



On Lithoconcepts: A Critical Contribution to the Discussions about the Study of Concepts

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RESEARCH

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ABSTRACT

In discussions related to the study of concepts in disciplines such as history, history of philosophy, and political thought, in which many scholars, especially Reinhart Koselleck, Quentin Skinner, and John Pocock have made significant contributions, a kind of polarity has occurred. Most of the attention has often been paid to the possibility of the history of separate concepts, with a focus on the *change* of their meaning, on the one hand, or to the priority of intention, convention, and context, with an emphasis on the *use* and *function* of concepts, on the other hand. Despite their differences and while acknowledging their remarkable achievements, both approaches attempt to resolve simply the problems arising from and recognizable by the complex interrelation of the semantic structure of concepts and pragmatic factors, and also, the interrelation of diachronic and synchronic aspects, with some general and exclusive rules. I argue in this article that the recognizing of what I call lithoconcepts, as a significant but relatively neglected category of concepts, can demonstrate that the problematic of concepts is not limited to what has been disputed in the mentioned approaches. By examining the process of the genesis of lithoconcepts, it would be revealed that we are dealing with a *spectrum* of concepts, the proper understanding of which requires more comprehensive approaches.

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KEYWORDS:

History of Concepts;
Spectrum of Concepts;
Implications of Concepts;
Discourse Ambiguity;
Methodology; Koselleck.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Mossleh, Pegah. 2023. "On Lithoconcepts: A Critical Contribution to the Discussions about the Study of Concepts." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 26(1): 57–78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.383>

Following the contemporary linguistic turn, discussions about the concepts in the methodology of the humanities and social sciences have also developed significantly. However, in modern times, as Robert Leventhal (1997, 96–97) has pointed out, Begriff/concept has always been criticized since Kant. Thinkers such as Herder, Hamann, and Humboldt improved our understanding of the constructive role of language in human life and the relation of concepts to language as a whole (Taylor 2016, 19–22). Also, the whole final part of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (2003) was devoted to 'the doctrine of the concept.' It was only after such a process that Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997, 18) once stated, 'a consciousness of the history of concepts becomes a duty of critical thinking.'

In recent decades, many important new discussions have emerged. The main approaches in this field include Reinhart Koselleck's 'History of Concepts' and, in contrast with it, a kind of contextualism in what is called 'Cambridge School,' which itself includes Quentin Skinner's contractionism and John Pocock's discourse theory. We should also mention the works of scholars such as Kari Palonen, Melvin Richter, Mark Bevir, Michael Freeden, Claudia Wiesner, Helge Jordheim, Dietrich Busse, and so on, who have made valuable contributions to the discussion.

In this article, by introducing what I call *lithoconcepts*¹ as a significant but relatively neglected category of concepts, I intend to critically argue that the attempt to apply some general and exclusive rules to the studies of concepts, leads to methodological problems and, consequently, errors in analyses. We need approaches that help to understand a *spectrum* of concepts, from passivity to different extent of effectiveness, which are the result of complex combinations of semantic and pragmatic factors in different historical application-situations.

From Koselleck's statements about concepts it seems as if, according to Palonen (2014, 23), each concept forms its own diachrony, which turns them into specific decontextualized units of study. On the other hand, from the contextualist point of view, any concept is nothing but its *application* in the text and context and/or its *function* in a discourse. Each approach has sought to prove the truth of its own general rule about the [key] concepts, and some effective distinctions between them have not been sufficiently considered. The distinction of what Koselleck calls basic concepts (Grundbegriffe) from other (non-basic) concepts, a distinction that is one of the foundations of his work, also does not help to recognize some significant differences in concepts. In addition, the scholars of both approaches, in their debates with each other, have somewhat ignored an important problematic aspect in relation to the concepts. The problem is not just to demonstrate that semantic changes in concepts in historical periods are possible. It is also questionable which concepts, and to what extent, and why, contain elements that not only resist change but can *seriously* affect the whole of any given text, discourse, and theory, and distort any given application. Of course, we can see, due to his discussion of the temporal and more stable semantic layers *in* concepts, that Koselleck has not completely neglected this issue. But since his focus was generally on change in concepts—that should be understood in line with his modern belief in progress—he did not formulate it properly.

¹ It is Constructed from the Greek word lithos/ λίθος (stone) and concept. In Greek, litho is a prefix for what is related to stone and the process of turning to stone, such as λιθοστεις. Also, as German equivalents for lithoconcept, *Lithobegriff* or *Steinbegriff* might be suggested.

At most, he pointed to the possibility of not changing concepts and did not consider the genesis process of active lithoconcepts and the serious complications they may create for any use. So, it may be said that this article improves Koselleck's arguments.

As a preliminary definition, the lithoconcept is a complex concept with multiple aspects that inserts its solidified *implications* into any new application. In such a concept, a large part of the main thematic burden of a philosophical, and/or sociopolitical discourse, and claims of truth and necessity have been deposited, and, over time, it has been at the center of power struggles, under the pressure of knowledge–power–truth relations. Therefore, in the process of genesis of a lithoconcept, morphology, structure of components, as well as all contextual factors are effective to different extents. The formation of lithoconcepts, thus, has nothing to do with Platonic conceptual realism or Hegelian ontology, but is a process with irreducible semantic, pragmatic, historical, social, and political aspects.

Contrary to most discourse theories, instead of being changed or reinterpreted in new situations, and being adapted to different discourses, lithoconcepts impose their own established implications in different socio-linguistic applications. An optimistic attitude to the possibility of 'de-sedimentation' and spontaneous or arbitrary removal of the lithoconcept's implications in 'use' or 'function' can lead to an illusionary conception that, as we will see in the final part of the article, harms analyses and theories.

In order to clarify what has been briefly stated so far, in the first two sections of the article, the relevant aspects of the mentioned approaches will be examined with 'critical analysis' methodology. Then, in the third section, I will attempt to present my arguments about lithoconcepts as a distinguishable category of concepts. In the last section, the significance of recognizing lithoconcepts for the methodology of the humanities and social sciences will be addressed.

'BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE,' AND FOCUS ON THE DIACHRONIC CHANGE OF CONCEPTS

Koselleck's *History of Concepts* emerged and developed, as Kari Palonen (2014, 21) once noted, against a kind of 'academic ideology' that emphasized to students that 'concepts should be as atemporal, univocal and uncontroversial as possible,'² while, according to Koselleck, 'the historical, ambiguous and controversial character of concepts' should be 'a precondition for studying politics, culture and History.' Koselleck (2006, 100) has declared in the *Begriffsgeschichten* that 'daß Grundbegriffe nicht auf überzeitliche Ideen oder Probleme festgelegt werden dürfen, auch wenn wiederkehrende Bedeutungstreifen auftauchen können.' It can be seen that although he considers that the repetition of a series of meanings is possible, ultimately believes in the change and temporality of concepts. In this section, I intend to focus critically on these two themes. That is, on the one hand, to show that his metaphorical language and explanation about sedimentation and the hardening of the layers of meanings in some concepts (Koselleck 2000, 19) contain important points about the study of concepts; and, on the other hand, to argue that his formulation is not sufficient, and since his aim was to stand against that 'academic ideology' and to demonstrate

2 For example, Frege (2008, 11–14) defined concept by 'Funktion' and emphasized that 'we need that concepts be sharply delimited because without such a delimitation (Begrenzung) it would be impossible to set up logical laws about them.'

the historical social progress along with the development of political language, the process and consequences of *diachrony of lithofication* were overshadowed by *diachrony of meaning change*.

Koselleck (2002, 4–5) called the period 1750–1850 ‘Sattelzeit’ and claimed that in this period the premodern use of language transformed into our use. He states: ‘Since about 1770, old words such as democracy, freedom, and the state have indicated a new horizon of the future, which delimits the concept in a different way.’ Then, he concludes that the same can be achieved by reading and interrogating ‘other old concepts of the political language in terms of features indicating movement’ (6).

Thus, the old concepts are to be studied in terms of ‘features indicating movement’ because the premise is that they must be consistent with the theory of the Sattelzeit and progress. Recognizing such a tendency in Koselleck’s thinking, also, Dietrich Busse (2016, 113) says that the motive behind Koselleck’s conceptual history was his intention for introducing the concepts as ‘*movens*’ and ‘driving forces in the historical process.’

Koselleck (2002, 6) acknowledges that ‘this presupposition does not have to hold for all words.’ But the problem appears when we find phrases with absolute generality in his text that are inconsistent with that acknowledgement. For example, he puts this generalization as follows: ‘since the eighteenth century, the entire political and social vocabulary has completely changed. Political and social concepts have a temporal internal structure which tells us that ... the weight of experience and the weight of expectation have shifted in favor of the latter’ (128). This claim is problematic in two respects. The first is that, in addition to its inconsistency with Koselleck’s earlier statements, adding ‘completely’ as an adverb for change makes it highly indefensible. Because even if it could be accepted that the meanings of concepts have changed since the 18th century, it does not necessarily mean that they have *all* changed ‘completely.’ Indeed, if all the concepts change completely, then the diachronic aspect of the language will be neutralized. Rather, what is questionable and should be considered in research, is to understand, instead of false generalization, which concepts have changed, to what extent, and which have not changed, to what extent and why, and which of their implications have become fixed and rigid. Helge Jordheim (2017a, 52) points out that in many of the concepts studied in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,

there are semantic elements that date back to Greek and Roman Antiquity, and that are still atwork, still repeated, intentionally or unintentionally, every time a concept like ‘democracy’, ‘tyranny’ or ‘empire’ is used. However, the same concepts also hold far more recent semantic components that are subject to continuous, rapid and even accelerating changes, from one context or one rhetorical situation to another.

The other problematic aspect of such a claim is that the field of political and social concepts can be so broad that it includes virtually all concepts, and such an over-expansion of the range of concepts, actually, in reverse, leads to the devaluing of the claim. Moreover, especially about the philosophical-social and philosophical-political concepts, research on fixed and unchangeable elements can be even more important. But, a valuable point here is Koselleck’s reference to the ‘weight’ of the inner elements of concepts, which we will discuss critically later, although he limits it to the duality of ‘experience’ and ‘expectation.’

Koselleck (2006, 100) was aware of the possibility that some concepts might '(b)lock' their re-meaning or reinterpretation, although this makes it even more difficult to accept the aforementioned generalization. He states: 'Es gibt rückblickende Begriffe, die alte Erfahrungen gespeichert halten und sich gegen Umdeutungen sperren.' But no more detailed description of such concepts and their implications can be found. Where he mentions the possibility of the constancy of concepts as well, there is no adequate explanation of the characteristics of such concepts themselves.

When Koselleck (2006, 88–89) mentions Heiner Schultz's classification of possible forms of change or constancy in the relations between concept and reality, we can see, in fact, only the acknowledgment that concepts may not change. Even in the description of 'stability of conceptual structure' in Marxism, such stability is attributed to non-semantic factors such as the ideology and censorship of orthodox Marxism. Thus, only one part of the factors that may block the change of concepts is considered, that is certainly not enough. Although this explanation is important for its part, the factors related to the concepts themselves—including what Michael Freedon (2017, 124) calls the 'internal morphology of the concept' or what Johan Olsthoorn (2017, 162) calls the 'internal structure of the concept itself'—have been completely overlooked. One might even argue that Koselleck's explanation here, perhaps unintentionally, comes closer to Quentin Skinner's attitude (2002, 165) that we should focus on the *role* of concepts in upholding social philosophies. Even if one does not agree with scholars such as Jens Bartelson (2004, 19–23), who speak of the 'autonomy of concepts' in a generalized way, Koselleck's reductionism here is still incompatible, even with an important insight of his own (2002, 129), that concepts are not passive but active as '*factors* in the formation of consciousness.'

Contrary to this instance, where Koselleck (2002, 136, 152) explains 'revolution' as a historical-theoretical concept, it rightly shows how the morphological construction of the word re-volution, and its diachronic implications, are effective in its conceptualization. He writes:

contained within the concept of revolution are the notions of repetition, return, and even cyclical movement. This meaning is in no way just an incidental residuum from the borrowed Latin word, *revolutio*. On the contrary, the concept contains a structural statement about revolutions pure and simple ... The doctrine of recurrence, theoretically contained in the concept of revolution, implies both diachronic course constraints, which analogously repeat themselves, and acts by definite agents that can occur side by side.

From such a difference between Koselleck's arguments in the above two cases, where he explains the possibility of the stability of concepts and the locking of their change, and where he argues about the concept of revolution, we can find that when explaining the reasons for the constancy of some concepts, with a reductionist analysis, he skips the semantic complexities. While it is necessary that concepts be examined equally, both when they change and when they resist change.

There is an important argument in *Sediments of Time*, especially in the final part of *Repetitive Structures in Language and History*, after a detailed discussion about the necessity to pay attention to innovative and repetitive elements together. It is about the continuation of the German theology line in Marx's Manifesto through some of the words and concepts of the German language, and is important for our discussion and

will be addressed later in this article. But before that, in the next section, there will be a brief critical analysis of the contextualist approaches.

THE STATUS OF ‘CONCEPT’ IN CONTEXTUALIST APPROACHES

This section is divided into two subheadings to address the contributions of Skinner and Pocock to the discussion. But unlike scholars such as Mark Bevir (1992, 278) and Kari Palonen (2014, 243) who clarified the significant differences in their methodology, I will try to make it clear that despite the differences, their approaches are similar in terms of ignoring the category of lithoconcepts and the possibility that their implications make serious impacts on any applications and discourses.

QUENTIN SKINNER: FOCUS ON THE APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS

This section contains a critical review of Skinner’s attitude towards changing concepts as well as his thinking about the relation between concept and word.

With regard to the change of concepts, Skinner’s two points of view can be distinguished. From the first point of view, which can be described as subjectivist or voluntarist, he considers what is called the ‘phenomenon of conceptual transformation’ as not really a change in concept at all, but as ‘transformations in the applications of the terms by which our concepts are expressed’ (Skinner 2002, 179). It is from such a standpoint that he declares: ‘one of the ways in which we are capable of reappraising and changing our world is by changing the ways in which these vocabularies are applied’; and describes the change in the application of concepts as ‘one of the engines of social change’ (178). This view includes another variation, which Skinner puts it as ‘rhetorical’ conceptual change. In this variation, too, the focus is on application, but unlike the previous one, the precedence is not with the intention of the subject but with the state of social affairs.

From the second point of view, Skinner describes the long-term shift of concepts as their *fortuna*: conceptual changes happen along with the ‘transformation of social life’ (180).

All of the above variations have two points in common: a focus on the change of concepts,³ and the passive nature of concepts in subjective conscious applications by agents, as well as during the transformation of social life. In this way, agency plays a key role in Skinner’s theory, and he even once criticized the history of ideas because in it ‘the fact that the ideas presuppose agents is very readily discounted’ (Skinner 1988b, 35). But, he himself discounts the fact that some concepts always carry a part of the *forces* of individual and collective agents in the form of a semantic burden within themselves that prevents them from just waiting, as passive tools, for the next arbitrary application. In some of his illustrations, Skinner (1988a, 131–2) shows that he is aware of such restrictive forces that arise during the use of certain words–concepts. For instance, according to him, if a merchant wants to prove himself religious and legitimize his work by application of certain words, ‘he will find himself restricted to the performance of only a certain range of actions.’ But, according to

³ Palonen (2014, 55) has also pointed that understanding conceptual changes is a common subject for Koselleck and Skinner.

his usual formula, Skinner assumes that the cause of such restrictions is merely the ‘agreed criteria for the application’ of words. Thus, he discounts *forces* that are involved in the creation of agreed criteria of application themselves and have already been stored and rigid in the internal structure of some concepts. However, due to his very attention to such restrictions, scholars such as Melvin Richter (1995, 126) have concluded that because Skinner acknowledges the linguistic limitations upon political power should be distinguished from those who see language as ‘the instrument of power holders.’

As mentioned, another issue is the relation between concept and word. It is not unknown that the concept is not the same word that expresses it. That is also one of the recurring themes in Skinner’s works. Moreover, he emphasizes that the pursuit of the history of a word and its various uses cannot be assumed to be the same as understanding the meaning of a concept (1988a, 120). By referring to Raymond Williams’ *Keywords*, Skinner (1989, 7–8) states: ‘he equates the word and the concept and in speaking of *democracy* he explains how the “concept” is “embodied” in the word’; and adds: ‘to argument for such an equivalence is undoubtedly a mistake ... it can not be a necessary condition of my possessing a concept that I need to understand the correct application of a corresponding term.’ Then, as an illustration, he states that if Milton’s thought is to be investigated whether the originality of the poet was of great importance to him, this goal may never be achieved ‘by examining Milton’s use of the word *originality*.’

There is less doubt that the concept is not the same as the word that expresses it. But, also, it is necessary to mention three points. (1) The distinction between concept and word should be noted only as a methodological warning to avoid misguidance in historical research, not to assume that the concept can be examined entirely regardless of the word; (2) About the term ‘possessing,’ if it is interpreted too much *individually*, without a common language in the form of words, then the concept may be reduced to what Gilbert Ryle claimed to be a ‘dispositional or functional category’ (Gunnell 2011, 133). Such an extreme subjective conception based on exploring one’s mind for a concept is as harmful to the study of concepts as reducing them to objective signification. But, if what is at stake is ‘self-conscious possession’ of a ‘group or society’, as Skinner (1989, 8) himself has acknowledged, then certainly it comes with a ‘corresponding vocabulary.’ It would be a fallacy to assume that the same rule can be applied to both a *crude concept* like ‘originality’ in the mind of an author, and a well-developed concept such as democracy with a collective history of 25 centuries; (3) It’s true that a certain concept can be found in the works of a thinker at a particular time in history that is not expressed with the same word we use today. But, since a certain concept and a word or words are joined, their connection can no longer be ignored, and the *impact* of the history and structure of the word on the *application* of the concept should not be underestimated. For example, the concept of subjectivity can be recognized in Plato’s thought without the word subject or subjectivity being found in his works. But the concept of dialectic cannot be examined either in his thought or in Habermas’ thinking today, regardless of the word dialectic in their writings. That is why Koselleck (1996, 68), in response to critics, pointed out that ‘the concept of democracy, once coined, has its own history, which is not identical with the history of constitutional forms.’

I end this section by mentioning Humboldt’s (1963, 17) insight that ‘Das Wort, welches den Begriff erst zu einem Individuum der Gedankenwelt macht, fügt zu

ihm bedeutend von dem Seinigen hinzu, und indem die Idee durch dasselbige Bestimmtheit empfängt, wird sie zugleich in gewissen Schranken gefangen gehalten.'

JOHN POCOCK AND THE PRIORITY OF DISCOURSE

On the trajectory of Pocock's surveys in the field of political thought, the importance of 'discourse' gradually increased, to the extent that he declared (2009, 87): 'what was formerly ... known as the history of political thought is now more accurately described as the history of political discourse.' Pocock (1995, 5) describes language as if it were an absolute determinant, so that even the intention of the author is 'given' entirely by 'the modes of speech available to him.' Discourses and paradigms are determining. As, in his account of Pocock's thought, David Boucher (1985, 168) pointed out, 'the author can be viewed as "an agent (even an incident)" in the history of a paradigm.' Hence, Bevir (1992, 277) has placed Pocock among the 'hard linguistic contextualists, criticizing soft linguistic contextualists for stressing authorial intentions, not forms of discourse.' Elsewhere, noting that 'Pocock insists the language *within which* an author operates functions paradigmatically to prescribe what he might say and how he might say it', Bevir (1997, 169) has concluded that such a view is similar to the 'critique of subject by the structuralists and their post-structuralist descendants.'

Now, we need to examine his view on three issues: Diachronic study of concepts and conceptual history, the relation of concept and discourse, and the relation of concept and word.

It seems that, in *concepts and discourses*, Pocock (1996, 50–51) takes a more moderate stance than those mentioned above. He finds the history of concepts helpful in that we can 'learn much information and acquire many insights' from it, but does not see it as sufficient because the separated concepts 'cannot display that interrelatedness they possess when arranged—not by lexicographers but by language-building.' He accepts that the history of all components, such as concepts, can be separately traced and 'can be set vertically across the horizontal histories of the various language systems,' but believes that 'historians of discourse' do not dissolve 'the languages they study into the "concepts" of which these languages are compounded.' Also, in contrast with his mentioned statement that convinced Bevir to compare him to structuralists, here he acknowledges that such an 'already existing vertical component' is formed by the actions of the human agents acting within and upon the languages. Despite expressing his preference for writing synchronic history, Pocock describes 'the diachronic or vertical histories of particular language usages and particular words undergoing continuity and change in time, ... as shafts or tunnels sunk vertically through the stratified deposits of recorded history' (52–54).

With regard to the relation of concept and word, he has the same attitude as Skinner. Using the word 'state' as an example, he warns of 'the danger of ascribing the same concept, or the components or variations of the same concept, to the same word or the cognates of the same word wherever they occur in the historical record' (54).

Although Pocock makes room for diachronic aspects of history, his conception of the synchronic–diachronic relation paves the way for Richter's criticism. According to Richter (2001, 77), when Pocock asserts that 'the history of concepts is dependent upon, and ancillary to, the history of multiple discourses, therefore diachronic analysis must be subordinated to synchronic analysis'; while, according to Koselleck, 'each depends on the other.'

Pocock (2009, 11–12) declares that to deny the ‘determining role’ of isolated concepts in politics ‘is not to deny that they play any role whatever’, but this *non-determining* and accessory role of concepts, without any distinction, is too much reduced, insignificant, and ineffective. Moreover, whether the ‘agents’ act merely *within* the language or *within* and *upon* the language, it has no effect on the presupposed passivity of the concepts.

While speaking of the possibility of ‘migration’ of concepts from one structure to another, however, Pocock (1972, 22) acknowledges that concepts migrate, ‘altering some of their implications and retaining others.’ It’s true that in this description, the priority of paradigmatic structures within the language is still obvious, but it is not impossible to assume, cautiously, some degree of *being active* for concepts.⁴ The significance of *implications*—not just meanings or applications or functions—in his statement should also not be ignored. But he has not explained that the change or retaining of such implications is not merely because of factors other than themselves; it is *also* due to the force of their own factors, which, of course, remain *not-clarified* and Pocock, like many others, does not pay enough attention to it.

GENESIS OF A LITHOCONCEPT, HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

At the beginning it should be said that although this section may contain some new arguments, it is not unprecedented and has its well-known background: the insight of Gadamer (1997, 17) about the importance of ‘perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts’; Koselleck’s views on the activity of concepts and the semantic layers within them; the attitude of Helge Jordheim (2017a, b) toward the impact of old semantic components on current discourses, and the importance of a new philology; Michael Freeden’s discussion (2017) of macro-analysis and the micro-analysis; and the insight of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) that each concept has its own components, history, effectiveness, becoming, and relationships. However, the assumption of this article is that despite such significant insights about the concepts, no proper articulation has yet been provided to answer such questions as: which concepts, to what extent, and why do not simply change? And what impacts may the *implications* of such concepts have on their new applications and/or discourses in which they are included?

So far, it has been sufficiently discussed about the emergence of different degrees of flexibility or rigidity from concepts in different situations. As mentioned, even Pocock acknowledges that some of the implications of concepts, in their migration from a structure to another structure, may retain. Thus, in this section, more attention is paid to the question of which concepts and why may have some rigid implications, to the extent that they turn to *lithoconcept*; and the question of the consequences of such concepts will be addressed in the next section.

My starting point is Koselleck’s recognition (2006, 99–100) that not all concepts are equally important in the history of concepts, nor do they have the same ‘potential for change.’ Therefore, it could be said that they also vary in terms of their potential for turning to lithoconcept. Koselleck’s description of Grundbegriffe can be helpful in

⁴ Given such attitudes, Boucher (1985, 186) has argued that Pocock should not be placed at the radical end of the spectrum of structuralism.

this regard. He describes them as ‘hochkomplex’/high complex, ‘strittig’/controversial, and ‘unersetzbar und unaustauschbar,’ which can be translated into indispensable or irreplaceable, and inconvertible or irremovable. In addition, in an important statement, he asserts: ‘Geschichtliche Veränderungspotentiale sind in jedem Grundbegriff schon enthalten’ (100). If so, that the historical potential for transformation is *already contained* or *implicated* within the basic concepts, then, it is equally true to say that some concepts already have implications that can potentially solidify and turn the concept into a lithoconcept. Koselleck has not adequately explained which factors lead to such potential in particular concepts. Hence, in the following, an explanation of the factors and process of formation of the lithoconcept will be provided.

In Koselleck’s account, two categories of characteristics of basic concepts—however, for our discussion, it is preferred to use ‘special’ concepts—can be distinguished. Of course, it does not mean their separation. One category includes characteristics such as complexity, and the other includes characteristics such as indispensability and irremovability that together create potential in the concept for transformation or rigidity. Thus, the first category of factors, at a given moment, is related to the concept itself and includes the broadest sense of all what is called morphology, internal components, and structure. The other category covers the factors that, at the same given moment, are considered as other than the concept itself. It includes all contextual factors such as *usage*, *application* in text or rhetoric or debate, and *function* in any given discourse. Actually, two categories of factors reflect the main elements of the mentioned competing approaches, however, in a nonexclusive and non-polemical way.

It should now be clarified what implicit factors in some of the concepts themselves, including the complexity factors mentioned by Koselleck, may contribute to the development of the potential for change or rigidity. I should attempt, without falling in the path of redescribing the general process of concept formation, to briefly explain the factors in question.

1. The multiplicity of aspects of a concept is a factor for its complexity. Multiple aspects may be embedded in the concept during different periods of time. The more aspects, such as ontological, epistemological, moral, sociopolitical, and so on, might be recognizable in a concept, the more complex it would be considered. It is possible to trace the origins of each aspect to the intention of a specific author or authors who used the concept in particular situations. But it is also possible that such a definite origin may never be found. Because some aspects may have developed as a result of unrecorded applications by unknown agents in history, or, according to Helmut Lüdtkke’s metaphorical expression (1985, 356), as a result of ‘an invisible-hand process.’⁵ Therefore, prioritizing particular factors for the creation and persistence of aspects can be achieved not by a general rule, but by diachronic and synchronic studies on each concept.
2. The other factor should be sought in the *type* of concept. *Existential* concepts and *process* concepts, which carry lived experiences or explanations for human ideas and experiences, are more complex than concepts that are

⁵ At the International Conference on Historical Semantics and Historical Word-Formation in 1984, using Adam Smith’s famous metaphor about the free market, Lüdtkke described ‘Language change’ as ‘an invisible-hand process.’

actually nothing but general names for specific instances.⁶ The more extensive experiences a concept carries or the multifaceted processes it reflects, the more complex it becomes. According to Nietzsche (1892, 71), all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically condensed elude (entziehen) definition. Also, concepts that contain several concepts in themselves, such as multidimensional concepts that some scholars call ‘umbrella concepts’ (Della Porta & Keating 2008, 185), are more complex.

3. The degree of differentiation of a concept in a conceptual network can be considered as another factor for complexity. Because such a concept, while covering some of the instances and/or experiences and/or processes of those close concepts, also has separate implications.
4. Although a concept is not the same word that expresses it, since its expression at a definite moment of history is tied to a particular word, the significance of their mutual impact, that is, the impact of the components of that concept on any possible use of the word, and the impact of the etymology of the word on different applications of the concept, should not be underestimated.⁷ This mutual impact can be considered as another factor relevant to our discussion. Thus, it is necessary to avoid insisting on a general rule about the concept–word(s) relation, especially in understanding the process of the genesis of lithoconcepts.

Now, considering the above explanation, some points need to be addressed, which in turn provide an explanation for another category of factors, that is, factors other than the concept itself, or contextual factors in the broadest sense of the word.

First, the complexity of the concept does not create the potential for change, per se and unconditionally. Rather, it depends on which of the elements of the complexity have gained the most *weight*. If the elements that tend to make rigidity have gained more weight, then the complexity leads to rigidity, but in the condition of increasing the weight of ready-to-change elements, the potential for conceptual change will increase. Hence, Michael Freeden (2017, 126) remarks that ‘the analysis of concepts and their history needs to factor in the relative weight of all those conceptual components ... in each concrete case.’

Second, the interdependence of the semantic and non-semantic aspects of the concepts, here is well reflected in the relation between the complexity of the concepts and their contextual characteristics. Many factors of the complexity of the concept, though not all of them, refer to non-semantic conditions of the past that have now, at a certain historical moment, become internal *forces* of the concept itself. The intentions of the author or authors, cultural features deposited in the concept, and the effects of power struggles are some of those non-semantic factors. Nietzsche (1892, 71) put the same point in other words when he described a ‘synthesis of meanings’ that occurs in some concepts: ‘the history of its utilization (Ausnützung)

6 Some scholars have described this distinction with different articulations. For example, Christopher Beedham (2005, 4) by distinction of ‘abstract concepts,’ sees the ‘referential theory of meaning’ as appropriate only for ‘concrete objects.’

7 The fact that some scholars, among them Dietrich Busse (2005), criticize and condemn the emphasis on etymology, in what they call ‘traditional semantic,’ should not cause its effectiveness for the analysis of some concepts to be completely ignored. It’s true that overemphasis on the etymological and philological aspects could impair the studies of concepts, but neglecting these aspects, especially in understanding lithoconcepts, can be harmful as well.

for various purposes finally crystallizes in a kind of unity which is difficult to dissolve, difficult to analyze.’

On the other hand, what determines which concepts are to be considered indispensable, irreplaceable, and so on, is not *merely* new contextual factors such as the will of agents or discourses, but is also complexity of concepts and forces stored within them as semantic factors.⁸ Perhaps, it is because of such interdependence that Carsten Dutt (2011, 40), in a chapter on historical semantics, has stated that Koselleck’s ‘central intention’ in the history of concepts is ‘not only historical semantic but also pragmatical history.’

Third, a proper understanding of change or the rigidity of concepts may not be possible just by focusing on *meaning*. The distinction between meaning and implication is decisive here. Implications contain elements and deeper layers, the knowledge of which is not exactly the same as knowing the meaning of the concept, and this should be considered in the methodology of study on the potentials of concepts. The same distinction, not separation, could be recognized when, using the example of the concept of marriage to explain ‘structures of repetition’, Koselleck (2016, 66–72) remarked the ‘pre-linguistic biological implications’ and ‘social implications,’ including cultural, legal, and theological pre-givens.⁹

Fourth, it is not sufficient to just acknowledge the entanglement of diachronic and synchronic studies. Recourse to a general rule in this case also cannot be efficient. The problem is not—as, for example, we find in one of Jordheim’s (2017a, 50) critical references to Koselleck—that a scholar is supposed to just simply overlook the synchronic in favor of the diachronic, or vice versa. There is no single formula for a predetermined balance. For any concept worthy of analysis, we need to determine the weight of diachronic and synchronic elements by research and justification. It will then become clear that there is a *spectrum* of concepts, in each point of which *different balances* can be found between diachronic and synchronic elements. Whether recourse to a single universal formula about the entanglement of that two aspects, or taking a reductionist stance, or giving permanent priority and superiority to one of them, cannot provide a proper understanding of the issue.

Although the above explanation contains general arguments in the methodology of conceptual studies, it also delineates the formation and characteristics of lithoconcepts and clarifies how they should be examined. Now, it can be said that lithoconcept is a concept that: (1) has become complex due to the multiple aspects implied in it, (2) contains concentrated diverse experiences and/or multifaceted processes, and (3) is highly differentiated in a conceptual network to be consciously used in a particular discourse or in power struggles and ideological conflicts, and (4) intense contextual pressures have caused those components that were able to develop the potential of its lithofication to gain more weight.

Any concept may become a lithoconcept if: (1) it carries a large part of the main thematic burden of a philosophical and/or sociopolitical discourse, and (2) it has an established interconnection with a [disputable] word that expresses it—whether this

8 Melvin Richter (2001, 78), to explain Koselleck’s attitude, puts the mentioned *forces* in such a way that ‘every word, term and concept thus has a diachronic thrust, against which anyone seeking to add a new meaning must work.’

9 Raymond Williams (2015, xxix–xxxiv) also noted this distinction in his introduction to *Keywords*. Also, for a helpful discussion on this distinction, see (Ricoeur 2003, 146; Silk 2016), especially pp. 14–16.

connection was fixed at the beginning of its appearance or it has been formed at any historical moment, (3) claims of truth and necessity have been deposited and rigid in it, and (4) it remains at the center of political conflicts or academic controversies (knowledge–power relations) for a long time. Therefore, the factors that create the potential for lithofication of a concept include both internal factors of itself and the factors of its application context(s), in a broad sense.

It is not possible for a concept to turn into a lithoconcept until it finds its repetitive expression in a strong connection with a certain word. Hence, repeating the general rule that the concept and the word are not the same, should not be a ground for underestimating the mutual impact of the concept–word in the analysis. Otherwise, at least, the process of formation of lithoconcepts cannot be understood.

In fact, with Koselleck's argument about the possibility of locking the concept in the face of change, and with Jordheim's explanation of the old repetitive semantic elements, and with other such arguments, we have actually come close to identifying the lithoconcepts. But the final steps have not been taken to identify them as a special and noteworthy category. The main reason why such steps have not been taken is to focus too much on a package consisting of meaning, application, function, change, and adaptation, and to discount the decisive impact of implications, insertion, intrusion, inconsistency, and distortion. Apparently, it is usually assumed that either the meaning, use, and function of a concept could change in different situations, and, thus, would deserve attention, or could not change, so it would be considered as something passive, which neither has any new significant impact nor needs to be properly examined. What is overlooked is that some concepts have implications that are not only fixed and rigid—and even when the explicit meaning changes, they may remain implicitly as a hard deposit—but also are by no means neutral and passive, and will have decisive impacts on any subsequent use.

In the next section, the impacts of lithoconcepts on different applications and discourses will be addressed with two examples.

PRAGMATIC SIGNIFICANCE OF RECOGNIZING LITHOCONCEPTS

The purpose of this section is to clarify the significance of recognizing lithoconcepts for the humanities and social sciences, with a brief analysis of two instances of lithoconcepts: dialectic and elite.¹⁰

Because of its lexical capacity, Dialectic, which was merely a methodological and polemical tool for Eleatic thinkers, above all for Zeno, was consciously chosen by Plato (1961) for use in *Platonic discourse*. He found it necessary to distinct it from other closely related concepts in a conceptual network such as rhetoric (Phaedrus, 266; Philebus, 57–58), eristic (Philebus, 17), *logon/lógon* (Politeia VII, 539), etc. Then, that new dialectic was loaded with ontological, epistemological, anthropological,

10 Four reasons why these two concepts are chosen as instances for the lithoconcept: (1) the process of developing a lithoconcept can be well assessed in them; (2) The relation of philology and etymology with historical semantics and the history of concepts is remarkably clear in them; (3) As will be clarified in the article, they are two different typical examples of Lithoconcepts; (4) Their distorting impact on some discourses and theories has actually been revealed and can be investigated.

theological, mythical, political, and educational elements. In Plato's relentless confrontation with the sophists and rhetoricians such as Isocrates (Barnes 1996, 20), that overloaded dialectic was at the center of the debates. Such conditions led—despite Aristotle's attempt (1831, *Metaphysics* IV, 1004b) to downplay it and reduce its multiple aspects, though not to the pre-Platonic level—to the preservation of all its new aspects in neoplatonic thought and Christian theology. For Augustine (2007, 100), following Plato, dialectic had a high status and was equivalent to 'disciplina disciplinarum.' In the Middle Ages, for example, in the time of Anselm and Abelard, dialectic, in a much more violent situation than Plato's time, was placed at the center of a bloody battlefield of the various sects. Even believing or not believing in dialectic could be considered as obedience to divine laws or as heresy.¹¹ It was in such conditions that Abelard (2007, 2), instead of considering his work as research for truth, described it as a 'war' with 'the weapons of dialectical reasoning.'

Heavy pressures—in addition to the decisive role of the word dialectic, which always leads to the artificial dichotomies and monolinear teleological conception of history—formed another stage of the process of the lithofication of dialectic. That process continued during the uses of dialectic by Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, and some other thinkers, to Hegel. In Hegel's system, all the rigid and fossilized implications, from Platonic mythology to Christian theology, along with elements of German idealism, turned dialectic to lithoconcept in the strongest form. From Hegel until now, the lithoconcept of dialectic has intruded its fossilized implications in all new applications, to different extents. In the following, I will explain the three consequences of using this lithoconcept—and lithoconcepts in general—in different application-situations.

1. METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND ANALYTICAL ERRORS

In situations where lithoconcepts are not recognized as a specific and effective category, first, the *illusion* arises that they can be used arbitrarily as adaptable concepts without any serious impact from their rigid implications. Second, both methodological arguments and analyses in the condition of neglecting lithoconcepts will suffer destructive errors.

The mentioned illusion can be discerned in a philosophical current that, following Aristotle and from scholastics onward, especially after Hegel, has always attempted to handle a reduced version of dialectic for certain purposes. It was not accidental that dialectic, despite the fact that many scholastics tried to apply it only as a part of a curriculum or method of examining assumptions, was placed at the center of violent medieval struggles. Its claim of truth and its ontological and normative implications were so strong that users could not predict it. In his commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Lanfranc wrote: 'dialectic is not an enemy of the mysteries of God, rather it confirms them if it is rightly used when the matter demands it' (Luscombe 1997, 43). Finally, in the Renaissance, the efforts of thinkers such as Lorenzo Valla and Rudolph Agricola to *reform* the dialectic, according to one interpretation (Cassirer, Kristeller, & Randall 1956, 147–55), or to 'rhetorize' it, according to another interpretation (Nauta 2007, 202–5), were dissolved in the flood of neo-Platonic dialectic.

¹¹ The fact that Anselm, as Bishop of Canterbury and as one of the king's close associates, called Roscelin as one of the "heretics of dialectic" sheds light on the vital situation of dialectic (Mews 2002, II/164).

The inefficiency of contemporary theoretical efforts to *reform* dialectic, such as the obsolete ‘empirico-realist dialectic’ of Georges Gurvitch (1962) and the naive and optimistic ‘mauvaise et bonne dialectique’ in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of ‘hyperdialectic’ (1964, 127), could also be predictable. Because they appeared in the post-Hegel era, when the lithoconcept of dialectic had gradually reached its most solid form. It is interesting that when Merleau-Ponty (1973, 205–6) criticized the sanctified dialectic in Marxist currents of his time, he considered its implications, such as deterministic progress of history and teleologism as ‘illusions’ that could be ‘removed’ from it. This is exactly the kind of analysis that falls into the *illusion* I am arguing about. Although the coining of the vague term ‘hyperdialectic’ shows that he realized that it was time to avoid using dialectic in its traditional form, it arose out of his illusion about the possibility of decomposition and the arbitrary removal of the lithoconcept’s implications. An examination of that so-called hyperdialectic reveals that it is only a crude and ineffective term whose relation with dialectic is almost only verbal and is close to a fallacy. Because in it, the dialectic is uprooted from its logical ground and devoid of content. Such a dialectic is no longer a dialectic and is reduced to two-sidedness and mutuality, or dialogue. Actually, its identity is even more destroyed than that kitchen without a sink and a cooker, which Michael Freeden (1996, 86) once mentioned as an example.

Recognizing that dialectic brings about serious problems in any way, some scholars, such as Enrique Dussel (1985) and William Desmond (1992), criticized it and tried to solve the problem by coining terms—Analectic and Metaxology—that escape the dialectic’s noose. However, examining such efforts is beyond the scope of this article.

2. DISCOURSE AMBIGUITY

Contrary to a presumption of the discourse approach, for example in Pocock’s theory, that concepts adapt to different discourses through acceptance of transformation or reinterpretation, lithoconcepts impose their established implications in different sociolinguistic applications. Such an event is not simply a non-change of meaning or implications—as Pocock assumed, or a (b)locking, as Koselleck suggested—that can just be considered as a kind of passivity. Rather, while *using* (Skinner’s favorite term) a lithoconcept, it can cause a semantic turn and a gap between the intention of the speaker/author and the result of his speech/writing. Also, while *functioning* (one basic term of discourse theory), lithoconcepts are not just subordinate to the discourse structure and can cause dysfunction, ambiguity, and inconsistency. Hence, it can be said that, at least in the case of lithoconcepts, the theories of ‘author’s intention,’ ‘conventionalism,’ and ‘discourse’ need to be revised.

An important point is that even if some speakers/authors are aware of the problematic nature of the implications of some of the (litho)concepts, they suppose that if they merely mention their awareness and reject those implications, then their impact on any usage will be prevented. But, despite such supposition, the compressed forces in the solidified implications of lithoconcepts may not be voluntarily neutralized in order to use them *safely* according to the will of the agent. After Hegel, such an approach started with Marx (1991, 27), who claimed that Hegel’s dialectic was standing on its head and he could turn it upside down to discover a rational kernel within its mystical shell. He believed that his dialectic was ‘fundamentally’ different from Hegel’s, and even its direction was opposite to Hegelian dialectic. Marx’s assertions clearly

reveal a simplistic-optimistic attitude that supposes it is possible to simply remove all diachronic implications of dialectic, with a formula.¹² In spite of his supposition, many scholars have revealed the decisive impact of the metaphysical implications of Hegel's dialectic on the general direction and even on the details of Marx's thinking and theory (Callinicos 2004, 71; Meikle 1985; Sayers 2011; Uchida 1988; Williams 2000, 213–14).¹³ However, they did not consider that those impacts were inevitable, because of the nature of dialectic as a lithoconcept.

That optimistic attitude can also be found in current uses of dialectic. For example, while recognizing many of the implications of Hegelian dialectic, Habermas suggests that it is possible to use dialectic regardless of them. For realizing the idea of progress and social evolution and to maintain the dynamism of the theory of emancipation, he resorts to dialectic, and therefore his theory gets involved in its Hegelian philosophical implications, whose costs, as he once acknowledged, are 'too heavy' for social theory (Habermas 1985, 78). This is why Thomas McCarthy (1985, 239) emphasizes that the *teleological* feature of Hegelian-Marxian philosophy of history is retained in Habermas's theory of social evolution. Also, David Owen (2002, 176), in his book on *Habermas and the idea of progress*, declares that Hegel's influence on Habermas is undeniable and, in fact, Habermas 'reformulates Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*',¹⁴ and Habermas' concept of developmental logic and *Aufhebung* 'share a general structure.'¹⁵ Thus, on the one hand, Habermas considers Adorno's negative dialectic as internally inconsistent and ineffective (Coles 1995, 20; McCarthy 1985, 107–8), and on the other hand, he does not want to accept the costs of the implications of Hegelian dialectic. Rather, his use of dialectic not only suffers from some of those rigid metaphysical implications but also leads to the *ambiguity* of his discourse.¹⁶

3. INEFFICIENCY OF THEORIZING

The arguments in the previous sections make it clear that if a lithoconcept is assigned a key role in theorizing, the resulting theory will be ineffective and may completely collapse. Even if the theorist is aware of some of the rigid implications and intends to modify or remove them, the optimal use of the lithoconcept, most likely, will not be possible. However, here it should be noted that one type of lithoconcepts can be distinguished that may be relatively reconstructable. The conditions for such a possibility are: (1) semantic structure: inclusion of different meanings and implications in the semantic layers of the concept, already, before it turned into a lithoconcept; (2) lexical formation: the potential for delithofication and reconstruction in the etymological and philological aspects of the concept; (3) the contents of (1) and (2) should be just opposite to the current rigid implications of the concept; (4) the

12 Tom Rockmore (2002, 178) has addressed the inadequacy of the scholarly care that Marx devoted to Hegel.

13 Also see the impact of dichotomies and implications of the dialectic of Hegel's *Phenomenologie des Geistes* on Marx's work in Levine (2012, 207).

14 *Aufhebung* is the central concept in Hegel's dialectic, as its driving engine and, at the same time, as the carrier of many of its metaphysical implications.

15 Also see, Teunissen (1999); and for a critique of Habermas' dichotomies and their impact on his discourse of emancipation, see Dallmayr (1984, 252).

16 What was said about the impact of the implications of dialectic on Habermas' discourse could also be found, with some differences, in Adorno's work, but its explanation is beyond the scope of this article.

theorist's awareness of the mentioned conditions and sufficient research to recognize the diachrony of lithofication of the concept.

Perhaps, 'elite' can be considered as a good example of such lithoconcepts. With regard to the 'Elite':¹⁷ (1) It has *élire*, *eligere*, and *electus* in its lexical structure, all of which contain 'to elect' and 'to choose'; (2) Based on its historical semantic, it included the meaning of being elected in some *social processes*; (3) But it, some times and in some uses, also covered 'best' and 'eminent,' in which the element of being 'chosen' was weak and, instead, 'rank,' 'class,' and 'heredity' were more prominent; (4) Then, long-term involvement in the conflicts of democrats, authoritarians, Marxists, and so on, changed the weight of the semantic elements of the 'elite,' so that we can see the complete dominance of non-elective elements in the *elit-ist* theories of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca. (5) Finally, carrying a large part of the burden of Platonic essentialism and Machiavellianism in the elitist discourse, 'elite' turned to a lithoconcept with rigid nondemocratic implications.

Now, the examination of the use of this lithoconcept in, for example, Peter Schumpeter's theory, which is often called 'democratic elitism,'¹⁸ reveals its internal inconsistency. Heinrich Best and John Higley (2010, 2) have found Schumpeter's theory even 'contradictory' and, 'ambiguous', which confirms my argument about discourse ambiguity created by lithoconcepts. The attempt to integrate the concept of 'elite' with democracy—or according to an articulation, 'to merge two antagonistic principles: democracy and elitism' (Best & Higley 2010, 2)—because of the insertion of the nondemocratic implications of elite into the theory reduces democracy to an empty shell: 'competitive method for leadership' (Schumpeter 2003, 269). Therefore, it fails to understand the spirit of the concepts contained in the democratic discourse for providing effective suggestions to strengthen it. Nonetheless, considering that the 'elite' meets the three conditions mentioned at the beginning of this section for the possibility of de-lithofication, it can be assumed that if a theorist knows its current lithoconceptual character and also fulfills the fourth condition, then it will be possible to *reconstruct* it by retrieving its democratic elements. While such a reconstruction is not conceivable for dialectic. The possibility that philology and etymology can be helpful, which some deny dogmatically and exclude them from semantic analyses, is revealed in the process of recognizing and distinguishing lithoconcepts such as elite.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to demonstrate that in discussions related to the history of concepts, those concepts that, due to their characteristics, can be called lithoconcepts have not been considered as a special and decisive category. While the recognition of such concepts would yield significant methodological consequences. In fact, by coining this term, I have attempted to show that some concepts, in different usage situations such as rhetorical and debating situations, and in diverse discourses, not only do not undergo a crucial transformation, but also their stability is not simply equivalent to passivity or resistance.

17 My interpretations in this part are based on Raymond Williams' research (2015, 72–74) about "elite".

18 The fact that academics have called Schumpeter's theory 'democratic elitism,' even though he never used this label, reveals how the implications of a lithoconcept can impact a theory, even if its word is not directly used.

Rather, because of the intrusion of their solidified implications in any new usage, they have decisive impacts on the discourses and theories that include them. Methodological problems, analytical errors, discourse ambiguity, and inconsistency of theory, are the consequences of such impacts, which often cannot be predicted and controlled in advance.


An important conclusion of paying attention to the lithoconcepts, as revealed in the article, is that some of the debates between the mentioned approaches can be resolved. Many controversies have arisen from dichotomies such as meaning-use and intention-function, and reductionist efforts or preference of one over the other. But, knowing the process of formation of lithoconcepts would clarify the necessity and intertwining of both historical semantics and pragmatics, and both diachronic and synchronic studies. We need to know both the etymological and philological aspects and the contextual conditions, which can change the weight of the structural elements of the concept.

Therefore, the issue is no longer just whether the meaning of concepts change or not. Also, we do not need to accept such a dichotomy that either there can be a history of concepts, separately, or only the uses or functions of concepts are relevant. The issue is that we are dealing with a *spectrum* of concepts in which the effectiveness of structural and morphological factors and the influence of contextual ones are combined in various forms. In each of the concepts in this spectrum, the weight of diachronic and synchronic elements is different. Hence, the task of the researcher is to explore such complexities instead of dealing with concepts with a single and predetermined rule. With regard to any concept that deserves investigation, it should be clarified with *convincing arguments* which factors have more weight. To understand the process of formation and consequences of lithoconcepts and, in general, to study concepts more properly, we need more complex and less exclusive approaches, consisting of historical semantics and pragmatics, diachronic and synchronic studies, analysis of historical facts, and interpretation of socio-political contextual factors. Finally, by shedding light on the category of lithoconcepts, the article may have been able to reveal the need for a review of previous methodological discussions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory
 DOI: 10.33134/rds.383

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Mossleh, Pegah. 2023. "On Lithoconcepts: A Critical Contribution to the Discussions about the Study of Concepts." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 26(1): 57–78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.383>

Submitted: 29 July 2022
Accepted: 15 June 2023
Published: 07 August 2023

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