

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a retrospective post-humanist and fematerial reading of the work of Charlotte Posenenske. This paper re-reads Posenenske's work in relation to how a decentring of the human subject and artistic author in her Minimalist, fabricated, sculptural practice could be considered to extend an empathy to materials and allow for intimacy with objects; defined here as an amity, a kinship, a close reading, and consideration for objects and materials.

The sculptural processes implicated by Posenenske, and her removal of the hand of the artist from her work not just in the production but also the installation and placement of the work, is radical. Posenenske's work steps beyond the outsourcing of the labour of art to an anonymous factory worker in the case of the found object, or to a fabricator. Instead her work insists on a collaborative process not just in production but in the arrangement, configuration, and distribution of the artworks, that breaks down the hierarchies embedded in the production, reception, and circulation of art.

Posenenske's work is currently enjoying a revival and being correctly acknowledged for its radicality and importance to the history of Late-Modernist sculpture. This paper asks, what might Posenenske's sculptural practice offer to the discourse of sculpture now in terms of notions of sculptural intimacy, and to a post-humanist, feminist ecological revision of female practitioners of minimalist sculpture?

keywords

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Minimalist intimacy and feminist materialism in the work of Charlotte Posenenske

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Introduction

Charlotte Posenenske was a sculptor born in pre-WWII Germany who died relatively young in 1985 at the age of 54 after famously leaving the art world and art-making behind in 1968 to study sociology with a particular focus on industrial labour. As an artist, Posenenske is known primarily for her factory-produced, serial sculptures made from common, industrial, quotidian materials such as corrugated cardboard and galvanised steel. This essay focuses primarily on Posenenske's series *Vierkantrohre Serie D* (Square Tubes Series D, 1967), which takes the form of common architectural galvanised steel ventilation ducting. These sculptures are distinctive in terms of their focus and explication of the conditions of their production, dissemination, and circulation, intended by the artist to be arranged by the gallery technicians and members of the public and to be reconfigurable in the exhibition environment.

Posenenske's work has recently enjoyed a revival and has achieved significant recognition after being largely omitted from the art historical narrative since the artist stopped practicing in 1968. The revival of Posenenske's work in major museum and gallery exhibitions, particularly in the United States, has often focused on the later series *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. The dialogue and discourse surrounding these exhibitions have regularly focused on reframing Posenenske's work – because of her insistence on the 'participation' of the audience and others in their gallery arrange-

ments – as an early precursor to more contemporary modes of artistic practice such as Relational Aesthetics and socially engaged and participatory practices.

This paper provides a re-framing of Posenenske's work alongside contemporary post-humanist discourse, re-situating *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* in terms of how it may operate to dismantle anthropocentric models of human and non-human relations in the context of sculptural artmaking. Posenenske's work is examined in terms of how it demonstrates ways that non-human objects, materials, and humans can collaborate, co-produce, and co-labour in models for production that take in the economic model of labour and production in Marxist thought and go beyond this anthropocentric model of production and labour to include non-human entities as co-labourers that comprise the artwork. Posenenske's work is placed alongside a post-humanist reading of objects and a de-anthropocentric framework of production, collaboration, and empathy between humans, objects, materials, and social and political realities through which to resituate her significant and radical sculptural practice.

This paper explores the possibilities of more-than-human collaborative labour offered by Posenenske's sculptural work, exploring the politics of the hand and artistic authorship as presented in her sculptural practice. Posenenske radically questioned the unique authorial status and privilege of the artist by including and explicating 'many hands' as authors in the work. This approach is placed in contrast with the work and ideology of other minimalist artists Donald Judd and Richard Serra, illustrating how Posenenske deviated from the norms of her canonical American Minimalist contemporaries. Posenenske insisted on the removal and redistribution of her authorial status in terms of how her work was produced, disseminated, exhibited, and ultimately how it was traded on the art market.

The empathic potential of the industrial object is explored as regards Posenenske's work *Vierkanthrohre Serie D*. Posenenske's work is located between divergent histories of the found and readymade object, that of the Duchampian lineage, and the Constructivist lineage. This analysis seeks to discover what the industrially produced object offers in terms of potential for post-human empathy in Posenenske's work. Following this, a semiotic reading of *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* is positioned and problematised as both anthropomorphic and as offering a pathway towards material empathy, a way of feeling into empathy and care with materials and more-than-human material and objects through post-human discourse.

Finally, this paper examines more-than-human Marxist politics of labour in Posenenske's work, considering the potential for a posthumanist view of multiple human and non-human labouring entities in Posenenske's work. This section examines how the collaboration between the artist, the factory worker, the museum worker, and the viewer in Posenenske's work act to collapse the hierarchies of value in

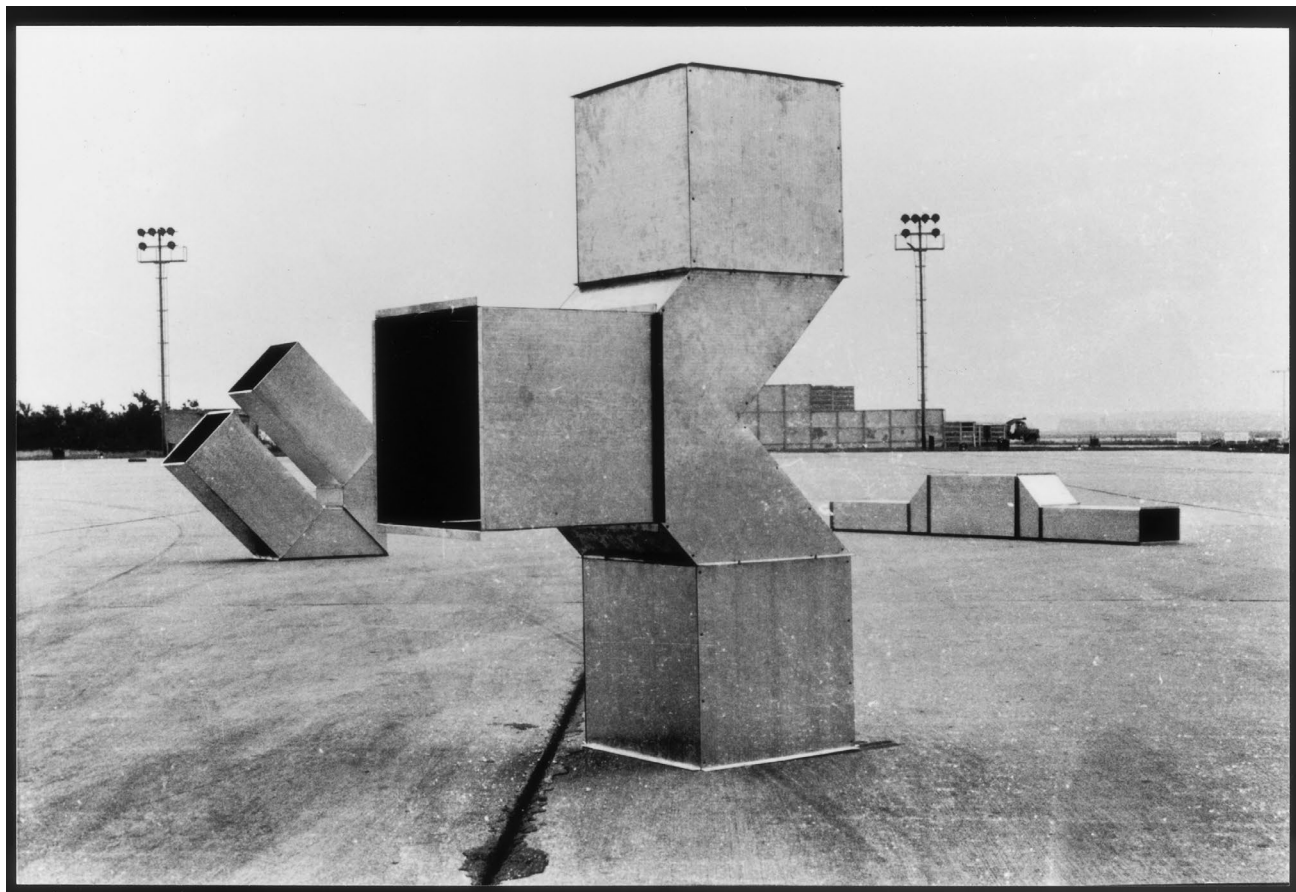
human social and labour relations and rehabilitate the alienation of the worker. Further to this, the non-human agents – objects and materials and the machines or apparatus that make Posenenske’s work – are considered as labouring alongside the human ‘authors.’ This expanded model of collaborative labour is proposed as posthuman artistic labour.

While Charlotte Posenenske is notable for her radical form of artmaking, this is often eclipsed by the fascination and attention she has gained for her early exit from the art world and her abandonment of the making of art. This paper seeks to locate and re-examine Posenenske’s sculptural works, particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, within a posthumanist discourse, pursuing the possibility for her works to be reconsidered as radical artistic, social, and de-anthropocentric objects that consider and refigure a more-than-human labour politics in the production of artworks.

Many hands; artistic authorship and democratic artmaking in Posenenske’s work

Charlotte Posenenske’s work *Vierkantrohre Serie D* consists of a series of six shapes manufactured industrially in galvanised sheet metal and fabricated into large square tube forms that closely resemble ventilation ducts, carefully designed by Posenenske. This work and other series by Posenenske such as *Drehflügel Serie E* (Revolving Vanes Series E, 1967-68) were founded and contingent on the removal of the authorial hand of the artist, and the replacement of the singular artistic hand of authorship with many hands of process, fabrication, handling, and installation by various other actors, such as fabricators, gallery technicians, and members of the public.

The works in Posenenske’s *Vierkantrohre Serie D* were and still are, following her consent before her death, manufactured by a factory in Frankfurt to Posenenske’s specifications (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 13). The specified individual forms are relatively modest in scale, but once assembled into configurations can become industrial, even architectural in scale. Once fabricated, the installation configuration for these sculptures was, at Posenenske’s instruction, to be decided on-site by the installation crew in the gallery or museum. When the works were exhibited, Posenenske intended for these forms to be infinitely reconfigurable by viewers whom Posenenske referred to as ‘consumers’ (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7), a term that explicitly underlined her focus on the entire economic cycle of production of her objects in terms of circulation, dissemination and reception, and the politics of labour and authorship.

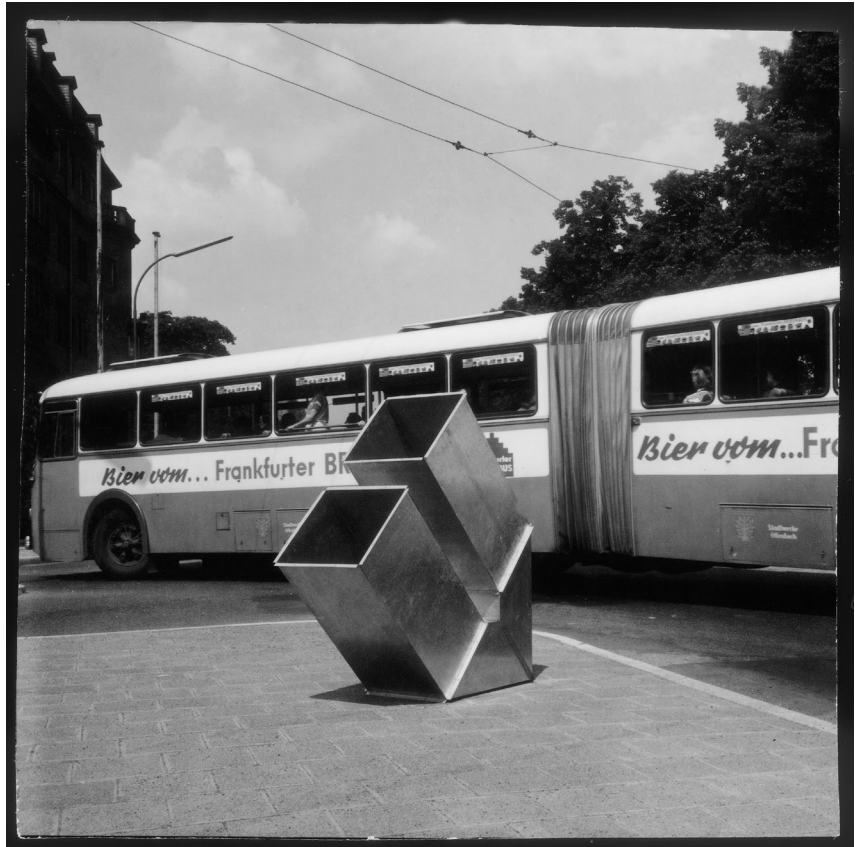


These objects were offered to the 'consumer' at cost price, made financially possible by the fact that Posenenske was the recipient of an inheritance (Kleinman 2010). Posenenske encouraged the 'consumer' to consider these objects as being infinite in terms of their potential for configuration and arrangement, writing in the catalogue for her Kleine Gallery exhibition: 'Don't worry if you're never "done," because the re-combination could proceed in perpetuity without ever becoming boring' (Vogel 2019). As a result, the series *Vierkantrohre Serie D* has a sense of contingency and performativity, despite their industrial appearance and large, monumental scale when assembled into combinations. The sense of performativity is derived from the artist's directive and invitation that this and other works in her serial configurations be re-made, re-arranged, and re-figured during and in subsequent iterations of their exhibition.

The performativity of her sculptures was demonstrated at the debut of a related series of serial duct-like sculptures, *Series DW*, at the Galerie Dorothea Loehr in 1967. Posenenske had a crew in Lufthansa overalls arrange and re-arrange the

Fig. 1 Installation view of Charlotte Posenenske, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* at Frankfurt airport in 1967. Courtesy of the Estate of Charlotte Posenenske and Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin.

Fig. 2 Installation view of Charlotte Posenenske, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in Offenbach, 1967. Courtesy of the Estate of Charlotte Posenenske and Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin.



units at the opening event. Posenenske wrote in a text accompanying the exhibition: 'You'll see this evening that in the rooms and courtyard of the gallery large shapes in cardboard will be assembled in always new combinations... There is a wide range of combinations... The choice depends on the size of the space, the time at disposal, the number of spectators, and the weather tonight' (Posenenske 1967). This passage demonstrates the mutability and contingency with which Posenenske regarded these serial objects at the time of their exhibition in 1967. To Posenenske, their appearance is subject to multiple external factors and conditions, human and more-than-human (the weather), rather than being fixed, monumental, and solely dictated by the artist.

To add to their performativity, Posenenske often photographed the forms in liminal, transitory civic, or industrial environments, such as this example of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* [Fig. 1] pictured at a siding in Frankfurt Airport, or in another example where this sculpture is photographed installed temporarily on a busy traffic island in Offenbach. [Fig. 2] The photographs of the sculptures are staged by Posenenske, and her placement and installation of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in every-

day or transitory environments serves to demonstrate how the artist regarded her work as deeply part of the everyday, of the ordinary and useful components of the world, mutable and subject to change, rather than as rarefied art objects with elevated fixed status in the world. Further, she regarded her role as an artist as forming one part of the production process, rather than as the unique, singular originator of the work. As Martin Pesch writes: 'She viewed her function as that of a supplier who made material available, but who did not have to be present at the moment of artistic realisation' (Pesch 2000).

Contemporary versions and exhibitions of the work have not fully allowed for the process of 'consumer' re-configuration specified by Posenenske, presumably due to museological concerns about the archival safety of the artworks (ie, to protect them from the hands of the public). In the 2010 exhibition of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* at Artist's Space New York, the ducts were configured every week by curatorial staff and then by the artists Ei Arakawa and Rikrit Tiravanija. This iteration of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* presents a version of Posenenske's 'many hands' that operates to exclude the public, and to re-establish a hierarchy of authorship with these works, handing authorial power to a selected and elite few: curators and artists. This is an iteration of her work that would seem to stray from Posenenske's ideology, considering her commitment to examining the politics of labour and democratisation of the art object, demonstrated both in the time of her artistic practice and subsequently in her study of sociology with particular focus on the labour conditions of factory workers and exploitation of labour (Vogel 2019). The decision by Artist's Space to invite Rikrit Tiravanija and Ei Arakawa to arrange the works would appear to be motivated by contemporary revisions of Posenenske's work being viewed through the lens of socially engaged practice and participatory practices of the 2000s and early 2010s.

Posenenske's work, when operating with her original intentions, removes the elitist authorial touch of the artist; in the place of the hand of the artist, the work rather includes and acknowledges the touch of many other hands. The fabricator, the installation team, and the touch of the 'consumer' are explicitly included and acknowledged by Posenenske as integral to the production of the artwork. The system of production forms a discursive part of the work. Amelia Winata writes about the democratisation of the labour cycle in Posenenske's work in terms of its democratic aims, and describes how the artist enthusiastically engaged with 'mass production as a vehicle for democratisation. She chose to sell the square tubes unsigned and un-editioned and at the cost of production. In addition, the tubes were intended to be handled, assembled and reassembled by random groups of people' (Winata 2019: 74).

Posenenske explicates and makes visible the industrial labour system through her redistribution of the singular hand of authorship and through her refusal to appropriate an industrial process into make bespoke or rarefied art objects like other Minimalist contemporaries such as Judd. Instead, the hand of the fabricator and the industrial labour of the machine are made visible in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* precisely because this work looks identical to the ventilation ducts commonly produced and installed in buildings. They remain fundamentally ventilation ducts. This fidelity to the functional object makes visible the labour of the machine and the fabricator. Their co-produced product remains untransformed and is presented on the same hierarchical footing as works of art. Posenenske credited the fabricators in the production of her work and embraced the patina of damage, scratches, and marks that arose from their transport and handling. As Leah Pires writes in *Art in America*, 'she credited fabricators and viewers as equal collaborators in the production of the artwork, drawing attention-long before 'social reproduction' and 'affective labour' became buzz phrases-to the invisible work that makes all other work possible' (Pires 2019: 109-110).

Posenenske substitutes her single authorship with the acknowledgement and inclusion of many hands of the producer, labourer, technician, and public or consumer. The democratisation of both production and decision-making around the placement of the work was radical, even in the context of its time when Minimalist practitioners in the United States had begun to openly outsource the production of their works to fabricators and had been producing their work from plans and diagrams. In her 1968 Manifesto-like statement in *Art International* that is considered to herald her retirement from the art world, Posenenske writes: 'They are components of a space; since they are like building elements, they can always be rearranged into new combinations or positions. Thus, they alter the space. I leave this alteration to the consumer who thereby again and anew participates in the creation' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 14). Thus she openly acknowledges the agency of the viewer, the space, and the participation of agents other than herself, as not only incidental but central to the production of her work.

Posenenske's work steps beyond the outsourcing of the labour of art to an anonymous factory worker in the case of the readymade, or to a manufacturer in the case of American Minimalists such as Donald Judd and Richard Serra. Posenenske's work insists on a collaborative democratic process not just in production but in the arrangement and configuration of the artworks. This disassembles the hierarchies embedded in the production, reception, and circulation of these artworks. Even in the American Minimalist practices contemporaneous to Posenenske, where artists such as Judd frequently outsourced the making of the artworks to manufacturers, the artist always remained the genius, the creator, the author and

financial beneficiary of the artworks that they regularly produced with others. Burkhard Brunn writes in *Manifesto* that as administrator of Posenenske's estate, in 2012 he continued to reproduce her works at cost price, on demand. He notes that the object's 'unlimited reproducibility represents a subversive strategy against the commercialization of art, since not only is no profit made, but any increase in value – something most collectors desire – is ruled out' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 14).

Posenenske did not seek to remain the sole author, creator or beneficiary of her work. She explicitly situated her role as an artist within a greater ecology and system of production, labour, and dissemination. Posenenske writes further in her *Manifesto* re-published in a 2012 monography edited by her partner and estate administrator Burkhard Brunn, 'I make series because I do not want to make single pieces for individuals' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 23). Brunn annotates Posenenske's original text, remarking that in the case of *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* 'unlike an edition, the series are not limited' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 23). She constructed a situation where the serial, non-editioned object of artistic production explicated and engaged in an ethical and ideological concern for the politics of artistic labour and the market. This concern propelled the formal and fabrication decisions of *Vierkanthrohre Serie D*, ultimately arriving at a 'mass produced Minimalism that pointedly addressed the pressing socioeconomic concerns of the decade by circumventing the art market and rejecting established formal and cultural hierarchies' (Dia:Beacon 2019).

Industrial objects, embodied sculptural empathy and posthumanism in Posenenske's work

In her *Statement* originally published in *Art International 12* in May 1968, Posenenske writes: 'They (the objects) should present nothing aside from what they are' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 39). Despite Posenenske's intention that *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* and her other serial sculptures would remain outside a symbolic or semiotic interpretation, it is difficult to separate them from interpretations and representations of power, social and cultural references, and the trap of anthropomorphism especially given the socio-political directives and references that Posenenske herself implicated in her sculptures. Burkhard Brunn in his commentary on this line from Posenenske's *Manifesto* concedes the impossibility of pure self-referentiality in Posenenske's work, writing that: 'The similarity between the

Square Tubes and ventilation equipment alone contradicts the claim of self-reference' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 39-40).

This section will discuss the art historical and contemporary notion of the 'found object' and 'readymade', and situate Posenenske's industrially produced sculptures in this art-historical lineage. From there, semiotic and symbolic readings of Posenenske's industrially manufactured objects are implicated. Semiotic and anthropomorphic readings of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* paradoxically are posed as having the potential to create a more-than-human empathy with the mass-produced and quotidian objects that surround and facilitate human life. Engaging semiotics and anthropomorphism in interpreting Posenenske's work provides a pathway to describing embodied and empathic encounters and enables a posthumanist reading of this work.

While the found object is now a common constituent of contemporary artworks, at its origins in the early 20th century this strategy in sculpture presented a radical shift in the way artworks were composed and produced. Marcel Duchamp is credited with creating the term 'readymade' and the device of reframing mass-produced commercially available objects as artworks by signing them and situating them in a gallery context. As Okwui Enwezor notes: 'Duchamp opened the aperture of deconstructing that not only removed sculpture from its base as a monument, and thus the evisceration of its symbolic content in the form of the celebration of power' (Enwezor 2011: 9). Enwezor refers to the 'celebration of power' that the Duchampian act of authorship represents, with the placement and signing of objects by an artist enough to confer artwork status onto even the most banal objects. Duchamp pointed to this authorial power particularly with those objects he chose to elevate to artwork status, most famously the urinal, a shovel, and a bottle rack. These items are not just quotidian but also connote human waste (piss, junk, and detritus), serving to highlight further the power the artist could exert by elevating even these most culturally disregarded or devalued of objects.

Posenenske's industrially produced works sit awkwardly in between a found object and the Duchampian readymade. She does not lean on her authorial power to expose the hierarchies of artistic authorship like Duchamp; rather, she seeks to redistribute this power among many contributors. Nor are her works pre-existing or 'found' – they are intentionally designed and manufactured as art. In this sense, her works find more commonality with the lineage of Russian Constructivism and Productivism and the Bauhaus (Pires 2019: 109-110). seeking instead the integration of art-making and democratic production into the broader context of social change and an intention for the radical reordering of human labour. Posenenske's works are not comprised of 'found' or purchased readymade commercially available objects, but rather they were produced to Posenenske's specifications via a

mass industrial process that meant that the objects look identical to mass-produced objects.

John Roberts distinguishes between the Constructivist approach to the readymade as an elevation and equalisation of the labour of the worker and the labour of the artist. Roberts describes this as a situation where ‘the non-artistic collaborator “completes” the circuit of authorship as the artist enters production by removing the distinction between artist and worker’ (Roberts 2007: 160). Roberts puts the Constructivist model of artistic production at odds with the Duchampian approach to the readymade, where the original maker of the object remains distant from the artist. This demonstrates the ideological and artistic lineage that informed Posenenske’s practice. Despite her early exit from the art world, she held at least briefly some believe in the ability of art to critically engage with the circuits of production and labour outside the context of art (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 10), like the precursors to her work found in Constructivism and the Bauhaus.

Posenenske’s *Vierkantrohre Serie D* remains very much in touch with other humans that co-produce and collaborate to stage the work. Posenenske invited or sought to provoke viewers and non-artists to touch and move the work, thus placing these non-human objects into direct and embodied contact with the ‘consumer.’ Thinking in terms of embodiment and empathy, it is useful to engage in a semiotic reading of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* to further explore an embodied reading of the work. Jessica Morgan has anthropomorphised Posenenske’s industrial, utilitarian *Vierkantrohre Serie D* ductwork, observing that they resemble lungs (Morgan 2019: 154) – the organs that deliver the purifying mechanism and life-giving oxygen to the body.

Vierkantrohre Serie D is at the very least unavoidably engaged in semiotic references to industrial and architectural respiration, given that their original function is to provide the transmission of air in and out of large buildings. As Morgan (2019: 154) writes: ‘Their forms suggest that Series D might bring fresh air to carry away a building’s stale exhaust.’ The reference to architectural respiration is inescapable. In the post-WWII German context, these artworks can be interpreted poetically in this anthropomorphic way as allowing a sense of new life to be breathed into a system, referencing the renewal and rebuilding of a society after the destruction of war. The introduction of a semiotic reading to this work, a sculpture that, according to Posenenske’s *Statement*, was intended to work outside of language and semiotic structures and insisted on matter and objects as meaning on their terms, provides the possibility for drawing closer to the relations between the human and non-human elements that comprise this work. Engaging in anthropomorphism and semiotic readings of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* introduces the notion of an embodied proximity to and with the work, to allow for what might be thought of as an empathic materialism.

Empathic materialism could be characterised as a process of *feeling into* materials via a sculptural work. The notion of Aesthetic empathy was explored by Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) in the early 20th century, which she characterised as:

a complex mental process, by which we (all unsuspectingly) invest that inert mountain, that bodiless shape, with the stored up and averaged and essential modes of our activity... of the German word *Einfühlung*, I have called Empathy. [*]

From *έν* and *πάσχω, έπαθον*. The German word *Einfühlung* 'feeling into'-derived from a verb to *feel oneself into something*. (Lee 1913: 61).

Lee's description of empathy with the non-human matter of the mountain as a 'feeling into' can be placed in the context of the experience of encountering and entering into a relationship with material in the case of Posensenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. A semiotic, anthropomorphic interpretation of Posensenske's mechanical object allows space for the body and human subject to become engaged empathically in this work. This potentially leads to a human consideration of the relationship between the material of the 'consumer's' body, the manufacturer's body, and the material of the sculpture.

In this consideration, as Lee would have it, a 'feeling into' a radical and deeply material empathy is caused by the shared embodied materiality of the viewer and object.

The relationships between the human and non-human in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* produce a condition that invokes material, embodied empathic relations alongside discursive, social, and political relations that connect and amplify one another materially and formally in the sculpture. This artwork gathers and explicates forces via its materiality; the politics of labour, the materiality of galvanised aluminium, the labour of the worker in the factory or production line, the intention of the artist, the arrangement created by the installation technician in the museum, and the agency of the viewer of the artwork when experiencing these out-of-place objects.

This gathering together, resulting in material empathy, suggests that there is a potential posthuman reading possible in and for Posensenske's work where the ethical (labour politics), ontological (the material existence of the sculptures, the artist and the viewer), and epistemological (the knowledge systems of artmaking and reception) combine and appear in high relief through the non-human material of the sculpture. Through the lens of recent feminist posthumanist thought, Posensenske's work could be regarded as participating in a refiguring of human and non-human relations and the attendant hierarchies of social politics and gender.

Donna Haraway's notion of natureculture is an originating example of post-human thinking that critiques and points to the fallacy of binary oppositions such as nature and culture, mind and body, and the attendant power structures these binaries uphold. Haraway's natureculture works in favour of acknowledging interdependent and blended taxonomies and hierarchies of species, both human and non-human. As Haraway writes in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 'Flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds: these are joined in naturecultures' (Haraway 2003: 20). Haraway and other post-human scholars such as Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, and Iris Van DeTuin argue that the world is in a constant state of co-creation through the entanglements of matter, non-human agents, discourse, and semiotics.

Rosi Braidotti outlines the position of posthuman theory on social hierarchies as such: 'posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the "exceptionalism" of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of zoe, or life in its nonhuman aspects' (Braidotti 2013: 66). In this sense, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* not only contests dominant hierarchies of human labour and social structures but also the more-than-human hierarchies and taxonomies of materials and, in so doing, further interrogates the human social order. Posenenske, by inviting materially empathic situations with familiar objects and materials, scrambles the material and taxonomic codes. In a contemporary context and through the lens of posthumanism, this scrambling of taxonomies indicates that empathy can become networked through our bodily human intra-actions with sculptures and that matter can be thoughtful and full of 'zoe,' and invested with the labouring politics of the human and non-human.

In Posenenske's work, the sculptural decentring of the singular human agent or subject is not just the decentring of a generic human but acts particularly to decentre the patriarchal modernist subject, who in Western art discourse, has been mythologised as a male genius who enacts singular authorship with materials, resulting in a work of art. Posenenske's explication of the multi-authored production of the work of art in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* and in her other serial works breaks down the mythology of the patriarchal, singular artist author genius. As Braidotti observes 'Universal "Man", in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity' (Braidotti 2013: 65). Braidotti contends that challenging the dominant masculine, white urbanised subject leads to other hegemonic binary structures being critically dismantled in what she describes as a 'cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives' (Braidotti 2013: 66).

Considered through the lens of the posthumanist work of Braidotti and Haraway, Posenenske's sculptures challenge this dominant white male author myth, and implicate and entangle material, discursive, and semiotic modes. *Vierkantrohre Serie D* materialises and enacts the decentring and destabilising of the dominant, patriarchal modernist ideal of the human subject and destabilises hegemonic anthropocentric human relationships to non-human objects. The sculpture does this by implicating materials in space, explicating the semiotic order and acknowledging social and labour structures that compose the work. The value structures inherent in binary structures work to privilege white, phallogocentric positions. Braidotti contends that this human 'man' subject has sustained its privilege by subjugating others, human and non-human alike.

In this series of interconnected onto-ethico-epistemological relations (which Barad characterises as a coming together in an entangled fashion the spheres of being, ethics and knowledge, where none of these positions can be separated (Barad 2012: 185), the artwork is co-produced and comes into existence. These entangled relations can produce a deep, more-than-human empathy between the collaborators of the artwork (material, objects, found objects, artist, and viewer), where all components are of equal agency and value in the constitution of the coming into being of the artwork. Barad (Ibid.) writes in favour of a 'knowing in being' of 'onto-ethico-epistemology', where the world comes into being in every moment and engagement, and which requires a different framework and understanding of knowledge practices that implicate all the human and non-human experiences of the world. As Barad writes in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: 'the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter' (Barad 2007: 185). So too with Posenenske, who engaged deeply in the ethics and politics of the becoming of her artworks by engaging in empathic material processes and multi-authorship. It is in the moment all these strands come together, the ontological, the ethical and the epistemological, that Posenenske's sculptures come into being.

The empathic material potential present in Posenenske's industrial sculptures could be thought of as a 'knowing in being', as a collapse and entanglement of the nature/culture, subject/object, and male/female divide. In *Vierkantrohre Serie D* this could open space where the artist as executor of an artwork, the materials and objects (even if found or industrially produced), and the viewer become part of a broadened system of apprehension where the co-producers and co-makers of the work are positioned on an equal footing, a co-constitution or co-production that arguably could produce a condition of close attention and thereby care and empathy.

Marxism, Materials and More-than-human labour

Posenenske's work, particularly the industrially produced series *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, is regularly discussed through the discourse of Marxism and Post-Fordism. In the publication *Charlotte Posenenske, Work in Progress* that accompanied her major solo presentation at Dia Beacon, New York, Jessica Morgan opens her essay on Posenenske's work by describing the history and economics of factory line operations at Ford Motors, starting with their Model T assembly line that began operating in 1913. Morgan describes the worker alienation that took place on these mass-production factory lines, resulting in attempts by Ford to retain workers by raising wages and increasing worker numbers (Morgan 2019: 154).

Posenenske's work emerged from the context and cultural sensibility of post-war Germany, which was both physically rebuilding from the rubble after the war and grappling with the responsibility and guilt of National Socialism and Fascism while experiencing 'Wirtschaftswunder, a vast "Americanization" of the new German industrial, urban, and economic landscape' (Kleinman 2010). Posenenske and her friends and associates were engaged in various counter-cultural and political movements of the time. She painted the façade and interior of Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr's headshop Pudding Explosion in Frankfurt, which was stocked with counter-cultural merchandise and reputedly under police surveillance because of suspected illicit political activity. Broadly speaking, there was a general anxiety about the increasing mechanisation of labour in the 1960s that was accompanied by other social justice movements concerning gender, race, and equality. The advent of German *Wirtschaftswunder* influenced Posenenske's methodologies, politics, and work, along with the discourse of Marxist thought and the notion of the estrangement of the worker from the objects they produce.

These factors and the general upheaval, student protests, women's rights and cultural revolutions of 1968 across Europe and the United States all provide a backdrop to Posenenske's work. As Burkhard Brunn writes: 'Charlotte's concept becomes clear against the backdrop of the late 1960s when it was not only rebellious students who wanted to change the rigid social conditions...Charlotte was interested in change through human action' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 10). *Vierkantrohre Serie D* is set against the backdrop of this milieu and the events and relations of labour in the specific German context. Her practice was politicised and charged with the currents of change.

Posenenske's industrially produced *Vierkantrohre Serie D* potentially rehabilitates both what Karl Marx describes as the worker's alienation from the product, or object, and the viewer's alienation from the utilitarian factory-produced object.

While the worker is certainly an instrument in Posenenske's model of artistic labour, the factory worker is no more or less instrumentalised than the artist or the viewer in her labour model. In the 'many hands' model described earlier in this paper, Posenenske implicated a situation where the authorship of the artwork is acknowledged and shared among many workers. In the context of a Marxist or Fordist reading of Posenenske's work, this could be considered as a re-distribution of worker instrumentalisation and alienation in the production of *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. In the context of contemporary post-humanist thought, this re-distribution could be considered again to include a de-anthropocentric point of view, one where the labour of the human is no more or less than the labour of the machine.

The labour of the materials and objects themselves are part of the collaboration required of all forces and entities in the production of the *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. The post-human model of a co-created world that entangles 'flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds' (Haraway 2003) may be considered alongside Marxist *Entfremdung* in the context of Posenenske's work. Morgan writes that *Vierkantrohre Serie D* undoes Marx's *Entfremdung* or the worker alienation that occurs in the production line by remaking these forms identically but personalising them and bringing them into humanness. Morgan writes:

by inviting labourers to become consumers with creative agency, (they) bring an essential humanness into the interchangeability, specialization, and repetition of progressive assembly. Posenenske's Series D acts as a sort of antidote to the alienation of the worker and to the product itself. (Morgan 2019: 154)

Morgan refers to a 'personalisation' that occurs with *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, derived from Posenenske's engagement with the manufacturers to design and commission these otherwise utilitarian objects. The artworks stay in close touch with their makers and the worker's labour is credited in the work. This personalisation is further expanded with respect to the object's exhibition in the context of an art gallery or museum. These ordinary, utilitarian objects become viewed in the same way as other more bespoke, rarefied objects of art, although they share none of the notions of the unique or original object that have historically existed as markers of value and skill in works of art. Morgan remarks on the human-ness of the assembly line, revealed by *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, as systems that are designed by, for, and to fulfil human needs and desires. Posenenske's work amplifies and reveals the intrinsic humanness of the assembly line by presenting these objects for concerted close contemplation in the context of a gallery or museum.

Another way of interrogating this sense of close attention and material and the potential for object empathy via the mass-fabricated or found object may be

located in the consideration of labour in the context of artmaking in a Marxist sense. John Roberts speaks to this in his publication *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, where he examines the found object and the art historical Avant-Garde through the lens of Marxism and an analysis of the economies of labour related to the authorship of the artist and the production of the artwork. Roberts argues that: 'By transforming a reproducible non-art object into an unreproducible art object in the form of a reproducible art object, the logical relations of artistic labour and productive labour are exposed and inverted' (Roberts 2007: 33).

Roberts argues that the industrially, readily reproducible object, when reframed as an art object, reveals the power of the institutions and authoring hand of the artist. It serves to perform a disrobing of the commodity status and operations of the found object (even in the case of 'low' objects) and reveals the artistic and productive labour behind the object. The commodity, taken from its original context and intended use, is described by Roberts as extending its capability for metamorphosis into another sphere of production, into the commodity circuit of the art market. This action is presented as a performance of the agility of the commodity and of the markets, art, and otherwise that can adopt it and transmute it into another form of commodity where it transcends or transforms its original use value. Roberts' analysis extends only as far as human authors, be it the factory worker, the artist, or the participant/audience, as participants in conscious or unconscious collaboration in the artwork.

Posthuman artistic labour could be argued to be present in Posenenske's work. The object and materials of an artwork could be regarded in Posenenske's work as labouring alongside the 'many hands' of human authors to produce the artwork. Posenenske's *Vierkantröhre Serie D* engages in and acknowledges a collaborative system of authorship and labour. In the contemporary context, this collaborative authorship may extend to non-human entities. As Roberts writes, Socialism attempted to: 'eradicate the distinction between the factory worker and the artist... The non-artist as collaborator becomes the figure who brings authorship out of subjectivism into collective intellect' (Roberts 2007: 160-161).

In this model of collective intellect, authorship steps out of subjectivism or subjecthood. In the case of Posenenske's *Vierkantröhre Serie D*, collective intellect and collaboration could be expanded beyond the ambits of Robert's anthropocentric intellect or that of human consciousness towards a collectivisation of intellect that includes artist humans, non-artist humans, and non-humans, machines, and other entities. This model considers the labour of the artist and the labour of the materials alongside and with the human agent. In this situation, the co-labouring of humans and non-humans in a sculpture can begin to accomplish

what is being proposed as material empathy, where artworks are co-constituted, and authorship and work are distributed across several human and non-human entities in an empathic exchange. Work happens with all the components and participants, both human and non-human.

In this posthuman model of artistic production lies the potential for a radical empathy among humans, materials, and non-human forms that may be acted out in the making and reception of *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. Materials and objects are considered and understood as active and agential conspirators that inform the form, shape, size, and meaning of the work and their attendant politics. This is both an interrogation of systems of capital and labour through a Marxist lens and a consideration of collaboration and co-production – regarding materials and other objects effectively as co-workers – that can influence and implicate a sense of empathy and intimacy with all things in the production and reception of sculpture. Could this engage a renewal of empathy for the non-human both inside and outside the art context?

The machine in the instance of Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D* functions similarly to Barad's analysis of the apparatus described in their theory of intra-action and in *Agential Realism in Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Barad contends that apparatuses are not neutral scientific instruments, but rather active agents in the production of the world, collaborators along with the human agent, matter, and discursive, ethical, and semiotic forces. Barad writes: 'apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetime as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming' (2007: 142). Apparatuses equally examine and reconfigure what they examine in an ongoing, unfixed, and temporal ontology.

Some parallels can be drawn between Barad's analysis of the apparatus and the factory machine that produces Posenenske's work. The machine that produces Posenenske's artwork is not neutral, nor are these machines operating entirely independently from the human operator. The machine that produces Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre der Serie D* and the series of tools and processes of industrial fabrication act in concert with the human operator, the instructions of the artist, the materials, and the prevailing social and labour conditions. As in Barad's version of the apparatus, the machine that produced Posenenske's work refigures what it makes, the artwork itself is always, as Barad would say, in the ontological state of becoming in its infinite potential for reconfiguration, but also in terms of the relations that the artwork activates between the human, non-human, social and political discourse, language, and semiotics.

Posenenske famously left the art world and stopped making sculptures in 1968, citing the following in *Art International*: 'Though art's formal development has

progressed at an increasing tempo, its social function has regressed... It is painful for me to face the fact that art cannot contribute to the solution of urgent social problems' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7). Perhaps the posthuman notion of labour and vibrant collaborations across the human and non-human sphere presents a new opportunity to rehabilitate these works in the context of Posenenske's concern about what art might contribute to what she describes as 'urgent social problems' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7). In the current context of ecological crisis, what *Vierkantrohre Serie D* implies about the democratisation of human engagements with art and about honouring and discovering fealty with objects and materials alongside human politics and systems may contribute to de-anthropocentric thinking.

The nearly un-transformed or mass-produced industrial objects that Posenenske manufactured as sculptures expand the authorship of the artist's hand to 'many hands', including the touch of the machine and the apparatus. This reveals a more-than-human collaborative process that is further played out in a gallery that produces the effect of focusing care and attention on the overlooked or quotidian mass-produced object. The transfer of the authorship of a singular human hand to many hands, including the machine or apparatus, could produce a form of intimacy with the object that may otherwise be obscured by more obvious human interventions or impositions of self-expression or gestural touches where the intentions of the human author are foregrounded. Posenenske's work points to the potential of a sculptural artwork to examine objects closely and with empathy, to examine the terms of how we relate to the world socially, economically, materially, and politically, and to be instructive with regards to how we live and might want to live more justly with the people and things around us.

Conclusion

Charlotte Posenenske's work, and particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, has been examined in this paper through a post-humanist lens and more-than-human empathic perspectives on the politics of labour. Considered in contrast with the work of her Minimalist contemporaries, Posenenske's work delineates a clear difference in terms of ethics and ideologies of labour between her approach and American Minimalists in particular. Posenenske's work and her position on the authorship of the artist correspond with the Post-WWII German milieu from which Posenenske's work emerged. The Western art-historical lineages of the 'found object' and 'readymade' concerning Constructivism and Duchamp have been explored concerning Posenenske's practice, and the differences in the ideologies

of worker, value, and product in these two related but divergent models of practice have been noted. Posenenske's practice, and particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, has been identified as sharing more of the impulses of the Constructivist version of production, where the labour of the factory worker is elevated to the same status as the labour of the artist.

While acknowledging the influence and backdrop of Marxism and the discussion of labour in Posenenske's work, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* has been posed as offering the potential for a consideration of sculptural artistic labour as a more-than-human collaboration. This is a politics of labour that includes post-humanist thought, explicating a collaboration between the artist, the factory worker, the museum worker, and the viewer, while collapsing the hierarchies of value in human social and labour relations. *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in this sense is the product of more-than-human labour where the materials and objects equally labour in the system of production, display, and dissemination of this artwork.

Empathy with materials and non-human entities can be created with Posenenske's sculptures. In Posenenske's work, it is possible to consider the extension of the agency of labour to the non-human and to consider the object and materials of an artwork as labouring alongside the human 'author' to produce a form, or series of forms, in relation in a sculptural artwork. This paper re-considers the work of Charlotte Posenenske, re-framing the discussions of labour in her work through a post-humanist reading of objects and a de-anthropocentric framework of production, collaboration, and empathy between humans, objects, materials, and social and political realities. In this sense, Posenenske's work points to the potential of sculptural artwork to examine objects closely and with empathy, to examine their relations socially, economically, materially, and politically. Perhaps sculptural artworks can be instructive about living and labouring with the non-humans, and about how it might be to live more empathically with other humans and non-humans.

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