetics allows beauty to emerge via the involved person's actualization of the idea that infuses the piece (Goldie & Schellekens 2007). It is akin to and, therefore, can illuminate contemporary analysis since it presents conundrums that can only be apprehended by entering into their seeming irrationality. In this state one is in a position to be affected in a way similar to what Bion (1962, pp. 6–7) and Fordham (1978, 1993) identify as the generalized sensory impressions that in analysis generate the embodied countertransference.

In both the artistic and analytic situations one's rationality creates an 'outside' stance that becomes the greatest of impediments. This precludes involvement because it frames the art or the analysand in theoretical or personal assumptions that obscure

relevant motifs (Horne 2004).

Following Heidegger (1962/27, 1992, 1992/25), I will be asserting and demonstrating, with some modifications of my own and of others (Dreyfus 1998; Zahavi 2005; Brooke 2009), that the dispositions from which meaning attribution emerges is most parsimoniously depicted by the concept**(1)** of selfness or selfhood. As parts of speech these are abstract nouns that refer to general states, 'darkness' and 'neighbourhood' being examples. By contrast the representational noun 'self' that is qualified by an article such as 'the' or 'a', indicates a specific entity.

As an abstract concept, selfness manifests as a set of dispositions that include discoveredness, disclosedness, affectedness**(2)**, within-timeness, groundedness and mineness. In semiotic**(3)** terminology disclosedness is characterized by its propensity for signification**(4)** and discoveredness by its capacity to manifest significance (Danesi & Perron 1999, pp. 67–96; Chandler 2002, pp.17–74). These dispositions of selfness in turn provide the ontological**(5)** grounds for specific self-states that manifest ontically**(6)** with the capacities of significance and signification, and of impact, historicality**(7)**, possibility and possession.

Selfness or selfhood can be viewed as a horizon—a limit condition—that via its dispositions permits the disclosure and therefore the discovery of particular 'worlds'. These are constituted by being-in**(8)** with specific people, sentient beings and things that disclose**(9)** their signification and thus affect us. On the basis of 'mineness', as 'I', we apprehend 'our worlds' as being 'mine', and when referring to them speak of 'the "world" of my family' or 'my work "world" '. The sum total of these 'worlds' of my own is what makes up the totality of 'my world'.

Specific 'worlds' are instantiated via grounding in the abstract state of worldness or worldhood: the ontological. The core disposition of worldness is involvedness which grounds the particular significance we give to, and the particular signification we give forth, in our being-in our various and particular 'worlds': the ontical. In the vernacular, we call these engagements relationships and we qualify them in different ways. However, I'm suggesting that to call the ontical state that emerges from the potential of involvedness in a relationship obscures the semiotic process that brings it about. This semiotic process result in our assigning meaning to all the events we encounter on a daily basis. In light of this, I'm suggesting that the ontological disposition of involvedness leads to the ontic semiotic process that instantiates 'my worlds' (Harre 1988).

These 'worlds' can ultimately be seen as sets of discourses**(10)** in which individual self-states come into existence, the discursive selves (Heidegger 1993; Harre & Gillett 1994).

We can understand the difference between the literal world—in which we are standing back—and our 'worlds'—in which we are being-in by examining the two ways in which we use the phrase 'in the theatre'. In the case of a theatre patron this phrase means to be inside a building that is used to stage plays. The everyday patron brings their already established 'view' of theatres to the situation at hand and, as a result, 'stands back' and observes from a subject/object perspective that is predicated on his/her 'world of the theatre' as an entity to be enjoyed. However, in time, a patron who attends the theatre frequently may become more 'at home with'—being-in—the multiple contexts of the theatre, such as lectures prior to the staging of plays, organizing events that bring in

financial support or working as a board member (Horne 2004). The disclosure and discovery of such potential dimensions of the theatre constitute a more extensive 'world of the theatre' for the now-involved patron.

In the case of an actor or an actress, their experience of the 'world of the theatre' is much more far-reaching than that of the patron because it refers to the disclosure and discovery of the significance of, for example, being-in with other actors, the discourses of the plays in which he/she acts and the stage sets and lighting within which he/she performs. The actor/actress is much more 'at home' in the theatre than the casual patron.

In any situation, if we can avoid withdrawing and becoming mere observers, we may experience always already being found—constantly being disclosed— and made— endlessly discovered (Zinkin 1991/2008; Zinkin et al 2008). We are disclosed in the discourses of our self-states and discovered in their 'worlds' of significance. In the model I'm proposing, this 'social construction' (Gergen 1994; Burr 2003; Zinkin 1991/2008) does not describe an originary self that stands outside of the 'worlds' of the culture in question. This is because self-states are *always already potentially* present in the dispositions of selfness and are disclosed through the ground of worldness. Selfness and worldness mutually implicate one another (personal communication Sharon Green).

In the remainder of this paper I will show how conceptual art was instigated by a group of artists who introduced a variety of 'worlds' into the previously en-framed— circumscribed—and, therefore, standing back 'world' of abstract expressionism. As a result of this change of stances, I will show how the intrigued patron of conceptual art is always already being-in the 'world' of the art piece in question. Within this complexity, the art patron can be in the position of the actor who is 'in the theatre'. However, he/she can also remain 'standing back' to view the art work as an object 'out there' as does the occasional theatre patron.

Finally, I will propose and attempt to demonstrate that the involvement of art patrons in the conundrums of conceptual art is identical to the involvement of analysands in the enigmas of the analytic space. In particular, I will suggest that foundational subject/ object positions—standing back—hinder the resolution of these enigmas and that an approach that privileges a grounding of self/states in the disclosedness and discoveredness given by selfness/worldness, aids in their elucidation. As Heidegger (1962, p. 369) says, 'In the "I" [self-states] we have in view that entity one is in "being-in-the-world"'.

Conceptual art: art anti foundational art

The first generally recognized piece of Conceptual Art was Marcel Duchamp's *fountain*, which was entered but prohibited from being displayed in the New York Armory show of 1917. This was an ordinary urinal on which he wrote 'R. Mutt 1917' in a parody of the artist's signature that authenticates the work (Foster et al 2004, pp. 154–59; Danto 2005, pp. 331–32; Varnedoe 2006, pp. 95–97).
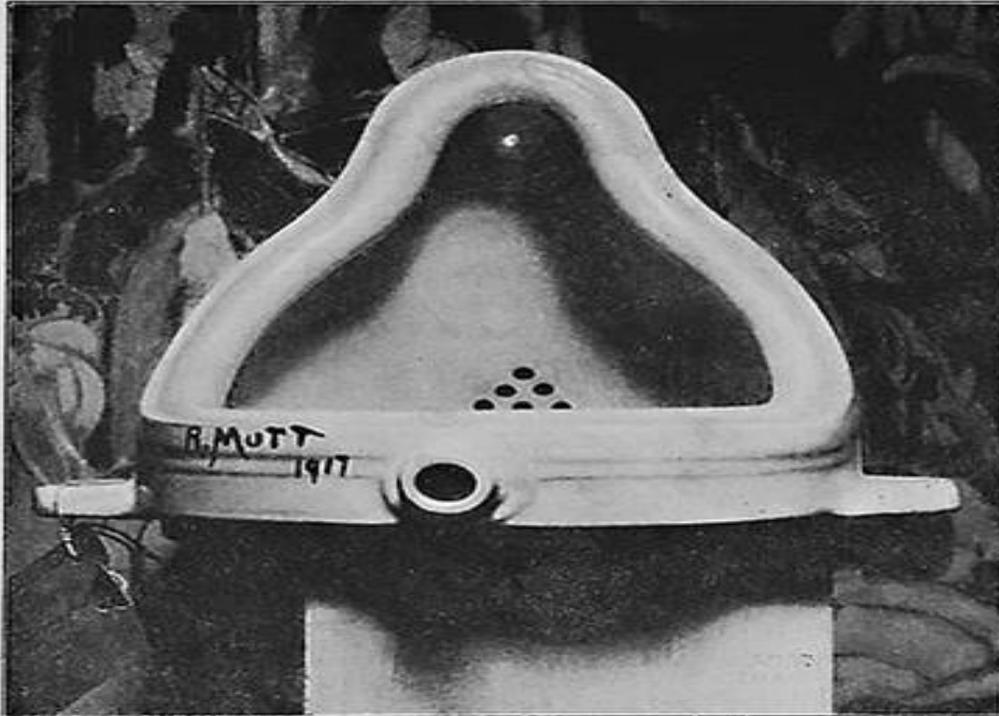
Figure 1 - Fountain by Duchamp

Duchamp was part of the Dada movement that developed out of the horrors of WWI as a broad critique of the bourgeois institutions and practices from which the war emerged (Dickerman 2006, pp. 277–96). In *fountain* Duchamp used what he called a 'readymade'—distinguishing its appearance from that of works created by individual artists—that fore-fronted the eschewal of formal aesthetics but was still beautiful by virtue of the concept to which it spoke.

In the case of *fountain*, the idea was that a piece justifying the title 'art' is dependent on the context, in this case an art exhibition, in which the work is 'placed' (Danto 2001, pp. 72–74).

The urinal went from being a material object in the marginalized 'world of male ablutions' to being a symbolic subject in the highly valorized 'New York art world'. The judges had seen this as a literal 'disruption' as though a drunk from skid row—a denizen of 'the nether world'—had walked into the exhibition space (Hausser 1982, pp. 3–17).

However, more cogently for the judges and of which they were unaware, the urinal was an enigmatic irritant (Hinton 2009) that had taken the mantle of subjectivity from the artist, who was no longer channeling the archetypes—Pollock, the doyen of American expressionism, had a Jungian analysis—or his soul out through his fingertips and into his brush strokes (Varnedoe 2006, pp. 3–7; Danto 2001, pp. 26–29, 76–77). In fact, Duchamp had become an otherworldly figure, a wise fool, whose subjectivity was difficult to articulate. I am suggesting that the anxiety of the judges that had led to their excision of the urinal from the exhibition was provoked, albeit unconsciously, by these shifts.

Figure 2 - Jackson Pollock Painting

However, the irritation could also be seen as a symptom that pointed towards the pathology of the circumscription of the established 'art world' of the time. Such a 'symptom' is perhaps the concept—a trace—that points towards a meaning that is initially hidden (personal communication Michael Howard).

Duchamp, however, was acting as though he was a physician who was prescribing the radical cure of opening the windows and letting the patient be treated by the fresh breezes that were now free to blow in, thereby neutralizing the sickly vapors that had accumulated. In the terms that I have been using previously one could say that Duchamp was letting 'the quotidian world'—the fresh breezes—into the established 'art world'—the sickly vapors. I am suggesting that, as does an analyst with an analysand, he was initiating a war of the 'worlds', in which an unfamiliar 'world' confronts an established 'world' that instantiates an entrenched self-state. In this setting, disruption initially occurs but, with an understanding of the meanings of the resulting ruins, this in time gives way to reparation (Darling 2009, pp. 18–33).

Despite the members of the various Dada (Dickerman 2005) and other groups' (Foster et al 2004; Darling 2009) use of conceptualism, there was a continuing hegemony of German expressionism (Bassie 2005) and then of American abstract expressionism, the iconic figure of which was Jackson Pollock (Fineberg 2000, pp. 67–97; Foster et al. 2004, pp. 348–59), both of which privileged the 'expressivity' of the artist. Another significant challenge to an art that was formally aesthetic (Greenberg 1961) and privileged the 'creation' of an *artiste* did not fully emerge till the late 40s. At this time, the Italian Lucio Fontana, by making cuts and piercings in unpainted canvases, opened the traditional two dimensional en-framed ground of the painted canvas in the frame into a material object in three dimensional space that traditionally had defined sculpture (Foster et al. 2004, pp. 411–14; Mangini 2009).

Not only was Fontana sometimes not applying paint to the canvas but with his destructive gestures he was violating its preciousness. More iconoclastic still was the fact that his works were neither paintings nor sculpture although they had the formal features of both (Mangini 2009). Fontana's cut works had busted out of the traditional 'world of paintings' into a 'world' in which the self-state directing the work was no longer the artist; the material object now itself was an enigmatic signifier—equivalent to a self-state—that was yet to be named.

Inspired by Fontana, whose work he saw during the early 50s while living in Italy, Robert

Rauschenberg continued the trope that privileged not only destruction, like cutting the canvas, but also reparation, like opening a third dimension. He depicted the 'disappearance' of the *artiste*, in his almost identical collage abstractions *Factum I* and *Factum II*. In these pieces the singular moment of creationwas brought into question by the assembly line that came into view in the similarity of the paintings (Varnedoe 2006, pp. 194–95). Likewise depicting the death of the artist but in a more destructive register, for the work *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953, he bought a drawing from the guru of American abstract expressionism, Wilhelm de Kooning. Using the colour of unpainted canvases, he then meticulously painted over de Kooning's work leaving only slight traces of its original presence (Foster et al 2004, pp. 368–70).

Figure 3 - Factum I by Rauschenberg

Figure 4 - Factum II by Rauschenberg

This gesture was not purely anarchic; it reflected an interest in the meaning potential of traces that evolved from unplanned artistic work that had been called 'non-composition' by one of his collaborators John Cage. A striking example of this trope was *Automobile Tire Print*; the imprint of a tire on unpainted canvas (ibid., pp. 368–69). Traces were not the 'full monty' of expressionism and left viewers wondering what are they were pointing towards, what would be 'seen' (Wittgenstein 1953, p. 200). What would be found and made?

Of interest is that in these same years, Bion (1970, p. 26), Fordham (1993) and Winnicott (1971) were formulating similar concepts such as 'O', a state that 'does not fall in the domain of knowledge or learning save incidentally' or what one finds by 'not knowing beforehand' or via 'playing' and thus creating 'an intermediate area of experience' that is 'the place where we live'.

Could it be that there was a zeitgeist that privileged 'non-composition' emerging in the arts and the human sciences in the 40s and 50s that psychoanalytic theory and practice was also unwittingly undergoing? I am suggesting that this was the case and that it was occasioned by a paradigm shift in response to the inability of foundational concepts, such as an originary self and its stable one-dimensional 'world', to adequately explain the phenomena of 'art' and of the analytic encounter. Interestingly, in very recent times

this shift is being somewhat accepted in analysis and, as a result, is now more fully in play (Fairfield et al. 2002). Was this the point of view that Zinkin was trying to bring to his colleagues' attention (Zinkin et al. 2008) but did not live long enough to realize?

Conceptual art: art anti the 'world of art bureaucrats'

In the late 60s and early 70s conceptual art in North America became somewhat preoccupied with depicting conceptual propositions (Foster et al. 2004, pp. 545–48). An artist who was strongly identified with this tendency was Joseph Kosuth (1969). For example, his piece *One and Three Chairs* (Foster et al 2004, pp. 532–33) that consisted of a literal chair with its photo and the dictionary definition of a chair on the wall behind posed, amongst other things, the problem of the 'true' depiction of the chair in question.

Figure 5 - One and Three Chairs by Joseph Kosuth

At this time European conceptual artists, such as Marcel Broodthaers, as well as making anti 'art' pieces (Darling 2009), turned their critical attention to the power structures that controlled both the museum and the gallery presentations of works and their commoditization (Foucault 1972/1980). His most successful piece was a faux gallery exhibition that he curated in 1972. This was *The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*, based on the trope of the eagle and referring to the symbol of power that it instantiated. Included were well known works from previous eras and contemporary artists and random cultural references to and depictions of objects, all of which included the motif of the eagle (Foster et al. 2004, pp. 552–53; Fineberg 2000, pp. 354–56). In this work, amongst many things, he was both challenging the categorizing processes of American conceptualism and of ordering in general (Wittgenstein 1953, p.8) and of the eagle-like bureaucratic power from above of art and other cultural establishments and purveyors.

In pieces like this, conceptual artists were moving their critiques into the 'wider world'. Now, they were no longer just in dialogue with their foundationalist predecessors but also with the power structures of the 'art industry'. In the late seventies this dialogue

with particularly omnipresent cultural discourses such as misogyny was taken up by such conceptualists as Cindy Sherman. In traditionally organized photographic works of herself in the personas of numerous iconic women, she critiqued both the imprisonment of women in the 'objectifying gaze' largely of men but also of themselves. In addition and more profoundly, these pieces were a critique of the constructed nature of representation in general (Foster et al 2004, pp. 581–83, 632–33).

Conceptual art: art anti the cultural discourse

The Russian-born conceptual artists, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, have worked together since the beginning of their individual careers in the late sixties. Originally from Moscow and living in Manhattan since 1978, their early paintings, of which *Don't Babble* of 1972 is a good example, were representational. Even so, these paintings were conceptual since, although the two artists were working on the one painting, the style of each artist was so similar that it was impossible to tell which of them had painted particular parts of the work (Ratcliff 1988; Fineberg 2000, pp. 428–30).

Figure 6 - Don't Babble

The assumption challenged by the painting *Don't Babble*, like Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II*, is that all works of art are created by specific individuals. In *Don't Babble*, Komar and Melamid worked together in such a seamless way that there was no evidence of their individual contributions. As a result, the selfness from which the production of the work issued had no discernable self-states, providing further evidence

for their non-foundational status but also suggesting that new discourses can emerge on the ground of 'selfness' without the direct involvement of particular instigators.

In *Don't Babble*, and in similar works of their early period, like Rauschenberg and others in the 50s, they challenged the myth of the stable self and the concept of the genius. However, in *Factory for the Production of Blue Smoke*, created in 1975, shortly after Broodthaers did *The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*, Komar and Melamid, in a totally discursive register, critiqued both the capitalist and communist discourse on productivity.

Figure 7 - Factory for the Production of Blue Smoke

In the painting they made for the piece, the factory is depicted as a classical Greek temple, the form of which at that time was considered to be both aesthetically and spiritually ideal. The temple/factory implies that productivity has become the 'religion' of industrialized societies. The setting of the temple/factory in an Arcadian landscape, typical of those seen as ideal in the European paintings of Enlightenment, points to the domination that foundationalist views of religion and of productivity still have over Western thinking, both capitalist and communist.

As a waste product, the temple/factory is producing blue smoke rather than disgorging black smoke. By Komar and Melamid drawing the viewers' attention to the color of the smoke, they are suggesting that not all the 'products' of a factory are items that contribute to the 'ideal life'. The blue smoke is an ironic reference to ideality in that it is the color of 'pure' water or the 'clear' sky, in contrast to the usual, decidedly 'non-ideal' 'dirty' gray.

In *Factory for the Production of Blue Smoke*, Komar and Melamid, for the first time, inserted the subversive discourse derived from the painting into the discursive 'space' of the culture involved. This was accomplished by the mailing of official looking letters to the premier of Greece, a leading private European industrialist, and the Saudi Arabian oil minister, suggesting that they jointly finance the building of the factory for the production of blue smoke in Greece. Those chosen to receive the letter were representative of the state, private capital and oil production respectively, the sectors that drive the forces of industrialized economies.

When these individuals received the letter from Komar and Melamid, they were in 'possession' of both the prevailing discourse of industrialism, and the subversive discourse of the artists. As a result of this discursive dialogue, there was the possibility, which in this case did not eventuate, of destabilizing the truth claims of the prevailing discourse within the 'space' of the cultural discourse itself. In this case, Komar and Melamid had inserted a disruptive discursive 'virus' into the totality of the cultural discourse not just, as Broodthaers had done, into one or another of its specialized parts. In this activity, they were mimicking what psychoanalysts do by bringing their countertransference reverie—the disruptive 'virus'—into the analytic space of their work with their analysands (Ogden 1999).

As a result of this *dialogical*(11) juxtaposition, it can be seen that the prevailing discourse is unstable, as it is in any psychoanalytic treatment, since it is based on questionable hidden assumptions. Once this is revealed, the inner organization of the prevailing discourse will shift, exposing its totally provisional nature (Bakhtin 1981).

The traditional philosophical technique for resolving discursive clashes is *dialectical* (Hegel 1977). In this method, the prevailing discourse is put into relationship with the subversive discourse, and a mediating term that will resolve the discursive clash is sought. When this becomes apparent a new discourse arises that incorporates the truth claims of both discourses. The process of discursive resolution continues, and a closer and closer approximation to an absolutely 'true' discourse is said to occur. However, the discourse on the concept of truth itself is never put into question because the mediating term is an implicit part of the hermeneutics of the culture in which the dialectic takes place (de Peuter 1998; Dyess 2006).

In contrast to this, Komar and Melamid are using the dialogical method in which there is a continual challenge to the validity of the concept of truth itself. New meaning that results from this dialogical clash of discourses 'emerges' (Cambray 2006) from its matrix in a way that is analogous to the emergence of new organizations from the interactions of elements in complex biological and chemical systems (Prigogine&Stengers 1984). As a result, in the discursive 'space' of any culture—including the micro-culture of the analytic space created in any analysis—as truth becomes a more and more implausible concept— 'space' for a variety of previously excluded discourses becomes more available. As a result, the discursive 'space' of the culture and the individual's analytic space becomes more complex and, therefore, more useful (Rowland 2009).

When elephants paint

Elephants have been known to produce designs in the sand for some time. However, in 1995 the 'New York art world' began hearing about an elephant in the Phoenix, Arizona

zoo, which was painting. Her name was Ruby and she was said to be painting in the style of the abstract expressionists. Their request to collaborate with Ruby turned down; Komar and Melamid, after making calls to zoos across the USA were given permission to work with Renee, an elephant artist in the Toledo, Ohio zoo. Three days of blissful 'artistic frenzy' with their new colleague followed. After working with Renee, Komar said of his outsider identification with her that 'As a Russian-American Jew….I feel like a member of an endangered species that is gradually becoming extinct'.

Shortly afterwards, a newspaper article brought Komar and Melamid's attention to the plight of the Thai elephants wandering the countryside or confined in elephant camps that were occasioned by them being made redundant transporters of teak from the forests of Thailand. (These were being decimated by the demand from Western countries for fine wood furnishings.) At this news, 'Lenin's revolutionary call to action —'what is to be done'?—welled up from somewhere deep within their Russian soul' (Komar, Melamid&Fineman 2005, p. 13).

The above quote is from the book—the 'work of art' of Komar and Melamid's conceptual project—that describes the history and fulfillment of the Thai elephant painting project. Although it is written in a seemingly sincere tone, as evidenced by the quotes above, there are other broad hints that all the events and responses chronicled are in fact parts of a piece of conceptual art. This is indicated by such things as a picture of Melamid on the back cover looking at a book about Duchamp with an elephant and its mahout (trainer and guide). In addition there is a mention that, at a tony reception for the visiting 'conservationists', Komar gave a copy of the Communist Manifesto to a member of the Thai royal family by whom it was politely accepted.

In the above depictions and other hints we see traces of a variety of discourses—many more than in the *Factory for the Production of Blue Smoke*— embedded in the prevailing discourse of the philanthropic artists and of their associates. As a result, the situation is more like that of analysis in which often three or four self states are in play in the analytic space at any one time. About the possible outcomes of the realization of these traces, Komar and Melamid ironically and sincerely say 'if their [the elephants'] paintings could be marketed to collectors, sold at benefit auctions, maybe even hung in museums, these disenfranchised timber workers could re-enter the global economy in a triumphant new guise—as working artists' (Komar,Melamid&Fineman 2005, p. 15).

With financial support from New York based philanthropists and conservation groups and from governmental agencies in Thailand, they flew into Bangkok and from there went up country to meet with officials in the several places where elephants and their mahouts were being retrained for mundane tasks outside the teak harvesting industry. In several of these elephant havens, Komar and Melamid's group provided brushes, paint, and canvas, and the elephants began to paint by gripping the paint brushes with their trunks. It was found that not only could these elephants paint as well as those in zoos in the USA, but that the elephants in different havens developed their own local style, as human artists often do in a 'school of painting'.

Figure 8 - Elephant Painting

Figure 9 - Painting by Juthanon

Figure 10 - Painting by Non Choke

Figure 11 - Painting by Bird

As they had been in their former elephant painting experience in the USA, Komar and Melamid were particularly intrigued by the resemblance of elephant paintings to those of the abstract expressionists. Quickly, the Thai media broadcast the news of the elephants' painting successes throughout the country. As a result, when Komar and Melamid returned to Bangkok, they were regaled as both celebrities and saviors, albeit in a more kitsch register than they were in New York City, by the Thai royal family and the local wealthy philanthropists and conservationists. Even more surprising and ironic was, as the elephant painting progressed, the news that they were painting in the abstract expressionist style spread to the 'New York art world', and the paintings suddenly became sought after items, picking up the theme of the perfidy of art dealers from Broodthaers' *The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present*.
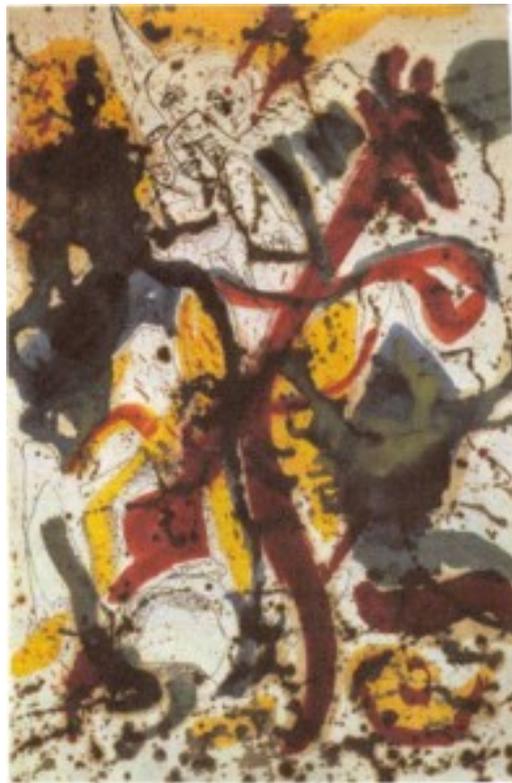
Figure 12 - Untitled by Pollock

Figure 13 - Silver and Black by Pollock
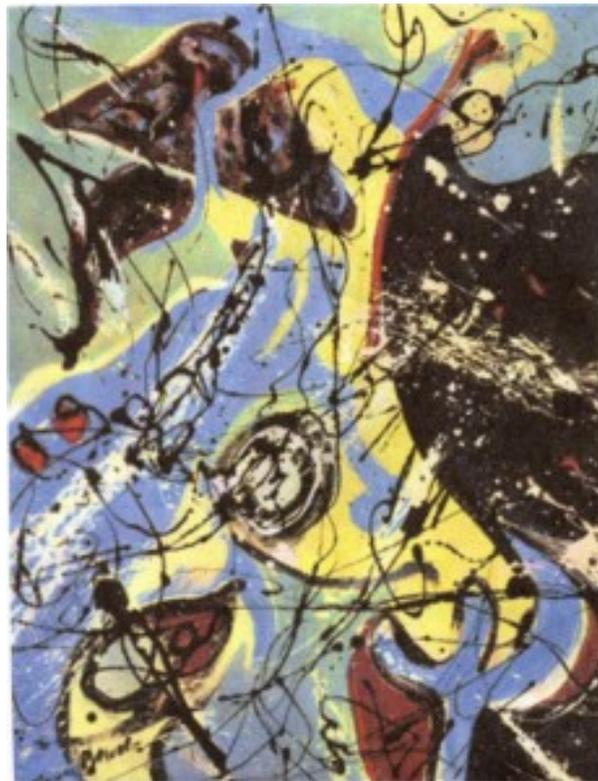
Figure 14 - Composition by Pollock

As a result of this buzz, Komar and Melamid were selected by the Russian Government to be their representatives at the Venice biennale where they exhibited the elephant

pieces together with a video of them painting. On the strength of this they were able to arrange an auction by the well known firm of Christie's, where the work of such famous abstract expressionist artists as Pollock and Motherwell are regularly sold. Here, the elephant paintings sold for an average of $30,000. Most tellingly, Komar and Melamid noticed that potential buyers were intently scrutinizing the paintings prior to the auction. When asked what they were trying to discover, they said, 'I'm looking for some mark to show that the work has been painted by an elephant'. The art buyers were looking for a 'genuine elephant', just as someone would look for a signature to show that a painting was a 'genuine Pollock'!


Figure 15 - Auction at Christies'
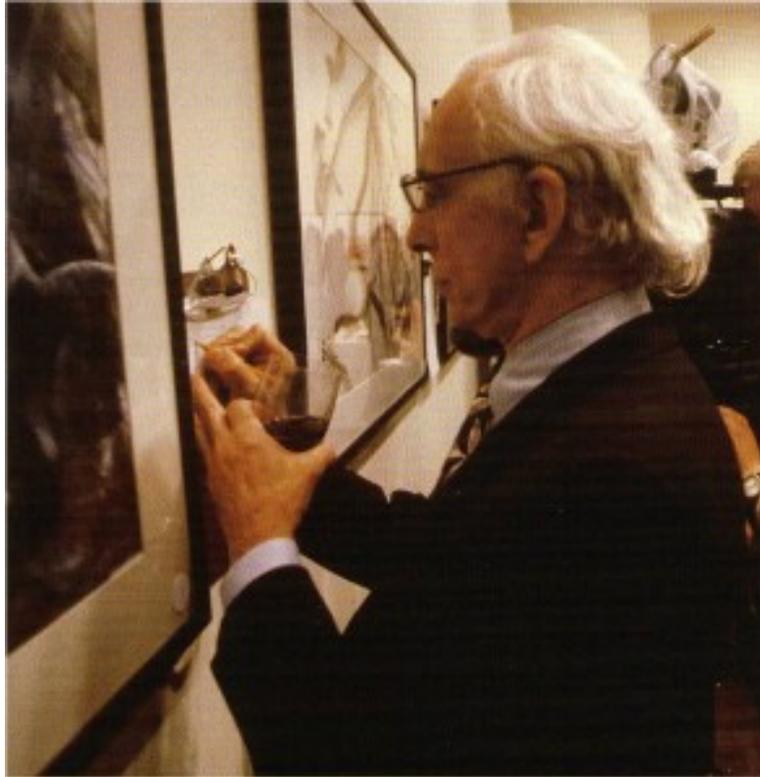
Figure 16 - Buyer Checking for a Mark

This seeking for authentication of the work by potential buyers was the final evidence for Komar and Melamid that the elephants had become repositioned into the discourse of the artist as the one of a kind originator of a piece through his/her 'expressive' capacities and formal aesthetic sensibilities. It was to such attributions that Duchamp and Rauschenberg were objecting when the former created *fountain* and the latter conceived *Factum I* and *Factum II*, and *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. *When Elephants Paint* pointed to this attribution and it also referenced the pecuniary advantages that Broodthaers and others had highlighted of procuring such 'one of a kind' works.

If the conventional position of the artist has been taken by the elephants, where are the 'artists' Komar and Melamid positioned in the discursive matrix that they have created in the overall 'work of art'? They are not positioned in the discourse of the inspired genius, or the discourse of the creator of a valuable one of a kind object. They are, rather, present in the discourse of the one who shifts the discursive position of the elephants from that of 'redundant employees' to that of 'artists'. Perhaps, via the dispositions of disclosedness and discoveredness, Komar and Melamid through their passionate involvement with the elephants' capacity to signify in paint, revealed that they, like humans, were disposed to mineness and hence could inhabit rudimentary self-states.

Interestingly in this case, although the shift of the elephant's position is into the discourse of the artist as private business person, they are earning money not for their own direct benefit or their mahouts' personal advantage, but to enable their philanthropic supporters to develop solutions, such as 'retraining', for other out of work elephants. In a more far reaching sense than Broodthaers could create, Komar and Melamid used the repositioning of the elephants in the discourse of the artist as

producers of unique items for sale to expose the discourses that govern the capitalist economics of the 'art world'. Without the presence of the philanthropic discourse, the conventional apparatus that would likely have controlled both the elephants involved as artists and the humans who were involved as consumers would probably have operated to the detriment of the elephants.

Finally, in the case of *When Elephants Paint*, the work of art becomes the book (Komar, Melamid & Fineman 2000) that was published about the whole event that was sold in the usual way and became available, not just to the wealthy collectors, but to any one with $20 to spend, thus radically shifting the self-state of the art patron from wealthy millionaire to ordinary citizen. In this way and in the ways I have described above many new 'worlds' and their corresponding 'self-states' have materialized. As these 'world'/self-states are generally more egalitarian than those they replaced, they have benefited many different groups of people and the previously redundant elephants.

Discussion

In light of some of the sleights of hand referred to above, what does the conceptual art —perhaps better called (con)ceptual art!—of Komar and Melamid tell us about the nature of self-states and from whence and how they evolve? Firstly, it shows us they are not substantial. They are merely discourses that are parts of the fluid and shifting matrices of discourses from which new organizations of meaning are always already emerging. Secondly, it demonstrates that the prevailing self-state discourse of the ego always hides one or more subversive discourses containing self-states by which it can be replaced.

In the discursive matrices that make up the self-states of individual humans, the position taken by Komar and Melamid in *When Elephants Paint* may be like the 'third' position taken by an analyst that most analysts agree exists but, nevertheless, disagree as to its constitution (Britton 1989, 2004; Ogden 1994; Schoenhals 1996; Benjamin 2004; Green 2004; Hanly 2004; Zwiebel 2004).

This is both an attitudinal and a spatial position that has the quality of stability (Horne 2001). By means of this 'grounding' the analyst is more able to countenance both 'reparative' and 'destructive' self-states without privileging either (Klein 1946). This allows the analyst to be somewhat free of expectations, and as a result, able to make 'room' for the emergence (Cambray 2006), via a dialogical struggle, of self-states that may create unexpected, unfamiliar, and unprecedented experiences (Meltzer et al 1975). After events of this sort, analysands often say things like, 'My painful past history can't be erased. However, those times are over. Now I can let things touch me deeply. I see everything completely differently'. Such statements indicate that the predominant self-state has become open to being-in a new and more complex set of discourses.

In the context of analysis, prevailing discourses of particular schools abound. When an analyst is 'embedded' in only one of these discourses, he/she can imprison the analysand in self-states privileged by his/her school labeled, for example, instinctual, archetypal, inter-subjective, true, cohesive, integrating, attaching or individuating that all have their own widely differing discourses. The analyst so 'embedded' may have a tendency to view the analysand from within a particular foundationalist point of view, thereby failing to apprehend the complex multiplicity of discourses that constitute the

analysand as an overall phenomenon. However, when the analyst is able to disengage from being a protagonist in the prevailing analytic discourse of his/her school and take the 'third' position of the conceptual artist self-state mobility becomes a possibility.

In this position, the analyst will not be relativistic; rather, he/she will have the freedom to take a phenomenological view from the 'somewhere' of a grounded position being-in the particular discursive matrix. As a result, he/she may be more able to be 'free of memory, desire and understanding' (Bion 1970), and have a greater capacity to take an attitude of 'not knowing beforehand' (Fordham 1993). This can open 'possibilities' for emergence of more varied matrices of the discourses of the self-states of his/her analysands (Harre &Gillett 1994, pp. 97–112; Chandler 2002, pp. 175–203; Burr 2003, pp. 104–49).

Conclusions

In order to suggest a solution for the problem of self origination, I've proposed that it evolves out of the 'ground' of a set of ontological dispositions common to all humans that I've called selfness. From this abstract condition, via the ontic manifestation of the dispositions in specific 'worlds' that are both made and found, self-states embedded in discourses and experienced as 'mine' emerge.

In this paradigm there is no given inner mind and outer world. Historicity is an ontic attribute of humans, and the multiple discourses that form our 'worlds' are always already there at our birth. In this light we can see that our ego is but a complex that is largely the unwitting product of our historicity (Jung 1907). It has no essential substance and yet, like the insecure and paranoid leader of a totalitarian state, creates a discourse justifying its power over its subjects, the split off self-states of which we are only minimally aware (Lyotard 1979).

In a foreshortened overview of conceptual art from its beginnings in the early 19th century to the present day, I have suggested that it is unwittingly attempting to solve many of the conundrums that beset contemporary analysis; conceptual art can be seen as cultural analysis. In this process, one can see that both conceptual artists and some analysts are deconstructing (Derrida 1978) foundationalist claims. In analysis it is the ego complex's claim to omnipotence that is deconstructed, and in conceptual art it is the artist as the 'genius' producing one of a kind works from his/her inspiration that is demolished. Another telling similarity is that both conceptual artists and members of some analytic schools eschew formalism; conceptual art disrupts prescribed aesthetics and contemporary analysis challenges foundationalist heuristics.

In light of the above, I am suggesting that in contemporary discursive conceptualism we have a cultural exemplar of what occurs in the psychoanalytic space with the individual analysand. Via his/her embodied countertransference and then in words the analyst disinters a previously marginalized discourse that may eventually affect the prevailing discourse of the patient's ego complex. With the help of these cultural and analytic 'viruses' both the artist and the analyst are able to initiate a destruction of 'received wisdom', thereby clearing the way for reparation via the reorganization of the available discourses in their particular settings.

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Footnotes

(1) A concept is abstract in the sense that it is a notion that is universally valid; it does not depend upon a particular context.

(2) Affectedness refers to embodied sensibility: 'the feeling of what happens' (Damasio 1999).

(3) Semiotics is the study of signs, codes and signifying practices.

(4) Signification is the defining function of signs which is that they are meaningful units which are interpreted as standing for something other than themselves.

(5) Ontology is the branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence or being as such.

(6) Ontic inquiry is concerned primarily with entities and the facts about them such as their reality, physicality or factual existence.

(7) Historicality refers to the record of the individual's lived experience that he/she carries through time.

(8) Being-in means to reside at or to dwell at in the sense of being at home which implies being familiar with (Heidegger 1962, p. 80). It is a connotation of the word 'involved'.

(9) To say that something has been 'disclosed' or 'laid open' in Heidegger's sense does not mean that one has any detailed awareness of the contents that are thus 'disclosed', but rather that they have been 'laid open' to us as implicit in what is given, rather than by inference from it (Heidegger 1962, pp. 105-06).

(10) A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It produces a picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of viewing it in a certain light (Burr 2003, p. 64)

(11) Dialogical refers to the fact that all language (and the ideas that language contains and communicates) is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of endless re-descriptions of the world (Bahktin 1981).