

**Exhibiting Practice:  
Retrospective Survey Exhibitions of Conceptual Art, 1989-2000**

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## Abstract

In recent decades, the retrospective survey exhibition has become one of the primary sites for the presentation of art historical propositions. This thesis examines the contribution of four such exhibitions to a history of Conceptual art: *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* (Paris, 1989); *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965–1975* (Los Angeles, 1995–96); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York, 1999); and *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* (London, 2000). These exhibitions could not claim access to an objective and empirically verifiable category of 'Conceptual art,' but played an active role in the construction of that category. Through individual case studies, this thesis analyses the processes through which the history of this relatively recent art 'movement' has been elaborated. It seeks to understand how works of art can be accommodated to a museum-based art history and how they can be called upon to support particular curatorial narratives. At the same time, it considers to what extent they may be able to resist the conditions of display imposed upon them and may, instead, continue to signify independently of curatorial intention. In so doing, this thesis re-emphasizes the notion of critical practice, as well as the performative and discursive dimensions of Conceptual art that have often been passed over in historical exhibitions. It rejects the "oppositional" model of radical artists pitted against conservative institutions and argues for an understanding of Conceptual art based upon the recognition that claims for its independence from the institutional art world were made within the available rhetorics of a discourse that sustains the self-identities of both artists and institutions. Ultimately, this thesis reflects the understanding that to continue to regard artist and institution, artwork and exhibition, in their isolated functions is to fail to attend to the ways in which art, as a social practice, may support broader ideological structures.



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## Introduction

That the current project does not set out to provide an overview or an originary history of Conceptual art will be obvious from its title; an examination of retrospective survey exhibitions on the subject clearly has a different intention. What are the implications, then, of considering the phenomenon of such exhibitions? Could such an approach be taken to imply the adequacy of such conventional histories of Conceptual art as already exist? Does it acquiesce to the view that 'history proper' can only be written by those who were present? Does it represent a pragmatic acknowledgement that to intervene in an already contested area would only be to muddy the waters still further? Or might it be understood as a compensatory response to a crisis in the languages of art history engendered, in part, by Conceptual art itself? Whatever the merits or drawbacks of existing accounts, there are clearly many issues that impinge on the writing of any history of Conceptual art. It is the intention of this introduction, however, to demonstrate that there are substantive reasons for examining historical survey exhibitions in their own right, and not, as might be thought, as a retreat from the difficulties encountered in writing a history of Conceptual art.

In the contemporary art world, exhibitions perform a supremely powerful role in the dissemination of information about art. As Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne have claimed:

Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring-device, exhibitions... establish and administer the cultural meanings of art.<sup>1</sup>

To write about exhibitions, therefore, should not be understood to reflect a crisis in faith in the traditional languages of history and criticism. It is in part to respond to the changing structures in the art world itself in which the large-scale exhibition is now the main vehicle for communication; but, crucially, such an approach also sets out to discover the ways in which works of art achieve signification within the complex system of representation constituted by the exhibition. This should enable some understanding of what is consistent between works of art in terms of the conditions of artistic practice, and not of what divides them at the level of aesthetic appearance. In short, it is to deny that



works of art are stable vessels of self-sufficient meaning, and to claim instead that their meanings, always contingent and subject to change, are produced in discursive relations.

Four exhibitions are examined in this thesis: *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1989/90), *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (LA MoCA) (1995/6), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* at the Queens Museum of Art, New York (1999), and *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2000).<sup>2</sup> Although a number of scholarly and popular publications on Conceptual art appeared during the period spanned by these surveys (approximately, the decade of the 1990s), it was through the exhibition form that the histories of Conceptual art were primarily constructed and reconstructed.

Historical exhibitions, though, are not 'natural' representations. They are necessarily selective for reasons of space, finance and availability of work. They are organized by curators with their own knowledge, experience and preconceptions, and they are presented within institutions that have particular social responsibilities and ambitions. The historical exhibition, it must be emphasized, is a *contemporary* manifestation. As such, it may tell us at least as much about our present moment of consciousness as it does about the period it ostensibly covers. To ask only whether an exhibition successfully 'captures' an aspect of the past, or whether it 'misrepresents' the past, is to overlook the exhibition's significance in the present. At the same time, to imagine that the retrospective survey exhibition deals with a pre-existing and fixed historical category is to fail to recognize the work that it does in constructing and maintaining that category.

There is a sense, too, in which these exhibitions regard Conceptual art as a movement, or an artistic tendency, that was ineluctably *of its time*, but also uncannily prescient. Conceptual art is taken to represent a gesture of resistance, perhaps art's last possible gesture, toward an ever more pervasive commodity culture.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it may be the fantasy of these exhibitions to transpose Conceptual art into a present now ready for it, and in which its true significance might at last be realised. The historical exhibition, therefore, has the

potential to bring about an enhanced understanding of the past through the recognition of its prefiguring the present. It is hoped that consideration of these exhibitions in the particularity of their own moment will disclose those aspects of Conceptual art that may have remained latent, or under-acknowledged, in its own time, and that examining the particular uses to which works of art (and other historical materials) are put in expanding the discourse about Conceptual art will reveal something of the function of history in the present.

***The museum, the temporary exhibition and the 'experiential narrative'***

Historical exhibitions are products of the culture of museums; consciously and unconsciously, they reflect the agendas, motivations and desires of their institutional hosts. Carol Duncan has been one of the most influential writers in the developing field of museum studies. In the modern world, she has argued:

art museums constitute one of those sites in which politically organized and socially institutionalized power most avidly seeks to realize its desire to appear as beautiful, natural, and legitimate. Museums are therefore excellent fields in which to study the interaction of power and the history of cultural forms.<sup>4</sup>

Duncan has shown persuasively that the modern art museum is not simply the repository for works of indisputable quality and historical importance that it pretends to be, but rather, that through the organization of its collection, the museum plays an active role in shaping the history it purports to represent. Through its sequenced spaces, the arrangement of its objects, through labelling and effects of lighting, the museum significantly affects the experience and interpretation of the objects it displays. Duncan's approach differs from earlier, more sociologically-oriented work by attending to the museum not so much as an institution through which distinctions of social class are produced and maintained as for its construction of an ideal subject, an individual "perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically, and culturally to enact the museum ritual."<sup>5</sup> More recent work in the discipline, however, has tended to find Duncan's work too deterministic,<sup>6</sup> and Duncan has herself admitted that no individual perfectly corresponds to the museum's ideal subject. "In reality," she says, "people continually 'misread' or scramble or resist the museums cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs according to all the historical and psychological accidents of who they are."<sup>7</sup>



Most early work in the field of museum studies tended to focus on the museum's permanent collection. Only relatively recently have scholars begun to examine the temporary exhibition more consistently. These exhibitions demand particular attention since they enable the museum to transcend the limitations of its own collection and may also allow for the creation of a semi-autonomous space within the museum in which its customary narratives may be challenged. Because works of art can be borrowed more easily, and at much less cost than they can be purchased for the permanent collection, such exhibitions may be better able to respond to comparatively short-term shifts in the culture. The exhibition may constitute a major, groundbreaking contribution to scholarship, and it may provide a forum for a productive exchange between the 'two art histories' of the museum and the academy. As Charles W. Haxthausen has indicated, the temporary exhibition may be the institutional space in which a museological and an academic art history "most often encounter one another – not only because university based art historians visit exhibitions, but also because they contribute to their catalogues, speak at the conferences or lecture series organized around them, and in some cases even function as guest curators."<sup>8</sup>

When exhibitions have been the subject of study, there has usually been a call for an emphasis on the specifics of an exhibition's installation, for its recognition as a cultural form that functions more effectively through visual demonstration than textual explication.<sup>9</sup> My approach differs in that I choose to consider the exhibition through the field of discourse it creates. This is not a particularly new idea. Indeed, as long ago as 1989, Juliette Laffon, co-curator of *L'Art Conceptuel*, was claiming, "[i]t is now generally accepted that the way works are exhibited and the way a show unfolds can be interpreted as discourse."<sup>10</sup> As Laffon's comment implies, to consider the exhibition as a discursive field does not entail that the exhibition's visual qualities be entirely disregarded to concentrate, instead, only on textual aspects of the catalogue, labelling, didactic materials, promotional or advertising copy and reviews, for example. In referring to a discursive field, I mean that *all* aspects of the exhibition – from the selection of artists' work, to the design, layout, and architecture of the exhibition space, the lighting and labelling of exhibits, the provision of reading rooms or study areas, and also those textual materials already mentioned – contribute to the meanings it generates. Meaning arises through the interaction of these varied

elements within the historically and culturally specific system of rules that regulate exhibition practice. The intention of this thesis is to examine the construction of a history of Conceptual art through the medium of the historical exhibition. Accordingly, the reader will find that little attempt has been made to reconstruct the exhibition as an 'experiential narrative,' except where a specific combination or sequence of art works operates to produce a particular art historical proposition, reading or meaning.<sup>11</sup>

There are three further reasons why I do not adopt such an approach. First, that through its catalogue and reviews, many more people are familiar with an exhibition and the historical work it does than ever have the chance to experience the exhibition at first hand. Through these resources, the exhibition is freed from the specifics of its time and place (something of which the early 'entrepreneur' of Conceptual art Seth Siegelaub was acutely aware), and continues to generate meaning, independent from the experience of the visit, thousands of miles away and/or many years later.

Second, that the emphasis on an experiential narrative will inevitably imply a linearity that may or may not reflect the organisation of the exhibition itself. Some exhibitions may prescribe a particular route through their exhibits (typically such a route will suggest a chronological reading), others, however, may be organised on a more open-plan basis, allowing the visitor to construct his or her own itinerary. Even within the first type of exhibition, the visitor retains a limited amount of freedom to reinvent the 'script' by skipping past certain works or by returning to rooms already visited. Thus, the experience of the exhibition will be different for every visitor, and the range of this experience could never be captured in a single narrative account.

Finally, while the experiential narrative will be sensitive to the ways in which works relate to each other under the influence of complex display techniques to produce particular frameworks of interpretation for the visitor, in its examination of these internal relationships it can come to resemble the kind of content analysis familiar from formal art criticism. Moreover, such an approach risks casting the curator as a meta-artist for whom other artists' works are but touches of colour in a transcendent artistic production.<sup>12</sup> Exhibitions are not discrete, self-contained phenomena, and it is my approach in this thesis to

relate exhibitions to their broader social and cultural contexts; the experiential narrative, it should be noted, risks foregoing this necessity.

### ***Existing studies of Conceptual art***

As a relatively recent movement in art history, the legacy of Conceptual has been vociferously contested. Most of its protagonists are still living, and since the first memoirs of (former) Conceptual artists began to emerge in the 1980s, reputations and claims to priority have been jealously guarded. The art historian Blake Stimson has pointed to the “self-instituting or bureaucratic function of conceptualism’s colonization of its own critical reception,”<sup>13</sup> and more so than with any other historical category, Conceptual art has taken possession of its own history through an ever-growing number of published writings and critical reassessments by those involved. This administration of its own historicisation continues from Conceptual art’s desire to obviate the need for criticism by incorporating the means for interpretation of the work into its own production. As the producers of fine art objects, Conceptual artists were no longer willing to accept that the evaluation and interpretation of that object was solely the responsibility of the critic.

In this difficult moment for criticism, critics were obliged to thoroughly reconsider the function and status of their activity. Some misplaced their critical voices altogether. Since the earliest surveys of Conceptual art, it has seemed that the most appropriate response to its critique of authorship and authority has been to allow Conceptual artists to speak for themselves by assembling their writings in the critical anthology. In her book *Conceptual Art* (1972), Ursula Meyer declined to present any critical interpretation whatsoever. “Attending to the critical function itself is the nature of Conceptual Art,” she claimed; “[t]here is no further need for critical interpretation of idea and intention already clearly stated.” It was thus “in keeping with Conceptual Art that it is best explained through itself, i.e., through the examination of Conceptual Art, rather than through any assumptions outside of itself.” Consequently, her book was not really a “critical anthology’ but a documentation of Conceptual Art and Statements.”<sup>14</sup> In similar style, Lucy Lippard wrote in the Foreword to her own *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* that criticism tended to “clog up... with irrelevant information” the direct processes being employed by Conceptual artists. She, too, chose not to offer any further level of interpretation,



presenting instead a publication that described itself in its extended title as, “a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia.”<sup>15</sup>

In the last ten years, there has been a spate of new publications on the subject of Conceptual art. Though critical anthologies continue to appear, with the benefit of several decades hindsight, writers have been more willing to editorialise on interpretations of Conceptual art, even, in a few cases, to attempt tentative histories of the movement. Published in 1998, critic and historian Tony Godfrey’s book *Conceptual Art*<sup>16</sup> was one of the first of these publications. As Godfrey points out, “because of its high intellectual component [Conceptual art] has seemed the natural province of academia.” Furthermore, “because those who supported the most theoretical tendencies in Conceptual art have remained the most vocal... much that was poetic, witty or humorous has been... underrated or neglected.”<sup>17</sup> Writing for the general reader, it was Godfrey’s concern to avoid a narrow and elitist academic interpretation and to give instead a wider picture of what Conceptual art might be.

Appearing a year before the exhibition *Global Conceptualism*, Godfrey’s book shared the concern of that exhibition to expand and de-centre the canon of Conceptual art, both chronologically and geographically. He suggests, for instance that although the term “first came into general use around 1967... it can be argued that some form of Conceptual art has existed throughout the twentieth century,” and that “in the 1960s you were as likely to find [Conceptual art] being made in San Diego, Prague and Buenos Aires as New York.”<sup>18</sup> While I accept the necessity to critically re-examine accepted definitions of Conceptual art, I believe that to employ the term as inclusively as Godfrey does risks effacing the very real differences in the conditions of artistic practice across different decades of the twentieth century and in different geographical locations. While the artists and works of art discussed in this thesis under the rubric of Conceptual art are limited to those included in the four exhibitions identified, I believe that if the term is to be a critically useful one, it will imply a more historically specific understanding that also recognises the distinctive factors shaping art practice in different localities.

Michael Newman and Jon Bird have been keen to acknowledge the expanded history of Conceptual art, to recognize “its local specificity and its global

reach.”<sup>19</sup> In their editorial introduction to *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (1999), however, they demonstrate a much greater inclination than Godfrey to conceive of Conceptual art in historically and socially specific terms:

[Any definition of Conceptual art] will be complicated by “the independent developments and strategies adopted in different countries and such factors as the relations between the artist-subject and the social formation, the dominant and residual aesthetic traditions against which Conceptual artists reacted, the hegemonic role of art and educational institutions and their relation to official ideologies, and the social movements and historical forces in the their global and local manifestations that acted upon and against aesthetic avant-gardes.”<sup>20</sup>

Newman and Bird’s account is less populist and more academic than Godfrey’s. The process of ‘rewriting’ referred to in the anthology’s title, for instance, “is one of reflection and reinterpretation, leading to reassessments of historical and critical evaluations in the context of new insights from both theory and practice.”<sup>21</sup> From the perspective of my own study of historical exhibitions, Newman and Bird’s approach also benefits from its acknowledgement of developments in the field of museum studies and its recognition that the meaning of Conceptual art was frequently articulated in relation to its sites of institutional display.

The American historian, Alexander Alberro has published widely on Conceptual art over the last decade. He has co-edited *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (2000), with Blake Stimson, *Recording Conceptual Art* (2001),<sup>22</sup> with Patricia Norvell, and in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (2003)<sup>23</sup> has given an account of early developments through the lens of the activities of the gallerist, Seth Siegelaub. Alberro’s writing has often sought to challenge the myths surrounding the supposedly ‘pure’ or analytical forms of Conceptual art of the late 1960s. His introduction to the *Anthology* subjects Conceptual art to critical re-examination by charting the evolution of an independent strand of ‘institutional critique’ in the work of Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and others, and by comparing Western models of Conceptual practice with the more ideologically-charged practices of artists in Latin America.<sup>24</sup>

Alberro and Norvell’s *Recording Conceptual Art* made available, for the first time, a series of interviews with artists conducted by the latter during 1969. Here, Alberro argues persuasively that, contrary to the usually accepted view

that Conceptual artists rejected the values of art history, many of the interviewees demonstrate “an acute historical awareness or self-consciousness,” that “almost all of them see themselves as historical subjects and strive to insert themselves into a historical narrative.”<sup>25</sup> Alberro develops these claims further in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, where he argues that the entrepreneurial skills of Siegelau assisted his core group of artists in an “unprecedented careerism” and a professionalisation of artistic practice that paralleled developments in the world of business.<sup>26</sup>

Blake Stimson, co-editor with Alberro of the *Anthology*, has argued that most Conceptual art ultimately betrayed its initial liberatory promise by “confin[ing] itself to the laboratory of the art world at a time when such professional specialization had little valence or currency.”<sup>27</sup> Assessments of Conceptual art’s complicity with the mechanisms of the capitalist culture condemn the movement to ‘failure’ and to melancholy reflection on lost Utopian ideals. In this thesis, however, I adopt a more dialectical approach than those who would judge Conceptual art by either its radical independence or its reproduction of dominant social structures. Within the early discourse of Conceptual art, there is a demonstrable rhetoric of dissent from the commodity culture. In reality, however, artists could protest commodification of the artwork and the alienation of labour whilst not wishing to sacrifice their own livelihoods into the bargain. Artists then, as now, were free to reimagine the social function of art in a transformed society, yet had also to secure a means for survival under the prevailing economic and cultural conditions. This is not so much a matter of wanting to have one’s cake and eat it as it is an expression of the desire to change for the better the most uncomfortable aspects of the system within which one is implicated.

Along with Tony Godfrey’s book, Paul Wood’s *Conceptual Art*,<sup>28</sup> has come closest of the recent publications to providing the traditional monograph. Yet Wood’s task is beset by the difficulty of deciding whether Conceptual art should be understood as the art of a quite specific historical moment, or as a descriptor of a broader tendency that characterises almost all contemporary art. “Looked at in one way,” Wood says picturesquely, “Conceptual art gets to be like Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire cat, dissolving away until nothing is left but a grin: a handful of works made over a few short years by a small number of artists.” From a different perspective, “Conceptual art can seem like nothing less than the hinge



around which the past turned into the present.”<sup>29</sup> Within the expanded history of the later 1990s, he observes, Conceptual art takes on a double identity: either as the art of “white male rationalists... a fading, bureaucratic echo of modernism,” or as a pluralistic and engaged postmodernism “*avant la lettre*.” Admirably, Wood declares that one of the tasks of his introduction to Conceptual art is to hold apart these rival senses of the central term.”<sup>30</sup>

Peter Osborne’s major publication ‘Conceptual art’ (2002)<sup>31</sup> is a variation on the critical anthology model.<sup>32</sup> Osborne begins his introductory ‘Survey’ by immediately raising the question of definition. Since Conceptual art was essentially an art of questions, any attempt to define it, he says, “immediately runs up against the problem that definition is one of the key things at stake in Conceptual art itself.”<sup>33</sup> Rejecting the narrowly linguistic definition associated with Conceptual art’s early pioneers in New York and Britain, Osborne favours “a more historically and critically inclusive approach” that highlights instead “the role of ideas in the production of meaning from visual form.”<sup>34</sup> Raising, in this way, the vexed question of Conceptual art’s relationship to a more diffuse conceptualism, Osborne points out that the latter “marks out a terrain that almost all contemporary art inhabits... for all its conceptuality, most contemporary art has a far less critical, and less troubled, relationship to the object of visual perception than a properly – that is polemically – conceptual art.”<sup>35</sup> In this thesis, I have resisted using the term ‘conceptualism’ wherever possible for its lack of specificity, its effacement of significant historical and cultural difference. My work here furthers Osborne’s investigation of this question of definition as it becomes part of the task of the historical exhibition.<sup>36</sup>

Michael Corris has been one writer who has consistently re-emphasized the social dimension of some forms of Conceptual art. Corris was a prominent member of the Art & Language group in New York in the 1970s, and his writings as editor of *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (2004)<sup>37</sup> reflect this involvement. Corris’ editorial texts explode two common but contradictory misapprehensions. First, that Conceptual art was merely an exotic outgrowth from art-for-art’s-sake formalism. Second, that it “embodied the ideal of 1960s counterculture resistance... rang[ing] against the status quo and resid[ing] at the margins of the dominant culture.”<sup>38</sup> By the mid-1960s, Corris argues, it had become clear to many that the status of the Modernist art object was contingent upon a sophisticated critical discourse and a framework of supporting

institutions. Conceptual art turned its attention to the language of art, to its social and institutional supports in order to determine the circumstances under which continuing practice might be possible. “Working and talking with each other,” were, for Corris and others in Art & Language, “a means to construct a discursive space at some ideological and social remove from the institutional order of what was then called ‘normal art.’”<sup>39</sup>

While Conceptual art seemed for some to embody the concerns of the 1960s counterculture – “like everything that happened in 1968, at Columbia and Paris and all other symbolic places is finally being understood”<sup>40</sup> – the understanding of art’s social responsibility that emerged through some sophisticated forms of Conceptual art was a far cry from political sloganeering or activism. Indeed, as Corris explains, it was the strong conviction of certain members of Art & Language that “political art... could only inhibit a realistic understanding of the cultural problems facing artists working under the conditions of late capitalism,” that it constituted “an evasion of the real work of critical self-reflection.”<sup>41</sup>

One consistent aspect of the expanded history to which many of these writers draw attention has been the concern to recognise the significant contribution of female artists to Conceptual art and to re-insert women into the historical narrative. Artists such as Adrian Piper, Lee Lozano, Christine Kozlov and Ingrid Baxter (N.E Thing Co.) played an important role in the early evolution of Conceptual art, while the development of new forms of practice informed by feminist theory (by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Mary Kelly, Martha Rosler and others) was vital to the emergence of strands of post-Conceptual and neo-Conceptual art in the later 1970s and 1980s. However, despite the importance of this contribution, it has to be acknowledged that the art world of the 1960s and early 1970s was still dominated by the work of men. Women frequently found themselves excluded and very often had to discover alternative spaces for exhibition and to nurture alternative networks of communication in order to get their work shown. This necessity sometimes gave the work a distinctly different character. As the artist Susan Hiller has recalled, in the face of their exclusion from the chauvinistic mainstream, female artists in Britain collectively adopted the slogan ‘no minimal standards’ to allow their work to be incorporated into a new notion of ‘art.’<sup>42</sup>

The dilemma now facing writers and exhibition organisers is whether to include only those few (again) who found an opening into the male-dominated mainstream, or to attempt to give a flavour of what was being made and shown in community spaces and theatre foyers and usually denied grant aiding. I am conscious that readers who are hoping to discover in this thesis an examination of women's role in Conceptual art, or of feminist art practice during the period, will find only a discussion (in Chapter Six) of Mary Kelly, Kay Fido Hunt and Margaret Harrison's collaborative work *Women and Work* (figs. 84, 85, 1975). While, in this respect, I cannot be accused of revisionism, I sincerely hope not to have reproduced the sexist attitudes of the art world in the 1960s and early 1970s. Ultimately, I believe that the specific nature of women's and feminist art practice in this period – its utilisation of alternative networks of communication, alternative spaces for exhibition and its appeal to a new notion of 'art' that might involve 'no minimal standards' – warrants sustained scholarly examination in its own right.<sup>43</sup>

### ***The political conscience of Conceptual art, 1960s – 1990s***

In its mainstream Western form (that with which I am primarily concerned in this thesis), the early discourse around Conceptual art was articulated mainly in the vocabulary of a broadly left-liberal politics. Many artists associated with Conceptual art had sympathies with the civil rights and anti-war movements; some became involved with artists' pressure groups such as the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) or Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC).<sup>44</sup> One of the movement's most prominent artists pronounced himself to be "basically a Marxist", but such open declarations of political allegiance were unusual.<sup>45</sup> Between the years 1967 and 1972 – the movement's "crucial period," according to critic and historian Charles Harrison<sup>46</sup> – there was a generally Utopian tone to much writing about Conceptual art, both from artists and supportive critics. This distinguished the critical discourse around Conceptual art from the aestheticism of late Modernist criticism, whose leftist sympathies had receded to the point of near-invisibility in the climate of American anti-Communism after World War II.

By the early-to-mid-1970s, however, the sense that Conceptual art might be able to effect substantive change within the art world and also contribute to wider social reform had largely dissipated. Artists resigned themselves to the pervasive social and economic conditions of late capitalism. In this transformed



intellectual climate, some returned to more traditional forms of practice (in the process, appearing to relinquish any critical/political ambitions for their art), some abandoned their art practice altogether to become involved in more directly political community and trade union work, still others chose to continue in a state of “conscientious paralysis.”<sup>47</sup> For some of those who continued their artistic practice, it seemed possible that to develop new forms of practice informed by feminist, psychoanalytic and semiotic theory might offer a potential way out from the seeming impasse. The broad trend was one from a left-liberal thinking in the civil rights period in the mid-to-late 1960s, to a more overtly socialist, Marxist or Maoist philosophy in the early 1970s (especially, perhaps, in Britain and New York), and, in turn, to various forms of identity politics and/or the politics of representation, often influenced by post-Freudian or Lacanian analysis and post-structuralist critical theory.

By the time that Conceptual art was re-examined in the first major museum retrospective of the late 1980s (*L'Art Conceptuel*), the cultural, intellectual and political climate had again shifted significantly. In the previous decade and a half, there had been a series of critically heralded returns to painting – sometimes thought of as a practice with a special and ineluctable historical value, sometimes as one with the capacity to re-invent itself with a new *post-Conceptual* self-reflexivity. In 1981, the Royal Academy in London announced *A New Spirit In Painting*, an ambitious, large-scale exhibition – one of the most influential of the decade – which championed the “Neo-Expressionist” work of a number of young (and not so young) European painters.

In counterpoint to these developments a younger generation of artists had emerged in the later 1970s whose work seemed to draw upon Conceptual art's interest in language and the photographic image, but who seemed more astute than the older artists about the function of the linguistic and visual sign in the commodity culture. Artists such as Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman were among those whose work was described as Neo-Conceptualist. With works by Neo-Expressionist painters commanding huge sums in the buoyant art market of the mid-1980s, the work of the Neo-Conceptualist artists demonstrated a more ambiguous relationship to the market – on the one hand, sometimes seeming to court its own commodification as evidence of the all-consuming nature of late capitalism, on the other, seeming to

testify to its inheritance from the 'anti-commodity' Conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Opening in the final months of a decade in which the major artistic trends had seemed to be money-driven,<sup>48</sup> *L'Art Conceptual* represented a critical response to the recent cultural situation, and a reminder that the value of art need not be solely monetary. As Juliette Laffon, one of the organisers of the exhibition, told the "agent of art", Ghislain Mollet-Viéville:

The decision to do an exhibit on conceptual art was a reaction against the current scene. We wanted to remind people that art can be rigorous and radical "in attitude and form"... By struggling against materialism, formal complacency and the omnivorous market, the conceptualists were able to explore the essential equation: Art = Thought. In my opinion their rigor and purity are more relevant than ever.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the first major retrospective of Conceptual art identified the now historical 'movement' as one that had defended the purity of the practice of art against the commodification of the artwork. The aspiration to escape the capitalist culture while living within it has a romantic character, especially in retrospect, but as the gallerist Seth Siegelaub has pointed out, the romantic aspect of this attempt has been a facet of the revival of interest in Conceptual art since the late 1980s. In the decades between Conceptual art's first appearance and its re-examination in retrospective survey exhibitions since 1989, the situation of art in the capitalist culture, as Siegelaub has indicated, had changed fundamentally:

The artist no longer thinks of him- or herself as a worker exploited by collectors (public or private)... but considers himself as an art professional... The very idea of the artist as "outsider", "*contestataire*", etc., has become marginal, almost ridiculous in the light of how securely art has been integrated into the center of capitalist life...<sup>50</sup>

The revival of interest in Conceptual art has often seemed tinged with a wistfulness or nostalgia for a time before art was so thoroughly incorporated to the machinery of late capitalism, a time when the artist could still believe in his or her critical distance from the culture industry.

### ***'Failure' and 'recuperation'?***

Given that Conceptual art was seemingly powerless to prevent the sea change in the culture that Siegelau describes, its re-examination in exhibitions since the 1980s has often conveyed a sense of its 'heroic failure'. *L'Art Conceptuel* began the task of situating Conceptual art alongside the already thoroughly institutionalised avant-gardes of the early twentieth century – surrealism, dada, futurism, for example – and Benjamin Buchloh, in his keynote essay for the catalogue, found Conceptual art guilty of having only reproduced the "aesthetic of administration" without being sufficiently aware of the extent to which artistic practice and aesthetic procedures are inscribed in conventions of institutional power.<sup>51</sup>

In an essay entitled 'Escape Attempts', written for the catalogue of *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, Lucy Lippard observed that "Conceptual artists were free to let their imaginations run rampant," but that with hindsight "it is clear that they could have run further." She concluded ruefully that, following the opening up of artistic practices during the Conceptual period, "[a]rt was recaptured and sent back to its white cell."<sup>52</sup>

The exhibition *Global Conceptualism* considered conceptualist practice in a range of non-Western contexts, and although in these contexts Conceptual art often thrived in adversity, by the late 1980s, with the weakening of the communist bloc and a new openness among former communist states toward Western-style neo-liberalism, artists who previously had worked at (or below) the threshold of acceptability to the state sometimes found their work co-opted by governments keen to stage spectacular cultural events. Other artists succumbed to the lure of the market economy and the chance to make lucrative careers for themselves in the West.<sup>53</sup>

For a number of the artists working in Britain whose work was surveyed in *Live in Your Head*, Conceptual art represented not so much a 'heroic failure' as a Pyrrhic victory. "It is a measure of the seditiousness of those works", one critic of the exhibition observed, "that you will never have heard of most of the people who made them."<sup>54</sup> While the austerity of much of the work reflected the artists' disengagement from the marketplace, it was this that allowed them to be forgotten or excluded when more market-friendly forms of art made a return in



the late 1970s. Indeed, before *Live in Your Head* and the publication a little later of noteworthy volumes by John A. Walker and Richard Cork,<sup>55</sup> this period of art in Britain remained something of a historical lacuna.

I have attempted to briefly describe how, from the perspective of these historical exhibitions of Conceptual art, the political thinking that underpinned the early discourse around the movement has been seen as a romantic idealism that doomed it to inevitable failure. In the late 1960s and early 1970s much energy was expended in discussing the concept of an 'anti-art' that might somehow exist separately to the art world of galleries, museums, collectors, dealers and magazines, but it is my argument in this thesis that 'anti-art' can have no meaning independent of art. Such a concept could only be conceived from a position within the discourse of art itself. If, as I explain in Chapter One, the concept of 'anti-art' was nothing more than an aspect of an avant-gardist rhetoric by which artists sought to indicate their radical credentials and to establish a break with earlier art, most historical accounts of Conceptual art have, nonetheless, taken this rhetoric at face value, as evidence of an intrinsically conflictual relationship between progressive artists and a powerfully conservative institutional art world.

Such an approach takes Conceptual art's anti-institutional rhetoric as the standard against which its historical achievements are measured, but this is to judge Conceptual art by impossible criteria – nothing less than the complete transformation of the cultural sphere, or total liberation or escape from it. Inevitably, this leads to assessments of Conceptual art's 'failure' or compromise – its appropriation or 'recuperation' by the institutional art world to which it is presumed to be opposed, but within whose structures, in reality, it found its radical meanings and the conceptual materials for its development. Moreover, such an approach limits interpretation of this rhetoric to its overt content, ignoring the fact that the meanings of such discourses are framed by the specific spaces from which they are enunciated. This thesis proposes an alternative methodological approach that recognizes the fact that even dissenting forms of artistic practice are constructed within the complex system of social and economic relationships that constitute the art world.

Chapter One begins this task by accounting for Conceptual art in terms of its emergence through and within the conventionalised discourses of the art world

and in its relationship to the institutional structures against which it ostensibly directed its critique. In giving such an account I draw upon some aspects of Raymond Williams's analysis of the dynamics of culture, presented most clearly in his essay 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' and in the book *Marxism and Literature*.<sup>56</sup> Williams's analysis develops the earlier Marxist analyses of writers such as Louis Althusser, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Antonio Gramsci that would have been familiar to many in the art world, especially following the disturbances in Paris during May 1968.<sup>57</sup> My use of Williams is not intended to revivify an approximately contemporaneous discourse (it is not an attempt to inhabit the intellectual space of artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s), rather, I return to Williams' texts for their usefulness in showing a way out of the 'containment' or 'entrapment' models of culture implied by some writers in the Marxist tradition and in later strands of post-structuralist thought. 'Containment' theories of culture describe how even practices that might be supposed to challenge the dominant ideology ultimately only re-enforce its structures of power. Resistance is seen as complicit within the very structures it seeks to subvert, confirming existing relations of power and reflecting the strategies and structures of the dominant. If historical exhibitions have tended to present Conceptual art as a 'heroic failure,' this is because its critique of the art world, and of the broader culture of which it is a part, has been thought to have been contained in just such a way. Thus: Benjamin Buchloh's claim that Conceptual art reproduced the aesthetic of the post-war administrative culture, and artist Margaret Harrison's admission that "Conceptual art was a mirror image of the art world it criticised."<sup>58</sup>

It is one advantage of the approach outlined by Williams that it allows us to go beyond the issue of 'containment' and to re-discover scope for resistance within the faults and inevitable incompleteness of the dominant formation itself. Williams drew upon Gramsci's notion of hegemony as a way of theorising not only the power of ideology as "deeply saturating the consciousness of society", but also as offering within itself opportunities and spaces for dissidence. "We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular," Williams wrote, "indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified."<sup>59</sup> Because, from the whole range of meanings and practices available both in the past and present, the dominant culture must emphasize some while excluding others, there is the

potential for alternative and oppositional forms to co-exist with the dominant culture.

Williams gives us the concepts of “dominant,” “residual” and “emergent” as tools with which to analyse the shifting, dynamic nature of a culture. Within the dominant formation – that is, within that body of meanings, values, practices that is at any one time most powerful and hegemonic – a residual culture may be lived and experienced on the basis of those elements of an earlier social formation that have not been wholly effaced in the present. The residual typically exists in an unstable relationship to the dominant, neither dispensable nor fully assimilable to its interests. Within the dominant there may also be emergent elements, which develop from new sets of social interactions within changing societies, “the new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, [that] are continually being created.”<sup>60</sup> Residual and emergent elements may be either ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ to the dominant culture. The alternative may be tolerated, overlooked, even encouraged as long as it does not challenge the dominant, but when an element becomes oppositional in an explicit way it will be approached and absorbed in order to contain its threat.

In Chapter One I adapt Williams’ concepts to analyse the discourse around Conceptual art in the mid-to-late-1960s. Proposing that the Modernist criticism of Clement Greenberg and his followers was still effectively hegemonic in the art world until the mid-1960s, I examine Conceptual art as an emergent tendency that also drew significantly on residual elements of the early twentieth century avant-gardes. Though he is often thought of as one of the chief architects of ‘containment’ theory, Michel Foucault rejected the notion that resistance could only be a “a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.”<sup>61</sup> In the same chapter, I also draw upon Foucault’s notion of a “reverse discourse” to show how attempts by Modernist critics to traduce Conceptual practices in fact helped to clarify what was distinctively transgressive about them, allowing artists to appropriate the ideas and vocabulary originally intended to denigrate.

Conceptual art rapidly made the transition from an overlooked alternative to something that more explicitly challenged the dominant, and in Chapter Two I describe the processes by which the mainstream attempted to approach and



'incorporate' Conceptual art during the 1970s, but also promoted the return of more traditional forms of art. The courting of dissident or alternative practices, on the one hand, and their suppression, on the other, are part of a single process by which the dominant culture contains and controls their threat. Crucially, the chapter also shows how Conceptual art was able to elude 'recapture'. The process of assimilation, most conspicuous, perhaps, in the *Documenta V* exhibition of 1973, occasioned a new critical self-awareness on the part of the artists, leading to the development of radical forms of art increasingly influenced, as I have indicated, by feminist, psychoanalytic and semiotic theory. Ultimately, it must be acknowledged that Conceptual art profoundly transformed the dominant culture that incorporated it. More than thirty years after its first manifestations, not only has 'Conceptualism' become all pervasive, if not dominant, in the artworld,<sup>62</sup> but it has radically transformed the consciousness of museums and galleries as well as the practice of art history.

The theoretical approaches I have outlined here are expanded upon in Chapters One and Two, but they also underpin my analysis in the later case studies. My discussion of key works and practices by artists such as Michael Asher, Art & Language, John Baldessari, Ian Burn, Conrad Atkinson and the collaboration of Margaret Harrison, Kay Fido Hunt and Mary Kelly, understands them in terms of their articulation from within specific institutional and social locations, mapping their relations with wider discursive formations. I show how, far from being co-opted, recuperated or contained by institutional narratives, they were able, for differing reasons, to create a moment of discontinuity that revealed the constructedness of the exhibition, its being a product itself of a culturally and historically specific practice despite its attempts to pass itself off as a natural and neutral representation.

### ***An exhibitionary history***

To a considerable extent, the four exhibitions I have mentioned were self-selecting as the subjects of this thesis. Other retrospective survey exhibitions of Conceptual art have taken place, however. Only a year before *L'Art Conceptuel* was seen in Paris, the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Bordeaux had presented its own exhibition, *Art Conceptuel 1* (1988),<sup>63</sup> and with the subsequent appearance of *Art Conceptuel, Formes Conceptuelles* (Galerie 1900/2000, Paris, 1990)<sup>64</sup> and *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art* (University Art Museum, Santa

Barbara, 1992),<sup>65</sup> four exhibitions on the subject had taken place in as many years. These exhibitions, however, were either smaller in scale and ambition than those selected for the case studies, or were assembled without the resources of a major institution at their disposal.<sup>66</sup> Since 2000, there have been three notable exhibitions that have contributed to the further re-evaluation of the Conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s: *Conception: Conceptual Documents 1968-1972* at the Norwich Gallery (2001),<sup>67</sup> *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium, 1965-1975* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2002)<sup>68</sup> and *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, at Tate Modern, London (2005).<sup>69</sup> The latter two exhibitions took place while research was already in progress, and, although all three are referred to at points in this thesis, the decision was taken not to consider them in any depth because of the need to establish a cut-off point to the period of study.<sup>70</sup>

Notwithstanding the selectivity involved in identifying only four exhibitions for consideration in this thesis, it is probably fair to say that these exhibitions defined themselves as the most important contributions to an exhibitionary history of Conceptual art.<sup>71</sup> In 1989, *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Fig. 1), was the first major museum exhibition to examine the art of the late 1960s and 1970s. Its organisers, Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf, professed to be unconcerned with Conceptual art's legacy in the present, and rather than tracing Conceptual art's living influence for contemporary artists, they chose to consider it as a relatively discrete historical entity. As Claude Gintz told Mollet-Viéville:

[W]e were not directly concerned with the movement's influence on more recent artists. I would certainly not deny that there has been such an influence, but that is not the perspective we had in mind. The exhibit is a retrospective. We wanted to show how the conceptualization of art that began after World War II culminated in the late '60s and early '70s.<sup>72</sup>

As the first major historical exhibition on the subject, one of the primary concerns of *L'Art Conceptuel* was to account for this art in terms of its relationship to an earlier counter-Modernist tendency, and thus to locate Conceptual art firmly within the art history of the twentieth-century. Conceptual art, the exhibition sought to demonstrate, had drawn upon, and further developed, some of the methods and ideas employed by European artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein, which could themselves be

traced back to the early twentieth-century avant-gardes. Surrealism and Dada had received their institutional legitimation more than twenty years before,<sup>73</sup> and if Conceptual art could be understood as a continuation from them, then its own art historical validity and its place in the museum of modern art could be assured. It was an inevitable consequence of the exhibition that some shift would take place, both in the way particular works were perceived and in the way the broader Conceptual art 'movement' was itself regarded. Acknowledging the need to be open about the transformations involved, Gintz, Laffon and Scherf were "very aware that they were contributing to the history of the movement."<sup>74</sup>

No less than the curators of *L'Art Conceptuel*, those who worked on the exhibition *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975* for LA MoCA (Fig. 2) were convinced of the importance of their own contribution to an ongoing history of Conceptual art. The curators, Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, professed their hopes that the exhibition might provide an opportunity for reflection, reconsideration, expansion and revision of a history that was "still relatively misunderstood and highly contested – particularly in the United States."<sup>75</sup> In her 'Preface' to the catalogue of the Paris exhibition, museum director Suzanne Pagé had questioned why the responsibility to begin the historicization of Conceptual art had fallen to a European museum when many of the principal protagonists had been American.<sup>76</sup> *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, the first major exhibition on the subject of Conceptual art to be shown in the United States, was, perhaps, a belated response to Pagé's question. Reclaiming it from the tradition of the European avant-gardes, *Reconsidering the Object of Art* re-emphasized Conceptual art's emergence in the moment of crisis of a Western – more specifically, American – Modernism.

Unlike the earlier Parisian exhibition, *Reconsidering the Object of Art* sought to highlight the important influence of Conceptual art for the generations of artists who came after. As Goldstein and Rorimer explained, this period in art, "so pivotal in its introduction of a new approach to the conception, production, and experience of works of art, is key to an appropriate understanding of post-modernism and the work of the "post-Conceptual" generation of artists that emerged in the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s."<sup>77</sup> Despite the fact that *Reconsidering the Object of Art* brought together artists from Europe, Canada



and North America, its emphasis was nevertheless firmly on those aspects of its topic that seemed most relevant in the context of the United States' recent past.

*Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980* was a response to those earlier written and visual histories of Conceptual art, including the exhibitions in Paris and Los Angeles, which its curators felt had unduly favoured work produced in the metropolitan centres of the Western art world. *Global Conceptualism* claimed that Conceptual practices emerged spontaneously in various locations around the world in response to specific local factors, and not because artists there had adopted models of practice then current in New York or Western Europe. As the curators, Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, admitted, there was thus a tension in the project between the requirement to correct the existing histories, and the desire to radically shift the discussion away from a critical discourse that presumed particular relationships of power and influence between 'centre' and 'periphery.' It was significant, therefore, that the exhibition took place at the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows (Fig. 3), a museum on New York's own periphery, and as one critic pointed out, symbolically "closer to Gotham's major airports than its art ghettos."<sup>78</sup>

While *Global Conceptualism* intended to "revise conventional historicizations of conceptual art," it did so through "the strategic addition of multiple, poorly known histories presented as equal corollaries rather than as appendages to a central axis of activity."<sup>79</sup> The exhibition necessarily entailed a process of redefinition if it was to avoid the possibility of the whole enterprise being read through the lens of Conceptual art, hence, the curators' attempt to identify the category of "conceptualism" as one that might establish its own meanings and conditions rather than being subsumed under an existing rubric.<sup>80</sup>

*Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* opened at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery (Fig. 4) in the spring of 2000 while *Global Conceptualism* was still fresh in the memory - indeed, while the latter exhibition was still on tour to other institutions in the United States. If the claim of *Global Conceptualism* had been for the transcendence of the traditional topology of art history through the model of a decentred conglomerate of provinces, the premise of *Live in Your Head* seemed somewhat retrogressive in its ostensible recourse to the nationalistic representation of art produced "in Britain."<sup>81</sup>

The exhibition's curators, Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia claimed, however, that their aim was not "to define 'Britishness' in the works selected." In the exhibition catalogue, they admitted to the seeming perversity of presenting an exhibition of art in Britain from a period that was characterised by the internationalism of its outlook. They remarked, however, that it might be desirable to "question the extent of this 'internationalism', the limited points of reference used to define the period, and the extent to which we have yet to appreciate the true significance of artistic practices outside Western countries."<sup>82</sup> If *Live in Your Head* could show that art in Britain during the late 1960s and early 1970s employed many of the same procedures as in other countries worldwide, with a similar sense of the fluidity between artistic disciplines and media, then an exhibition that might otherwise have seemed quaintly parochial might instead succeed in demonstrating the ultimate redundancy of artistic nationalisms during this period.

Conscious of their contribution to an ongoing historiography, the curators noted that "[a] number of international exhibitions have recently re-examined the artistic legacy of the 60s and 70s," and hoped that their own exhibition would "lead to the perception of further linkages or aspects of this seminal, and still provocative, period."<sup>83</sup> With an implicit nod to the critical language developed by *Global Conceptualism*, Phillpot and Tarsia explained that *Live in Your Head* sought to "clarify the points of origin of a formative generation in British art," but as the first major retrospective of conceptual and experimental art in Britain, *Live In Your Head* made a valid historical contribution of its own.<sup>84</sup>

This thesis seeks to understand how Conceptual art has been produced as a historical category through these contrasting exhibitions, and to examine the ways in which works of Conceptual art have been called upon to support varied curatorial narratives. It recognizes that since the late 1980s exhibitions have significantly expanded critical and historical understandings of Conceptual art (sometimes elaborating on, sometimes challenging previous models), and it accounts for the particularity of each of the four major exhibitions in their contemporary cultural contexts, both for what we might learn about Conceptual art in its shifting moments of reception, and in order to better understand the function of history in the present.

## ***Research methodologies***

My discussion of these exhibitions occurs in the four case studies that comprise the major part of this thesis. There are two main reasons why a 'case studies' approach seemed appropriate. First, that the sustained analysis of a case study would allow a clearer understanding of each exhibition's distinct contribution to the construction of a history of Conceptual art. To subsume discussion of each exhibition within themed chapters, for example, would produce a more fragmented, repetitious and confusing text. Additionally, with the case studies appearing in chronological order, this approach would allow the reader to better comprehend the sequential logic of these exhibitions – each new exhibition effectively commenting upon and revising previous representations – as the revival of interest and the re-evaluation of Conceptual art progressed after 1989.

The second reason for adopting a case studies approach is as a response to the fact that each of these exhibitions raised a pertinent issue (usually more than one such issue) in relation to the problems encountered in exhibiting Conceptual art after twenty or thirty years, or in the ways in which history may be constructed through the medium of the exhibition: issues such as the availability of verifiable data and historical precedence in *L'Art Conceptuel*, of Conceptual art's historical relationship to Modernism in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, of the relationship of a geographically specific Conceptual art to more globally dispersed conceptualist practices in *Global Conceptualism*, and of spectacularisation and the ways in which theory/practice may be displayed (or not) in *Live In Your Head*, for instance. These are pressing concerns in the contemporary moment of Conceptual art's re-evaluation, and each deserved to be treated in its own right. Each case study also served as a lens through which to examine a number of key issues in the original moment of Conceptual art's critical reception, however: issues of intentionality, 'dematerialisation', internationalism and the social function of art, to name just four. My methodology in adopting a 'case studies' approach, therefore, is not to treat these exhibitions as discrete and self-contained phenomena, but to show how they both draw upon and contribute to the shifting historical discourse of Conceptual art.

It is my emphasis on the exhibition as a discursive field that differentiates my approach from those who have emphasized the exhibition's visual or aesthetic



dimension. Curators of retrospective exhibitions of Conceptual art draw upon a whole range of visual and linguistic materials at every stage of an exhibition's conception and organisation. The range of these materials reflects the reality that the meaning of Conceptual is not to be deduced from works of art alone, but is constituted in and across a variety of further 'texts' – exhibitions, exhibition catalogues, magazines, artists' writings, critical and historical literature, lectures. In the case studies, and in the thesis as a whole, I have drawn upon a similar range of materials to the curators themselves, while considering also those rhetorical devices – systems of display, itineraries, floor plans, didactics, provision of reading rooms – through which the exhibition is produced as a strategic representation. Through an analysis of the use of these texts, I subject the curatorial premise to critical scrutiny while treating the exhibition as a prism through which to examine key issues at stake in the early discourse around Conceptual art.

In addition to the diverse sources I have described, I have also conducted a number of interviews with artists and curators as a further method of critical enquiry. The interviews were conducted both orally and by telephone, and took place over thirty months between January 2003 and July 2005, a period approximately coinciding with the main body of primary research. Interviews proceeded from a central core of questions with the respondent having the lassitude to answer as they saw fit, before being allowed the opportunity to raise any further points of concern. The interviews were not primarily intended as a form of oral history, rather as opportunities to reflect upon ethical and philosophical issues arising in the presentation of historical survey exhibitions. Nevertheless, a certain amount of anecdotal detail was inevitable. The kind of data acquired through interview cannot be regarded as a neutral or more authentic form of history. It will reflect both interviewer and interviewee's subjective prejudices and experience, and may be subject to inconsistencies of memory, to hyperbole and other conversational rhetorics. Material acquired in this way was therefore subjected to the same critical scrutiny as that from archival or published sources, and where possible was cross-referenced against them.

Though the curators of historical exhibitions will typically include a foreword in their catalogues, these generally offer little useful information about the work involved in conceiving, organising and presenting an exhibition to the public.

Major exhibitions, such as those discussed in this thesis, tend to appear as *faits accomplis*, with their contingent aspects and the faultlines of their premises made to disappear by authorial sleight of hand. Thus it was considered important to approach members of the curatorial teams responsible for each of the four exhibitions in order to gain a better understanding of the practices and procedures involved in mounting them. While it proved impossible to obtain interviews with all of the curators concerned, those individuals who agreed to an interview were, for the most part, extremely forthcoming and frank in discussing their aims for their respective exhibitions, and the compromises necessary in the light of many and varied practical considerations. Through these discussions I was able to obtain a much clearer understanding of the difficult work of organising a major public exhibition.

Artists have frequently been more willing to talk about their experiences of involvement in group exhibitions than curators have been about their experiences of working on them. It was important, though, to try to obtain some feedback from artists concerning their participation in the specific exhibitions examined in this thesis. Artist interviewees were asked to reflect upon the historicization of Conceptual art *as a movement* within these exhibitions, and to express any opinions about the role of their own work, within the exhibition, as assisting or, possibly, resisting this process. Again, circumstances meant that not all of the artists I would have liked to interview on these matters were available or willing to comment. Nevertheless, those interviews that were carried out were generally very informative and reflected a range of opinion from those who thought the retrospective survey exhibition inevitably tended toward a “lowest common denominator” representation of Conceptual art, to those who felt that their own work functioned within these exhibitions quite independently of curatorial intention and institutional ambition.

The interviews were considered an integral part of research for this thesis, and were a crucial means of mapping human experience onto the impersonal theoretical dichotomies of institutional containment versus artistic freedom, conservatism versus radicalism, dominant and dominated, in the process of transcending them.

As this Introduction has explained, Conceptual art has typically been assumed to be critical of dominant structures in the art world, and resistant to its

incorporation to institutional narratives. This thesis offers a new way of thinking about Conceptual art in which the old “oppositional” model of radical artists versus conservative institutions is replaced by one which recognizes the rhetorics of artistic independence and institutional domination as products themselves of art world discourse. It examines the construction of Conceptual art as a historical category through the medium of the retrospective survey exhibition, and it seeks to understand the ways in which works of art may be called upon to support loaded curatorial narratives. At the same time, it attempts to discover to what extent works of art may continue to signify independently of curatorial intention, to resist their conditions of display. Inclusion in the retrospective survey exhibition does not necessarily effect the works’ institutionalisation; by re-emphasizing the performative and discursive aspects of Conceptual art that have consistently been downplayed in historical survey exhibitions, this thesis shows how works of Conceptual art may avoid their containment by the exhibition and, instead, may continue to perform their critical function.



- <sup>1</sup> Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, 'Introduction', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. by Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-4 (p. 2).
- <sup>2</sup> *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, ex. cat., ed. by Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989–18 February 1990); *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.; London: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 15 October 1995-4 February 1996); *Global Conceptualism: points of origin, 1950s-1980s*, ex. cat., ed. by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 28 April-29 August 1999); *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain*, ex. cat., ed. by Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 4 February-2 April 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Claude Gintz's claim in the catalogue for *L'Art Conceptuel* that, "[i]f we start from the principle that the issue which gave birth to conceptual art was a form of resistance to the 'commercialization' of art, to its commodification, this may be because such commodification was just on the verge of taking a new step, reaching another level... a bit like, in the realm of the political, May '68 may be read retrospectively as the refusal of something which was proclaiming itself, like the last revolutionary gesture within the heart of the developed capitalist world." Seth Siegelaub, 'Some Remarks on So-Called 'Conceptual Art': Extracts from Interviews with Robert Horvitz (1987) and Claude Gintz (1989)', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, pp. 91-94 (pp. 92-93).
- <sup>4</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Nai, 2004). Taking up Duncan's qualification, Julia Noordegraaf has proposed that the notion of 'script,' developed in the field of the sociology of technology, can be employed to reveal and analyse the actual use of the museum by its visitors. As Noordegraaf explains, the term refers to the implicit set of instructions for use inscribed in a technological (or cultural) object by its designers. An analysis of the script of museum presentation, therefore, would "bring to the fore the set of instructions that defines the relationship between the museum and its audience." (p. 15) Although Duncan also uses the idea of the 'script,' hers is a more literary usage that refers to the museum's staging of a structured narrative to be enacted by its visitors. In Noordegraaf's sense of the term, the 'script' is more open to its being re-written by visitors whose use and understanding of the exhibits, and whose itineraries through the exhibition space will reflect their own prior dispositions. As much as museum displays *act upon* their viewers psychologically and behaviourally, they are also *conditioned by* the habits of viewers thoroughly versed in the visual culture. "The notion of the script," therefore, "does more justice to the fact that museum presentations are the product of both its designers *and* its users." (p. 17)
- <sup>7</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, p. 13.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*, ed. by Charles W. Haxthausen (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2003), p. xiv.
- <sup>9</sup> See, for example, Andreas Beyer, 'Between Academic and Exhibition Practice: The Case of Renaissance Studies', in *The Two Art Histories*, pp. 25-31.

- <sup>10</sup> Mollet-Viéville, Ghislain, 'L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective', interview with Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Suzanne Pagé, *Galleries Magazine* (October/November 1989), 100-103 (p. 102).
- <sup>11</sup> In Chapter Three, for example, I discuss how, in the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel*, the (near-) chronological progression through a series of rooms dedicated to 'proto-Conceptual' practices, post-Minimalism and serial art seemed designed to privilege the *Proto-Investigations* of Joseph Kosuth as the inaugural works of Conceptual art. In Chapter Six, in my discussion of *Live In Your Head*, I indicate the emphasis placed on the notion of a *tabula rasa* by siting together near the entrance to the exhibition John Latham's *Still and Chew* (the end of Modernism), Bob Law's *Number 95. Mr Paranoia IV 20.11.70* (the end of painting) and Roelof Louw's *Pyramid: Soul City* (the end of sculpture).
- <sup>12</sup> The realisation that curators were becoming supremely powerful figures in the art world with the power to co-opt artists' work to the production of ever bigger cultural spectacles was the basis of Daniel Buren's criticism of Harald Szeemann's *Documenta V*. For my discussion of these developments, see Chapter Two.
- <sup>13</sup> Blake Stimson, 'The Promise of Conceptual Art', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), pp. xxxviii-liv (p. xlv).
- <sup>14</sup> Meyer, Ursula, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972).
- <sup>15</sup> The full title, running to nearly ninety words, occupied the entire cover of the publication: *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard* (New York: Praeger, 1973, reprinted London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
- <sup>16</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998)
- <sup>17</sup> Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, p. 15.
- <sup>18</sup> Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 6, 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Michael Newman and Jon Bird eds., 'Introduction' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion, 1999), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).
- <sup>20</sup> Newman and Bird, 'Introduction', p. 6.
- <sup>21</sup> Newman and Bird, 'Introduction', p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegel, Smithson, Weiner*, by Patricia Norvell, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2001).
- <sup>23</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2003).
- <sup>24</sup> Alberro, 'Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. xvi-xxxvii.
- <sup>25</sup> Alberro, 'At the Threshold of Art as Information', in *Recording Conceptual Art*, pp. 1-18 (p. 4).
- <sup>26</sup> Alberro, 'The Contradictions of Conceptual Art', in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, pp. 1-5 (p. 1).
- <sup>27</sup> Stimson, 'The Promise of Conceptual Art', p. xlv.
- <sup>28</sup> Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate, 2002).



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- <sup>29</sup> Wood, *Conceptual Art*, p. 6.
- <sup>30</sup> Wood, *Conceptual Art*, p. 9.
- <sup>31</sup> Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002).
- <sup>32</sup> The volume includes a 'Documents' section that reproduces a number of key texts (organised thematically) and includes a sub-section dedicated to Conceptual art's 'pre-history' (1950-1960). The 'Works' section includes numerous illustrations with a brief commentary on each, and in an introductory 'Survey', the author provides his own critical analysis of Conceptual art. Osborne hoped that this approach would provide "the basis of a new critical history of conceptual art," in which "critical writings by conceptual artists are as much a part of this history as their works." (p. 11) While I agree that writings by Conceptual artists should not be treated only as secondary information, as my brief discussion of the earlier publications by Meyer and Lippard has shown, it is doubtful whether this is such a groundbreaking approach as Osborne suggests.
- <sup>33</sup> Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, p. 14.
- <sup>34</sup> Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, p. 11.
- <sup>35</sup> Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, p. 18.
- <sup>36</sup> In the light of Osborne's discussion in his 'Survey', Chapter Five in the present volume examines the distinction between conceptualism and Conceptual art made by *Global Conceptualism*. I argue that the attempt to represent this distinction as between, on the one hand, the radical and socially engaged practices of non-Westerners, and, on the other, the geographically privileged yet formalist work of European and American artists, effectively effaces the social dimension of much work in the Euro-American context.
- <sup>37</sup> *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, Practice*, ed. by Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- <sup>38</sup> Corris, *Conceptual Art*, p. 269.
- <sup>39</sup> Corris, *Conceptual Art*, p. 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Gregory Battcock, 'Painting is Obsolete', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 88-89 (p. 88). The article was first published in *New York Free Press*, 23 January 1969, p. 7.
- <sup>41</sup> Corris, *Conceptual Art*, p. 276.
- <sup>42</sup> Susan Hiller, interview with the author, 7 March 2005.
- <sup>43</sup> Hazel Frizell's forthcoming PhD thesis, 'Representations of Specific Concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement in British feminist art, 1970-78' (Kingston University), will make an important contribution in this still under-researched area.
- <sup>44</sup> See Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: Dutton, 1984). The activities of these organisations very often brought artists into open conflict with the museums where they hoped to show their work. See Lucy R. Lippard, 'Biting the Hand That Feeds', in *Alternative Art, New York, 1965 – 1985*, ed. by Julie Ault (New York; Minneapolis; London: The Drawing Centre; University of Minneapolis Press, 2002).
- <sup>45</sup> Lawrence Weiner, 'At Amsterdam', interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* 4 (spring 1972), 66-73, p. 70.
- <sup>46</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Conceptual Art and Critical Judgement', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 538-545 (p. 538). Reprinted from the exhibition catalogue, *Art Conceptuel, Formes Conceptuelles*, ex. cat., ed by Christian Schlatter (Paris: Galerie 1900/2000; Galerie de Poche, 1990).
- <sup>47</sup> Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith, *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*, published as *Art-Language* 3, no. 1 (September 1974), p. 93.
- <sup>48</sup> See the views of Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner in *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), pp. 59 – 68, discussed in Chapter Two.



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- <sup>49</sup> Mollet-Viéville, 'L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective', p. 103. "Agent d'art" was a term chosen deliberately by Mollet-Viéville as one which implied a more dynamic relationship between the artist and his/her representative than the more usual 'dealer' or 'gallerist'. See, Paul Ardenne, 'Ghislain Mollet-Viéville: A Very Special Agent' < <http://www.conceptual-art.net/agentus.html> > (14/01/2007).
- <sup>50</sup> Seth Siegelaub, 'Some Remarks on So-Called 'Conceptual Art': Extracts from Interviews with Robert Horvitz (1987) and Claude Gintz (1989)', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, pp. 91-94 (p. 92).
- <sup>51</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962-1969)', in *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, pp. 41-53. For Buchloh, some of the paradoxes of Conceptual practices were that "the critical annihilation of cultural conventions itself immediately acquires the condition of the spectacle, that the insistence on artistic anonymity and the demolition of authorship produces instant brand names and identifiable products, and that the campaign to critique conventions of visuality with textual interventions, billboard signs, anonymous handouts, and pamphlets inevitably ends up by following the preestablished mechanisms of advertising and marketing campaigns." (p. 140)
- <sup>52</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, 'Escape Attempts', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, pp. 38-39 (pp. 17, 38).
- <sup>53</sup> See, for example, Margarita Tupitsyn, 'About Early Soviet Conceptualism' (pp. 98-107), Sun Wan-kyung, 'From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea' (pp. 118-125) and Gao Minglu, 'Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong' (pp. 126-139) in *Global Conceptualism*.
- <sup>54</sup> Charles Darwent, 'Now You See It, Now You Don't', *The Independent*, 6 February 2000, 5.
- <sup>55</sup> John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*, (London; New York: I.B. Taurus, 2002); Richard Cork, *Everything Seemed Possible: Art in the 1970s* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003). Before these publications, the only detailed surveys of this period were provided by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's history of feminist activity in Britain, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970 – 1985* (London: Pandora, 1987) and a collection of essays edited by Bart Moore-Gilbert which included a chapter by Stuart Sillars devoted to the 'new art', feminist practices and performance. 'Is it possible for me to do nothing as my contribution?', in Bart Moore-Gilbert, *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 259 – 280.
- <sup>56</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 31-49; *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- <sup>57</sup> See, for example, Gregory Battcock, 'Marcuse and Anti-Art', *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 8 (Summer 1969), 17-19, 'Marcuse and Anti-Art II', *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 2 (November 1969), 20-22, and Ursula Meyer, 'The Eruption of Anti-Art, in *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 116 – 134.
- <sup>58</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962-1969)', in *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, pp. 41-53; Margaret Harrison, 'Statement' in *Live in Your Head*, p. 95.
- <sup>59</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', pp. 37-38.
- <sup>60</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', p. 41.

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- <sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 96.
- <sup>62</sup> See the views of Bird and Newman, in their 'Introduction'.
- <sup>63</sup> *Art Conceptuel 1*, Musée d'Art Contemporain, 7 October – 27 November 1988. The exhibiting artists were Art & Language, Robert Barry, Hanne Darboven, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner.
- <sup>64</sup> *Art Conceptuel, Formes Conceptuelles*, Galerie 1900/2000, 8 October – 3 November 1990. Exhibition catalogue edited by Christian Schlatter. The exhibiting artists were Vito Acconci, Vincenzo Agnetti, Art & Language, Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Mel Bochner, Alighiero E. Boetti, Stanley Brouwn, Chris Burden, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Braco Dimitrijevic, Barry Flanagan, Terry Fox, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke, Douglas Huebler, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, Christine Kozlov, David Lamelas, Barry Le Va, Les Levine, Robert Long, Robert Morris, Robert Mouraud, Maurizio Nannucci, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Mel Ramsden, Allen Ruppersberg, John Stezaker, Bernar Venet, Lawrence Weiner, Ian Wilson.
- <sup>65</sup> *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art*, University Art Museum, 8 January – 23 February 1992. Exhibition catalogue edited by Frances Colpitt and Phyllis Plous. The exhibiting artists were Art & Language, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, David Bunn, Sarah Charlesworth, Clegg & Guttman, Douglas Huebler, Mike Kelley, Joseph Kosuth, Louise Lawler, Glenn Ligon, Thomas Locher, Antonella Piemontese, Stephen Prina, Richard Prince, Buzz Spector, Lawrence Weiner and Christopher Williams.
- <sup>66</sup> *L'Art Conceptuel 1* included only seven artists or groups, for example, while Galerie 1900/2000, the venue for *Art Conceptuel, Formes Conceptuelles* is privately-run by David and Marcel Fleiss.
- <sup>67</sup> *Conception: Conceptual Documents 1968-1972*, ex. cat., ed. by Catherine Moseley (Norwich: Norwich Gallery, Norwich School of Art and Design, 2001).
- <sup>68</sup> *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium, 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Suzanna Héman, Jurrie Poot, and Hripsimé Visser (Amsterdam; Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum; Nai, 2002).
- <sup>69</sup> *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, ex. cat., ed. by Donna De Salvo (London, Tate, 2005).
- <sup>70</sup> While *Open Systems* attempted to provide only a snapshot of Conceptual activity circa 1970, it encountered the common difficulty of seeking to understand the work of the period in terms of a grand interpretive paradigm: one which emphasized approaches influenced by systems theory. The exhibitions in Norwich and (to a lesser extent) Amsterdam, were informative counterpoints to this approach, demonstrating what can be achieved through a more limited frame of analysis: in the former case, an emphasis on the role and/or influence of the Conceptual art document, and in the latter, of particular galleries and collectors.
- <sup>71</sup> The possible exception here is the apologetically parochial *Live In Your Head* which is considered partly because of its importance in the British context from which the author writes, but also because the exhibition raised important questions about provinciality in the international art world and the geographical 'home' of Conceptual art. I examine these questions in chapter six.
- <sup>72</sup> Mollet-Vieville, 'L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective', p. 101.
- <sup>73</sup> The major exhibition 'Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage', for example, had been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York between 27 March and 9 June 1968. The exhibition later travelled to the County Museum of Art, Los Angeles and the Art Institute of Chicago. Ex. cat., ed. by William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968). In a rehearsal of the kinds of complaint



that would later be voiced in relation to historical exhibitions of Conceptual art, reviewers of the exhibition criticized its ordered, historical presentation of practices that were felt to have been revolutionary, both politically and aesthetically. See Dore Ashton, 'New York Commentary', *Studio International* 175, no. 901 (June 1968), 320-322.

<sup>74</sup> Mollet-Vieville, 'L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective', p. 103.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, 'Introduction', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, pp. 13-15 (p. 15).

<sup>76</sup> Pagé wrote: "Why has it been left, once again, to Europe, precisely at this moment (just as it had been Europe who immediately acknowledged its inception) to reactivate an artistic practice seen, in many respects, as mythically exemplary in its rigor, its radicality, and in the involvement of its principal protagonists, most of whom were American?" 'Preface', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, pp. 11-12 (p.11).

<sup>77</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Frank, 'Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde 1957-1963; Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s', *Art/Text* 67 (November 1999-January 2000), 90-91 (p. 90).

<sup>79</sup> Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, 'Foreword', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. vii-xi (p. xi).

<sup>80</sup> Rachel Weiss, interview with the author, 28 November 2004.

<sup>81</sup> The exhibition was dedicated to art "in Britain," rather than to British art. The phrase was employed deliberately as it did not discriminate against the many artists working in Britain who had come here from abroad, and who had contributed significantly to the vitality of artistic practices in Britain at that time. See Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, 'Introduction', in *Live in Your Head*, pp. 6-7 (p. 6), and Clive Phillpot and Matthew Higgs, 'In Conversation', in *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (No. 1)* ed. by Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead; Newcastle upon Tyne: BALTIC; University of Newcastle, 2000), pp. 53-94 (p. 56-57).

<sup>82</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', pp. 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> A small number of the artists in the exhibition had managed to maintain international reputations in the intervening decades – Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert and George, Susan Hiller, Mary Kelly and Richard Long, for example. However, in the later 1970s and throughout much of the 1980s, many of the other participating artists, and much of their work, had disappeared from public view as the more traditional practice of painting made a series of 'triumphal' returns. Some artists were consequently difficult to trace, and one declined the invitation to take part; others refused to contribute particular works, or used their allotted space in the catalogue to rail against the academic historicization of the period. See, Clive Phillpot and Matthew Higgs, 'In Conversation'; Margaret Harrison, 'Statement', in *Live in Your Head*, p. 95.

As Catherine Lampert, the Whitechapel's director, admitted, preparing and presenting the exhibition had required "a special kind of archaeology and tolerance." In order that alternative histories might be recovered, it was necessary that the exhibition adopt a more inclusive approach, rather than focusing on the small number of canonical works usually taken to define the period. The topicality of much of the work produced, and the ephemerality of its materials, meant that many works were no longer extant, however. A number of works were therefore recreated for the exhibition, and although this provoked a number of philosophical questions about the works' ontology, it was ultimately felt that the story of Conceptual and experimental art between



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1965 and 1975 was, in Lampert's words, "more about intellectual and cultural freedoms than... about a movement or 'ism' centred upon reputations and artefacts important to a museum approach." Catherine Lampert, 'Foreword', in *Live in Your Head*, pp. 4-5 (p. 4).

## Chapter One

### Conceptual art and the Conditions of Critical Practice, c. 1967-1972.

For its June 1997 issue, Simon Faulkner reviewed the exhibition catalogue *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975* in the journal *Art History*.<sup>1</sup> This exhibition (examined in some depth in Chapter Four) was held at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and was only the second major historical survey of Conceptual art to have taken place anywhere in the world. Faulkner did not really review the catalogue, however, less still the exhibition itself, but his piece did raise a central question in what he referred to as “the historicization of Conceptual art,” namely: “how to link the avant-garde art practices [of] the late 1960s to the political ferment of the period.”<sup>2</sup> This question, as Faulkner pointed out, had found few adequate solutions, and the present catalogue, he felt, did little to solve the problem. Faulkner’s article, perhaps not entirely unwittingly, also highlighted the circularity of the historical discourse around Conceptual art, the way the same issues keep looping back, becoming re-articulated and re-examined in new contexts, but perhaps never conclusively resolved. For some Conceptual artists and historians alike, the sense that Conceptual art remains ‘open,’ an unfinished (indeed, an *unfinishable*) project, is testament to the very validity of its historical critique; the issues it raised cannot safely be laid to rest without depoliticising art as a social practice and making of it instead a type of aesthetic commodity.<sup>3</sup> Those contemporary artists who regard their own work as a form of continuing critical practice thus look to the histories of Conceptual art for their estimations of a previous generation’s achievements in that regard.

Faulkner argues, however, that histories of Conceptual art, or ‘conceptualism’, as he prefers to call it, have suffered from their adherence to an interpretive structure characterized by its reliance on “a set of dichotomies between notions of independence and co-option, marginalization and centrality, dominated and dominant, radicalism and institutionalization, anti-commercialism and commercialization, which either form the implicit conceptual and evaluative frame within which the account is circulated, or are explicit in the historical narrative presented by the account itself.”<sup>4</sup> Such approaches, Faulkner argues, present Conceptual art in terms of a logic of opposing absolutes: on the one hand, the radical practices of avant-garde artists determined to challenge or subvert the institutions of history, the museum and the gallery; on the other,

those same institutions, equally determined to appropriate radical practices to the dominant social structures they represent and, through their activities, reproduce. Faulkner illustrates his argument with examples from the writing of John A. Walker, Victor Burgin, Jeff Wall, Charles Harrison, and from Lucy Lippard, who wrote in her catalogue essay for *Reconsidering the Object of Art* that:

Conceptualists indicated the most exciting “art” might still be buried in social energies not yet recognized as art. The process of discovering the boundaries didn’t stop with Conceptual art: These energies are still out there, waiting for artists to plug into them, potential fuel for the expansion of what “art” can mean. The escape was temporary. Art was recaptured and sent back to its white cell, but parole is always a possibility.<sup>5</sup>

As Faulkner points out, the integrity of Conceptual art practices, and of those radical practices that followed it, is to be judged in Lippard’s account according to “its location on other side of a set of oppositions which construct an institutional ‘inside/outside’ binary in terms of notions of ‘escape’ and ‘recapture’.”<sup>6</sup> The problem for accounts structured in this way is that the distinction ‘inside/outside’ may be either naively simplistic or disingenuous, and, therefore, absolutist notions of ‘escape’ and ‘recapture’ are illusory. On the one hand, artistic identity and the limits of artistic practice are constructed in and through a network of relationships between artist, audience, curator, dealer, gallerist, critic, historian etc.; there is no essential artistic identity outside of these relationships through which a dissident practice might be produced. To conceive of the artist as an autonomous agent who is necessarily compromised in his/her relationships with an external institutional sphere is to deny that artistic production takes place within specific social and cultural contexts, or, as Faulkner puts it, to ensure that “artistic dissidence is removed from the contingencies and complexities of its production.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, though Lippard does at least allow for the possibility of “parole,” such accounts frequently tend toward a view of institutions as the ideological apparatuses through which a monolithic dominant culture reproduces itself by exercise of power. Not only does this curtail the possibility of any effectively dissident expression, condemning alternative practices to their perpetual defeat, but it also fails to recognise that institutions must incorporate and reconcile many disparate concerns. A museum of art, for instance, is not simply a unitary ideological edifice, but a social system which, if it is to function efficiently, must



preserve in a state of relative equilibrium the different interests of its directors, curators, administrative, ancillary and support staff and audiences.

***From optimistic independence to institutionalised failure?***

As an alternative to approaches which adopt this dichotomous structure, Faulkner proposes a “cultural materialist” model that would:

examine[...] the specific conditions under which the discourses of Conceptual art were produced – its reliance on the conventions and established discourses of avant-gardism and on the dominant structures of the artistic field for the cultural resources and frames out of which its oppositional critique was developed. Such an examination would find neither absolute conditions of independence and rupture, nor conditions of absolute compromise and containment, but would rather describe the complex conditions of oppositional practice within a framework which would have little use for essentialized conceptions of independence and compromise.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter is an attempt to provide a preliminary discussion of Conceptual art in something like these terms, a discussion that will be opened out in the case studies of subsequent chapters. It is an attempt to indicate some characteristics of the particular cultural and social context from which Conceptual art emerged, and to account for the potential offered within that context for the specific forms of cultural dissidence identified with Conceptual art: the ‘dematerialization’ of the art object, institutional critique, the ‘linguistic turn,’ and so on. It is important to emphasize, however, that in resisting what Faulkner characterises as the ‘entrapment’ model of culture – that which would claim dissidence as an effect of power that merely reinforces notions of the deviant and the permissible – it is not intended to present an account of Conceptual art as a heroic and ultimate refusal of the dominant cultural formation. Rather, the relationship between dissident cultural practices and the ‘recuperative’ desire of an institutional culture can perhaps be regarded as a kind of language game, an ‘enunciative practice’ in which certain possibilities available within a given context are actualised in a particular situation of exchange to produce an advantage over one’s adversary, but with every probability that one’s opponent will then produce a counter-move, a new articulation that redresses the advantage previously gained. Thus, while this chapter attempts to identify some of the enunciative procedures through which Conceptual art was able to challenge existing dominant modes of artistic distribution and appreciation, the following chapter will take account of the

strategies by which cultural institutions were then able to re-absorb and assimilate Conceptual strategies, to incorporate aspects of them in order to ensure the continued vitality of the dominant formation.

In trying to account for these processes of incorporation, the following chapter considers the exhibition *Documenta V* (Kassel, 1972) and its aftermath. I do not intend to suggest, however, that there was an abrupt change in the critical fortunes of Conceptual art around 1972 - before which date Conceptual art, in all its manifestations, had constituted an authentically oppositional practice, and after which, it was once and for all dispossessed of any critical viability. This would be to reinstate the binary logic of 'escape'/'recapture' according to these terms falling on either side of a historical watershed. Rather, I regard Conceptual art practice as being conceived fundamentally, and from its outset, in terms of its dialectical relationship to the institutional support structures of the art world. And while *Documenta V*, for many artists and critics alike, occasioned an awareness of a shift toward the incorporation of Conceptual art to the dominant cultural formation, this same awareness stimulated a crucial reassessment and readjustment which contributed to the development of new forms of critical engagement.

In the aftermath of *Documenta V*, and in the increasingly politicized art world of the mid-1970s, some Conceptual artists (notably, Ian Burn and others associated with Art & Language in New York) discontinued their practice altogether and occupied themselves instead with various forms of social activism. Nevertheless, many of those who continued to practice as artists gradually turned away from self-referential procedures (compatible with, and accommodated without difficulty, it seemed, to existing modes) toward those concerned with the politics of representation and identity as these *continued* to intersect, crucially, with the practice and experience of art. Thus, Lippard's terminology of 'escape' and 'recapture' presents in terms of an absolute opposition a process that was enacted *always within* a prescribed area of social practice – an area ratified by certain conventionalised forms of thought and behaviour, but nonetheless permitting of a certain level of latitude in their acceptance and performance – and which is reductively and mistakenly characterised in terms of a chronological shift from "optimistic independence to institutionalized failure."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Faulkner has pointed out, by establishing an analytical framework that opposes "absolute independence" to "complete

institutionalization,” such conventional histories as Lippard’s judge Conceptual art by impossible criteria – nothing short of the total transformation of the artistic field – and thereby condemn it to ultimate failure. For Conceptual art to be effectively dissident, it would have to be wholly independent of the ideological formations that constitute art as a social practice, yet, paradoxically, such a position would short-circuit the conditions under which dissidence may occur:

Within this kind of framework Conceptualism’s often Utopian rhetoric is taken as the criteria upon which its practices are judged. This leads to inevitable assessments of compromise and failure, and more importantly, limits the interpretation of this rhetoric to its overt content, ignoring the fact that the meanings of such discourses are framed by the specific spaces from which they are enunciated.<sup>10</sup>

Faulkner’s comments alert the reader to the distance that may exist between artists’ claims for their work and the reality of their social and cultural position. In the typical rhetoric of the avant-garde, for example, an artist may call for, or even claim that his or her work produces a rupture with all previous conceptions of art, or, indeed, the sublation of art with the ‘praxis of life.’ Yet such statements are always made from a position of interiority within the artistic sphere. The separation of ‘art’ from ‘everyday life,’ which the avant-gardist will nonetheless recognise as characteristic of the bourgeois culture, is the very condition of the avant-gardist’s gaining some critical purchase on the reality into which s/he is otherwise integrated. When art is finally absorbed into the practice of life, as the avant-gardist hopes, the subject position from which s/he was able to speak will have passed into non-existence.

### ***Determinism or aesthetic autonomy***

Faulkner recalls the controversy provoked by Benjamin Buchloh’s catalogue essay for the earlier exhibition, *L’Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* (Paris, 1989). The influential exhibition organiser and dealer in Conceptual art, Seth Siegelaub, had responded to Buchloh’s essay expressing incredulity that the critic’s account had neglected to mention, “even in a passing footnote, for example, May ’68 or the U.S. war in Vietnam, which marked the period [1962-1969] even in the art world.”<sup>11</sup> In return, Buchloh criticised the approach that Siegelaub advocated for its “mechanistic determinism” and for its failure to have adapted itself in the light of a “twenty-year debate on the relative autonomy of the aesthetic from the ideological and the political sphere and the concomitant difficulties for writing a



social art history.”<sup>12</sup> A history of Conceptual art that adopted an approach derived from cultural materialism, as Faulkner proposes, could potentially overcome many of the drawbacks of both an excessively formalistic art history (an “art history as art history as art history”),<sup>13</sup> and of a ‘vulgar Marxist’ approach characterised by crude economic or political determinism. A cultural materialist approach would be attentive to the ideological formations that structure the social field or art, but would adopt a more nuanced understanding of the superstructural, and therefore decline to identify the superstructural as purely secondary phenomena.<sup>14</sup>

In considering the issue of art’s relation to society, Raymond Williams has argued that a relationship based on such an abstraction is false, since art, along with all other practices, in fact, constitutes society and cannot be conceived as temporally or structurally secondary: “Until it and all other practices are present, the society cannot be seen as fully formed. A society is not fully available for analysis until each of its practices is included. But,” Williams continues, “if we make that emphasis we must make a corresponding emphasis: that we cannot separate... art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process.”<sup>15</sup> Williams is clearly at odds here with the view, expressed by some Conceptual artists, that the arts, and visual art in particular, are constituted as distinct and autonomous bodies of practices, meanings and values, which offer severely limited application outside that which is taken to be their own sphere. Joseph Kosuth, for instance, claimed that in its capacity to remain aloof from philosophical judgements, art demonstrated similarities with logic, mathematics and science, “[b]ut whereas the other endeavours are useful, art is not. Art indeed exists for its own sake.”<sup>16</sup> It is my position in this thesis that the practice of art should not be reduced to the obsessive and tautological activity of “art defining art,” and thus treated as a separate sphere distinct from the rest of the culture; rather that, following Williams, art should be recognised as a social practice, subject to certain conventionalised laws and procedures of its own, but, nonetheless, subject to the same ideological, economic and political determinants as all other social practices that together make up a society.

One consequence of this is that the practice of art cannot be taken to operate, in all its various manifestations, in any one sector of the culture alone: it is the sole

province neither of the dominant nor the alternative/oppositional cultural sector; it embodies neither solely emergent nor solely residual cultural phenomena. It cannot be assumed, though it may indeed be “a familiar rhetoric,” that of its essence, art operates in the emergent cultural sector, that it represents “the new feelings, the new meanings, the new values.”<sup>17</sup> Although a particular work of art will be a *new articulation* within the culture, much art continues to be of a residual kind, expressing the meanings and values that belonged to a previous social formation. It is true to say, for instance, that much painting and sculpture clings to modes of visibility that were developed as long ago as the Renaissance. Moreover, most art will be what Williams identifies as “a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture.”<sup>18</sup> It will provide no challenge to existing modes of production, distribution and consumption; it will be made, bought and sold, and appreciated in total accordance with the established meanings and values of the existing social formation. Like any movement, tendency, or style within the arts, Conceptual art should not, therefore, be approached with preconceived notions that it represents a new sensibility, or that, by its very nature, it constitutes a resistance to, a reaction against or a repudiation of existing modes. Conceptual art may, *or may not*, be able to defend itself against the criticism that it, too, represents a contribution to the dominant culture. It may, in certain aspects, embody emergent meanings and values; in others, it may iterate residual meanings and values, and in both these aspects, as we shall see, its distinctive aspects may be more or less easily incorporated by the dominant formation. Conceptual art’s claim to embody a new sensibility and an effectively critical practice will need to be demonstrated in relation to that which is representative of the dominant formation in the particular cultural sphere of which it is constitutive, but, as I have already indicated, what constitutes the dominant in any sphere of social or cultural practice will be subject to the same ideological, political and economic determinations as within all other spheres of the culture.

### ***Modernism and the authority of Clement Greenberg***

In the face of such an approach, the question may be asked whether there can truly be said to be a central system of practices, meanings and values within the visual arts that can properly be called dominant and effective? We may begin by tentatively advancing the claim that, in much of the Western art world of the 1960s, the critical writings of Clement Greenberg represented the most

sustained and cogent expression of Modernism in the arts, and that artistic Modernism was itself an attempt to articulate cultural production to the contingencies of a broader social modernity. We might say, also, that Greenberg's writings from the 1930s to the 1940s acquired dogmatic status, in part, through their publication in the widely-read volume *Art and Culture*,<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 5) that they constituted a system of meaning and value that did, to a considerable extent, represent a contribution to the dominant system.

Immediately, though, certain qualifications are necessary. First, we shall have to remind ourselves that, since the nineteenth-century, modernity had been defined in terms of a temporal duality. Baudelaire described modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable."<sup>20</sup> Greenberg's modernist criticism embodied, no less, both emergent and residual forms, tracing back certain key characteristics of Modernism to the Enlightenment philosophy of Immanuel Kant.<sup>21</sup> If Modernism in the 1960s can, in any sense, be considered an expression of the dominant, this will alert us to the dangers of regarding the dominant as either uniform or static. Rather, the dominant formation will be recognised as historically contingent, variable and dynamic, it is involved in a continual making and remaking of itself, and must discover ways to incorporate both emergent and residual cultural forms whenever these pose a threat to its own sustainability.<sup>22</sup> Second, we will have to assert that the particular strand of modernist theory developed by Greenberg, though highly influential, was by no means universally accepted (even before the early 1960s), and also that there were significant differences of emphasis even among those acolytes who constituted the 'Greenberg group.'<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the status of Greenberg's criticism was such that the validity of other approaches was habitually determined in relation to it, and even after the mid-1960s, when his criticism was being questioned by a new generation of critics and artists, the Greenbergian legacy constituted the object in relation to which artists necessarily articulated their practice as critique. Indeed, such was the esteem in which Greenberg's criticism was held, that *Artforum*, itself probably the most influential and widely read art magazine of the 1960s, has, in retrospect, been recognised as a publication effectively dedicated to the playing out of a struggle over the continuing relevance of Greenbergian ideals, a struggle which took on the appearance of an "Oedipal psychodrama."<sup>24</sup>



The question of the extent to which Greenberg's criticism could be said to have reflected, reproduced or to have been structured in a homologous relationship with the meanings and values of the dominant social formation is one to which there is no straightforward answer. Nevertheless, it would obviously be specious to equate Greenberg's writings unequivocally with the dominant ideology. Although his writings on art were undeniably influential, it would be a mistake to imagine that, through the medium of his writings, Greenberg was able to exercise absolute authority; his writings were only ever contributions to a multifarious discourse.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, to find the meanings and values of the dominant faithfully reinscribed in Greenberg's criticism would be to succumb to a logic of determinism that would reduce Greenberg to a passive instrument of the dominant ideology and deny him any agency as a subject. Greenberg, we must remember, did not identify with the dominant ideology. The earlier Marxist allegiances of his writing were transformed, however, within critical writings that situated themselves *pragmatically* in the context of the post-War economic boom and McCarthyist anti-communism. In 1961, for instance, Greenberg averred that, "some day it will have to be told how 'anti-Stalinism,' which started out more or less as 'Trotskyism,' turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come."<sup>26</sup> In the light of this, the question can be rephrased to consider the extent to which Greenberg's continuing allegiance to the idea of artistic autonomy and self-criticism – the key characteristics, as he saw it, of the Modernist avant-garde – either constituted an oppositional formulation with regard to the dominant ideology, or was effectively in collusion with the dominant ideology as it manifested itself in the consumerist/imperialist policy of the United States government.<sup>27</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of the current project to consider these issues at any length, I believe it is fair to say that Conceptual artists' critique of Greenbergian Modernism was articulated in relation to a critical discourse that was *perceived* as upholding most of the foundational beliefs of the dominant culture; hence, the desire of some Conceptual artists to produce a "non-commodity" art that did not encourage its being bought and sold as luxury goods and which through its democracy of means and ease of communication might overcome or challenge imperialist geographies of 'centre' and 'periphery.'<sup>28</sup>

Raymond Williams talks of the hegemony of the dominant social system being found in its providing a set of meanings and values which "as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming."<sup>29</sup> Hegemony

constitutes a sense of reality for most of those who experience it beyond which it is difficult to move. John Baldessari has often spoken about his early career as a painter in terms of a struggle to escape an attenuated “fourth or fifth generation” Abstract Expressionism.<sup>30</sup> Such comments reflect the degree to which Greenberg’s criticism continued to constitute what was ‘real’ and what was possible within painting well into the 1960s. Charles Harrison, the critic and historian who, since 1971, has been formally associated with Art & Language, has observed that in the group’s view, “Modernism [by the mid-to-late 1960s] had become a system which made the objects of its own attention.”<sup>31</sup> By this, Harrison means that criticism of the type produced by Greenberg and his followers had ceased to be a commentary on existing works of art; instead criticism now stood in a reverse temporal relationship to the objects of its attention, since those objects were now being produced to satisfy the evaluative criteria of the critical system. Greenbergian formalism can thus be said to have become hegemonic in the visual arts since, at this time; it effectively determined the limits of a social practice. Hegemony means, however, not just that certain forms of practice will seem inherently ‘right,’ but that artists’ conceptions of what it means *to be an artist* will be formed within the terms of the dominant discourse. How was it possible, then, that artists such as Baldessari and those of the Art & Language group could conceive of, let alone develop the forms of, a resistant practice?

### ***The grounds for dissidence: a ‘movement’ or a performative practice?***

Should Conceptual art be regarded as a particular grouping of artists, a *movement* in the commonly accepted phrase, whose participants shared the same mode of thinking and approach to making art, thus allowing them to conceive of, and occupy, a plausibly oppositional consciousness? Any examination of Conceptual art will discover a bewilderingly heterogeneous range of understandings of what constitutes Conceptual practice (as subsequent chapters will demonstrate), and *that*, only if one can convince artists to accept the appropriateness of the designation “Conceptual art” in the first place. Though the phrase is now commonly accepted and used to denote almost any form of art practice that is simply *neither painting nor sculpture*, it did not acquire such a broad usage until some years after its first appearance. Indeed, as late as 1973, the phrase was still understood to indicate one among a range of alternative (sometimes almost synonymous, sometimes related, sometimes

mutually exclusive) practices, all nonetheless considered to be, in some way, *anti*-Modernist. Often taken to be the definitive contemporary account of Conceptual art, Lucy Lippard's publication, *Six Years*, for instance, described itself on its cover as a "cross-reference book" focusing upon "so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems art, earth, or process art."<sup>32</sup> It was not, therefore, that "Conceptual art" established some *uncontested* ground on which individuals with shared interests could gather in order to establish a movement of mass resistance to Modernism, but it was nevertheless the case, as Terry Atkinson pointed out, that many did gather *opportunistically* beneath "the Conceptual Flag."<sup>33</sup>

What Atkinson's comments confirm is that the identity "Conceptual artist" did not need to be in place before artists could begin to produce art that was, in some sense, alternative or oppositional, but, that once in place, it did then become a habitable identity. Indeed, the later emergence of a recognisable Conceptual art "identity" contributed, for Atkinson, to the ossification of something that had previously been fluid and not easily contained within existing aesthetic categories. "From 1966 until 1971," he wrote in 1994, "Conceptualism had managed to keep moving on the question of the identity of the artist (the construction of artistic subjectivity). After 1971 it settled for an established artistic subjectivity – the identity of the Conceptual artist as it was by then."<sup>34</sup> If the emergence of such a recognizable identity effectively foreclosed on the possibility of its ongoing critical development, or, put another way, if the identity "Conceptual artist" was not *of itself* a guarantee of criticality, how instead had it been possible to articulate the terms of a dissident practice? An alternative way of conceiving of this might be offered by an approach employed first in the linguistic studies of J. L. Austin. Following Austin, it might be argued that the identity of Conceptual art as dissident practice emerged through a series of *performative* actions. That is, that it was not necessary for such an identity to be already in place; rather, it was constructed in and through practice, in the process of signification itself, and then, that the discourse of Conceptual art was worked out through the social interaction (including both expressions of commonality and antagonism) of its protagonists. But if this is to be accepted, the question still needs to be asked: "By what means and with what resources can Conceptual art bring itself into being as dissident practice?"



### ***A selective tradition***

Cultural materialists such as Williams have argued that dissident potential does not ultimately derive from essential characteristics in individuals (though individuals may be mobilized at times to produce dissident acts), but through contradictions necessarily produced within the dominant ideological formation. Despite their aspiration toward an image of totality, dominant systems are always under threat from diverse social or cultural disturbances, which they must seek to nullify, negate or absorb. Williams has thus emphasised that social or cultural orders must not merely *re-produce* themselves, but must constantly *produce* themselves anew: "social orders and cultural orders must be seen as being actively made: actively and continuously, or they may rapidly break down."<sup>35</sup> Because social or cultural orders must strategically manage and absorb such disturbances, the potential remains for refusal or inability to identify with the interests of the dominant ideology. It is in this that dissidence may occur. If a dominant culture is thus looked at diachronically, as encompassing traces of past attempts to manage disturbance, as well as the conditions from which future disturbance may emerge, it will be recognised that it can never be a homogeneous structure. It will be complex and stratified, reflecting the range of different interests that, under particular historical conditions, co-exist as constitutive of the dominant culture.

Because the dominant culture is a complex, layered structure, hegemony can never be complete; the system can never achieve the totality to which it aspires. And because, as we have seen, it must continually produce itself, there arises a process that Williams terms "the *selective tradition*: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as '*the tradition*', '*the significant past*'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other practices are neglected and excluded."<sup>36</sup> Theories developed in art criticism or history can be no different from those advanced to account for other social practices, and in Greenberg's criticism we may recognise a classic example of this selective tradition. For Greenberg, Modernism began with Manet,

by virtue of the frankness with which [his paintings] declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted. The Impressionists, in Manet's

wake, abjured underpainting and glazes, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colours they used were made of paint that came from tubes or pots. Cézanne sacrificed verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit his drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas." With the Cubists, this logic of development arrived at a kind of painting "so flat indeed that it could hardly contain recognizable images."<sup>37</sup>

But if Manet, the Impressionists, and Cézanne are chosen for the way they represent key stages in painting's progressive orientation toward flatness, the selectivity is, indeed, the thing; there can be little room in Greenberg's account for such 'aberrations' as Dada and Surrealism, for the post-Revolutionary avant-garde in Russia, or for artists who clung to anachronistic modes of figuration, for example. These moments are the necessary exclusions from Greenberg's 'significant past.'

Insofar as we are able, at all, to take Greenberg's criticism as structurally homologous with the dominant cultural formation, we will have to take account of what Williams termed 'residual' forms. Williams defines these as "experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, [but that] are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation."<sup>38</sup> And it is here that any simplistic identification of Greenbergian Modernism with the dominant ideological formation will encounter a problem. While residual modes of figuration in painting may be incorporated into the logic of Greenberg's criticism on the basis that they represent the prolongation of earlier pre-Modernist modes, the neo-Dadaism of Johns and Rauschenberg, for example, cannot be included on account of its deriving from an entirely separate logic of development; neo-Dadaist irony and/or wilful banality can play no part in a properly self-critical Modernism. Yet these 'residual' forms *were* incorporated into the dominant cultural formation *beyond* Greenberg's criticism. The process of incorporation occurs, as Williams explains, because some part, or some version, of the 'residual' culture "will in many cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in those areas."<sup>39</sup> Thus there was no simple equivalence between Greenberg's criticism and the broader dominant formation, although the former may have represented one aspect of the latter.

While aspects of Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism constituted 'residual' forms incorporated into the dominant cultural formation, they were permitted (perhaps even encouraged) to the extent that a certain degree of dissimilarity prevents the system's entropic decline. How then was it that these forms were simultaneously available to Conceptual artists as resources for a truly dissident practice? The answer may be found in the *discontinuities* between the dominant cultural formation and Greenberg's writing. Though Greenberg's criticism may have been *perceived* by Conceptual artists as reflecting or reproducing the dominant social formation within the relatively restricted cultural sphere within which their professional consciousness was formed, it was nonetheless possible, in practice, to oppose the one without necessarily opposing all aspects of the other. In constructing a selective history of Modernism's development (according to the requirement that art address itself to that which was unique in the nature of its medium), Greenberg necessarily made many omissions where different cultural manifestations did not support his key thesis. However, since these manifestations were residual and not wholly incorporated in the dominant culture, their own history could potentially be recovered as representing the negative image of Modernism, and that history built upon in the elaboration of a dissident practice. Where Greenberg's history was necessarily incomplete, its lacunae could become the habitable spaces of an alternative or oppositional formation.

### ***The 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-gardes and the ghost of Duchamp***

In one sense, then, Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism might be understood as constituting the pre-history of Conceptual art.<sup>40</sup> In the work of an artist such as Douglas Huebler it is possible to see the return of Surrealistic procedures characterized by chance and random occurrence. (Fig. 6) Even the modular geometry of Sol LeWitt's three-dimensional work (Fig. 7) was arrived at by a working method designed to put into productive conflict the rational and the irrational, the logical and the illogical.<sup>41</sup> Other artists, such as Victor Burgin, came much closer to the Constructivist idea of a utilitarian, socially committed art. As Burgin saw it, the "the optimum function of art" was "to modify institutionalised patterns of orientation towards the world and thus to serve as an agency of socialisation."<sup>42</sup> The requirement for art to function, in this way, as a form of social engineering was felt especially strongly in many countries outside the Anglo-American mainstream of Conceptual art, but especially, perhaps, in



Latin America, by artists such as Lygia Clark (Fig. 8) and Hélio Oiticia, for example.

The possibilities for dissident practice, then, can emerge from the exclusions of the dominant cultural or social formation. The emergence of a kind of art that rejected the traditional object-forms of painting and sculpture in favour of an object-/less 'art-as-idea' could be seen as a more-or-less straightforward repudiation of the Greenbergian doctrine of medium-specificity. The critics, Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, laid out some of the concerns of the emergent "ultra-conceptual" tendency in art in the influential article, *The Dematerialization of Art*. Lippard and Chandler were at pains, however, to establish certain artistic and literary precedents for the kind of art they discussed, and declared it to be unsurprising "that the main 20<sup>th</sup> century sources for a dematerialized art are found in Dada and Surrealism." But, for the "most valid prototype," they thought, "one must return to Marcel Duchamp." They continued that younger artists probably did not consider Duchamp a particular influence. This was due to "the almost total absorption and acceptance of Duchamp's esthetics into the art of the present," they felt: "He is no longer particular; he is pervasive."<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, Joseph Kosuth, one of the artists whose work Lippard and Chandler discussed, was prepared to be explicit about the importance of Duchamp, and not only for his own work, but to all 'conceptual' art. In his widely read article *Art After Philosophy*, Kosuth claimed that:

The event that made conceivable the realization that it was possible to 'speak another language' and still make sense in art was Marcel Duchamp's first unassisted *Readymade*. With the unassisted *Readymade*, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change – one from 'appearance' to 'conception' – was the beginning of 'modern' art and the beginning of 'conceptual' art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.<sup>44</sup>

This passage of Kosuth's is remarkable for two reasons. First, because he credits to Duchamp the innovation that made it possible to "speak another language." In other words, that it was through the legacy of Duchamp that the negative image of Modernism had become perceptible, and might therefore be looked to for whatever examples it could teach in the development of a dissident practice. Second, and as a consequence of the first, because Conceptual art is

here thought to be more legitimately 'modern' than the *Modernism* to which it is opposed.

Despite what some critics took to be the all-pervasive influence of Duchamp, some Conceptual artists were less than convinced of the usefulness of his ideas. Terry Atkinson of the group Art & Language claimed to detect "the simple-minded and mundane ghost of Marcel Duchamp" behind many inferior works of Conceptual art. While many Conceptual artists were content to look about them for ever more exotic objects to which it could be applied, including "the domain of mental entities," for Art & Language, the usefulness of the concept of the *Readymade* was now only to be found in the question of how things were singled out rather than what was singled out.<sup>45</sup> Though they did not agree on many things, the artist, Daniel Buren, was in accord with Art & Language on the nature of Duchamp's legacy: "Duchamp was no more than the forerunner of 'painting-with-no-matter-what', of 'everything is art', 'nothing is art'." <sup>46</sup>

Although most Conceptual artists would have been familiar with Duchamp's work, Lippard and Chandler were probably right that he was not considered a particular influence.<sup>47</sup> There has, however, been a considerable historical 'writing-in' of Duchamp as a significant precursor to Conceptual art - what Atkinson has called the "overdetermination of Duchamp" - of which we must be cautious.<sup>48</sup> In considering the importance of Duchamp to the emergence of a dissident Conceptual art, it would be necessary to separate the 'cult of Duchamp' (already well advanced in the 1960s) from the particular usefulness of his work and ideas. With the necessary qualification that Duchamp not be seen as some privileged, mythical progenitor, we may cautiously agree with Kosuth that the Duchampian legacy (along with that of Surrealism and the newly rediscovered Soviet Constructivism) did permit the realisation that it was indeed possible to speak a language other than Modernist formalism. But Paul Wood is probably correct to observe that "[i]t was, overall, less a matter of the original avant-gardes inspiring a new generation, than that generation making its own critical moves in the face of a triumphant modernism (and a triumphant consumer capitalism), and in the process discovering its antecedents and bringing them to light."<sup>49</sup> If Conceptual art was to be effective as a dissident practice, it could not simply repeat those residual strategies of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-gardes now incorporated in the dominant culture. Dissidence too

would have to produce itself anew, or be immediately incorporated as mere *stylistic* revival.

### ***Habitable spaces***

Dissident practices can only ever articulate themselves in relation to dominant social or cultural formations. Power and resistance are implicated within one another. "Where there is power, there is resistance," Michel Foucault wrote, "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."<sup>50</sup> Foucault rejected the notion that there is some irrepressible core of humanity from which dissidence may arise; rather, he thought, resistances are inscribed in relations of power as their irreducible opposite. Power presupposes resistance, and resistance continues from power. This is not a particular revelation of Foucauldian analysis, however. Lippard and Chandler had already sensed the continuity of the seemingly radical 'dematerialized' art with the traditional object-based forms it appeared to oppose:

The idea that art can be experienced in order to extract an idea or underlying intellectual scheme as well as to perceive its formal essence *continues from* the opposing formalist premise that painting and sculpture should be looked at as objects *per se* rather than as references to other images and representation.<sup>51</sup>

But neither, Foucault tells us, should power be located in "the primary existence of a central point... it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable."<sup>52</sup> Because relations of power must constantly be re-made, resistance, too, produces itself, at every moment, in its historical and spatial specificity. Even in the action of shoring itself from criticism or disturbance, then, the dominant ideology will produce *within itself* the conditions for the development of new forms of dissident practice. Thus, when Michael Fried makes his defence of high Modernism in *Art and Objecthood*, he effectively brings into greater visibility that which he wished to subordinate and contain. The archetypal Modernist work, Fried thought, is experienced as if "at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest."<sup>53</sup> Defending the *instantaneousness* of this experience against the preoccupation with the *duration* of experience in Minimalist art, he condemned the latter for its "theatricality." In stigmatising one



particular kind of experience, Fried made that same experience available for appropriation in the form of what Foucault has called a “‘reverse’ discourse.”<sup>54</sup> Martha Rosler, for example, has described how the very vocabulary employed in Fried’s text enabled her to recognize the forms that a viable oppositional practice might take:

I read Michael Fried’s essay... and he spoke of the problem of art that did not follow these Modernist precepts as being “theatre.” And I said, “bingo, that’s it, that’s right.” The art that’s important now is a form of theatre, and one thing that means is that it has to be in the same space as the viewer...<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the categories designed to contain, control or stigmatise a practice can, in fact, produce the habitable spaces of a dissident practice and provide the language through which one may take possession of one’s own experience.

### ***The unavailability of painting***

In Greenberg’s criticism of the 1940s and ‘50s, the emphasis on medium as the means by which to discover that which was “unique and irreducible” in art was, very much, an article of faith; the idea of a ‘self-critical’ art that might attempt to *do away with* painting and sculpture in order to get closer to the supposed essence of art would, for Greenberg, have been inconceivable. Thus, it was instead the illusionistic three-dimensional space of figurative painting that was seen to represent the greatest obstacle to the medium discovering its own standards of quality: “The fragmentary silhouette of a human figure, or of a teacup,” Greenberg thought, would be sufficient to “alienate pictorial space from the literal two-dimensionality which is the guarantee of painting’s independence as an art.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, while the types of abstract painting championed by Greenberg were self-evidently unavailable, if the conditions for their critique could be reduced to the simple breaking of taboos we would need to ask why radical artists did not consider a return to figurative painting an effectively oppositional strategy at this time; in other words, why ‘the negation of the negation’ did not result in the restoration of the original form. This might seem a nonsensical question, for in the contemporary discourse around Conceptual art - perhaps, more specifically, around *conceptualism* – conceptual practices and figurative painting are generally supposed incompatible.<sup>57</sup> But to suggest that a *form* of figurative painting might have been one avenue open to artists

dissenting from Greenbergian doctrine would only require taking a small step beyond Kosuth's assertion that the fact that "objects are conceptually irrelevant to the condition of art," says nothing about whether "a particular 'art investigation' may or may not employ objects, material substances, etc. within the confines of its investigation."<sup>58</sup> Might not a particular 'art investigation,' then, include painted objects if their inclusion might further that investigation?<sup>59</sup>

In the mid-to-late 1970s, Art & Language, regarded by many as amongst the most hard-line of Conceptual artists in their rejection of traditional modes, had already returned, as producers, to a kind of imagistic painting by which they hoped to carry out a dialectical critique of contradictory ideological/representational modes. (Fig. 9) Charles Harrison and Paul Wood have observed that an unexpected consequence of this return to painting was that:

painting began to demand attention as painting. The problems of making a painting 'work', and that is inescapably to say questions of 'value', moreover of aesthetic value as distinct from moral or political value, returned to the agenda of a practice that had seemed to suspend them.<sup>60</sup>

They added, however, that this kind of critical examination of the aesthetic, with its emphasis on art as a form of production, continued to distinguish Art & Language's work from much that was offered as painting, including the return to figuration in the 'new spirit' painting of the 1980s, "with its claims to universalism, creativity, the privileged – and mythic – insightfulness of the author/artist."<sup>61</sup>

Greenberg, however, could scarcely be accused of having privileged the artist as mythic creator, for it is the historical process itself that emerges in his account as the privileged term; the artist's agency is so diminished that, arguably, s/he serves merely as its vehicle. Greenberg abjured figuration as compromising Modernist painting's progressive orientation toward flatness, but although Conceptual artists wished to develop an alternative or oppositional practice, figurative painting remained contingently unavailable until such time as it might be re-invested with a critical viability that did not take recourse in earlier expressionistic modes.

### ***Modernism, Minimalism, and critical continuity***

Because a dominant cultural formation is not a homogenous structure, but a temporarily advantageous coming together of disparate, sometimes contradictory interests, Conceptual artists were able to identify with some aspects of the dominant culture while rejecting others. Notwithstanding their desire to move beyond the constraints that Greenberg's Modernism seemed to impose, Conceptual artists remained, for the most part, adherents to the notion of artistic progress through self-criticism (though this had sometimes to be reconciled with the *tabula rasa*-ist tendencies of those inclined to conceive of their practice in the context of the avant-garde tradition). For some, then, the crucial thing was to identify the difficulty encountered by the previous generation, to devise some means through which that difficulty might be overcome, and thus to allow art to proceed to its next stage of development. As Victor Burgin recognized, "the idea that there is an important question to be answered by your generation and your generation alone is peculiarly Modernist."<sup>62</sup> Burgin, though born in Britain, had studied at Yale University in the mid-1960s during the heyday of Minimalism, when artists such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt, Helen Frankenthaler and others were teaching there. (Figs. 10, 11) Burgin remembers Judd telling a class that the bringing into existence of a form indebted neither to the organicity of the baroque tradition nor the geometry of the classical tradition would be a major discovery. For Judd, this was a *material* problem of sculptural form, but as this problem was inherited by Burgin's generation, a radical solution to the problem would be proposed:

What occurred to me, and no doubt occurred to a lot of other people at the same time, because later we had the first wave of conceptualism, was that the only such form that you could think of would have to be a mental form or it wouldn't actually make sense to say that it was neither geometric or organic.<sup>63</sup>

On another occasion when Robert Morris was teaching, Burgin had questioned Morris' assertion, made in the essay *Notes on Sculpture*,<sup>64</sup> that he wanted his work to be no more or less important than any other 'term' in the room. Burgin had understood that by 'term,' Morris had meant any of various architectural features or furniture: "anything in the room that has an objective presence." For Burgin this had raised the question, "...why have sculpture at all, if it's no more or less important than anything else? What's to stop us walking in there and



looking at the radiator?” Morris had denied that that was what he had written, but for Burgin this was the moment at which it became clear that, “this is it, I’ve hit upon the important question to be answered by the next generation.”<sup>65</sup> Works by Burgin such the well-known *Photo Path* (1969) (Fig. 12) – consisting of photographs of the gallery floor, printed at actual size and stapled to the section of floor they reproduced – were an attempt to force the issue raised through Morris’ essay. The artist hoped that viewers habituated to the forms of perceptual behaviour and cognition considered appropriate to sculpture might be encouraged to bring those same forms of behaviour to something which was not sculpture. *Photo Path* was one answer to the question of “how [to] draw attention to the floor, but without altering the form of the floor?”<sup>66</sup>

To the succeeding generation of Conceptual artists, Minimalism represented a further development out of Modernism, but also Modernism’s terminal point. It had extended the logic of many of the key tenets of Modernism to the point at which that logic now appeared untenable. Greenberg’s emphasis on ‘flatness,’ for example, had paradoxically entailed coming to regard a painting as a *painted object*, and hence had established the grounds for Judd’s advocacy of “specific objects” that were neither painting nor sculpture.<sup>67</sup> The importance of Judd’s ideas as a stepping stone to his own critique of Modernism was openly acknowledged by Kosuth when he claimed that with the piece, *Any Five Foot Sheet of Glass to Lean Against Any Wall*, (1965) he had succeeded in “making a work of art that was neither sculpture (on the floor) nor a painting (on the wall).”<sup>68</sup> For Greenberg, a significant advance toward ‘flatness’ had been made with the “all-over” technique developed by painters such as Mark Tobey and Jackson Pollock. (Fig. 13) In their work, marks were distributed across the entire surface of the picture, producing a thoroughly cohesive and integrated picture plane. Minimalist artists, however, would take this evenness of finish to hitherto unimagined extremes, suppressing further the vestiges of the work’s internal relationships in favour of the *external* relationship between the object and its circumstances of display. Whereas these circumstances of display were construed in Minimalism mainly in terms of the work’s relationship to its architectural surroundings, in Conceptual art, this awareness was expanded to include the institutional and discursive space within which works of art became visible.

### ***The 'Minimal aesthetic'***

The issues inherited from Minimalism thus enabled in Conceptual art an opening up of the *language* of art. Yet the problem now would be one of presentation. What would be the most appropriate means for communicating these new ideas? And in this respect, the aesthetic of Minimalism would prove to be powerfully resilient. As the critic and historian Terry Smith has observed in relation to his own experience of collaboration with Art & Language in New York:

Minimalism seemed, at that moment, as the norm, [sic] the bottom line, the most basic language for art, the least artful aesthetic. And conceptualism was the future, the ideas to be found, the experiences to be had. But these could be reported back, as it were, to people in the only mode that was not potentially misleading – minimalism, of course... This is the minimal/conceptual nexus at the point of being a condition for practice.<sup>69</sup>

As Smith's comments make clear, the Minimalist aesthetic had certain connotations that continued to be of use in Conceptual practice. Minimalism was regarded as a neutral mode of presentation, the least likely to interfere with or distort the information. It had reduced the range of aesthetic options to a minimum, but a further reduction would occur in the purging of colour from Conceptual art. This, in itself, was significant. As Michael Baldwin of Art & Language has observed, "there was some naïve, and I think you may say primitive, assumption that somehow grey and black and white was kind of rigorous in some way, and spoke of intellectual pretension and posture, or whatever."<sup>70</sup> Minimalist artists such as Judd and Morris had published critical essays that explained the motivations and thought processes behind their work, and, for some Conceptualists, these had seemed to suggest the disappearance of the art into the discourse.<sup>71</sup> The elimination of colour, then, in Conceptual art was connotative both of intellectual rigour and the final dissolution of aesthetic considerations, however minimal, into the discursivity of the text.

Minimalism was aesthetically the dominant style of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and although the conscious adoption of a minimal aesthetic offered Conceptual artists certain contingent advantages, there was also a sense in which the same aesthetic, perhaps unconsciously, also determined the limits of what was conceivable in the presentation of Conceptual practice. As Raymond Williams (after Gramsci) has explained, it is the very nature of the hegemonic to

constitute “the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway.”<sup>72</sup> Terry Smith has eloquently explained the pervasiveness of the Minimalist style and the extent to which it had been internalised by artists: “It influenced us in the way we laid out our rooms, our studios, most gallery spaces, the set-up of one's exhibition. It became the bottom-line design principle of the moment, almost to the point of invisibility.”<sup>73</sup>

### ***An institutional context***

It would be a gross over-simplification, as we have seen, to suggest that Conceptual art presented a rupture with, a reaction against, or a contradiction of the Minimalist art that preceded it. Indeed, despite the protestations of some Conceptual artists to the contrary,<sup>74</sup> it is probably true to say that, initially at least, Conceptual art was conceivable only in terms of the visual and critical language that Minimalism had provided. Neither could Conceptual art be separated from the Modernist history from which Minimalism had itself emerged; the expansion of Minimalism's critique to include not just the architectural support of the gallery but the entire critical/theoretical language of art necessarily entailed examining the defensibility of art's sustaining discourses. Unsupportive critics often took this attention to the discursive conditions of art as evidence of Conceptual art's hidebound conventionality. “For all the pretense of entering the world out there,” Robert Hughes averred, “Conceptual art remains inexorably culture bound. Its very existence hinges on the privileged status of art itself, a status drilled into the world audience by decades of institutional art worship.”<sup>75</sup>

The basic claim of Conceptual art, as Hughes understood it, was that the making of objects was irrelevant. “The artist's duty is to to reveal and criticize the attitudes by which art is made,” but, he pointed out, “[t]here are no aesthetic criteria for dealing with such works.”<sup>76</sup> It is something of a paradox, however, that those artists who were most vociferous in advocating a ‘rupture’ with existing aesthetic criteria were probably also those that most clearly demonstrated art's dependence on its institutional context. In order to oppose institutional structures, one must necessarily invoke those structures, and while the possibility of one's critique is consequent on one's implication within the structure, the immediacy of this relationship ensures that what was intended as critique is always already available for incorporation into the dominant. Thus,



while Daniel Buren, for instance, was able to advocate a “complete rupture with art – such as it is envisaged, such as it is known, such as it is practised,” this could only be accomplished “while remaining in a very well-defined cultural field – as if one could do otherwise.”<sup>77</sup> And while the programme of ‘institutional critique’ elaborated in Buren’s work - as well as in that of Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers and others – aimed to facilitate a form of critical knowledge, these artists, on the one hand, had necessarily to court the institutions they ostensibly wished to critique, while, on the other, their projects were actively solicited by those institutions in order that they might demonstrate their own ‘enlightened’ attitudes.

The claim to have somehow escaped the institutional context was one rarely made by Conceptual artists themselves. To greater or lesser degrees, these artists were prepared to acknowledge that if their work was meaningful in any way, it was so in relation to its art context. Lawrence Weiner was explicit in a conversation with Willoughby Sharp:

When you deal with a piece of mine... You look at it and you place it in the context of art. Either it makes sense to you or it doesn’t, there’s nothing I can do about that. Whether or not it does make sense to you, you try to construct it within the context of what you know as art... it’s in the art context, I’m quite careful about that... You wouldn’t be sitting here if you didn’t accept the fact that it fits within the context of art.<sup>78</sup>

Robert Barry, too, was insistent that his work derived its meaning from its art context. Barry believed that his work raised “a lot of fundamental problems as far as the existence of a work of art is concerned... I think it questions the very *being* of any work of art.”<sup>79</sup> As far as “anti-art” was concerned, Barry seemed to recognise the non-possibility of such a category: “art and Anti-Art are really the same thing,” he told the critic Ursula Meyer, “I guess it is the great fantasy of modern artists to be able to make their art – without having to make art.”<sup>80</sup>

The notion of ‘anti-art,’ itself an inherently *artistic* conceit, was not one that was entertained by many Conceptual artists, and it is of little use, either, to any historical understanding of Conceptual art. Conceptual art entailed the questioning of art’s own conditions of existence from a position of interiority. If this were not the case, then it would have no claim to be art. Similarly, if any view of Conceptual art is to approach adequacy, it will need to examine

Conceptual art in relation to the discourses that shaped the cultural field in which its critique was elaborated. Conceptual art did not represent any great refusal of the concept 'art', nor of the institutional nexus within which the practice of art is constituted. The fantasy of an escape to some idealistic realm would have represented an abnegation of critical responsibility: it would have meant a disavowal of the problems inherent within art as a social practice, and thus a refusal of the necessity to develop strategies through which those problems might be transformed or overcome. To orientate one's practice to the discursive conditions by which art was possible was not a retreat to 'art-for-art's-sake' formalism, but, on the contrary, the necessary pre-condition for any critical practice which sought to gain a more developed understanding of art's relationship to broader ideological structures. It was only through such procedures that the possibility for any real transformation in the social identity of the artist might be realised. "The fish does not have to get out of the water to examine the water," Terry Atkinson offered by way of an analogy, "but such a procedure may entail the fish ceasing to be a fish."<sup>81</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Simon Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', *Art History* 20, no. 2 (June 1997), 324-331. *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 15 October 1995 – 4 February 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 325.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Michael Newman, 'Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An Unfinished Project?', *Kunst und Museum Journal* 7: 1, 2, 3 (1995): 95-104, reprinted in *Conceptual Art*, ed. by Peter Osborne (London: Phaidon, 2002), pp. 288-289; and Art & Language, 'We Aimed to be Amateurs', paper presented to the conference "Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art", Institute of Contemporary Arts, 19 March 1995, reprinted in *Art-Language*, new series no. 2 (June 1997), 40-49, and in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 442-448.
- <sup>4</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 325.
- <sup>5</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Escape Attempts*, in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 15 October 1995 – 4 February 1996), pp. 17-38 (p. 38), cited in Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 327. Lippard's language recalls that of Robert Smithson's statement 'Cultural Confinement', where the artist declared: "Museums, like asylums and jails, have wards and cells – in other words, neutral rooms called 'galleries'... The function of the warden-curator is to separate art from the rest of society." *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1972), 39, translated from the original German, *Documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, exh. cat. (Kassel: Dierichs, Druck, 28 June - 8 October 1972). For more on Smithson's statement, see Chapter Two.
- <sup>6</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 327.
- <sup>7</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 326.
- <sup>8</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 328.
- <sup>9</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 327.
- <sup>10</sup> Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 328.
- <sup>11</sup> Seth Siegelaub, 'Addendum', in *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, ex. cat., ed. by Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon, Angeline Scherf, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990), pp. 257-258 (p. 257), reprinted in *October* 57 (summer 1991), 155-157 (p. 155), cited in Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black White and Grey', p. 325.
- <sup>12</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, 'Benjamin Buchloh Replies to Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub', *October* 57 (summer 1991), 158-161 (p. 160), cited by Faulkner, 'Nostalgia in Black, White and Grey', p. 325.
- <sup>13</sup> Siegelaub, 'Addendum', p. 257.
- <sup>14</sup> The notion of the superstructure should not, perhaps, be rejected altogether. Raymond Williams has criticised alternative models that posit instead a totality of social practices, each with specific characteristics and which interact in complicated ways, on account of these models discounting altogether the claim that there is any process of determination: "while it is true that any society is a complex whole of such practices, it is also true that any society has a specific organisation, a specific structure, and that the principles of this organization and structure can be seen as directly related to certain social intentions, intentions by which we define the society, intentions which in all our



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- experience have been the rule of a particular class... if we fail to see a superstructural element we fail to recognize reality at all." 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso/New Left Books, 1980), pp. 31-49 (p. 36).
- <sup>15</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 44.
- <sup>16</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 134-137 (p. 137).
- <sup>17</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 44.
- <sup>18</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 45.
- <sup>19</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1961).
- <sup>20</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), p.13.
- <sup>21</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961), 101-108, reprinted in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. by Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (London: Phaidon, 1992), pp. 308-314.
- <sup>22</sup> "A residual culture is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture," notes Williams, "but one has to recognize that, in real cultural activities, it may get incorporated into it. This is because some part of it, some version of it – and especially if the residue is from some major area of the past – will in many cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make any sense in those areas. It is also because at certain points a dominant culture cannot allow too much of this kind of practice and experience outside itself, at least without risk... By 'emergent' I mean, first that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part – and yet not a defined part – of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent." 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Harold Rosenberg, Meyer Schapiro and Lawrence Alloway, for instance, were the critics whose writings perhaps provided the most persuasive and visible alternative to Greenberg's during this period. Members of the 'group' did not always share their mentor's historicist leanings to the same degree.
- <sup>24</sup> Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), p.13.
- <sup>25</sup> To think of Greenberg's writings in this way would be to make him a central locus of power in the visual arts, but, after Foucault, we understand that power cannot be identified with an individual or a single institution, "it must be understood... as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 92.
- <sup>26</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'The Late Thirties in New York,' in *Art and Culture*, 230-235 (p. 230).
- <sup>27</sup> These issues were discussed in a pair of influential articles published in *Artforum* in the early 1970s. See, for example Max Kozloff, 'American Painting During the Cold War', *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973), 43-54, and Eva Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War', *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974), 39-41. Some of the key points are briefly re-stated in Chapter Five of the present volume.
- <sup>28</sup> On the notion of an 'anti-commodity' art, see, for example, the following three statements. 1. Jan Dibbets: "To sell isn't part of the art. Maybe there will be

people idiotic enough to buy what they could make themselves. So much the worse for them." Statement in *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, ed. by Lucy R. Lippard (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 58-59 (p. 59). 2. Robert Barry: "There are no collectors, for there is nothing to collect." Interview with Ursula Meyer, in *Conceptual Art*, ed. by Ursula Meyer (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. 34-41 (p. 40). 3. Lawrence Weiner: "They don't have to buy it to have it – they can have it just by knowing it." Interview with Ursula Meyer, in *Conceptual Art*, ed. by Ursula Meyer (New York: Dutton, 1972) 217-219 (p. 217). On the challenge to cultural imperialism and the geographies of 'centre' and 'periphery,' see my discussion in Chapter Five.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> See, John Baldessari, interview with Hugh Davies and Andrea Hales, in *John Baldessari: National City*, ex. cat., ed. by Davies and Hales (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 10 March – 30 June 1996), pp. 85-103 (p. 86).

<sup>31</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Conceptual Art and Critical Judgement', in *Art Conceptuel Formes Conceptuelles*, ex. cat. (Paris: Galerie 1900-2000; Galerie de Poche, 1990), reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 538-545 (p. 541). A similar passage appears in Harrison's 'Conceptual Art and Its Criticism', *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 35-48 (p. 42).

<sup>32</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, (New York: Praeger, 1972). For the full title of the publication, see note 39 to my Introduction.

<sup>33</sup> Terry Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970), 25-60 (p. 26).

<sup>34</sup> Terry Atkinson, 'Rites of Passage', *Art and Design* 9, nos. 1/2 (January/February 1994), 12-19 (p. 17).

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', pp. 309-311.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> See Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate, 2002), pp. 14-15, and Peter Osborne, 'Survey', in *Conceptual Art*, ed. by Peter Osborne (London; New York: Phaidon, 2002), pp. 12-51.

<sup>41</sup> Compare the following two passages from LeWitt's writing: 1. "To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work... After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible." 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (summer 1967), 79-83 (p. 80); 2. "Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach... Rational judgements repeat rational judgements... Illogical judgements lead to new experience... Formal art is essentially rational... Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically." 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969), 11-13 (p. 11).

<sup>42</sup> Victor Burgin, 'In Reply', *Art-Language* 2, no. 2 (summer 1972), 32-34 (p. 34).

<sup>43</sup> Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968), 31-36 (pp. 33-34).

<sup>44</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', pp. 41-42.



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- <sup>46</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Standpoints', *Studio International* 181, no. 932 (April 1971), 181-185 (p. 184).
- <sup>47</sup> I emphasise that this remark is a generalisation. The significant influence of Duchamp could only have been different from artist to artist. Michael Asher, for instance, has confirmed that Duchamp's work was not particularly important to him, and that he had no desire to repeat what Duchamp had already done. (Interview with the author, 24 June 2003, letter to the author, 5 August 2004.) On the other hand, John Baldessari has explained how he recognised in Duchamp a kindred spirit, and how Duchamp's emphasis on language seemed to offer a confirmation of his own thinking at the time. See Marcia Tucker, 'John Baldessari: Pursuing the Unpredictable', in *John Baldessari*, exh. cat., (New York; Dayton, Ohio: The New Museum; University Art Galleries, Wright State University, 1981), pp. 7-50 (p. 10).
- <sup>48</sup> Atkinson, 'Rites of Passage', p. 12. For an example of the process of 'writing-in,' see the roundtable discussion, 'Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp', *October* 70 (Fall 1994), 127-146.
- <sup>49</sup> Wood, *Conceptual Art*, p. 17.
- <sup>50</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, p. 95.
- <sup>51</sup> Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 36.
- <sup>52</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, p. 93.
- <sup>53</sup> Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (summer 1967), 12-23 (p. 22).
- <sup>54</sup> "There is no question," Foucault writes, "that the appearance in the nineteenth-century of psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified." Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, p. 101.
- <sup>55</sup> Martha Rosler, interviewed in the television programme *Art and the Left: The Critique of Power*, part of the series *Modern Art: Practices and Debates* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1993).
- <sup>56</sup> Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', p. 310.
- <sup>57</sup> See, for example, Dalya Alberge, 'Tate Rejects £500,000 Gift from "Unoriginal" Stuckists', <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1710820,00.html>> (15/01/2006).
- <sup>58</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy, part II' *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969), 160-161 (p. 160).
- <sup>59</sup> Two later, but important exhibitions of Kosuth's, *The Play of the Unsayable: Wittgenstein and the Art of the Twentieth Century*, at the Wiener Secession, 13 September – 29 October 1989, and *The Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Museum, 27 September – 31 December 1990, did, indeed, include paintings, and figurative paintings at that, though by this time Kosuth had long since ceased to think of his work in terms of 'investigations.' (He had announced in 1975 that his *Tenth Investigation, Proposition Four*, seen that year at Castelli in New York, would be his last.) In these installations, Kosuth employed juxtapositions of text with objects drawn from the museums' collections in order that each should inform readings of the other, allowing new meanings to arise that could not reside in text or object alone. Kosuth was neither the author of the texts nor the maker of the objects, however, but was responsible only for the new meanings that might potentially emerge through their being brought into conjunction. In the light of my argument in the



following chapter, it might be argued that Kosuth was putting into place the conditions for meaning to emerge through the viewer's mental organisation of what was seen. However, I would claim that the viewer was always being directed toward a *particular* reading; that the meanings to be found were mostly, if not exclusively, those that the artist *intended* to be found. Kosuth was a forceful presence behind the work, as even his advocates had to admit. David Freedberg, writing about the Brooklyn installation, was sure that no viewer "could have had any doubt that one was dealing with new work, one by Kosuth," and that the "distinctive Kosuthian style" was as visible in the Brooklyn installation as it was in his other works. 'Joseph Kosuth and the Play of the Unmentionable', in *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum*, ed. by David Freedberg (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), pp. 31-68 (pp. 48, 60).

<sup>60</sup> Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 'Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered', in *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties*, ed. by Paul Wood, Francis Frascina, Jonathan Harris and Charles Harrison (New Haven; London: Yale, 1993), pp. 170-260 (p. 247).

<sup>61</sup> Harrison and Wood, 'Modernity and Modernism Reconsidered', p. 247. *A New Spirit in Painting* was the title of an influential exhibition of painting held at the Royal Academy, London, in 1981. See Chapter Two.

<sup>62</sup> Victor Burgin interviewed by John Roberts, *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966-1976*, ed. by John Roberts (London: Camerawords, 1997), pp. 80-103 (p. 81).

<sup>63</sup> Burgin interviewed by Roberts, pp. 80-81.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, parts I-III', *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), 42-44; *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966), 20-23; *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (summer 1967), 24-29.

<sup>65</sup> Burgin interviewed by Roberts, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Burgin interviewed by Roberts, p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> It is presumably on similar grounds that Rosalind Krauss has been able to claim that Judd was, to all intents and purposes, a painter, that not only had he begun as a painter, but that he continued as such: "So even though Judd is the author of a famous essay arguing that painting should lose its virtual dimensions to become a 'specific object,' he remains a painter – totally involved with questions of illusion." Roundtable discussion, 'The Reception of the Sixties', *October* 69 (summer 1994), 3-21 (p. 9).

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art as Idea as Idea', interview with Jeanne Siegel, in *Artwords: Discourse on the '60s and '70s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 220-231 (p. 224).

<sup>69</sup> Terry Smith, 'Conceptual Art Then and Since', interview with Jelena Stojanovic, *Agenda: Contemporary Art Magazine* 26 (November/December 1992, January/February 1993), 19-34 (p. 29).

<sup>70</sup> *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* conference, King's College, London, 4 June 2004.

<sup>71</sup> See Mel Ramsden, 'Alternatives to Critical Theory and a Corrosive Irony', interview with Mary Ann Staniszewski, *Flash Art* 143 (November/December 1988), 106-107.

<sup>72</sup> Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Theory', p. 37.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, 'Conceptual Art Then and Since', p. 29.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Joseph Kosuth, 'No Exit', *Artforum* 26, no. 7 (March 1988), 112-115.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Hughes, 'The Decline and Fall of the Avant-Garde', in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 184-194 (p. 193), reprinted from *Time*, 18 December 1972.

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<sup>76</sup> Hughes, 'The Decline and Fall of the Avant-Garde', pp. 192-193.

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Beware', *Studio International* 179, no. 920 (March 1970), 100-104 (pp. 103-104), reprinted in translation and revised form from the exhibition catalogue *Conception-Konzeption* (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum, October-November 1969).

<sup>78</sup> Lawrence Weiner, 'Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam', interview with Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* 4 (spring 1972), 66-73 (p. 68).

<sup>79</sup> Robert Barry, interview with Patricia Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, Weiner*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 86-100 (p. 86).

<sup>80</sup> Barry, interview with Ursula Meyer, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', p. 36.

## Chapter Two

### The Critical Fortunes of Conceptual art, 1972-1989: *Documenta V* and After.

Beginning in the late 1980s, there appeared a number of major retrospective survey exhibitions accompanied by an increasing number of publications re-assessing Conceptual art. Charles Harrison has commented on the curatorial and historical ratification of Conceptual art that occurred over the ensuing decade, arguing that the years were characterised by the "growth of a competitive market in 'established' works of the 'classical' period – a moment located between 1965 and 1975, or, for the less gullible, between 1967 and 1972."<sup>1</sup> Harrison's comments, made in 2001, are indicative of two distinct phases in the critical and historical reception of Conceptual art: the first phase - the 'classical' period - occurring *sometime* between 1965 and 1975, and the second, that of the revival of its critical fortunes in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. It is to the different historical contexts of these two periods that the current project orientates itself in the belief that they may inform each other. That is, it is hoped that a critical examination of the problems encountered in presenting a curatorial history of Conceptual art will reveal those aspects of its practice that remain critically relevant, and that an examination of the use of historical materials in expanding the contemporary discourse around Conceptual art will tell us something about the needs of history in the present. The first chapter provided a preliminary account of the conditions under which Conceptual art emerged in the later 1960s and early 1970s. At this stage, before moving on to examine a number of historical exhibitions of Conceptual art that have taken place since 1989, it will be necessary to consider critical attitudes to Conceptual art during the interim period (approximately, 1972-1989), in order that the context and reasons for its later re-appraisal might be adequately appreciated.

Harrison argues that if the beginning of Conceptual art's 'classical' period can be dated to around 1967, then its conclusion coincided with the exhibition *Documenta V* held in Kassel, West Germany, in 1972. Harrison writes from a position of involvement as General Editor of Art & Language Press, and his wider argument is intended to portray Art & Language's *Index 01*, which was first exhibited at *Documenta V*, as the culminating work of this 'classical' period.



Nevertheless, in identifying *Documenta V* as a point of transition in the development of Conceptual art, he is in agreement with a number of recent commentators who have similarly identified the exhibition as a decisive moment. Compare, for example, Harrison's claims that *Documenta V* "marked the high point of curatorial interest in Conceptual Art and also, perhaps, the moment of its degeneration as a critical movement,"<sup>2</sup> with the following statements, remarkably similar in language and tone, the first by Tony Godfrey, the second by Paul Wood:

[*Documenta V*] may be seen as both the high-water mark and the end of Conceptualism as an apparently distinct movement... Art's revolutionary or subversive character was minimized and absorbed, to the extent that it now seemed little more than another tool in the arsenal of the establishment.<sup>3</sup>

[*Documenta V*] has some claim to represent the high-water mark of early Conceptual art, the point at which it moved from being an oppositional critical force, to a hegemonic power on the international art scene.<sup>4</sup>

For all three writers, *Documenta V* stimulates a shift in consciousness as, it seems, Conceptual art becomes accommodated to the dominant ideology with the consequent loss of its critical viability. But this raises a number of questions. In the previous chapter, I sought to explain on what grounds and by what means it had been possible to conceive of Conceptual art as an alternative, critical, practice, but it has not yet been explained how the strategies it put in place were managed and absorbed by the institutional structures of the art world - if that is indeed what happened. And if that *is* what happened, then questions must be asked about the immediateness and effectiveness of those managerial procedures. How is it that the demise of Conceptual art can be linked so securely to this one exhibition? How final was the institutional confinement of Conceptual art that occurred at *Documenta*? And what opportunities remained open for a critical realignment or counter-move?

*Documenta V* was held between 28 June and 8 October 1972. (Fig. 14) As the exhibition that introduced its large international audience to Conceptual and post-Minimal art, the fifth *Documenta* has long been recognised as a historical milestone.<sup>5</sup> The organisation of the previous *Documenta* in 1968 had been conducted through the twenty-four-member Documenta Council. The difficulty of reaching consensual aesthetic judgements within the council system produced

considerable internal conflict, and for the first time in the history of the event, the organisation of the fifth *Documenta* was entrusted to an artistic director, Harald Szeemann. (Fig. 15) Szeemann had been head of the Kunsthalle Bern until 1969, and had also worked as a freelance curator. Under his directorship, *Documenta* was transformed from the usual exercise in 'stock-taking' into the kind of 'themed' large-scale international exhibition for which the event continues to be the touchstone. Szeemann declared the theme of his *Documenta* to be "Inquiry Into Reality – Today's Image-Worlds," and set out to systematically trace the relationship of visual forms of expression to the various concepts of reality that structured them. Thus, the theme was divided into three categories: "reality of the image," "reality of what is portrayed" and "identity or non-identity of the image and 'what is portrayed'." Reality was to be considered "the sum of all images – artistic and non-artistic," and the theme accordingly allowed for an enormous variety of visual materials: advertising imagery, kitsch, comics, science fiction, political propaganda, mass media publications, social iconography (bank-notes, flags, stamps, etc.), pornography, the art of children and the mentally-ill, contemporary realist painting, pop art, "concept art," performance and actionism.

Bazon Brock, Professor of Aesthetics at the Hamburger Hochschule für Bildende Kunst, had prepared the theoretical background paper for *Documenta*. In March 1971 this was followed by a comprehensive draft, jointly authored with Szeemann and Jean-Christophe Ammann, which outlined the proposed theme of the exhibition. A further working paper that contained a provisional list of artists and exhibitors was then issued.<sup>6</sup> The publication of these materials caused considerable concern among artists, critics, dealers and museum directors who feared that *Documenta V* would misuse artists' work to illustrate its thematic relationships, and that its totalising ambition would be unrealisable both practically and within the limits of its budget. At a subsequent press conference, reassurances that *Documenta V* would not be an illustrated seminar but an art exhibition much like its predecessors did little to allay these fears.<sup>7</sup> As the critic Georg Jappe noted during the preparations for the event, "the big question-mark [would be] the artists." He elaborated:

will the artist consent to go beyond merely showing his work to the best possible advantage and seek a role within a context? In a conception which seeks to place public, expert and artist on a footing of equality, will the artists who are against all pedestals, consent to

step down from their own? We shall see how serious the leading artists are about wanting social effectiveness.<sup>8</sup>

In its May 1972 issue, *Flash Art* printed a letter from the artist Robert Morris (dated 6 May) in which, with regard to *Documenta V*, Morris complained:

I do not wish to have my work used to illustrate misguided sociological principles or outmoded art historical categories. I do not wish to participate in international exhibitions which do not consult with me as to what work I might want to show but instead dictate to me what will be shown. I do not wish to be associated with an exhibition which refuses to communicate with me after I have indicated my desire to present work other than that which has been designated. Finally, I condemn the showing of work of mine which has been borrowed from collectors without my having been advised.<sup>9</sup>

While the letter reflected Morris' own experience and stated his personal position, he considered this to be of less importance than the statement that followed, to which Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockbourne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra and Robert Smithson were also signatories. The statement had been written in response to *Documenta V* and had been communicated to its artistic director, (Fig. 16) though the points made, Morris affirmed, were pertinent to all exhibitions:

1. It is the right of an artist to determine whether his art will be exhibited. It is the right of an artist to determine what and where he exhibits.
2. A work of art should not be exhibited in a classification without the artist's consent.
3. An artist must have the right to do what he wants without censorship in the space allotted in the catalogue.
4. A complete, itemized budget of all institutional exhibitions – including all allocations to participants, transportation, curatorial fees, etc. – should be made public immediately after the exhibition.<sup>10</sup>

These statements seem implicitly to confirm the ascendancy of post-Minimal, if not Conceptual, art in the international art world of 1972. Artists whose work has yet to be ratified within the international museum and gallery system were unlikely to be those in the position to dictate the terms in which their work may be exhibited and interpreted within that system. The possibility of overseeing the context within which one's work is promulgated is open either to those for whom the conditions of distribution are truly self-determined, or, as in the case of those signatories to the group statement above, those who have already attained considerable status within the institutional art world. As Lawrence Alloway



observed in respect of these statements during the final month of the exhibition, “the notion of absolute control of the work commits an artist to endless curating of his work, a temptation that comes to everybody when their work is sufficiently in demand to provide leverage.”<sup>11</sup> Szeemann’s curatorial agenda seemed to be disproving the claim that the most advanced art was capable of determining its own critical and interpretive context. Some contemporary critics regarded this as a betrayal of the open, collaborative, approach that Szeemann had pioneered with the groundbreaking exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969. “It is outrageous,” protested Bruce Kurtz, “that the important new tendencies represented in *When Attitudes Become Form*, and to which Dr. Szeemann owes his reputation, have been so blatantly denatured and neutralized by *Documenta 5*.”<sup>12</sup>

Of the signatories to the joint-statement, Andre, Judd, Morris and Sandback withdrew, while Haacke, LeWitt, Le Va, Rockbourne and Serra were able to reconcile the content of the statement with their continued participation in the exhibition. Robert Smithson withdrew from the exhibition itself, but the catalogue contained a statement, entitled *Cultural Confinement*, in which the artist was scathing both of museums’ attempts to corral artists into “fraudulent categories,” and of artists’ complicitous role in perpetuating “illusions of freedom.” For Smithson, the museum had an ideological function not unrelated to that of the asylum or the jail. Its galleries, presided over by the warden/curator, were equivalent to the ward or cell and provided a space within which works of art might be safely isolated from their context in the outside world, neutralized, before being duly reintegrated into society. For Smithson, Conceptual art was not any better equipped to evade this regime of discipline than more traditional forms of art. Instead of truly confronting the issue of art’s aesthetic neutralization and commodification, Conceptual art, Smithson thought, represented a disavowal:

Occult notions of ‘concept’ are in retreat from the physical world. Heaps of private information reduce art to hermeticism and fatuous metaphysics. Language should find itself in the physical world, and not locked in an idea in somebody’s head... Writing should generate ideas into matter, and not the other way around.<sup>13</sup>

Instead, Smithson declared himself in favour of a “dialectics that seeks a world outside of cultural confinement.” This was not to be achieved through works that

suggested the idea of process within the ideological constraints of the gallery. "There is no freedom in that kind of behavioural game playing," he cautioned, the artist under such conditions was simply "acting like a B. F. Skinner rat doing his 'tough' little tricks."<sup>14</sup> Smithson's own practice had repeatedly sought a dialectic condition in terms of the site and "non-site" and the relationship established between inner and outer, closed and open, centre and periphery.<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 17) Yet as with the striking worker who hopes to convince his bosses that they need him more than he needs them, Smithson's withdrawal of his labour at *Documenta* arose from the recognition of his alienation from his own production.

For one critic, at least, the refusal to participate represented a "tactical error." In an article written at the time of *Documenta*, but published a few months later, René Denizot argued that its curatorial categories had no importance in themselves other than to "bring[...] all the works down to the same standard," and that by withdrawing on account of their supposed inappropriateness, "one implied that one's work would not stand up to these constraints and so admitted one's dependence on the gallery."<sup>16</sup> Some artists took a different approach, attempting to define semi-autonomous spaces within the limits of *Documenta* in which the visitor could be transformed from a passive consumer of the visual into a participant in various forms of social organisation. Engaging students and workers not contracted to *Documenta*, David Medalla and John Dugger constructed the *Peoples Participation Pavilion* in the gardens between the Neue Galerie and the Museum Fridericianum. (Figs. 18, 19) Dedicated to Ho Chi Minh and the Indo-Chinese people, the pavilion had a didactic and a recreational function, providing a space both for the discussion of peoples' struggles for liberation and for creative activities such as basket weaving. To enter the pavilion it was necessary to pass through a water-filled trough. For the artists, this functioned metaphorically - "you can't make the revolution unless you are in it; you cannot know the water until you swim in it" – and practically, to discourage the entry of the "bourgeois types" who would be reluctant to remove their shoes. It also served "as a filter from the sensations of the other works, because seeing 200 artists in one day was like reading 200 books in a week."<sup>17</sup> Medalla and Dugger may have managed to partially forestall the assimilation of their project to *Documenta*'s scheme, but their *Pavilion* replaced one ideological certitude with another: the cause of "socialist art through socialist revolution."<sup>18</sup>

On the ground floor of the Museum Fridericianum, Joseph Beuys set up his *Bureau for Direct Democracy*, relocated for the entire one-hundred day event from the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie where he was Professor. He had agreed to establish his office in Kassel because of the opportunity it offered to communicate his ideas with *Documenta's* large international audience. The *Bureau* dispensed various forms of printed information, and Beuys made himself available during office hours to discuss art's relationship to social life beyond aesthetic categorisation. (Fig. 20) Although it was Beuys' intention to propose "a very enlarged idea of art," he claimed that his work could, nonetheless, be considered a kind of Conceptual art:

I work mostly with ideas and information, but this information is related to very real, living questions of human life. They are not only related to the interests of a small minority, they are related to the needs of all people. There is a concept, and therefore I think that it is real conceptual art.<sup>19</sup>

The office environment was one of the most visible forms of the administrative culture, and had been reproduced, as Harald Szeemann later remembered, "to show that you can be creative anywhere." Beuys had meant to demonstrate the continued possibility of autonomous creativity and self-determination under administrative constraint. As Szeemann had understood it, he had "intended by his presence to abolish political parties, to make each man represent himself [sic]."<sup>20</sup> For the critics, though, Beuys' project was only partly successful. In *Artforum*, Carter Ratcliff remarked that it was admirable that Beuys had used *Documenta's* own space to advance his "counter-analysis," but that the physical experience of his office space was "not significantly different from the experience of galleries containing art more easily assimilated into *Documenta's* scheme."<sup>21</sup> Writing for *Artscanada*, Charlotte Townsend concluded that this was "[a] case of the art of politics and the politics of creativity operating in a safely circumscribed area."<sup>22</sup>

Art & Language were included in the *Idée (Idea)* section of *Documenta*, organised by Konrad Fischer and Klaus Honnef. The group was allocated a single square room on the first floor of the Museum Friedericianum within which was installed the previously mentioned *Index* (Fig. 21) (later designated *01* with the appearance of subsequent *Indexes*). On entering the room, the visitor encountered eight metal filing cabinets, resting in pairs on four grey-coloured



plinths. The drawers of the cabinets could be opened to reveal a series of printed texts mounted in a system of hinged leaves. Presented in this way were all the texts previously published in the journal *Art-Language*, along with a number of other texts, published or unpublished, by members of the group. The eighty-seven texts had been subdivided into some three-hundred-and-fifty discrete units considered intrinsically coherent.<sup>23</sup> Each of these units had been read in relation to the others, and the relation between the resulting pairs expressed in terms of one of three symbols. The four walls of the room were papered with enlarged typescripts recording these relations:

- (1) '+' sign for relations of logical or ideological compatibility
- (2) '-' sign for relations of logical or ideological incompatibility
- (3) 'T' sign indicating the insufficiency of grounds for judging compatibility prior to some logical transformation

The filing cabinets were raised to such a height as to facilitate reading of their contents from a standing position. For some members of Art & Language, at least, the *Index* was conceived with the aspiration of encouraging spectators into the role of readers and potential interlocutors. Those contributions, or re-descriptions, thus generated might themselves fall, or fail to fall, within the scope of the indexing system.<sup>24</sup> Thus the exhibition visitor, habitually the consumer of aesthetic sensation, was to be transformed within the conceptual space of the *Index* into a producer and collaborator. (Fig. 22) The majority of the *Documenta* audience, however, were not prepared to approach the work in this way. Indeed, many viewed the installation from the doorway without engaging further.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, the *Index* was unable to establish a context for itself sufficiently insulated from the spectacular operations of the *Documenta* scheme. It could not prevent itself from being regarded, in Charles Harrison's words, as "the quasi-decorative representation of a conversational world."<sup>26</sup>

As had Robert Smithson, so too did Daniel Buren use the pages allocated to him in the catalogue to express some harsh criticisms of emerging curatorial tendencies. Buren, though, was prepared to name names. "Increasingly," he claimed, "the subject of an exhibition tends to be not the exhibition of works of art but the exposition of the exhibition as work of art. Here it is the *Documenta* team, directed by Harald Szeemann, which exhibits (the works) and exposes itself (to the critics)." Buren went on to argue that curators were becoming supra-artists who used works of art as areas of local colour in their own compositions.

Whereas, in the past, an exhibition had been judged according to the quality of the works contained within it, the exhibition itself was now the “value-giving receptacle,” with the works serving only as “a decorative trifle for the survival of the gallery/museum as picture.”<sup>27</sup> Buren did not withdraw from *Documenta*, but presented an untitled work that, as his statement indicated, was intended to provide an *exposition d'une exposition* (exposition of an exhibition).

Since 1966, Buren had been producing works using fabric or paper striped with alternating vertical bands, 8.7cm wide, of white and another colour.<sup>28</sup> The support for the fabric/paper varied according to the opportunities, or limitations, presented on each occasion of its exhibition, the paper being employed as a ‘neutral’ device, devoid of formal or expressive interest, that through repeated use would direct attention to the particularities of each exhibition situation. Buren varied the second colour of the paper systematically from exhibition to exhibition in order to demonstrate the equivalence of colours, and to preclude their being read as aesthetically or psychologically significant. At *Documenta*, Buren pasted papers striped with white on white in seven locations throughout the exhibition. The seven pieces varied in their dimensions according to the surfaces they covered, and in five instances they were partially covered by, or otherwise interacted with, other works or visual materials in the exhibition. (Fig. 23) By their dispersal throughout the various sections of the exhibition, Buren’s papers sought to ‘frame’ that which was doing the framing. Since only one section of paper could be seen at a time, their dispersal also functioned to counteract any tendency to identify their whiteness with the self-contained ‘aesthetic’ whiteness of the monochrome. Instead, Buren’s papers sought to reveal the aesthetic and ideological whiteness of the gallery spaces through its mimesis.

Because of its exposure of the exhibition, for the critic René Denizot, Buren’s work had achieved the distinction of being “the only visible work” in *Documenta*; it had successfully “revealed itself in its own necessity as work of art and thus revealed the gallery as any place that it disposed with reference to itself by being exhibited.”<sup>29</sup> Paradoxically, however, the possibility of such a demonstration on Buren’s part only arose because of the prevailing conditions of cultural confinement.<sup>30</sup> For Denizot, *Documenta*’s affirmation of “the established order” presented an opportunity for work to “demonstrate more openly its need forcibly to denounce the futility of an order whose obvious rigour and

intransigence are evidence of its irremediable sclerosis and advanced state of putrefaction."<sup>31</sup>

Buren had attempted to reveal the diseased condition of the established order, and to provide a model of work that might dissent from its operations. If his work at *Documenta* is judged in terms of its pedagogical function, however, with hindsight, some equivocation is required. The fifth *Documenta*, in its scope and its affirmation of the emergent super-curator, can be regarded as the prototype for the increasingly more ambitious *Documentas* that followed it, as well as for the many large-scale international exhibitions and biennials that have become such a fixture of the international art world. Buren was conspicuously unable to halt these developments. Indeed, in 2004 he returned to his *Documenta* statement of thirty-two years earlier to comment upon its prescience. The tendencies that his text had anticipated, Buren considers, have become "a stylistic epidemic, an artistic genre in itself, a rampant competition in which the organizer proclaims as loudly as possible that he or she is the artist of the exhibition." The passivity of artists in the face of this situation is more serious, even, than it was: "If in 1972 they could still turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the ways in which they were being used, the straightforwardness of our epoch (which others might call cynicism) makes it entirely improbable that artists today do not know what is being plotted and what is being declared and the kinds of discourses surrounding them!"<sup>32</sup>

Partly coinciding with *Documenta's* one hundred day run, the exhibition *The New Art* was held at the Hayward Gallery in London, from 17 August – 24 September 1972. *The New Art* was the first in a planned series of biennial exhibitions surveying current art, and was curated by Anne Seymour, Assistant Keeper at the Tate Gallery. Seymour did not have the celebrated international reputation of Harald Szeemann, and it would doubtless be wrong to ascribe to her the kind of authorial intention for which Szeemann had been criticized. Nevertheless, implicit in the thankfulness of the Hayward Directors' *Preface* to the catalogue, there was the sense that Seymour's careful selection had managed to impose some order on a disorderly and contested terrain.<sup>33</sup>

Fourteen artists or collaborations were chosen (all of them male, or consisting of male artists), of whom, Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Richard Long and David Tremlett were also present at *Documenta*.<sup>34</sup> There was, however, a distinct irony in the title of the exhibition; by 1972, the



various kinds of work shown were, for the most part, no longer all that new.<sup>35</sup> Seymour's own 'Introduction' acknowledged that this work had been around for six or seven years, but that while many of the artists were in constant demand for exhibitions abroad, their work remained unfamiliar and misunderstood at home. *The New Art* presented an opportunity, therefore, for "a backward look at a ripple in the waters of art which has been moving outwards on the basis of impetus received more than half a decade ago." Catching these developments "at a moment of rethinking, expansion and change,"<sup>36</sup> *The New Art* was effectively a summation rather than a manifesto, the closing of one chapter before the opening of another.

*The New Art* occupied a place in the Hayward's programme alongside the more usual exhibitions of modern masters and mid-career retrospectives. Although Seymour could claim that the British public had previously seen very little exhibited work by the artists in the exhibition, the critic William Feaver pointed out that most of them had established reputations and were already well-known to the readers of certain art magazines and a section of the gallery-going public.<sup>37</sup> *The New Art* confirmed and consolidated these reputations. For Feaver, the exhibition represented the Arts Council's solution to the problem of how to accommodate the avant-garde: "wait until it has become familiar before inviting it into the South Bank cultural complex." To exhibit at the Hayward was to have one's work accepted into the bastion of the cultural establishment; the very architecture of the gallery seemed to place art under protective custody. "[L]ike a chunk of army surplus Maginot Line," Feaver observed, "the Hayward was clearly designed with defence primarily in mind; to afford protection to all past art... to sustain and promote a repertoire of national heritage under top security conditions."<sup>38</sup> Some of the work in *The New Art* seemed to struggle with or against its institutional setting. For some, this struggle was no doubt conscious and critical; for others, the awkwardness arose from a contradiction between the sense of space, either physical or social, presumed by the work, and that generated through the architecture of the gallery. Much of the 'new art' seemed to imagine a more personal relationship with its public than had the large paintings and sculptures that the gallery was designed to accommodate.

The sculptor, Richard Long, presented his largest indoor work to date, *Three Circles of Stones*. (Fig. 24) The installation consisted of three concentric circles of pebbles laid out over the floor of the mezzanine level. In one sense, Long's

was a token presence in the gallery. Since 1965, he had established his reputation as an artist with a special affinity for the landscape, acting within the natural environment and rearranging its elements for works that could only become publicly known through their photographic documentation. As Anne Seymour put it, Long's work seemed to be about "a quiet connection, private, a philosophical dialogue between the artist and the earth."<sup>39</sup> Yet at *The New Art*, a practice that had begun in transience and resistance to conventionalised notions of display seemed to offer its product as décor for the gallery space. Reviewers commented on the sensuous appeal of the stones and their formal relationship with the gridation of the gallery floor. William Feaver observed that:

Having made his reputation outdoors [Long] is being drawn back into the shop-window gallery situation, both to exhibit records of his exploits... and to install something of the effects he brings about in the open countryside. Long's operations on the face of nature... were, in their time, a breakthrough. Now though, having been armed with a special Arts Council chit authorising him to remove his lorryload of stones from a suitable beach, he has come full circle."<sup>40</sup>

Returning to the indoor exhibition situation, Long could offer nothing in terms of critique, merely an institutionally-sanctioned exemplar of polite taste that displayed the gallery to its best advantage.<sup>41</sup>

Buren's work at *Documenta* had tried to resist its serving the exhibition as work of art, and a number of the artists invited to participate in *The New Art* appeared to want the same thing. Victor Burgin installed six textual works produced over the previous three years: *This Position* (1969), *Room* (1970), *All Criteria* (1970), *From Seel* (1971), *Bracketed – Performative* (1971) and *IV 2* (1972). (Fig. 25) Displayed as numbered single-sentence statements on successive sheets of paper attached to the gallery wall, or bound into volumes available at a number of tables in the exhibition space, these works directed the reader through a circuitous sequence of mental operations by which an abstract object or event (analogous to the 'art object') might become cognitively available. Burgin's work was thus to be constituted in an irreducible 'performativity' that might be considered uncondusive to its underscoring the primacy of the exhibition setting.

Art & Language's *Index 02* - a modification of their earlier *Index* shown at *Documenta* - extended the system of citation to take account of secondary relations of compatibility (if A was compatible with B and C, then compatibility

between B and C had to be assumed). Like Burgin's work, it also laid claim to irreducibility through the open-endedness of its conversational matrix. As Charles Harrison's comments seem to confirm, however, it was more liable to be construed *pictorially* than were, perhaps, Burgin's 'performatives.' Nevertheless, for many critics and reviewers, Art & Language along with Burgin and John Stezaker did appear to constitute a somewhat separate contingent of more theoretically inclined or "intellectual" artists.<sup>42</sup> For the most part, however, the appeal of these artists to a similarly intellectual and engaged audience who might, in some sense, contribute to the work was overlooked. Art & Language's *Index 02*, for instance, was (mis)taken as a representation of the internal workings of the Art & Language community, "the grand allegory of art's contemporary privateness," as Rudi H. Fuchs saw it.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the substantial demands that these artists placed on their notional audience were likely to induce an intellectual fatigue that risked alienating those with only a casual interest. Georgina Oliver, reviewing *The New Art for Connoisseur* commented thus:

The heart is sick of printed instruction, of naked structures, just as once it had turned away from rich images without substance. The brain aches at the thought of systems of thought. Neck and eyes wince at the prospect of following, step by step, each point of 'logical' gymnastics, stuck to the wall on dry sheets of printed paper in the name of philosophy and Art. The mind smells administration and memories of algebraic equations in stuffy classrooms. It cannot face the process.<sup>44</sup>

What is significant in Oliver's comments is the inference that, by 1972, these were strategies that were already familiar and wearisome. That Conceptual art had congealed into a practice with established sets of procedures, and, moreover, a recognisable *look*, was confirmed much later by one of its former exponents. Terry Atkinson, one of those involved in the production of the Art & Language's indexes, would claim in 1992, that the indexes had effectively "rehearsed and ossified the condition of being recognizably conceptual, or rather Conceptual."<sup>45</sup> For Atkinson, 'the Indexing' was concomitant with the transformation of Art & Language practice in terms more attuned to the predilections of the professional art world, and constituted an executive action designed to control use of the Art & Language name. Atkinson's comments alert us to the possibility that the factors influencing what he recognised as the growing institutionalisation affecting Art & Language were not only those



imposed externally by the agents of the culture industry, but also those which arose internally through the managerial ambitions of some of its members. Or rather, they should indicate the arbitrariness of distinctions made on the basis of 'the external' and 'the internal,' for rather than power being construed as a force exercised by conservative institutions against radical artists - a top-down relationship between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless – it is inscribed *throughout* and fully constitutes art's relations of distribution. To declare oneself an artist is already to locate oneself within an economic and social relationship, dissent from which is but a conventionalised resistance to its facticity.<sup>46</sup>

*The New Art* marked institutional approval for Conceptual practices in Britain, and brought them to a considerably wider audience than before.<sup>47</sup> Yet sections of the art world, not to mention the general public, had little patience for these developments. In 1972, the Tate Gallery had begun to collect Conceptual art, acquiring works by artists such as Keith Arnatt, Victor Burgin, Judy Clark, Michael Craig-Martin, Jan Dibbets, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert and George, Dan Graham, John Hilliard, Douglas Huebler, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Bruce McLean, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Klaus Rinke and David Tremlett. As if to reassure an anxious readership, the Gallery's biennial report for 1972-74, published in 1975, emphasized Conceptual art's continuity with more traditional types of art. In a section of the report providing "A Note on 'Conceptual Art'," the reader was informed that "[t]hese new forms are not supplanting the more traditional modes; but just as fully as present day painting and sculpture, they constitute a central, continuous development from fine art produced earlier in the century." Conceptual art's concern with process was seen to have had its antecedents in Cubist collage and Abstract Expressionist gesture, its call for the spectator's involvement to have been prefigured by the physical movement necessary before large Modernist works (Moore, Pollock), or in the political or emotional response demanded by the paintings of Dali or Bacon, or by Picasso's *Guernica*. The report noted the desire of Conceptual artists to break with "the restricting mannerism or aestheticism" of preceding phases of art and to adopt instead "systems with the un-precious connotations of everyday systems of communication – photographs, maps, texts, etc." However, the adoption of these "utilitarian" forms was not to be thought of as the abandonment of "a lively concern with a work's physical and visual properties," rather, "[t]he careful ordering, spacing and gradations of tone and colour in the

new work often have a poetry - and indeed a sensuous range - which extend the achievements and themes of earlier art in these respects."<sup>48</sup>

For the authors of the Tate report, the significance of Conceptual art lay in its drawing attention to aspects of the work of art that previously had not been explicit in its form and physical appearance. This was beneficial for an enhanced understanding of earlier forms of art by heightening the awareness "that a work by Duccio, Vermeer or Moore"<sup>49</sup> is the product of a whole complex of personal, social, technical and specialist activities. What was being emphasised in "A Note on 'Conceptual Art'," then, was less Conceptual art's claim for a radical rupture from previous types of art, and more its contribution as a form of art which itself permitted an enhanced appreciation of those earlier forms. It is tempting now to read the "Note" not simply as reassuring patrons and public anxious that their habitual modes of appreciation were being challenged by Conceptual art. With the revivification of painting already afoot and with its return to market dominance only a few years away,<sup>50</sup> the "Note" can also be read as something of an apologia for a purchasing policy, judged hasty or injudicious, that had favoured an art of seemingly limited life-expectancy and little historical value.

In the United States, Conceptual art had not received the level of official support from which it had benefited in Europe and in Britain. Between 1969 and 1970, Conceptual art had attained public visibility and received institutional legitimation through a number of high profile group exhibitions - 557,087 at the Seattle Museum, *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* at the New York Cultural Center, *Information* at MoMA, *Software* at the Jewish Museum<sup>51</sup> – but as the decade progressed, Conceptual art was more likely to be seen in commercial galleries. From the early to the mid-1970s, the careers of American artists were sustained in large part by the greater interest in their work emanating from Europe, and until the late 1980s, at least, American Conceptual artists were still relatively under-represented in the displays of the major American museums.<sup>52</sup> In the spring of 1977, however, graduate students on the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Programme organised an exhibition at the museum's Downtown Branch which included a number of Conceptual artists: among them, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Victor Burgin, Ian Burn, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Bernar Venet and Lawrence Weiner. The exhibition, *Words*, declared itself in its subtitle to be *a look at the use of language in art, 1967-1977*;<sup>53</sup> (Fig. 26) as such it could be regarded as reviewing particular

developments in the decade following Conceptual art's initiation of what has been called "the linguistic turn."

*Words* is now remembered mainly for a review written by Jeff Perrone, published in the summer issue of *Artforum*, which has since achieved notoriety on account of its denigration of art conceived solely in terms of the linguistic idea. Since Duchamp, Perrone claimed, the appearance of the work of art had often seemed of secondary importance to the idea, leading to a situation in which the object itself had come to be dispensable. "In the last few years," Perrone wrote, "we have begun to accept works which are not only non-objects but which are conceptually simple-minded as well – completely dumb as ideas. Not just the physical embodiments of dumb ideas, but the dumb ideas themselves."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Perrone's review exposed the fallacy of any claims Conceptual artists could make to have positioned their work as outside of the museum's customary practices of acquisition and display. "[I]t should be clear," he thought, "that since this art contains nothing much more than words, reading the checklist of works is not so different as an experience from seeing the works themselves." Observing that the Whitney's Downtown Branch was a place in which graduate students might "learn how to institutionalize artworks," Perrone argued that,

[H]ere they picked the perfect subjects: works as words, works which are already practically institutionalized. To read the list is to experience the works, to "have" the list is to "have" the works. To put together such a show, all you do is type up a list, like typing a term paper. None of the art is explicable anyway; its literalness circumvents discussion. Art content is kept to a minimum, so what is left has a paper existence, as pure documentation and labeling. Art at rest is neutralized art. The museum doesn't even have to apply its own usual neutralizing procedures.<sup>55</sup>

For one critic at least, Conceptual art's questioning of the art object had ultimately produced a lazy and uninteresting art, and the "dematerialization" that had been presumed a radical critique of art's systems of distribution had instead revealed itself as a submission in advance to institutional power. By the summer of 1977, a decade after it had begun, Conceptual art, it seemed, had failed in its aspirations and was finished.

The period from 1977 to 1978 was, in many ways, a watershed in both the critical ambitions and fortunes of Conceptual art. In 1978, two exhibitions in New



York – *“Bad” Painting* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and *New Image Painting* at the Whitney’s main uptown space - heralded the widespread return to traditional media, even if the return was couched in terms of an emerging and fashionable postmodernism or of an approach to painting that might be termed “post-conceptual.”<sup>56</sup> The previous autumn, however, the critic Douglas Crimp had organised an exhibition that included the work of five artists who appeared to have absorbed some of the strategies developed in Conceptual art<sup>57</sup> even as they sought a new critical direction. *Pictures*, which included work by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith, has frequently been regarded as having presaged the “post-conceptualist” tendency that, increasingly through the 1980s, seemed to offer an alternative to the resurgence of figurative painting. The work of both the *Pictures* generation of artists and of the “New Image” painters could be said, in some sense, to be recycling or reworking images already circulating within society. However, whereas ‘New Image’ painting seemed to consent to its use in buttressing existing aesthetic categories, the *Pictures* artists, according to Crimp, employed representation “not in the familiar guise of realism, which seeks to resemble prior existence, but as an autonomous function that might be described as “representation as such”.<sup>58</sup>

Significantly, the *Pictures* artists used photography, film and video (but also performance, painting, drawing and sculpture) to demonstrate how images mediate experience and are themselves mediated by other images.

“[E]verything in this work,” Crimp claimed, “conspires against ever locating an origin, either within the work or exterior to it.”<sup>59</sup> Whereas the Conceptual artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s had sometimes regarded photography as a neutral medium of service in closing the gap between the autonomous art object and lived experience - employing the camera as a “‘dumb’ copying device,” in Douglas Huebler’s memorable phrase<sup>60</sup> - these ‘post-conceptual’ artists denied the possibility of access to the real beyond the reality of representation itself. Similarly, the presumption of transparency in the language through which artists of the earlier generation had presented various forms of ‘dematerialised’ artwork was transformed and problematized in the work of other “post-conceptual” artists, such as Jenny Holzer.<sup>61</sup> Holzer’s *Truisms* (1977-79) (Fig. 27) consisted of a series of short statements that appropriated the ubiquitous and subliminal ‘commonsense’ assumptions through which consent to a social system is produced and maintained.<sup>62</sup> Initially printed in spare black text on white posters,

Holzer's *Truisms* were fly-posted anonymously on walls throughout Manhattan, Encountered by chance on the street, and without indication of their author, the disjunctive effect was sufficient to render these commonplace maxims *unheimlich*, to reveal language as both a psychological and an ideological practice.

In the early months of 1981, the recovery of painting to rude health was proclaimed by an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. That *A New Spirit in Painting* appeared in the august surroundings of the Royal Academy - "where the galleries hold memories of so many great epochs in the history of painting" - immediately confirmed the historical significance of the return to painting and bestowed validity on the works included in the exhibition as continuing painting's venerable tradition. As the exhibitions' organisers pointed out, their concern had been to "see whether it is possible to discover in the most vivid new painting of our time certain common threads which cross national boundaries and which can be related to the great traditions of European and American painting."<sup>63</sup> For at least one of the organisers, Christos M. Joachimides, the *New Spirit* was consciously conceived as a rejection of the "puritan" approaches of the Minimal and Conceptual art that had come to prominence in the later 1960s and 1970s. Painters who had continued to work during these years had been engaged in a "partisan art, an underground battle against the official norm," Joachimides argued. Whereas an overly academic Minimal and Conceptual art had eschewed subjective experience and was "devoid of all joy in the senses," now, wherever one looked in Europe or America, one would find artists who had "rediscovered the sheer joy of painting."<sup>64</sup>

In the May 1982 issue of *Artforum*, (Fig. 28) the Conceptual artist, Douglas Huebler, condemned the 'New Painting' for its empty and lifeless recycling of historical images. "[D]espite the fact that what we see refers to "content" and "meaning," Huebler averred, "we realize that it's all "appearance." Furthermore, the 'New Painting' was reactionary because it,

uses subject as a kind of studio prop in a way that recalls the "Art for Art's Sake" aphorism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bowls of fruit, "the bourgeoisie at play," etc. – all unmediated subject matter – were represented in order that the real subject – picture making – could be more clearly seen.<sup>65</sup>

Such painting deployed these historical props to return attention to the activity of painting itself. For Huebler, the significant development in art since the late 1960s had been its focus on “matters that lie outside of art, on matters quite apart from how a work may read back into the procedures used to produce it.” Mentioning Hans Haacke, Helen and Newton Harrison, Dan Graham, Martha Rosler, John Baldessari, Michael Asher and Suzanne Lacy, Huebler argued that,

Their procedures are in the foreground of their work, but they are not its subject; reading back into them toward the subject matter which they bring in from the “outside” produces the dialectical process that is... the actual subject of the work.<sup>66</sup>

Although, for Huebler, the ‘New Painting’ was guilty of uncritically satisfying the market by presenting it with the familiar and readily consumed products it craved, the artist was not so disingenuous as to claim that Conceptual art had achieved, even temporarily, the improbable condition of being a non-commodifiable art. Huebler recognised the art world as essentially an “institution of distribution,” whose internal discourse assigned value, at least in part, according to the ease with which products could be bought and sold, those products formulated in familiar terms being easier to distribute than unfamiliar ones. “[Conceptual artists] showed outside the art system,” he accepted, “but that kind of showing required support only slightly different from that of operating within the official system.”<sup>67</sup> Instead, Conceptual art maintained a dialectical relationship with the established institutions of the art world; to have done otherwise “would have failed to produce any affective discourse.”<sup>68</sup>

For some in the early 1980s, it seemed that the aggressive confidence of the art market was having a determining effect on the types of art being produced. For Lawrence Weiner, however, to assert this was to confuse the content of art with its context. In February of 1982, Weiner along with Joseph Kosuth and Kathy Acker had invited Sandro Chia, Philip Glass, Barbara Kruger, David Salle and Richard Serra to join them for a discussion that provided the material for a project published in the May issue of *Artforum*,<sup>69</sup> the same issue in which Huebler’s article also appeared. Weiner argued that an artist’s use of language or of paint and canvas as the basic materials of his/her art were matters of personal choice. “Such a personal choice doesn’t mean anything in the context



of art. It's not the context that counts, it's the content," he insisted. For Weiner, the content of one's art was a matter over which the market should have no determining influence. The market *might* determine the ambiance into which one's work was received, however: as Weiner put it, "how art is used at a certain time."<sup>70</sup>

Art's *use* within the capitalist system is intimately connected to the exchange value of its products (though, arguably, art may be one of the least alienating forms of production that capitalism allows). The previously prevailing discourse of Modernism had seemed to provide some criterion for ascribing value other than that determined through the crude operations of the market, but in the aesthetic and critical vacuum following the collapse of that discourse, Joseph Kosuth argued, the value of an artist's work had been all but abandoned to the vagaries of market speculation.<sup>71</sup> "The pity is," he pointed out, "that all this has very little to do with the art; certainly very little to do with the artist's relationship to his or her work." But acknowledging that it might be difficult to maintain the ethical observances insisted upon by Weiner, he added that, "in the end it does, because such pressure makes it very difficult for artists to go in the direction that their work is taking them." Given that artists' work seemed to be increasingly at the mercy of market forces that allowed little opportunity for it to establish its own context, it was, for Kosuth, more important than ever that an artist fight for the meaning of his or her work. "It is as much a part of the making process as the manipulation of materials," he affirmed, "without that struggle art becomes just another job."<sup>72</sup>

Kosuth had long insisted on the artist's responsibility to establish the context within which his/her work must be received.<sup>73</sup> He had frequently stated that artists worked with meaning, not form. New meanings, he now repeated, were made by "canceling, redirecting or reorganising" the authoritative forms of meaning that had gone before. Kosuth claimed that the inadequacies and contradictions of Modernism had produced their antithesis in the post-Minimal and Conceptual art of the late 1960s. The better art of this time, he claimed, had "bared the mechanism of Modernism." Though Kosuth wanted to think of Modernism as a flawed belief system, he was unwilling to relinquish his faith in the notion of continuous progress that underpinned it. Instead of progress continuing through a familiarly dialectical model, in the critical vacuum that

followed Modernism's crisis, art was thrown back on its own recent past in a negation of the negation:

Many younger artists... as art students naturally found some of us to be the representations of authority, and therefore of institutionalized meaning. The antithesis to what we appeared to represent, the rupture-device, seemed easy: use painting.<sup>74</sup>

With the hyperbole born of youthful zeal, Kosuth had formerly pronounced painting to be dead. Painting's formidable history, he now admitted, had ensured that this would be a "slower and more agonizing death" than he had at first thought. He conceded that what he thought of as "the better work in this category" might itself be involved in a dismantling of painting's formal conventions, something it could achieve only through its internalisation of the issues of the late '60s and early '70s. Weaker work, however, through "bad craft" and "an intentional undermining of an earlier era's concept of 'quality'," was destined only to continue the death of painting through its devaluation of the historical virtues it invoked.<sup>75</sup>

Although, by the later 1970s, Conceptual art had largely lost its international status as critically and institutionally approved orthodoxy, throughout the 1980s it maintained an acknowledged presence in contemporary criticism as precursor to the work of the generation of 'neo-Conceptual' artists such as Ashley Bickerton, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Richard Prince or Haim Steinbach, as well as to that of 'post-Conceptual' painters such as Peter Halley, Gerhard Richter or David Salle. The American critic, Robert C. Morgan, did much to perpetuate this dialogue in a series of articles published with increasing frequency throughout the decade.<sup>76</sup> Over the same period, as the heyday of Conceptual art receded into memory, a number of provisional histories in the form of personal accounts began to appear, such as those by Ian Burn, Victor Burgin and Dan Graham.<sup>77</sup> The sub-text of such accounts was both the historicisation of the art of the 1970s, then beginning to take place, and the legacy that Conceptual art offered for subsequent generations of artists.

Burn objected to the "falsification" of the history of the 1970s, and the tendency to present the art of the period as "innovatively dull and empty, not worthy of much consideration." An Australian, he had shared a context, for a time, with Joseph Kosuth as part of the Art & Language community in New York. Though

he was on similar ground to Kosuth in claiming that Conceptual art had emerged in the later 1960s as artists struggled to find a resolution to the contradictions of Modernism, it was Burn's view that *new* contradictions had emerged that had made it impossible to discover such a resolution within the avant-garde tradition of modern art:

How long can you use mass media forms before becoming aware of the political and economic functioning of mass media in a capitalist society? How long do you need to work collectively before realizing that genuinely collective work is antagonistic to the social relations of a capitalist society? How long can you give expression to your most personal feelings within an alienating marketing structure before realizing you are alienating your own personal feelings? After you realize that the market can operate by selling ideas just as readily as its sells objects as commodities, how long can you continue to believe you are being subversive towards the market?<sup>78</sup>

Burn argued that any art historian aiming at a comprehensive history of the period would have to take account of the fallout from the recognition of these contradictions in the "diverse, experimental and culturally rich work that mushroomed outside of marketing constraints and avant-garde ideals: the community-oriented art and cultural activities, the work of numerous women's groups, the street murals and theater, the activities of artists working within trade union contexts and with social and political activist groups, and more."<sup>79</sup> In 1977, feeling that the ideological contradictions of art could not be overcome, Burn returned to Australia to work as a journalist and graphic artist in the trade union movement (though he took up his artistic practice again in the late 1980s).<sup>80</sup>

In 1986, Victor Burgin noted that the excitement that had greeted Conceptual art in the late 1960s and early 1970s had largely died down, and that Conceptual art was now "being woven into the seamless tapestry of art history." What vexed him, as it had Burn, was the sense that the genuine importance of Conceptual art at this time was being suppressed, that "this assimilation [was] being achieved only at the cost of amnesia in respect of all that was most radical in conceptual art."<sup>81</sup> Burgin's account was poised between a critique of the notion of 'post-modernism,' which, he acknowledged, was being used to support the return to painting, and an advocacy of the politics of representation, a tendency that, he claimed, had emerged from currents within Conceptual art. Burgin cautioned against a conservative tendency in post-Modernism that permitted the re-inscription of 'presence' into the work of art, the trace of that individual



creativity that guaranteed the locus of meaning behind the work and secured the unified self-image of 'art.' On the other hand, work on the politics of representation, carried out as "operations in a field of signifying practices" could be sensitive to the divisions – of form from content, of the private from the social, the word from the image, of the masculine from the feminine, of the inside of the institution from its outside – through which the self-identity of 'art' was produced and maintained. In this was the real legacy of Conceptual art to be found:

What was radical in conceptual art... was the work it required – beyond the object – of recognising, or intervening within, realigning, reorganising, these networks of differences in which the very definition of 'art' and what it represents is constituted: the glimpse it allowed us of the possibility of the absence of 'presence', and thus the possibility of change.<sup>82</sup>

As the 1980s began to draw to a close, the critical and historical interest in Conceptual art began to escalate considerably. The reasons for this are many and complex. Although a number have been touched upon in this chapter, an exhaustive account of them is beyond the scope of this project.<sup>83</sup> One such reason, however, was the opportunity for reassessment afforded by a significant anniversary of some of the key moments in the development of Conceptual art. The exhibition *January 5-31, 1969*, organised by Seth Siegelaub and including Robert Barry, (Fig. 29) Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner (Fig. 51) had long been thought of as the first exclusively Conceptual art exhibition.<sup>84</sup> On the exhibition's twentieth anniversary, Robert C. Morgan once again reflected on the significant influence of the work of those artists for the 1980s generation of "neo-Conceptualists."<sup>85</sup>

Morgan's article, 'The Situation of Conceptual Art: The January Show and After,' published in the February 1989 issue of *Arts Magazine*, was appended with a timely re-print of the infamous Arthur R. Rose 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner' from February 1969,<sup>86</sup> and also with new interviews with the same artists proclaiming 'The Return of Arthur R. Rose.' Barry and Huebler, in particular, took the opportunity to express scepticism about the historical revivification of Conceptual art. Barry felt that the ideas of the '60s and '70s were "deeply ingrained in our thinking, our making of art and even in our lives... whether embraced or reacted against, they can never be forgotten." However, he refused to become a hostage to a particular moment in the history of art: "I feel I owe nothing to Conceptual art," he said, "I'm not going to let my

thinking get stuck somewhere in the late sixties, in some critical or philosophical backwater with no exit.”<sup>87</sup> Huebler, while objecting to “the definitions of conceptual correctness,” was cynical about the efforts of some Conceptual artists to secure their place in the originary histories of the period by backdating their early works. He also alluded to Conceptual art’s legacy as a resource for younger artists: “a couple of generations have come along since, and dipped into the pot, without caring who did what when.”<sup>88</sup>

In the late 1970s, the joyless “puritanism” that some critics had found characteristic of Conceptual art had seemed to necessitate the return to art of sensuality and subjective expression. Despite the accelerated recycling of styles paradoxically necessitated by the art world’s infatuation with ‘the new season,’ the widespread reassessment of Conceptual art would not take place until the mid-to-late 1980s. By this time, the dust had settled sufficiently for some degree of hindsight to become possible, and Conceptual art was beginning to appear as if it might, after all, be accommodated to a continuing narrative of art history. Whatever had been Conceptual art’s challenge to the institutions of art – gallery, museum, connoisseurship, scholarship, publishing – those same institutions might now have a role to play in facilitating Conceptual art’s entry into the canon of modern art.

In the final months of 1988 *Flash Art* had published a *Conceptual Art* supplement that threw many of the complexities of the contemporary situation into sharp relief. On the one hand, such a project had a clear historical intention, concerning itself with a period “from the second half of the 1960s to the early 1970s.” On the other, it was a contemporary response to the ‘neo-conceptualism’ that had lately “flooded the galleries.” Lest it be seen purely as a historical exercise, however, interviews and writings by first and second generation Conceptual artists (such as Michael Baldwin, Robert Barry, Victor Burgin, Ian Burn, Dan Graham, Mary Kelly, Joseph Kosuth, Adrian Piper and Mel Ramsden) were balanced by contributions from some of those associated with neo-conceptualism (such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, General Idea, Clegg and Guttman). In addition, the project included a number of artist’s projects designed specifically for the pages of magazines, some of them especially for the supplement itself.

The presence of 'interventions' by Alfredo Jaar, Louise Lawler and Sylvia Kolbowski, alongside republished work by Hans Haacke and Dan Graham, acknowledged the importance of the magazine page as a *site* for many Conceptual works. But it was also intended to mitigate the danger that the interest of a high quality mass-circulation publication such as *Flash Art* might somehow represent - or accomplish - the accommodation of Conceptual art to 'business as usual.' For its editor, Mary Ann Staniszewski, the fact that the published material appeared as a supplement to the magazine proper allowed for its relative autonomy and preserved the potential for subversion or criticality. As she acknowledged, the 'special section' of a magazine was usually intended as a promotion for certain luxury goods, but, she felt,

a supplement is a small magazine that can interrupt the flow of a glossy art monthly. What better way to present conceptual art, which has often materialised within magazine pages and has displayed a persistent self-consciousness in regard to institutional frames.<sup>89</sup>

Reading Staniszewski's editorial, one can sense her anxiety that to attempt a traditional history of Conceptual art would be, at best, an enterprise doomed to founder on the rocks of vested interest, and, at worst, a betrayal of its critical project:

To map this very specific historical and theoretical movement of mid-sixties and early seventies conceptualism... could easily turn into a list of who did what first. And this approach to writing history ignores the fact that conceptual art ever happened in that conceptualism's important revaluations regarding how meaning is produced are not taken into account.<sup>90</sup>

Through a deft rhetorical detour, Staniszewski managed to turn the ostensible institutional assimilation of Conceptual art into an advantage. Conceptual art, she argued, was not a movement that evolved with a straightforward linearity that could be retraced through specific works or one-person shows. Rather, Conceptual art emerged as a collaborative and discursive venture that utilised, and was distributed through, a wide variety of information sources: magazines, journals, newspapers, catalogues, books and exhibitions. As such, the issues engendering Conceptual art, as well as its relevance to the current situation, she argued, were "better served by an institutional perspective."<sup>91</sup> Staniszewski's editorial thus reflected many of the problems and concerns that had been articulated within Conceptual art since its first appearance, and which had come



into view most sharply, perhaps, at *Documenta V*. How might artists re-imagine the relationship between the production and the distribution of their work? What possibility, or usefulness, was there of occupying an Archimedean point 'outside the system'? And if such a position *were* attainable, would not to seek it out be to remove oneself to a position of virtuous but ineffectual exile? On the other hand, might not the attempt to criticise the institution from within be welcomed by that same institution as a legitimating device to confirm the radicalness of its own policy? These questions, still unresolved and indicating Conceptual art's continuing critical relevance, were to be amplified throughout the 1990s as the curatorial and academic reappraisal of Conceptual art was to gain even greater momentum.

What can probably be considered the first museum retrospective of Conceptual art had already taken place at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Bordeaux between October and November 1988. *Art Conceptuel 1* did not intend a comprehensive survey of the period, however, and included the work of only seven artists and artist collaborations. Furthermore, it seemed aimed principally at a domestic audience, its accompanying catalogue being published only in French.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, the exhibition's impact on the Anglophone artworld was comparatively slight. In the last months of 1989, and in the first of 1990, an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris would have far greater resonance. *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* included the work of nearly forty artists, and was accompanied by a weighty bilingual catalogue with contributions from a distinguished international cast of critics, historians and artists. This latter exhibition initiated the next stage in Conceptual art's reception, that which would occur in relation to its attempted assimilation to a historical narrative of avant-garde art. For many artists, of course, there was a great deal at stake in this process. In the *L'Art Conceptuel* catalogue, and later in the journal *October*, a fierce quarrel was played out between Joseph Kosuth and the critic Benjamin Buchloh over who was best to begin the task of recording this history. The quarrel was just one indication that Conceptual art was not yet ready to surrender itself as the passive object of a curatorial and historical regard.

- <sup>1</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Conceptual Art and Its Criticism', in *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 35-48 (p. 36).
- <sup>2</sup> Charles Harrison, "Seeing" and "Describing": The Artists' Studio', in *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 150-174 (p.155).
- <sup>3</sup> Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), p. 251.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), p. 48. It should be noted that Wood has some historical association with Art & Language. In the mid-1970s he contributed writing to *The Fox*, a journal published by the Art & Language community in New York. In the late 1970s he edited, with Dave Rushton, a publication entitled *Politics of Art Education* (London; Edinburgh: The Studio Trust; Scottish International Institute, 1979). Rushton had been a contributor to *Art-Language* and had been a former student on the Art Theory course at Coventry College of Art set up by Art & Language members Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin and David Bainbridge. Wood is currently employed as Senior Lecturer in Art History at The Open University where Charles Harrison is Professor of History and Theory of Art and Staff Tutor in Arts. Together they have edited a series of books of critical and theoretical writing on art: *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992); *Art in Theory 1815-1900*, co-edited with Jason Gaiger (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998); *Art in Theory 1648-1815*, co-edited with Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
- <sup>5</sup> See Eric Banks, 'October 1972', *Artforum* 41, no. 2 (October 2002), 56.
- <sup>6</sup> The second working paper was authored by Brock, Szeemann and Ammann, with Arnold Bode, Karlheinz Braun, Peter Idon, Ulrich Gregor, Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz. These materials are held in the Library of the Documenta Archive.
- <sup>7</sup> The concerns of artists, critics, dealers and museum directors were noted by Georg Jappe, 'What is Reality? The theme of *Documenta 5*', *Studio International* 182, no. 935 (July/August 1971), 2-3, and Jürgen Harton, "Documenta 5 at Kassel", *Studio International* 184, no. 946 (July/August 1972), 2-4.
- <sup>8</sup> Jappe, 'What is Reality?', p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Morris, letter to Giancarlo Politi, editor of *Flash Art*, dated 6 May 1972. Published in *Flash Art* 32/33/34 (May/June/July 1972), 9 (p. 9).
- <sup>10</sup> Morris, letter to Giancarlo Politi, p. 9.
- <sup>11</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "Reality": Ideology at D5", *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1972), 30-36 (p. 31).
- <sup>12</sup> Bruce Kurtz, "Documenta 5: A Critical Preview", *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 8 (summer 1972), 30-37 (p. 32). Szeemann's exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information: Live in Your Head*, was shown at the Kunsthalle, Bern, from 22 March – 27 April 1969. It later travelled to the Museum Folkwang, Essen, and as a revised version to Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, and to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. The London exhibition was organized by Charles Harrison.
- <sup>13</sup> Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement', *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1972), p. 39. Smithson's statement was translated from the original German. *Documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, ex. cat. (Kassel: Dierichs, Druck, 28 June - 8 October 1972).
- <sup>14</sup> Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement', p. 39.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, Robert Smithson, 'Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam



(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 192-195. See also 'Four Conversations between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson', pp. 217-219, and 'Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson', pp. 242-252, in the same volume.

<sup>16</sup> René Denizot, 'A Serious Exhibition: a backward look at *Documenta 5 II*', *Studio International* 185, no. 953 (March 1973), 151-152 (p. 151).

<sup>17</sup> David Medalla, 'Art for Whom?', interview by Alastair Mackintosh. *Art and Artists* 7, no. 10 (January 1973), 26-31 (pp. 29-31). Medalla and Dugger are not usually thought of as Conceptual artists. (Medalla described himself in the *Documenta* catalogue as a self-taught artist and dancer/poet.) Despite this, both artists were included in the exhibition *Live In Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975*, ex. cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 4 February – 2 April 2000). For a discussion of the curators' position with regard to the category 'Conceptual art,' see Chapter Six in the present volume.

<sup>18</sup> Ironically, given the collaborative nature of the pavilion and its gesture of solidarity with oppressed peoples, the artists were included within the 'Individual Mythologies' category. Medalla's catalogue pages proclaimed the following: "Progressive artists all over the world resolutely advance the slogan: 'socialist art through socialist revolution!'" Medalla and Dugger's *Pavilion* was constructed at a moment when it seemed that "imperialism [was] heading for total collapse and the reactionary ideology of capitalism [was] heading for its final doom." It was the duty of "progressive artists" to "work toward the growth of a genuine and democratic socialist culture created by and for the people," to "integrate the practice of their art with the practice of revolution." More than thirty years on, it is self-evident that Medalla's hopes for the demise of both imperialism and capitalism were premature, that these forces have been able to successfully rearticulate themselves under the guise of globalism/globalisation, for instance (see Chapter Five). With the benefit of hindsight, the contradictions of Medalla's position are evident: for as long as there has been no revolution, there has been no socialist art by and for the people; all art has continued to serve the interests of capital. Critics sympathetic to, but less persuaded of the imminence of, "socialist revolution" objected that the artist was exhibiting in "the terrain of bourgeois art." To this accusation Medalla insisted: "All terrains in a bourgeois society [are] bourgeois, whether you exhibit in a factory or a church or in the streets – because bourgeois law operates there... Even socialist societies have art galleries – with different functions and a different organisation. In exhibiting we bear in mind two things: we must not compromise our principles, and we must be firmly in command." Medalla, 'Art for Whom?', p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Beuys, 'La Rivoluzione Siamo Noi – We Are the Revolution', interview by Giancarlo Politi. The interview was conducted during *Documenta's* run in July 1972 and published in *Flash Art* 26, no. 169 (March/April 1993), 55 (p. 55). Despite Beuys' claim to have been producing Conceptual art, he has not been included in any of the major retrospective survey exhibitions of Conceptual art. Much of the artist's work was dependent on the physical presence and associative potential of the materials employed. This is obviously at odds with any tendency toward 'dematerialisation' thought to be present in Conceptual art. The reasons for Beuys' absence are probably more complex, however. They may equally stem from his self-mythologization and shamanism. These sit uncomfortably alongside the rational pragmatism of some Conceptual artists. It may also be the case that Beuys' absence can in part be attributed to his association by proxy with the 'return to painting' in, for example, the work of Sigmar Polke, his colleague at the Kunstakademie, and Anselm Kiefer, one of his students there (see my discussion below).



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- <sup>20</sup> Hans-Ulrich Obrist, 'Hans-Ulrich Obrist talks with Harald Szeemann', *Artforum* 35, no. 3 (November 1996), 74-78, 111-112, 119, 125 (p. 112).
- <sup>21</sup> Carter Ratcliff, 'Adversary Spaces', *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1972), 40-44 (p. 40).
- <sup>22</sup> Charlotte Townsend, 'Documenta 5', *Artscanada* 29, no. 4 (October/November 1972), 42-44 (p. 43).
- <sup>23</sup> Michael Baldwin has complained that "[one of] the questions rarely addressed by commentators, and raised systematically by the indexes, concerns the indexical or practical division and fragmentation of the work: what is the 'smallest' (or largest) cultural unit that could be handled by someone operating the index. In other words, given that the index might operate indifferently on mere morphemes, or letters, or words, or phrases, on what basis might we choose to identify a given item for 'comparison' by the index operator?" Interview with the author, 12 March 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> This view of the *Index* is shared by the current members of Art & Language and is related in the 'approved' histories of the group. See, for example, Charles Harrison, 'Indexes and Other Figures,' in *Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 63-81. Terry Atkinson regards matters differently, however. For him 'the Indexing' represented the growing institutionalisation of Conceptual art practice, and an attempt to control use of the name Art & Language. His decision to leave the group, which he eventually did in 1974, was motivated by his unhappiness with this situation. See *The Indexing, The World War I Moves and the Ruins of Conceptualism* (Belfast; Manchester; Dublin: Circa; Cornerhouse; Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1992).
- <sup>25</sup> The observation was made by Mel Ramsden at the conference 'Philosophy and Conceptual Art,' King's College, London, 4 June 2005.
- <sup>26</sup> Harrison, 'The Trouble with Writing', p. 26.
- <sup>27</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Exposition of an Exhibition.' *Studio International* 185, no. 954 (April 1973), p. 152. Buren's statement was translated from the original French. *Documenta 5: Befragung der Realität Bildwelten heute*, ex. cat. Kassel: Dierichs, Druck, 28 June - 8 October 1972.
- <sup>28</sup> Buren had adopted this device from a commercially manufactured fabric. The fabric was commonly seen in France, where it was often used for the awnings of government buildings. For the theoretical basis of Buren's work at this time see his 'Beware!' *Studio International* 179, no. 120 (March 1970), 100-104, reprinted in translation and revised form from the exhibition catalogue *Conception-Konzeption* (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum, October-November 1969).
- <sup>29</sup> The following passage is representative and conveys the tone of Denizot's argument: "by their aesthetic neutrality, the pieces reveal the aestheticism of the gallery, at the point where they conceal its whiteness by covering it. And they themselves then reveal themselves by this interruption which they produce in the gallery. Paradoxically it is by their non-spectacular aspect, their aesthetic invisibility, that these pieces become essentially visible. They thwart the complexity of the gallery by their simplicity. Thus each piece inside the gallery opens the gallery in spite of it, spaces it out. This spacing occurs where a piece covering the gallery effects [sic] it – between works over which one's gaze passes without seeing anything – as an interruption which arrests the gaze and draws it into an empty space." Denizot, 'A serious exhibition', p. 152. Denizot was supportive of Buren's work at this time, and his article developed a number of the issues raised in the artist's own statement for the *Documenta* catalogue.

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- <sup>30</sup> The objection might also be raised that Buren's project at *Documenta* depended upon the acceptance by other artists of the conventions of display; were other artists also to question these conventions and adopt an approach similar to Buren's, for better or worse, there would remain no 'centre' to the exhibition in relation to which one might articulate one's work.
- <sup>31</sup> Denizot, 'A serious exhibition', pp. 151-152.
- <sup>32</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Where Are the Artists?', in *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, ed. by Jens Hoffman (Frankfurt; New York; Istanbul: Revolver; e-flux; Platform, 2004), pp. 26-31 (p. 27). Since the mid-to-late 1980s, Buren has sometimes been accused of being an "official artist." (See, for example, Art & Language, 'Ralph the Situationist', *Artscribe International* 66 (November/December 1987), 59-62.) This is paradoxical given the artist's opposition to some of the most institutionally sanctioned developments in the contemporary cultural situation. Unsurprisingly, Buren judges such allegations insulting and nonsensical, claiming that they have been made as a "tour de force" since his first commission to produce work for a public space, *Les Deux Plateaux* (1985-86) in the courtyard of the Palais Royal, Paris. *Daniel Buren*. Dir. Camille Guichard. Interview by Guy Tortosa. Centre Pompidou. 2000.
- <sup>33</sup> Robin Campbell, Director of Art, and Norbert Lynton, Director of Exhibitions, observed that "Since [the conception of the biennial series of surveys] the validity of broad or survey exhibitions has been challenged, as has the advisability of entrusting the selecting to one person. The matter of selection itself, implying a preference for one work or type of work over another, is under attack." Noting that Seymour's seriousness - "her need to act from a real understanding of the ideals and strategies directing avant-garde art" - had impelled her toward a more tightly delimited selection than had originally been envisaged, they nonetheless opined that "No one has ever assembled an exhibition with greater care for the total, public result... and solicitude for the artists' wishes and interests." 'Preface', *The New Art*, ex. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1972), p. 4.
- <sup>34</sup> The other participating artists were Keith Arnatt, Michael Craig-Martin, David Dye, Barry Flanagan, John Hilliard, Keith Milow, Gerald Newman and John Stezaker.
- <sup>35</sup> Some critics argued that the description of the work as "new" was, in *any* sense, erroneous. Rudi H. Fuchs, for instance, doubted that "conceptualism is altogether as new and contemporary as it would claim to be, or as the Hayward show's arrogant title would imply. Some of the artists... certainly are, but others... can all too easily for my taste be related to existing, traditional styles." 'More on *The New Art*', *Studio International* 184, no. 949 (November 1972), 194-195 (p.194).
- <sup>36</sup> Anne Seymour, 'Introduction', in *The New Art*, 5-7 (p.5).
- <sup>37</sup> Feaver observed that the majority of the artists included in the new art "have become the stock in trade of Nigel Greenwood's, the Lisson and Rowan Galleries, the Camden Arts Centre, the ICA, and the like-minded periodicals. 'London Letter: Summer', *Art International* 16, no. 9 (November 1972), 38-41, 54 (p. 38). In another publication, Feaver added: "Most of the artists involved already have considerable dossiers of Documenta-type reputation to count on. They are familiar characters in art school and art mag circles, and for their average age, have probably been exhibited, one way or another, as often as anyone since the juvenile Orson Welles." '*Documenta, Eurofrut and the New Art*', *London Magazine*, New Series, 12, no. 5 (December 1972/January 1973), 111-120 (p. 118).
- <sup>38</sup> Feaver, 'London Letter', p. 39.
- <sup>39</sup> Seymour, 'Introduction', p. 6.



<sup>40</sup> Feaver, 'London Letter', p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Unlike Smithson, for whom the site/non-site dialectic preserved two equal elements in continuous reciprocal relationship, Long's displacement of natural materials to the gallery was a tokenistic reference to an activity - mystic, mythic and romantic - that took place beyond its confines. Whereas Smithson declared himself to be more interested in the idea of "denaturalization" than any concept of empathy with "nature", (see, 'Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson'), Long's displacement of natural materials to the gallery was carefully conceived, as were the accompanying photographs in the catalogue, to evoke a sense of man's 'timeless' relationship to the landscape.

<sup>42</sup> See, Feaver, 'London Letter'; Robert Melville, 'Making It New', *Architectural Review* 152, no. 908 (October 1972), 247-248; Rosetta Brooks 'The New Art', *Studio International* 184, no. 948 (October 1972), 152-153.

<sup>43</sup> Fuchs, 'More on *The New Art*', p. 195.

<sup>44</sup> Georgina Oliver, 'The New Art', *Connoisseur* 181 (November 1972), p. 224.

<sup>45</sup> Atkinson, *The Indexing*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> When formulating the terms of a practice (the *World War I* work) that would ensure his way out of "official Conceptualism," from being both "named Conceptualist" and "named A&L," Atkinson had to concede that although "[t]he volte-face had been planned and made in the relatively private space of the relations of production (the studio)... it was essential that the volte-face should be enunciated and announced in public, in the relations of distribution. The obvious place was the public space of a gallery." Atkinson, *The Indexing*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Had space permitted, it would have been desirable as a counterpoint to my discussion of *The New Art* to examine here the important exhibition *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain*, shown in three parts at Gallery House, London, between August and October 1972. Run by Sigi Krauss and Rosetta Brooks, Gallery House retained the feel of an alternative exhibition space; no salaries were paid and there was no real budget. Occupying a building at 50 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road, Gallery House was owned by the Goethe Institute (Krauss received a small stipend for dealing with its mail). In addition to occasional Arts Council funding, exhibitions were supported by private donation and the governments of visiting international artists. *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain* was one of a number of groundbreaking experimental exhibitions to be shown at Gallery House. In contrast to *The New Art*, whose title, as I have indicated, was perceived by many as giving a somewhat false account of its contemporaneity, the *Survey* included a range of the diverse forms of practice then emerging, and was especially strong in the areas of performance, film and video.

Lest it be imagined, however, that Gallery House offered an ideal model of alternative exhibition practice, it should be remarked upon that women were seriously under-represented across the range of its presentations (see, Caroline Tisdall, 'Avant-garde, to all intents', *The Guardian*, 25 August 1972, *Arts*, p. 8), and that the *Survey* included work by only two women: performance artist Carolee Schneeman and poet and performance artist Carlyle Reedy (both American). When it is also recalled that *The New Art* included no female artists whatsoever, this should alert us to the overtly masculinist, not to say sexist, culture in the British art world at this time.

<sup>48</sup> *Tate Gallery 1972-1974: Biennial Report and Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), pp. 29-31.

<sup>49</sup> *Tate Gallery 1972-1974: Biennial Report*, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> By the time of the second Hayward biennial in 1974, voices were already been raised in defence of a beleaguered painting. *British Painting '74*, was



curated by Andrew Forge and declared its allegiance to painting as a "language and enterprise... a specifically tuned form of life." Forge was generous in complementing Seymour for an exhibition that had "all the virtues of choice made by one person out of involvement and curiosity." He acknowledged the timeliness of *The New Art*, noting that during the previous few years there had been "an explosion of energy" in art that turned away from the painted product. Nevertheless, Forge believed that the proliferation and valorisation of work that had mostly dispensed with the traditional art object and the mastery of specialised technical skills had produced a situation in which the practice of painting had been galvanized into a response. "I have the impression," he wrote, "that just as the almost universal spread of abstract art in the early fifties first dismayed and then challenged and strengthened painters who were concerned with representation, so we are now seeing a considerable recharging of conviction in the traditional categories." With hindsight it is possible to discern that the stage was already being set for the triumphal return of painting at the end of the decade. Andrew Forge, 'Introduction.' In *British Painting '74*, ex. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 26 September – 17 November 1974), unpaginated.

<sup>51</sup> 557,087, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, 5 September – 5 October 1969; *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, New York Cultural Center, New York, 10 April – 25 August 1970; *Information*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2 July – 20 September 1970; *Software: Information Technology: Its Meaning for Art*, The Jewish Museum, New York, 16 September – 8 November 1970.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Gabrielle Guercio, 'Formed in Resistance: Barry, Huebler, Kosuth and Weiner vs. the American Press', in *L'Art Conceptuel, une Perspective*, ex. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990), pp. 74-81.

<sup>53</sup> Words: A Look at the Use of Language in Art. Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch. 13 March-10 April, 1977. Exhibition organised by Isabella Puliafito and Martha Winans with the assistance of William Ameringer.

<sup>54</sup> Jeff Perrone, "'Words': When Art Takes a Rest", *Artforum* 15, no. 10 (summer 1977), 34-37 (p. 34).

<sup>55</sup> Perrone, "'Words'", p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> *"Bad" Painting*, ex. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 14 January – 28 February 1978) *New Image Painting*, ex. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 5 December 1978 – 28 January 1979). The possibility of a "post-conceptual" painting was being advanced as early as 1973. In an article for *Artforum*, James Collins had advocated painting as a practice that was focused on its strength as a hypothesis *about* painting: "the kind of painting advocated here is not the irrational excesses of the 'born with a brush in his hand and a beret on his head' school. The painter I refer to is a circumscribed kind of artist. A painter after Conceptual art is going to be more aware of the physical, conceptual, and societal limitations of painting." 'Things and Theories', *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973), 32-36 (p. 35).

<sup>57</sup> Two of the artists in the exhibition, Troy Brauntuch and Jack Goldstein, had been students at the California Institute of Arts (CalArts) where they may have become familiar with the work of first generation Conceptual artists such as John Baldessari and Douglas Huebler, both of whom were engaged on the teaching staff during the 1970s.

<sup>58</sup> *Pictures*, ex. cat. (New York: Artists Space, 29 September – 29 October, 1977). Douglas Crimp, 'About Pictures', *Flash Art* 88-89 (March-April 1979), 34-35 (p. 34).

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- <sup>59</sup> Crimp, 'About Pictures', p. 34. In the abortive quest to discover meaning residing within the image, further meanings might be enabled, Crimp thought. Rather than being seduced unto an ecstasy of representation, the *Pictures* artists "subvert[ed] the standard signifying function of [the images they presented], tied to their captions, their commentaries, their narrative sequences – tied, that is, to the illusion that they are directing transparent to a particular signified. What these artists provide is the possibility of readings that the culture which produces these pictures seeks to foreclose, readings whose multiplicity would contravene an ideology of the signified." 'About Pictures', p. 35.
- <sup>60</sup> Douglas Huebler, statement for the exhibition catalogue, *Prospect '69*, Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 30 September – 12 October 1969, cited in Jack Burnham, 'Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art', *Artforum* vol. 8, no. 6 (February 1970) 37-43 (p. 41).
- <sup>61</sup> As early as 1970, Mel Bochner had raised this as a problematic issue in *Language is Not Transparent*, but although this work seemed to promise the opening up of language to ideological analysis, it repeatedly and stubbornly returned the viewer to the visual dimension of written language beyond which facticity it was difficult to progress. The artist Mike Kelley admits to finding *Language is Not Transparent* "a particularly annoying and compelling work, and in some ways one of 'Conceptualism's' most self conscious works. The work consists of a sloppily dripping band of black paint on the wall, large enough to contain the phrase 'Language is not Transparent' which is written upon it in chalk. At first the work elicits a tautologically induced 'So what?' from the viewer, but then the work's very inability to define, aided by its limited presentational mode, opens up a vista of questions. The work seems to be full of very particular allusions: in its drippy execution - to the Abstract Expressionist Oedipal father of Conceptual/Minimal art, and in its use of off hand lettering in chalk on a black surface - to some kind of childish educational scenario. These things cannot simply be looked through to the abstract message of the phrase. They inform and color the phrase; they problematize its abstraction." Mike Kelley, "Shall We Kill Daddy?", in *Origin and Destination: Alighiero e Boetti, Douglas Huebler*, ed. by Marianne Van Leeuw and Anne Pontégne (Bruxelles: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1997), pp. 155-173 (p. 163).
- <sup>62</sup> Louis Althusser describes how the ideology of the dominant classes must be internalised in order to ensure its reproduction. The "interpellation" of subjects within the dominant ideology ensures that subjects "work by themselves"... They 'recognize' the existing state of affairs (*das Bestehende*), that 'it really is true that it is so and not otherwise', and that they must be obedient to God, to their conscience, to the priest, to de Gaulle, to the boss, to the engineer, that thou shalt 'love thy neighbour as thyself', etc." 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Essays on Ideology* (London; New York: Verso, 1984), pp. 1-60 (p. 55.)
- <sup>63</sup> Christos M Joachimides, Norman J. Rosenthal, Nicholas Serota, 'Preface', in *A New Spirit in Painting*, ex. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 15 January - 18 March 1981) 11-13 (p.12.)
- <sup>64</sup> Christos M. Joachimides, 'A New Spirit in Painting', in *A New Spirit in Painting*, pp. 14-16. In an interview with John McEwen published in *Art Monthly*, Joachimides defined the 'new spirit' in painting as: "a quite clear reaction to the exclusion of expression and sensuality from art after the years of Minimalism and even more trappistic years of conceptual art...And this very pretentious dictatorship that everything has to be 'that' and 'that's' the end of art was silly and not possible to sustain very long. And the artists, the museum



people, the public, the dealers protested. They didn't like this suppression of the essential values of art as they had been developed over the centuries and they are now coming back in an explosive way." Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides' 'How they got it together, "A New Spirit in Painting": extracts from an interview with two of the selectors', interview by John McEwen, *Art Monthly* 43 (February 1981), 3-4. (p. 4). *A New Spirit in Painting* included artists from, roughly, three generations, but it was principally through the presence of a number of lesser-known or younger European painters that the exhibition managed to create a sense of excitement about painting's renewed vitality. Artists such as Georg Baselitz, Rainer Fetting and Anselm Kiefer, or Sandro Chia and Mimmo Paladino were primarily associated with the neo-Expressionism of the *Neue Wilden* in Germany, or with the *Trans-Avantgarde* in Italy. For their supporters, the stylistic eclecticism of these artists' was intended to bring about the radical fragmentation of the unitary idea of the work and its relation to illusionary cultural models, replacing reference to the real with the artifice of historical symbolism and pictorial convention. See, for example: Achille Bonito Oliva, 'The International Trans-Avantgarde', *Flash Art* 104 (October/November 1981), 36-43; Donald Kuspit 'Flak from the "Radicals": The American Case Against Current German Painting', in *Expressions: New Art from Germany*, ed. by Jack Cowart (St Louis; Munich: St. Louis Art Museum; Prestel-Verlag, 1983), pp. 43-55. The latter was reprinted in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York; Boston: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Godine, 1984), pp. 137-151. In this, their project was, perhaps, not so far removed from that of the *Pictures* artists. For others, however, the vaunting of painting and the revival of earlier expressionistic modes was regressive, a response to the conservative social policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and to a booming art market intent on salvaging its commercial products after the recession of the 1970s. Probably the best known and most compelling case against these moves was provided by Benjamin Buchloh in his essay 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting', *October* 16 (spring 1981), 39-68, reprinted in *Art After Modernism*, pp. 107-134.

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Huebler, 'Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), 72-76 (p. 73).

<sup>66</sup> Huebler, 'Sabotage or Trophy?', p. 76.

<sup>67</sup> Huebler, 'Sabotage or Trophy?', p. 76.

<sup>68</sup> Huebler, 'Sabotage or Trophy?', p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> As stated by the editor: "The subject for Kosuth and Weiner was to construct a subjective response to [the] conversation, which naturally centered around current art practice, production, and promotion. The project for Acker was to write about Kosuth and Weiner's work." *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Weiner, cited by Kathy Acker, 'Impassioned with some song we', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), 66-68 (p. 67).

<sup>71</sup> Kosuth commented upon the "noticeable nonarrival" of a discourse that might replace Modernism, "post-Modernism" being "more of a notion than a discourse." Joseph Kosuth, 'Necrophilia Mon Amour', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), 59-63 (p. 62).

<sup>72</sup> Kosuth, 'Necrophilia Mon Amour', p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Kosuth's 'Introductory Note by the American Editor,' *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970), 1-4. I discuss the implications of Kosuth's position in the following chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Kosuth, 'Necrophilia Mon Amour', p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> Kosuth, 'Necrophilia Mon Amour', p. 61.



<sup>76</sup> These included 'Conceptual art and photographic installations, the recent outlook', *Afterimage* 9 (December 1981), 8; 'Conceptual art into photography/photography into Conceptual art', *Photographic Insight* 1, nos. 2-3 (winter 1987/spring 1988), 15-18; 'The Making of wit: Joseph Kosuth and the Freudian palimpsest', *Arts Magazine* 62, no. 5 (January 1988), 48-51; 'What is conceptual art, post or neo?', *Arts Magazine* 62, no. 7 (March 1988), 90-81; 'Robert Barry's return to the visible', *Arts Magazine* 62, no. 8 (April 1988), 68-73; 'The situation of Conceptual art: the January show and after', *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 6 (February 1989), 40-43; 'Idea, Concept, System', *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 1 (September 1989), 61-65.

<sup>77</sup> Ian Burn, 'The 'sixties: crisis and aftermath (or the memoirs of an ex-Conceptual artist)', *Art & Text* 1, no. 1 (fall 1981), 49-65, reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 392-408; Victor Burgin, 'The absence of presence: conceptualism and postmodernisms', in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986) 29-50; Dan Graham, 'My works for magazine pages: "a history of conceptual art"', in *Dan Graham*, ex. cat. (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985), pp. 8-13, reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 418-422.

<sup>78</sup> Burn, 'The 'sixties: crisis and aftermath', p. 405.

<sup>79</sup> Burn, 'The 'sixties: crisis and aftermath', p. 393.

<sup>80</sup> Applying the dialectical model favoured by Kosuth, it might be argued that whereas the 'New Painting' represented a negation of Conceptual art's negation, for Ian Burn, the recognition of Conceptual art's own contradictions had produced an advanced understanding (the Hegelian synthesis) in the recognition that even the avant-garde was in thrall to capital, and that art might, perhaps, only discover its real function through the kind of social, community and activist projects to which Burn alluded.

<sup>81</sup> Burgin, 'The Absence of Presence', p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Burgin, 'The Absence of Presence', p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Briefly restated, some of the possible reasons for the revival of interest in Conceptual art during the mid-to-late 1980s were: 1) what appeared to be its challenge to the commodity status of the traditional art object, especially following the art market boom of the early 1980s; 2) its being seen as having established strategic precedents for the 'neo-conceptualism' of the time; 3) the role of a number of first generation Conceptual artists as educators in universities and art colleges; and 4) the changing nature of the discipline of art history itself as, in the 1980s, it became increasingly concerned with political and theoretical issues and, arguably, less concerned with objects (to what extent Conceptual art had had a determining influence in this transformation would be an interesting question in itself).

<sup>84</sup> See Ursula Meyer's 'Introduction', *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. vii-xx (p. xiv). The exhibition was held in rented office space at 44 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York.

<sup>85</sup> Or rather, he reflected upon what had been significantly missed in their work. Morgan noted that: "In recent years, conceptual art has surfaced again in New York, with some of the vitality associated with the earlier period. Typical of the theoretically orientated decade of postmodernism, conceptual art in the eighties, or 'neo-conceptualism,' has either repeated the imagistic appearance of the late sixties as a ploy for another level of content – perhaps more involved with ideological concerns on the social and political level than in former years – or it has replaced the documentary text or photographs with a cynical materialism that foregrounds the commodity system. The deliberate

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irony of the latter style of neo-conceptualism is that by selling themselves as art, these commodities have entered into the social structure as a mockery powered by self-removal and entirely neglectful of the social issues that once accelerated the production of 'de-materialized' art in the sixties. Without fear or trepidation, the new 'commodity artists' have accepted the fate of an over-determined society and have played the game the art world expects in order to succeed on its terms – that is, on the terms of collectors who want the objects." Morgan, 'The Situation of Conceptual Art', p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> Arthur R. Rose, "Four interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner", *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 4 (February 1969): 22-23.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Barry, 'The Return of Arthur R. Rose', *Arts Magazine* 63, no.6 (February 1989), 46-50 (pp. 46-47).

<sup>88</sup> Douglas Huebler, 'The Return of Arthur R. Rose,' *Arts Magazine* 63, no.6 (February 1989), 46-50 (p. 48).

<sup>89</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, 'Conceptual Art', supplement to *Flash Art* 143 (November/December 1988), 88-97 (p. 88).

<sup>90</sup> Staniszewski, 'Conceptual Art', p. 90.

<sup>91</sup> Staniszewski, 'Conceptual Art', p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> *Art Conceptuel 1*, ex. cat. (Bordeaux: Musée d'Art Contemporain, 7 October - 27 November 1988). The exhibiting artists were: Art & Language, Robert Barry, Hanne Darboven, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner.

## Chapter Three

### Whose Conceptual Art?

***L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. 22 November 1989 - 18 February 1990**

The exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective* ran from 22 November 1989 to 18 February 1990 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. It marked the close of a decade in which a return to traditional media, heralded by exhibitions such as *A New Spirit in Painting*,<sup>1</sup> gradually gave way to forms of practice that dispensed with painting and sculpture in favour of a variety of practices that often seemed to recall the Conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the following decade, 'conceptualism', in its broadest definition, would arguably become the dominant form of international art practice. *L'Art Conceptuel*, as the first major museum retrospective of Conceptual art, was one of the most significant indicators of Conceptual art's critical rehabilitation, and marked the beginnings of its historicization as a canonical practice. As such, the show brought to the fore a number of issues germane to the writing of any history of Conceptual art.

The accelerated rate of revival of cultural forms, linked to a growing acknowledgement that history need not deal only with long distant events, ensured that the human subjects of this historical enterprise were mostly still living. The exhibition, therefore, raised questions about whom was best qualified to begin the task of recording Conceptual art's history: the practitioners themselves, curators or art historians. The matter became the subject of some controversy as the artist Joseph Kosuth and the critic Benjamin Buchloh became embroiled in a bitter disagreement over matters of personal and professional ethics, intention and authority, as these related both to art practice and the enterprise of art history. The repercussions of this dispute continued to be felt throughout the remainder of the decade. Ironically, the episode itself may now provide the material for its own historical analysis.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that by 1988 there was something of a revival of interest in what had been regarded for much of 1980s as the rather *démodé* practice of Conceptual art. This revival had been reflected, or assisted, by the publication of Mary Ann Staniszewski's Conceptual art supplement for



*Flash Art*, and by a number of articles throughout 1988 and 1989 by Robert C. Morgan, both writers responding, in part, to the work of so-called neo-conceptualist artists. It was into this historical and critical situation that the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective* arrived. There appeared to be at least two reasons why such an exhibition was appropriate at such a time. First, that the work of the first generation of Conceptual artists might function as a critical tool to illuminate some aspects of contemporary practice;<sup>2</sup> and second, that since most of the artists of the earlier generation were still alive, they might be called upon to clarify some of the thornier issues in the history and development of Conceptual art.

Although to begin the process of historicizing Conceptual art might be useful to an interested public and to art historians alike, it did raise a question as to how best to represent an artistic tendency that, according to the mythologies circulating around it, had attempted to retain a critical distance from both the institutions of art history and the museum. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship between Conceptual and neo-Conceptual art, the exhibition could be conceived of in two ways: either as a reaction against the money-driven art world of the 1980s,<sup>3</sup> or as the means to confer high-art status on the objects and texts produced during the 1960s and 1970s, to establish a 'pedigree' for the work of *neo*-conceptualist artists, and thus to provide the means of securing a market value for work whose very contemporaneity made it subject to the vagaries of fashion and market speculation. Indeed, it could be argued that the real importance of *L'Art Conceptuel* was to be found in the extent to which it brought these issues of historiography and historicization to the surface, both in the critical contributions to the catalogue and in the ways in which artists regarded their participation in the exhibition.

Organized by art critic and independent curator, Claude Gintz, along with Julliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf, *L'Art Conceptuel* included over a hundred works by thirty-eight artists and groups. As Gintz noted in the press release for the exhibition, written with museum director Suzanne Pagé and catalogue essayist Benjamin Buchloh:

Conceptual art's historic phase of development presents, from its beginning, such a complex range of approaches that all attempts at a retrospective examination must challenge the voices rising to reclaim the respected purity and orthodoxy of the movement. It is precisely

because of this spread that it appears necessary not to elaborate a history of Conceptual art that would organise itself in terms of a stylistic homogeneity, limited to a strictly defined group of individuals and to a historic body of practices and interventions.<sup>4</sup>

The exhibition, did not seek to present only the work of artists usually considered to be at the historic and discursive centre of Conceptual art; rather, it sought to locate these works in relation to those by a number of 'pre', or 'proto-Conceptual' artists, and to others by artists who, in a number of cases, emerged slightly later, and whose identification with Conceptual art was more problematic. In the organisation of its display, *L'Art Conceptuel* established a kind of itinerary that, although not strictly chronological, did suggest a certain historical narrative. (Fig. 30) A small introductory room, for example, presented work by a number of artists that could be regarded in some way as prefiguring Conceptual art itself. Duchamp's *La boîte en valise*, 1936-41, Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, (Fig. 31) and Yves Klein's *Transfer Certificates for Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility*, 1959, were here considered to reveal some of the characteristics that, for Gintz, would later be recognized as fundamental to Conceptual art: "the loss of viscosity, the accessibility of art as opposed to the one-of-a-kind object, the relativization of the notion of the author."<sup>5</sup> A second 'pre-conceptual' room included works by the Europeans Piero Manzoni, Hans Haacke and Stanley Brouwn, alongside that of the Americans, Dan Flavin, Claes Oldenburg, Ed Ruscha and Robert Morris.

A little further on, the visitor encountered an installation of the work that Benjamin Buchloh, in his essay for the catalogue, described as the "first truly conceptual exhibition (both in terms of materials being exhibited and in terms of presentational style)": Mel Bochner's *Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art* (1966).<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 32) In the same room, Dan Graham's magazine work *Homes for America 1965* (1966-1967) was displayed as representing "a kind of bridge between minimalist sculpture and Pop art on the one hand, and Conceptual art on the other."<sup>7</sup> Nearby was work by Hanne Darboven and Sol LeWitt, by its location, similarly suggesting the bridging of a gap between the permutational forms of post-minimalism and Conceptual art.

At the end of this first sequence of rooms the visitor encountered a number of the *Proto-Investigations* of Joseph Kosuth, (Fig. 33) dating from 1965, which

brought the viewer, in the words of Claude Gintz's itinerary to the exhibition, "face to face with what was to be emblematic of Conceptual art as it is generally understood."<sup>8</sup> Significantly, the presentation of Kosuth's work served, therefore, as a historically privileged introduction to the section of the exhibition in which the works of those artists considered as being central to Conceptual art were displayed. However, in keeping with an exhibition premise that wished to avoid a canonical or homogenizing view of Conceptual art, this second part of the exhibition also included work that, in a number of different ways, was regarded as having maintained a critical dialogue with "pure" conceptual practices, such as that by Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Marcel Broodthaers, Andre Cadere and Michael Asher. (Fig. 34)

In the commissioning and soliciting of essays for the catalogue (Fig. 35), too, the organizers attempted to avoid presenting the period from one particular geographical or historical perspective. Benjamin Buchloh was to contribute an essay that would focus on the American artists, Claude Gintz would deal with the Europeans, and Charles Harrison was approached to contribute a piece "from an inside perspective" on Art & Language, as well as on other British artists such as Victor Burgin.<sup>9</sup> Three other critical texts were also to be included: a piece by Gabriel Guercio on the critical reception of the artists involved in Seth Siegelaub's *January Show* - Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner; an excerpt from Robert C. Morgan's *Arts Magazine* article 'The Situation of Conceptual art,' which examined the *January Show* and its influence on later art practice; and a reprint of the famous 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth and Weiner' from the February 1969 issue of *Arts Magazine*. Thus, while the catalogue contributions did reflect a number of critical voices and perspectives on the period in question, there was, nonetheless, a significant emphasis placed on the *January Show*, and on its participating artists.<sup>10</sup>

Given his own involvement in the *January Show*, and the prominent position that his own *Proto-Investigations* would occupy in the exhibition itself, it was surprising, perhaps, that Joseph Kosuth would claim to be the victim of egregious historical injustice. Having read Benjamin Buchloh's catalogue essay 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique' prior to the opening of the exhibition, Kosuth would claim that, "It is the first time in my experience that I have seen a participant in a historical survey show attacked – much less



with such vehemence.” He continued: ‘When it is an art historian who takes as his task the defamation of a living artist in character, work, and name, the situation is even more difficult to countenance.’<sup>11</sup> Kosuth demanded right-of-reply, and his response to Buchloh’s essay was pasted, at short notice, into the already printed first edition of the catalogue.<sup>12</sup>

Kosuth accused Buchloh of a “wholesale falsification of history” and of a “blatant cronyism.”<sup>13</sup> He objected to Buchloh’s intimation that he had been disingenuous in failing to acknowledge the significant influence of older, more established artists on his own early work. Buchloh had cited a section of Kosuth’s well-known article ‘Art After Philosophy’ in which the artist had acknowledged the influence of Ad Reinhardt, Marcel Duchamp (via Jasper Johns and Robert Morris), and Donald Judd. But Buchloh had then questioned the omission of On Kawara and Mel Bochner from this list, while also claiming that Kosuth’s “explicit negation” of Sol LeWitt’s influence “makes one wonder whether it was not precisely Sol LeWitt’s series of the so-called ‘Structures’, (such as *Red Square*, *White Letters*, for example, produced in 1962 and exhibited in 1965) (Fig. 36) which were one of the crucial points of departure for the formulation of Kosuth’s *Protoinvestigations*.”<sup>14</sup> In response, Kosuth claimed that Buchloh had misread ‘Art After Philosophy,’ where, in part 2, he had acknowledged On Kawara, though not as a direct influence on his work. As regards the influence of Sol LeWitt, Kosuth admitted to an admiration and respect for the artist, but denied that he had seen *Red Square*, *White Letters* until the 1970s, and that he regarded the work, anyway, as an anomaly in LeWitt’s oeuvre.

But for Kosuth, the most reprehensible attack in Buchloh’s essay concerned the critic’s comments on the dating of Kosuth’s *Proto-Investigations*. Buchloh claimed not to have been able to find any evidence “which would confirm with definite credibility Kosuth’s claim that these works of the *Protoinvestigations* were actually produced and physically existed in 1965 or 1966,” and further, that none of his interviewees could remember having seen these pieces before the exhibition *Non-Anthropomorphic Art by Four Young Artists* at the Lannis Gallery in February 1967.<sup>15</sup> In Buchloh’s account, then, Bochner’s installation at the School of Visual Arts in New York in December 1966 appears to predate the first verifiable appearance of Kosuth’s *Proto-Investigations* by two months. This may seem an insignificant period of time, but amongst the hotly contested claims of priority among Conceptual artists, reputations have been built on little more than

this. Reminding readers that “the work is titled *Proto-Investigations* clearly from the vantage point of the [later] *Investigations*,” Kosuth claimed that the works had existed in 1965 as notes or drawings, but had only been fabricated later, after he had the financial resources to do so. “Is the physically exhibited presence of a work the only criterion for its existence?”, Kosuth asked rhetorically, answering pointedly that, “It isn’t if you know anything about Conceptual art.”<sup>16</sup>

In the pasted-in statement, Kosuth’s response on the matter of Mel Bochner’s influence was conspicuously absent.<sup>17</sup> But it may be useful, in this regard, to recall a much earlier disagreement that was played out in the pages of *Studio International* in response to the publication of ‘Art After Philosophy.’ In the second part of that text, published in November 1969, Kosuth had commented that, within the previous year, Mel Bochner had “given up work heavily influenced by ‘Minimal’ art” and had begun “a more ‘conceptual’ form of work.”<sup>18</sup> In February 1970, *Studio International* had published a letter from Dore Ashton, the Head of Department of Art and Architecture History at the Cooper Union, New York. Ashton wrote that, “since history has apparently condensed itself from a distant to a quotidian discipline, I felt you would appreciate an adjustment to the factual aspect of Mr Kosuth’s contribution.”<sup>19</sup> In the supposed interests of historical accuracy, Ashton pointed out that in 1965 Kosuth had been a student at the School of Visual Arts where “he was engaged in trying to make paintings that were distantly related to the de Stijl philosophy,” and where, slightly later, he was working on a term paper on Ad Reinhardt. Ashton’s implication that, in 1965, Kosuth, *the Conceptual artist*, was still very much under the spell of the tradition of painting is obvious. She goes on to argue that it was later in that year that Kosuth first encountered Mel Bochner, “a young instructor... who is a critical intelligence of marked interest.” Ashton continued:

It happens that Bochner was engaged in a private inquiry into the use of reproductive machines, particularly the Xerox machine, in relation to visual art and, yes, Conceptual art. Bochner compiled a ‘book’ which consisted of Xeroxed contributions of works by himself and many others, which was then exhibited. Not long after, Kosuth demonstrated his readiness to entertain a new ‘philosophy’ and, seizing upon the current vogue (in 1967) for that lovely word ‘conceptual’, he embarked (with not a little kind assistance from his teacher Mr Bochner).<sup>20</sup>

Naturally, Kosuth had felt obliged to respond to this rebuttal of his claim to have produced the first example of Conceptual art. In a letter published in the June 1970 issue of *Studio International*, Kosuth alleged Ashton's conservatism and, hence, her lack of qualification to pronounce on Conceptual art. He claimed that an interest in Xerox machines was "'in the air' but not for any art purpose. Bochner's use of them came after mine but he didn't get the idea from me." Kosuth claimed that no one who contributed to Bochner's *Working drawings...* thought they were contributing to Bochner's work, and that Bochner himself had not, at that point, conceived of the project in this way. Kosuth concluded by claiming Bochner's then recent connection to Conceptual art as being "as believable as the *Serial Art* movement he tried to construct about himself a couple of years ago. The only connection he could possibly have to *anyone's* concept of 'Conceptual art' is his conceptual dependence on Sol LeWitt's work for the past couple of years."<sup>21</sup>

Buchloh's questioning of the dates of Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* reopened an old wound. But Kosuth's dispute with Buchloh was not only over matters of verifiable data. Kosuth also questioned the objectivity of Buchloh's account, and his authority to comment on Conceptual art: "Mr Buchloh has not heretofore published on my work, although he borrows the voice of an expert on Conceptual art here."<sup>22</sup> After publication of the first edition of the catalogue, Kosuth contacted the exhibition organisers asking that an additional paragraph be inserted into his original text in subsequent editions, insisting on the importance of this paragraph as defending him against "one of most dishonest and damaging aspects of Buchloh's text."<sup>23</sup> Buchloh had accused Kosuth of continuing the Modernist positivist legacy by subjecting the Wittgensteinian model of the language game and the Duchampian model of the Readymade to a model of meaning that functioned around the notions of artistic intention and self-reflexivity. For Kosuth, though, Buchloh was himself "a very adept modernist who uses an endless citation of "facts" – dates, quotes, references, cited works and so forth for the purpose of constructing a scholarly, 'authoritative' genealogy."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in order to "isolate and dismiss [him] as a modernist," Kosuth felt, Buchloh's account had stopped discussing his activities "at the moment they can be favourably compared with the work of his friends on the 'institutional critique.' The period from *The Second Investigation* through to the period of [Kosuth's involvement in the journal] *The Fox...* is completely missing."<sup>25</sup>



The second part of Buchloh's essay concerned the explicit acknowledgement, in the work of such artists as Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke, that the materials and procedures of art are inscribed within an institutional, ideological and economic nexus of power. Buchloh took the work of these artists to constitute a form of critique that thus transcended the latent recognition of art's institutional functioning in early Conceptual art. By grounding his discussion in Kosuth's writings rather than an analysis of his work, and by not referring to any work coming after Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations*, Buchloh had, Kosuth felt, wilfully neglected what he regarded as the contribution of work such as his own *Second Investigation* (1968, Fig. 37) to a nascent 'Institutional Critique'.<sup>26</sup> The *Second Investigation* had appropriated sections from the 'Synopsis of Categories' at the front of *Roget's Thesaurus*, placing them anonymously in the advertising spaces of various public media: newspapers, magazines, billboards and handbills. Kosuth would later claim that "[t]he aspect of the questioning process that some now call 'institutional critique'... originated with Conceptual art's earliest works," and that "[o]ne goal of a work such as *The Second Investigation*... was to question the institutional forms of art. If the work that preceded this confronted the institutionalised form of authority of traditional art, this work pressed the point *out* of the gallery and museum and into the world, using public media."<sup>27</sup>

If Kosuth was protective of what he regarded as his contribution to the original development of an 'analytical' Conceptual art, he was equally keen to emphasise the part that certain of his works had played in making possible the 'institutional critique' that, for Buchloh and the organisers of *L'Art Conceptuel*, maintained a critical distance from the former. Furthermore, Kosuth was adamant about his right to determine the *theoretical* context in which his work was to be interpreted. In *Art after Philosophy* Kosuth had famously stated that "[a] work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artists' intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art."<sup>28</sup> The identification of the meaning of a work with an act of intentional designation on the part of the artist has been constantly reiterated in Kosuth's writings throughout the successive phases of his career over more than thirty years. Because art was to be thought of not in terms of the production of objects, but in terms of an examination of the use of the art 'proposition' within the very concept 'art,' independent, explicatory criticism was pronounced

redundant. It is for this reason that artists had the responsibility to establish and to defend the meaning of their work, and that “an artist's dependence on the critic or writer on art to cultivate the conceptual implication of his art propositions, and argue their explication, is either intellectual irresponsibility or the naivest kind of mysticism.”<sup>29</sup>

In the mid-1970s, Kosuth's view of the function of his work shifted as he began to consider it not simply in relation to the definitional context of the artwork, but to the broader discursive context of the *artworld*. His work of the late 60s and early 70s had reflected only its use within the pure context of art since the logical form of enquiry that Kosuth advocated was unconcerned with questions of empirical fact.<sup>30</sup> By 1974, however, Kosuth had come to regard *Art after Philosophy* as representing a kind of scientific positivism that was insufficiently aware of its own epistemological modernism. Subsequently, he placed a greater emphasis on the idea of art as *critically engaged practice*, with a dialectical function of mediating its context as it, in turn, was mediated by that context. In articles such as ‘The Artist as Anthropologist’ and ‘1975,’ written for *The Fox*,<sup>31</sup> Kosuth asserted the position of the artist as one who is fluent as a maker and manipulator of signs in his or her own culture, and whose responsibility it becomes, therefore, “to affect the culture while he is simultaneously learning from (and seeking the acceptance of) that same culture which is affecting him.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Kosuth did not wholly abandon the idea of art as intentional designation in favour of a praxiological critique of context, but rather regarded these two aspects as complementary and necessarily integral to the kind of work he was proposing. Indeed, it was the social and historical location of the artist that imbued the work with meaning through its description of the maker's relationship to his/her context. As he later put it: “Artists ‘make meaning’ to the extent that they can articulate that same context that provides, and limits, meaning. The artist, as situated actor, articulates and makes opaque that ‘frame of discourse’ in the process of making meaning.”<sup>33</sup>

Insofar as Kosuth was the artist probably most accepting of the term ‘Conceptual art’ and most willing to write on the subject, *Art after Philosophy* was immediately regarded – perhaps by critics more than Kosuth's fellow artists – as providing an effective manifesto for the supposed movement and as setting out an early definition of an ‘authentically’ conceptual practice. Yet if Conceptual art could, indeed, be considered a movement, it was one whose participants

could often demonstrate markedly different ways of thinking about their work.<sup>34</sup> Sol LeWitt, for instance, though more associated with a kind of post-minimalist serialism (and included, therefore, in the 'pre-conceptual' section of *L'Art Conceptuel*) had claimed a stake in the early definition and recognition of Conceptual art with the publication of his influential *Paragraphs on Conceptual art* in summer 1967.<sup>35</sup> LeWitt's practice around the time was characterized by the repetition and permutation of three-dimensional cubic and grid-like forms according to a pre-conceived plan that was systematically worked through regardless of aesthetic considerations. (Fig. 7) For LeWitt, as for Kosuth, it was the ideational element of the Conceptual work of art that was its distinguishing feature, yet for LeWitt this was conceived of in terms of a structure that would govern a process of production, rather than as an investigation into the concept of 'art':

In Conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.<sup>36</sup>

LeWitt's method of following to its conclusions a predetermined plan removed the possibility of the artist's subjective intervention in the realisation of the work. "To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity," LeWitt wrote, "the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible." Yet such a working method also had the effect of removing the intentional agency of the artist as guarantor of the work's meaning: "It doesn't really matter if the viewer understands the concepts of the artist by seeing the art. Once out of his hand the artist has no control over the way a viewer will perceive the work. Different people will understand the same thing in a different way."<sup>37</sup> This is obviously quite a different position from that held by Kosuth, for whom an act of intentional designation secures the object's function as a work of art, and for whom the duality of the object and subject are eliminated in the process of locating both in society and history.<sup>38</sup> For Kosuth, the meaning of a work of art must always reside in authorial intention, while for LeWitt, the artist relinquishes control of the meaning of his work at the moment it enters the public domain, and can no longer claim any authorial privilege over it. As LeWitt would observe in his 'Sentences on Conceptual art', published two years after the



'Paragraphs:' "The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perceptions are neither better nor worse than that of others."<sup>39</sup>

Another model for conceiving of the relationship between artist, artwork and viewer in the construction of meaning was proposed by Douglas Huebler. In *Art after Philosophy, Part II*, Kosuth had all but disqualified Huebler from consideration as a Conceptual artist on account of his age (Huebler was forty-five in 1969, Kosuth was just twenty-four), his having participated in the exhibition *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966 (which featured both late-modernist and minimal work), and his having been producing sculpture "as late as 1968."<sup>40</sup> Huebler, had he wished, might have claimed his conceptual credentials on the basis of his having participated, with Kosuth, in Siegelau's *January Show*, but also by having presented, in November 1968, the first exhibition which existed purely in catalogue form.<sup>41</sup> But in February 1989, at a time when the planning and preparation for *L'Art Conceptuel* was already well under way, Huebler would state: "Ever since I've been a so-called conceptualist I've resisted being pigeonholed by the definitions of conceptual correctness rendered by some of my colleagues."<sup>42</sup> For Huebler, a conceptual work of art could not be defined in terms of its adherence to any definition of 'proper' conceptual practice; instead, it would be conceptual by virtue of its dialectical relationship with the 'official' procedures of the artworld, and by its capacity to produce "organizational forms capable of processing and producing discourse concerning 'the world'."<sup>43</sup>

*L'Art Conceptuel* included eleven works by Huebler produced between 1968 and 1973. Seven of these were grouped under the designations *Variable*, *Location*, or *Duration Piece* that he adopted in 1968. Such pieces combined various forms of documentation - photographs, maps, drawings - always with a written statement that operated to unite the various materials in a conceptual relationship, and that combined with them would, in the typical wording of the statements, "constitute the form of the piece." For his *Location Piece #1: New York – Los Angeles* (1969, Fig. 38), for example, Huebler's statement read thus:

In February 1969 the airspace over each of the thirteen states between New York and Los Angeles was documented with a photograph made as the camera was pointed more or less straight out of the airplane window (with no "interesting" view intended).

The photographs join together the east and west coast of the United States as each serves to “mark” one of the thirteen states flown over during that particular flight.

The photographs are not, however, “keyed” to the state over which they were made, but only exist as documents that join with an American Airlines System Map and this statement to constitute the form of this piece.

Huebler's approach had something in common with LeWitt's in that aspects of the work were often determined by the implications of working through a pre-existing plan. As with LeWitt, this went some way toward removing the artist as the privileged centre of the work. Yet, in Huebler's work this de-centring was taken further: the viewer of the work became the agent responsible for re-constituting the relationship between its various elements. Significantly, the work was now organized in terms of what the viewer brought to it. As Huebler explained:

the percipient of one of my works reconstitutes its various forms of information, reading and seeing it all at once as a *seamless field*, the conceptual event that takes place occurs during a specific period of time in the mind of that person thereby making her, or him, the virtual subject of the artwork. It is my hope that through this event, the subject 'sees himself/herself seeing.'<sup>44</sup>

In another work seen in *L'Art Conceptuel, Variable Piece #4, 1970*, Huebler went further still, ceding to another party the responsibility for the further design and eventual completion of the work. Huebler's documentation comprised the “initial step” after which, “[i]t will be the responsibility of the owner of the piece to design and execute every aspect of a system that will actually complete the piece.” Huebler denied the purchaser of the work the opportunity for passive consumption, requiring instead his/her active collaboration, whilst also making opaque art's economic support system. In pieces such as this - or *Variable Piece #44, 1971-80*, in which Huebler's collectors were obligated to exchange photographs of themselves for incorporation in the work - Huebler incorporated into a ‘conceptual’ work a form of ‘institutional critique’ than Buchloh was not prepared to recognise.

Huebler, like LeWitt, was accepting of the fact that viewers might bring new, and unexpected, meanings to the work. But more than LeWitt - whose tone is suggestive of a pragmatic resignation - Huebler embraces the constitutive role of

the viewer: "If I say too much about my intentions then I feel that might get in the way. The work itself will have to stand independent of my hopes for it, which is to have people make these identifications."<sup>45</sup>

After his adoption in the mid-1970s of a more discursive model of practice, Kosuth, too, became more accommodating to the idea of a viewer who would complete the artistic process through his/her co-operative interpretation. Although an acknowledgement of that discursive context can be detected in Kosuth's writings at least as early as 1971,<sup>46</sup> it was not until the late 1970s that Kosuth began explicitly to emphasise the role played by the viewer in the construction of meaning. In the 1979 exhibition *Text/Context*, Kosuth placed a number of texts on advertising billboards which he hoped would engage the viewer/reader through the familiarity of the everyday language employed, yet which, in their tautological self-address, were also intended to disrupt the instrumental functioning of similar signs. (Fig. 39) In this way Kosuth hoped to usurp the passive spectatorship of an audience "always outside looking in," with an audience constituted on the "inside looking out" and able to discover meaning within social and historical contexts.<sup>47</sup>

While, in *Text/Context*, Kosuth is critically aware of the issue of a "subject behind the text" in its relationship with "the habituated and institutional meaning that the authority of the billboard as a media projects," there remains a didactic element to this work that continues to privilege the artist as the progenitor of meaning. For Kosuth, "the birth of the reader" is never "at the cost of the death of the author," but rather functions to confirm the position from which the author speaks.<sup>48</sup> As he described matters as recently as 1996:

It is *part* of the intention of this particular artist for the works to engage the viewer/reader's participation in the meaning-making process. By bringing with them what they do in their approach to the work, they thereby complete it. They are every work's "local" site. This role would be rendered passive, and would provide only a moment of consumption, without work which is anchored to a larger process of signification. Thus the speaker is designated, embedded in the human meaning which artistic intention constitutes. No speaker, no listener.<sup>49</sup>

The essay, 'Intention(s)', in which this passage appeared was published as part of a special feature in the September 1996 issue of *Art Bulletin* in which a number of artists, art historians, curators and philosophers had been asked for



their views on "writing (and) the history of art." The essay was divided into two parts, the first concerning itself with the issue of artistic intention, and the second seeking to discuss what Kosuth perceived to be the intentions and vested interests of art historians. In his defence of *artistic* intention Kosuth acknowledged that what the reader "brings to a work organizes what is seen," and that the production of that 'text' had become a primary part of the meaning-making process beginning with Conceptual art. Yet, in contrast to Huebler - who was prepared to remove his own presence from the work and to stand back with its percipient to discuss "the various ways in which we may regard what's there to be perceived"<sup>50</sup> - Kosuth regarded it as necessary to determine *in advance* the informational context in which the viewer encounters the work:

The (making) process of putting a proposition... 'into play' is only *one* of the responsibilities of the artist. The act of putting it into the world is empty unless an artist also fights for its meaning. The informational framing of the proposition itself increasingly becomes part of the artistic framing process.<sup>51</sup>

In Kosuth's view, the very grounds for authenticity of an artist's practice are in doubt if the artist is not prepared to establish for themselves the theoretical basis of their work; a work of art, cannot be an autonomous creation, whose meaning is provided by a context external to it, for if it is to be worthy of its status as work of art, it is so because it defines the agency of the artist working within a critical and self-reflexive practice. In what is probably his strongest and most explicit defence of the agency of the artist, Kosuth declares that "when you approach the work you are approaching the idea (and therefore the intention) of the artist directly... Indeed, there can no longer really be a separation between the work and the intention of the artist: the work of art, in this case, is *manifested* intention."<sup>52</sup> For Kosuth, the viewer is connected to the process of making meaning to the extent that the work designates the artist and describes the artist's relationship to his/her social and historical context. Thus, a successful work of art functions as an *index* of the artist's intention; it is meaningful insofar as it points to its maker. Traditional criticism had assumed that a (literary) work could be explained when its author, its 'final signified', could be discovered.<sup>53</sup> With Kosuth, however, the artist quite literally provides the explanation of his work in a way that denies the critic his traditional explanatory function. As has been indicated, Kosuth regarded the critic and the artist to be in competition over the meaning of a work of art; his critics have disparaged work that

appeared to be a “reading comprehension test,” designed to pit the artist against the critic and to expose the inadequate faculties of the latter.<sup>54</sup>

Kosuth’s difficulty, then, is not so much with the interpretations of his peers, or of a non-professional audience, as it is with the mediation of his work by critics and art historians. This, Kosuth regards as the first stage in an institutionalization of the work, and it is here, he claims, that “the true ‘aesthetics of administration’” can be found.<sup>55</sup> Kosuth regards critics and historians as administering the work’s entry into the world, and seems not to be able to conceive of any way in which the work could enter the consciousness of its public without their mediation: “it is a structural, and apparently inescapable, feature of the process of a work coming into the world.”<sup>56</sup> The work’s coming to mean something in the world is conceived of in terms of a struggle between the intentions of the artist and the meanings that would be imposed on it by critics and historians.<sup>57</sup> By 1996, Kosuth had come to regard the existence of a critical and art historical establishment as ineluctable. The point he wished to emphasize, however, was the fundamental difference between writing produced as part of the critical practice of the artist, and that produced as part of a discourse external to it. This difference Kosuth characterized in terms of “primary” and “secondary” theory:

No matter what actual form the activity of art takes, its history gives it a concrete presence. Framed by such a presence then, this theory is engaged as a part of practice. Such theory I’ll call primary. Secondary theory may be no less useful (in many cases *more* useful) but the point I’m stressing is that it has a different ontology.

Primary theory is no more interesting than the practice, *in toto*, is. However, theory not linked to an art practice is an unconcretized (or *unfertilized*) conversation after (or before) the fact. It is the *fact* of an artistic process which, having a location as an event, permits the social and cultural weight of a presence independent of pragmatic language. It is, in fact, the nominated presence of the process which *allows* secondary theory its *external object* to be discussed. Secondary theory, like philosophy in general, ultimately locates itself as an activity which attempts to explain the world that the external *presence* represents.<sup>58</sup>

The writing of critics and art historians, then, is always located in a relationship of dependence with regard to both the artist’s practice, and to what the artist says about his/her work as this, for Kosuth, constitutes an integral part of that practice. This situation of ontological dependence becomes apparent in the way in which ‘primary’ texts are given a special status in writings by critics and

historians: this special status reveals a “philosophical unease” which requires that “secondary” theory treat artists’ writings as the *nature* from which it constructs its own *culture*.<sup>59</sup>

Kosuth regards art history as suffering from a kind of existential crisis in which its former models of professional ethics have been transformed under the influence of critical theory. Previous requirements for fairness and accuracy in the recording of historical facts (“saying who did what and when, why, and whom it influenced”) have been abandoned by “*auteur* writers on art” who hope their own production “will gain special status itself as a cultural object, post-S/Z. (Keep the power, have the fun?).”<sup>60</sup> Kosuth asks, however, if he could be partly to blame in this, having written in *Art-Language* in 1970 that, “[t]his art both annexes the function of the critic, and makes a middleman unnecessary.” He continues:

I didn’t realize at the time, however, that the art historians might join our ranks *under cover*. This emerging professional class of writers seems to want celebrated careers *like* those of artists while they keep their protective perch, and its detached view, with the prerequisites and power of recorders of history. It appears there is a palpable, if admittedly vague, dimension of something like a ‘conflict of interest’ if those given the responsibility to inscribe history are under a powerful and conflicting need to, instead, *make it*.<sup>61</sup>

If Kosuth is disparaging of the intentions of art historians, behind this, the bitterness arising from a perceived injustice is quite discernable. Indeed, in two of the footnotes to his article, Kosuth is explicit on this; he refers to the “organized form of abuse” to which his own activities as an artist had been subjected, over a sustained period, by writers associated with the journal *October*.<sup>62</sup> Although Kosuth’s perception of a professional affront might not be unfounded,<sup>63</sup> the professional antipathies at the root of this grievance can be traced back long before the publication of any of the texts Kosuth cites, and even before that of Buchloh’s essay for the catalogue of *L’Art Conceptuel*. In fact, as early as 1975, Kosuth was claiming neglect by the critical and art historical establishment:

In the late sixties and early seventies in New York there was somewhat of a “junta” atmosphere in the art world. The Greenberg gang was attempting with great success to initiate an Official History gestalt, and there wasn’t much generosity toward us “novelty” artists that didn’t happen to fit into the prescribed historical continuum...



Exponents of the “party line” had saturated all aspects of the art establishment... At *Artforum*, under Phil Leider, they decided that if they would just ignore us maybe we would go away – their hegemony being what it was at the time... (Finally, I suppose to avoid admitting past errors, when “Conceptual art” could no longer be ignored *Artforum* came up with their own “Conceptual artists”. Sort of how the Russians came up with Husak to “lead” Czechoslovakia. They’ve pretty much still continued to ignore the work which has been around for years and constituted most of the early and even not-so-early Conceptual art exhibitions here and abroad.)<sup>64</sup>

The following year, in 1976, a number of writers who had been associated with *Artforum* became concerned about the direction the magazine was taking and began publishing a new journal, *October*. In the Conceptual art supplement compiled for *Flash Art* by Mary Ann Staniszewski, Kosuth expressed the opinion that the founding of *October* represented a response by these writers to the publication of *The Fox* – a publication for which Kosuth was a member of the editorial board – in the increasingly politicised art scene of New York in the mid-1970s. However, the founders of *October*, “although recently disaffected Greenbergians, were not ready to acknowledge an art practice they had ignored earlier at *Artforum*.”<sup>65</sup> *The Fox* was accordingly scathing toward *October*, and for Kosuth, it has been this fact that has continued to occasion both his neglect and his critical dismissal by writers associated with the latter.

If Kosuth is disapproving of what he considers the motives of critics and art historians, he seems less so of those of museum curators and exhibition organisers, even though their activities, too, contribute to the historicization of works of art and forms of art practice. The organisers of *L’Art Conceptuel*, for example, were under no illusions on this matter. “The role of a retrospective exhibition,” Claude Gintz noted, “is to begin to historicize, whether we like it or not. To start, and carry out the process.” He continued by acknowledging that the historical perspective which such exhibitions must necessarily adopt, divorces the artefacts from the original context within which they functioned: that “[t]here is... a kind of alchemy or transformation that occurs and that it would be pointless to try to resist.”<sup>66</sup> Such a transformation can dislocate a work of art from the social and historical context that, for Kosuth, secures its authenticity as a work of art. In ‘Necrophilia Mon Amour,’ Kosuth re-iterated this claim, insisting that the revival of former modes of artistic practice that characterised the ‘New Painting’ of the 1980s “depoliticised” the earlier work “as an institution with economic and social meaning.” He confirmed that “[i]t is through that (missing)

critique and reflexiveness that one historically locates oneself and takes responsibility for the meaning one makes, which is the consciousness one produces.” If the work asserts the social and historical conditions of its production to the extent that it should, then, Kosuth claims, it will have protected itself against co-option to an externally imposed narrative:

The power of the work we see in museums is exactly this. It is the authenticity of the cultural production of a human being connected to his or her historical moment so concretely that the work is experienced as real; it is the passion of a creative intelligence to the present, which informs both the past and the future. It is not that the meaning of a work of art can transcend its time, but that a work of art describes the maker’s relationship to his or her context through the struggle to make meaning and in so doing we get a glimpse of the life of the people who shared that meaning.<sup>67</sup>

In performing this function, then, Kosuth’s work historicizes *itself* in the moment of its own production. If Kosuth’s argument were correct, it would be overly simplistic to claim that the material presence of his works in a museological survey amounted to a betrayal of a presumed ‘anti-object’ stance that was understood to have challenged the conventional modes of acquisition, display and connoisseurship enshrined within the museum.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, the abiding nature of this ‘anti-object’ discourse ensured that these issues continued to occupy the organisers of *L’Art Conceptuel*. Suzanne Pagé, the exhibition’s commissioner, asked in her ‘Preface’: “What might be indicated by showing works which, through ‘dematerialization,’ have been constructed explicitly to escape the grasp of institutions and the condition of ‘objects’?”<sup>69</sup> Although ‘dematerialization’ is typically thought to have been the province of Conceptual artists, *L’Art Conceptuel* also showed the work of a counter-Conceptual tendency whose interventions into the ideological and architectural space of the museum frequently produced just as little in the way of art objects. The strategies developed by artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke necessitated a considerable sensitivity on the part of the exhibition organisers. On the one hand, there was the possibility that projects which took the museum itself for their subject matter might seem to absorb works by other artists; on the other hand, there was the difficulty that a display merely of documentation might inadequately represent the specificity of these artists’ critical interventions, neutralising them and rendering them assimilable to a historical overview.

More so, perhaps, than Broodthaers, Buren or Haacke, Michael Asher's work, during the broad period under consideration by the exhibition, had addressed itself to the particularities of its institutional context. In adopting a subtractive rather than an additive strategy,<sup>70</sup> and in his use of "situational aesthetics" (defined as "an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements within the institutional framework, that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself"),<sup>71</sup> Asher had systematically refused the museum the possibility of accumulating and exhibiting the traces of his practice. In a number of letters to Claude Gintz, written in the early stages of considering his contribution, Asher communicated his willingness to assist the organisers in their task of historical representation, without submitting to a periodising view of Conceptual practice that would regard it as a closed category.<sup>72</sup> Asher wished to retain a reflexivity about his participation in the exhibition. As Gintz confirmed when the exhibition reached Montreal: "[Asher] refuses to have his work from that time 're-presented' and hence historicized. In his logical, consistent way, he wanted the subject of his involvement to be the very existence of this retrospective exhibition."<sup>73</sup>

Asher's work for *L'Art Conceptuel* consisted of purchasing advertising space within a number of art-historical journals with the purpose of directing the exhibition audience and the journal's readership to the very fact of the exhibition's historicization of Conceptual practice. The published advertisements had already been produced by the museum for their own publicity.<sup>74</sup> (Fig. 40) On a wall of the exhibition space, as well as in his section of the catalogue, Asher displayed the following statement:

*L'art conceptuel, une perspective* is as much a view of Conceptual art as it is a perspective of the institutions used for the maintenance and historical reproduction of that practice.

What are the forces and conditions driving the historical analysis which are beyond Conceptual art practices own definitions of its historical context and production procedures?

Historical objectification ought to be accelerated while there is still a collective experience and memory which can assist in the clarity of an analysis simultaneously, opening up a space to ask fundamental questions regarding history making.



To look at this question further, I propose as my contribution to *l'art conceptuel, une perspective* that separate groups of historians be notified by an announcement of this exhibition in the below journals that a new historical perspective is being mapped onto Conceptual art practice.

- Apollo
- Art History
- Daidalos
- The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism
- La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France
- Romagna Arte e Storia
- Simiolus

The journals mentioned were available throughout the exhibition from the museum shop. (Fig. 41)

Conceptual art, no less than any other art movement, was reliant on an institutional network of support and distribution, even if, at times, this could be sublimated as part of its consciousness. Neither are exhibitions arbitrary occurrences, and Asher directed attention to the institutional framing of art as this occasioned the reassessment of Conceptuel Art practice in *L'Art Conceptuel*. Asher's contribution expressed a doubt as to whether Conceptual art could be regarded as a stable, canonical, category to which the institution could unproblematically lay claim. Asher observed that the retrospective survey often functions as a means to ensure the reproduction of aspects of a historical practice within a contemporary context; furthermore, that in substantiating an audience's feelings that contemporary practice is lacking something that was previously present, the retrospective can encourage a nostalgic, acritical relationship to earlier practice. For Asher, "both the quest for reproduction and the quest for nostalgia" seemed "totally inimical to Conceptual art practice whose program included a constant request for radical change and an analysis of how that might effectively be carried out." The task of the retrospective was made all the more difficult by Conceptual art's utilisation of strategies that "consistently attempted to subvert its very own institutionalization." By retaining a reflexive position regarding his own participation, and by refusing to neutralize the critical function of temporally and spatially specific work by reproducing and dislocating it, Asher hoped to contribute to the retrospective, "a tool to problematize aesthetic practice just as the practice it represents managed to do."<sup>75</sup>

In his catalogue statement, Asher seemed to infer that, at least in 1989, the history - or histories - of Conceptual art had yet to be written. He acknowledged the importance of practitioner's accounts of their involvement in the movement as assisting in the clarity of an analysis, but also seemed to recognize the relative autonomy of art history as a discipline with its own objectives and procedures. Asher's statement presented a model in which artists and art historians could collaborate in a way that would benefit the clearest understanding of the period and practice under consideration. Rather than the practice of art and that of art history being regarded as antithetical,<sup>76</sup> they were taken by Asher to be distinct, but to function together in a mutually supportive relationship. For Asher, what an artist has to say about his/her work does not automatically accede to a privileged position in relation to what a critic or art historian might have to say about it. Rather, these "represent two different forms of making observations" whose respective value can be determined by the extent to which the observations are supported by the work.<sup>77</sup> Artist's writings need not constitute the raw material which critics and historians manipulate in the production of their own culture, rather, as Asher's catalogue text proposes, they can assist in the historical clarification of a practice. Moreover, the transformation of an artist's writing about his/her work into critical or historical discourse is not regarded as politically disenfranchising the artist's activity, since the reader is thought capable of distinguishing between the respective positions of artist and critic/historian, and of recognising that different sets of interests may be at stake.

It is not the case, however, that the artist and the critic/historian must inevitably approach the work from radically different perspectives. The mutually supportive relationship between the practice of art and critical/historical discourse can, in certain circumstances, favour collaboration.<sup>78</sup> This was the case in the preparation of a book, edited by Benjamin Buchloh, which compiled Asher's writings on his work from 1969-1979. In his own 'Author's Introduction,' Asher commented on the working relationship between himself and Buchloh, noting that the book was a result of their "close collaboration," such that the published writings were "often the result of a joint authorship." Asher observed that the collaborative process had been a time consuming one, but that "author and editor considered it to be the method that would guarantee as precise a documentation as currently possible." He continued:

I do not know of any publication where an artist and a critic have shared authorship to this degree. Our collaboration has been essential for the analysis of individual works as well as for an understanding of the general historical context. Yet I hope that the fusion of the two approaches has not resulted in a seamless text, but rather reveals the parallelism that exists between the two enterprises of art production and criticism that are generally considered separate if not oppositional.<sup>79</sup>

Both artist and critic noted the potential contradictions of transforming a practice such as Asher's into discourse. Asher's work from the late 1960s to the late 1970s had concerned itself with investigating the material and ideological conditions for the production and reception of art. This investigation had articulated itself in relation to the specifics of each particular situation, usually by means of a temporary intervention into the architectural and/or administrative functioning of the commissioning institution. In thus refusing to make themselves available for re-location as contained objects for aesthetic appreciation, Asher's interventions had left nothing in the way of physical evidence of their existence.<sup>80</sup> For Asher, a significant function of the finished book was that it would "have a material permanence that contradicts the actual impermanence of the art-work, yet paradoxically functions as a testimony to that impermanence in my production."<sup>81</sup> To transform practice into discourse is not necessarily, therefore, to evacuate the work's criticality; rather, it may serve to highlight the critical aspect that otherwise makes problematic its accommodation to a canon.

The close collaboration that was possible between Asher and Buchloh indicated the extent to which Asher's thinking does not posit the artist as the privileged and autonomous agent in the production and reception of a work of art. Similarly, Asher's contribution to *L'Art Conceptuel* removed the artist from the centre of the work, directing attention to the forces and conditions operating upon art's institutional frame, as well as indicating a range of professional and non-professional functions - administrative, academic, speculative, accumulative – that, in part, constitute that frame. Asher's work has consistently performed this function. In a project at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, in 1977, under an institutional stipulation that made available only one half of the exhibition space, Asher turned the architectural symmetry of the museum into a structuring device for his work. He proposed that the space be divided into two equal but opposite halves. One half would show an installation of work from the



museum's permanent collection selected by the museum's director. In the other half, Asher had the light diffusing ceiling panels removed before the opening of the exhibition, to be replaced over the course of the exhibition by the museum's work team. Thus Asher made the usually concealed aspects of preparation and labour visible to the museum's public, revealing these to be a condition of aestheticized exhibition and display. However, Asher's work also demonstrated that the artist is responsible for only one aspect in the production and presentation of a work of art: "By clearly distinguishing and specifically presenting the different participants (work crew, curator, artist) that make an exhibition possible at such an institution," he said, "I wanted to show how these necessary but separate functions are equally essential for the constitution of a work."<sup>82</sup>

Earlier the same year, at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA), Asher had engaged a number of individuals, on an hourly rate, to be present for six hours a day during the opening times of the Institute, in the area allocated for his work. This area was adjacent to the bookshop and to the open office area visible at one end of the exhibition space. These areas were sufficiently proximate that employees of the institution and the paid participants in Asher's project could hear and observe each other's activities throughout the day. The area of Asher's installation was furnished with a few chairs, a table, and a couch, along with a coffee machine. The paid participants were expected, in principle, to be present for the six-hour period, but were allowed the freedom to leave or interrupt their stay at any time during the day. While present, the participants were also free to occupy themselves in whatever way they chose within the limits of their situation. (Fig. 42)

The construction of the work indicated the respective but inter-related functions of artist, paid participant, institutional staff, curators and visitors, as these are usually kept separate within the institutional aesthetic. This separation was maintained in Asher's project even as those functions were brought into a closer physical and operative proximity that ensured each would realise their own function in the production of the work. As Asher put it, "[t]his work insists upon the individual artist's autonomy as much as it insists upon the necessary collaboration within social production as a functional means and necessary condition for producing a work of art."<sup>83</sup> Thus the work destabilized the notion of the artist as the single originary source in the conception and production of a

work of art. To continue to identify a work of art with an artist perpetuates a situation in which artist, institution and viewer remain isolated in their functions, unable to locate themselves and each other in the complex of relationships within which the work is articulated. Like Kosuth in the mid-70s, Asher aimed to locate his work critically within its context and to collapse the subject-object relationship. However, while Kosuth maintained that this was only to be achieved by “bring[ing] together... the work and its maker in the process of locating both in society and history,”<sup>84</sup> Asher sought to do this by disrupting the simplistic identification of artist with artwork.

In work such as that at the Van Abbemuseum and LAICA, Asher did not naively believe that the artist could be completely removed from the work. His works continued to bear his name and were absorbed into critical discourse with the artist's identity still intact. One participant of the LAICA project observed that, while Asher's work had enabled a critical questioning of the individuation of producers and consumers, it had not sufficiently organized itself “in such a way that the attendant aesthetic experience [was] co-determined by all participants:”

Although we could determine the nature of our participation *within* the piece, its limits and definition were fundamentally under Asher's control. Further, it will be *seen* (appropriated?) as ‘Michael Asher's piece at LAICA,’ not as a collaborative endeavour...<sup>85</sup>

Yet the artist's identity functioned in such work as but one term amongst many, in a way that increased the viewer's awareness of the contradictions between an authorial presence and the role of participants, museum staff and visitors in the work's realisation. To remove the figure of the artist entirely from the production of art would be to deny art as praxis, and to transpose it instead to the realm of the metaphysical, wherein the aesthetic would function as an immutable, transcendent category. Instead, Asher's project at LAICA performed the function of relativizing the figure of the artist in order to examine its functions, its interventions into discourse, and its systems of dependency.

Asher's work after 1977 continued to question the use of the artist's name as a final signified that imposes a limit on the play of signification. Beginning in the early 1980s, a subtle but complex investigation of questions of authorship came to occupy Asher increasingly.<sup>86</sup> In his contribution to *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, the artist's name secured only two of the three parts of the

intervention: the page of his catalogue entry and the linked statement in the exhibition space itself. (Fig. 43) These two elements did not serve to indicate the final signified of the artist's name, but referred to the existence of a third, independent element: the announcement placed anonymously in the various journals. Operating beyond the defining limits of the exhibition and its catalogue, this announcement had a shifting, dual function. Without any indication that it comprised a part of an artist's work, its blankly functional appearance did nothing to make the reader suspect that this was anything other than the advertisement for a forthcoming exhibition that it, in fact, continued to be. At the same time, by its placement in journals dedicated primarily to the art of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Asher intended the advertisement to produce an effective discontinuity that would draw attention to the processes of Conceptual art's historicization. (Fig. 44)

If Asher's insertion was ever successful in producing such a moment of discontinuity, a decade and a half later, this effect may be substantially reduced. In the early stages of researching Asher's project for *L'Art Conceptuel*, I had located a number of the journals in which Asher's announcement was supposed to have appeared. Expecting to find something resembling the statement that had been included in the exhibition catalogue, my search was fruitless. Instead, there appeared a number of identical advertisements for *L'Art Conceptuel* that were, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from those typically used to promote museum exhibitions of the type, and that provoked no sense of their incongruity. I was left wondering if Asher's announcement had, in fact, ever been printed. It was only after entering into a correspondence with the artist, that he confirmed for me that the advertisements I had seen were the very announcements I had been looking for.<sup>87</sup> "I don't know why you saw the ads I placed as standard," Asher told me, "[p]erhaps they were and my assumption that there would be a clear disjunction was incorrect. Or else, when you see them today they appear completely normal since the conceptual movement can now be read in historical terms."<sup>88</sup> To the contemporary reader, the announcements appear utterly unremarkable, as easily assimilated to the advertising section of the art historical journal as, perhaps, Conceptual art has been to the retrospective survey exhibition. Notwithstanding the loss of their disjunctive effect, the announcements maintain their dual function: on the one hand, simply as advertisements for an exhibition that, itself, has become an object of historical curiosity; on the other, as a critical intervention into a



discursive network that, precisely *because* it now fails to produce any disjunctive effect, testifies to the thoroughgoing accommodation of Conceptual art to the routine operations of the institutional artworld. By presenting a work that functioned discursively, outside the confining space of the gallery and the catalogue, and which *continues* to function in the present, Asher resisted the incorporation of his practice into the historical overview, while ensuring Conceptual art's continued validity as a critical tool.

As its organisers admitted, *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective* set itself the task of beginning the historicization of Conceptual art. Although it acknowledged the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in presenting a museum retrospective of practices that questioned the status of the art object, and occasionally dispensed with the exhibitable artefact altogether, it nonetheless considered that a historical re-examination of Conceptual art was necessary, and that the transformation of its objects and practices that this would bring about was inevitable. Work by both the central Conceptual artists and those of a counter-Conceptual tendency, both of which had initially posed difficulties for the strategies of accumulation and display favoured by the museum, was enlisted, now, to legitimise a museological display. Work, such as that by Joseph Kosuth, which defined itself in terms of the artist's historical and social locatedness could be complicit in supporting such a historicizing viewpoint. That this could be the case was evidenced, arguably, by Kosuth's seeming to regard the show's function as the historical one of establishing who did what, when, and (crucially) before whoever else. Although the work of the counter-Conceptual tendency was, for the most part, denied the temporal and spatial specificity on which its criticality depended, Michael Asher succeeded in developing a contribution that retained its critical relationship to the exhibiting institution. Asher's intervention, by conceiving itself in the present moment of its specificity, ensured that the exhibition of which it was a part be regarded as but a transitory construction within the historical discourse of Conceptual art.

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- <sup>1</sup> *A New Spirit in Painting*, London, Royal Academy of Arts. 15 January - 18 March 1981. Exhibition organised by Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal and Nicholas Serota.
  - <sup>2</sup> This was so despite the claims of exhibition organiser Claude Gintz that the exhibition was unconcerned with the influence of Conceptual art on later generations of artists. Gintz made clear, however, that he did not discount there having been such an influence, merely that this was not what the exhibition set out to identify. See my discussion of *L'Art Conceptuel* in the Introduction.
  - <sup>3</sup> See Ghislain Mollet-Vieville, 'L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective', interview with Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Suzanne Pagé, *Galleries Magazine* (October/November 1989), 100-103 (p. 103).
  - <sup>4</sup> Claude Gintz, Suzanne Pagé and Benjamin Buchloh, press release for the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989-18 February 1990. Exhibition organised by Gintz, Pagé, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
  - <sup>5</sup> Claude Gintz, 'Parcours de l'Exposition', comprising part of the press release for the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, unpaginated. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Translated from the French by the author.
  - <sup>6</sup> See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual art 1962-1969)', ' in *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, exh. cat., ed. by Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989 - 18 February 1990), pp. 41-53 (p. 42).
  - <sup>7</sup> Gintz, 'Parcours de l'Exposition', unpaginated.
  - <sup>8</sup> Gintz, 'Parcours de l'Exposition', unpaginated. The exhibition included fourteen works by Kosuth, four of them from his *Proto-Investigations: Glass one and three*, 1965; *Wall: One and Five (English and Latin)*, 1965; *Clear, Square, Glass, Leaning*, 1965; and *Five Words in Orange Neon*, 1965.
  - <sup>9</sup> Letter from Juliette Laffon to Charles Harrison, 28 April 1989. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
  - <sup>10</sup> Moreover, the organizers had hoped to be able to reprint either Joseph Kosuth's 'Art After Philosophy', originally published in *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 134-7; or his piece 'No Exit' which had appeared in *Artforum* 26, no. 7 (March 1988), 112-115. Although permission for re-publication was given in both cases, neither essay was finally included. Letters from Catherine Francblin (*Art Press*) and Lisa R. Smart (*Artforum*) to Juliette Laffon, 29 June 1989 and 11 July 1989, respectively. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
  - <sup>11</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth responds to Benjamin Buchloh', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, p. 60.
  - <sup>12</sup> Charles Harrison has recalled that the catalogue was not available for the press view, and that museum staff were still pasting Kosuth's text into the catalogue at the time of the exhibition's opening. See, 'Conceptual Art: Myths and Scandals', *Artscribe* (March/April 1990), 15-16.
  - <sup>13</sup> Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth Responds to Benjamin Buchloh', p. 60.
  - <sup>14</sup> Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique', n. 6, p. 42.
  - <sup>15</sup> Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique', n. 18, p. 46. *Non-Anthropomorphic Art by Four Young Artists: Joseph Kosuth, Christine Kozlov, Michael Rinaldi, Ernest Rossi*, Lannis Gallery, New York, February-May 1967.



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- <sup>16</sup> Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth responds to Benjamin Buchloh', p. 60.
- <sup>17</sup> An earlier draft for the text, however, contained the following passage: "Mr Bochner in 1965 was telling his students that 'to be a real artist you should know how to render an apple' and such nonsense as that, and I wasn't easy on him. During the summer break of that academic year Mr. Bochner apparently spent a lot of time with LeWitt, Smithson and others, and by his return in the fall made a 180 degree change of philosophy. He was greatly displeased by the student jibes that 'the students taught the teacher'." Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
- <sup>18</sup> Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy, part II: "Conceptual Art" and Recent Art.' *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969), 160-161 (p. 161).
- <sup>19</sup> Dore Ashton, 'Kosuth: the facts', *Studio International* 179, no. 919 (February 1970), p. 44.
- <sup>20</sup> Ashton, 'Kosuth: the facts', p. 44. Ashton refers to Bochner's *Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art* (1966).
- <sup>21</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'An answer to criticisms', *Studio International* 179, no. 923 (June 1970), p. 245.
- <sup>22</sup> Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth responds to Benjamin Buchloh', p. 60.
- <sup>23</sup> Joseph Kosuth, fax to Juliette Laffon, 12 February 1990. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
- <sup>24</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art', October 57 (summer 1991), 152-157 (p. 154). Kosuth's section of this article reprinted, with further revisions, his already revised statement for the second edition of the catalogue of *L'Art Conceptuel*.
- <sup>25</sup> Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth responds to Benjamin Buchloh', p. 60.
- <sup>26</sup> The inescapable irony of this claim is that Kosuth had long maintained the idea that an artist's writings, lectures and conversations had parity with exhibitable work as part of his/her "total signifying activity." See, for example, Jeanne Siegel, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', in Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 220-231 (p. 228-229).
- <sup>27</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', *Art Bulletin* 78, no. 3 (September 1996), 407-412 (p. 407, and n. 3).
- <sup>28</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 136.
- <sup>29</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Introductory Note by the American Editor', *Art-Language* 1. no. 2 (February 1970), 1-4 (p. 3.)
- <sup>30</sup> See, Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 136.
- <sup>31</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', *The Fox* 1, no. 1 (1975), 18-30; '1975', *The Fox* 1, no. 2 (1975), 87-96.
- <sup>32</sup> Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', p. 25.
- <sup>33</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Within the context; modernism and critical practice', in Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After*, ed. by Gabriel Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 153-167 (p. 156). The text was first published Ghent: Coupure, 1977. The Kosuth studio has been unable to locate an original copy.
- <sup>34</sup> See Douglas Huebler's comments in, 'Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), 72-76 (p. 72).
- <sup>35</sup> Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual art', *Artforum* 5, no 10 (summer 1967), 79-84.
- <sup>36</sup> LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual art', p. 80.
- <sup>37</sup> LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual art', p. 80.
- <sup>38</sup> See, Kosuth, 'Within the context', p. 162.



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- <sup>39</sup> Sol LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual art', *Art-Language* 1, no 1 (May 1969), 11-13 (p. 12).
- <sup>40</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy, part II', p. 160.
- <sup>41</sup> *Douglas Huebler: November 1968*, ex. cat., New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1968.
- <sup>42</sup> Douglas Huebler, 'The Return of Arthur R. Rose', *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 6 (February 1989), 46-50 (p. 48).
- <sup>43</sup> Huebler, 'Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?', p. 74.
- <sup>44</sup> Frederic Paul, 'Truro, Massachusetts, October 11-14, 1992', in *Douglas Huebler: "Variable", etc.*, ed. by Frédéric Paul (Limoges: FRAC Limousin, 1993), pp. 125-130 (p. 128).
- <sup>45</sup> Ruth K. Meyer, 'Doug Huebler: An Interview, part II', *Ohio Arts Journal* (May-June 1981), p. 15.
- <sup>46</sup> In 'Context Text', the introduction to his *Sixth Investigation 1969, Proposition 14* (Cologne: Gerd de Vries, 1971) Kosuth observed that: "every unit of an (art) proposition is only that which is *functioning* within a larger framework (my art) and my art is only a unit which is *functioning* within a larger framework (the concept of 'art') and the concept 'art' is a concept which has a particular meaning at a particular time, but which exists only as an idea used by living artists and which exists ultimately only as (cultural) information." Reprinted in Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After*, 83-88 (pp. 87-88).
- <sup>47</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Text/Context: Seven remarks for you to consider while viewing/reading this exhibition', flyer published in conjunction with the exhibition *Text/Context*, New York: Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, May-June 1979. Reprinted in Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After*, 179-182 (p. 180). As of 16 March 2003, both the Kosuth studio and the Castelli Gallery have been unable to locate an original copy of this document.
- <sup>48</sup> 'The Death of the Author' was advanced by Roland Barthes in his essay of the same name written for, and first published in, *Aspen* 5+6 (fall/winter 1967). The art historian and critic Alexander Alberro has called this issue of *Aspen* "the first show of Conceptual art." For Alberro, the significance of Barthes' essay and its appositeness to Conceptual art was in its 'decentring' of the artist: "Of course the death of the author also means the birth of the reader: the viewer now actually taking control of the conceptual and often even material production of the work." Roundtable discussion, 'Conceptual art and the Reception of Duchamp', *October* 70 (fall 1994), 127-146 (p. 144). 'The Death of the Author' was reprinted in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-148. By contrast, Max Kozloff commented in 1972 on what he considered to be the perpetuation of an authorial mode in (some) Conceptual art. Kozloff complained that "[t]he 'receiver's' experience is *his* realization of the artist's intent, just as the artist's aim is to cultivate such realization." 'The Trouble with Art-As-Idea', *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972), 33-37 (p. 37). According to Barbara MacAdam, Kosuth has compared himself to "a writer using 'words invented by others. You still take authorship of the paragraph... The meaning produced is mine, so I take authorship.'" 'A Conceptualist's Self-Conceptions', *Art News* 94, no. 10 (December 1995), 124-7 (p. 127).
- <sup>49</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 409.
- <sup>50</sup> Huebler, 'The Return of Arthur R. Rose', p. 47.
- <sup>51</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 408.
- <sup>52</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 407.
- <sup>53</sup> See, Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.
- <sup>54</sup> Kenneth Baker, 'Joseph Kosuth, Castelli Gallery', *Artforum* vol. 10, no. 4 (December 1971), 86-87 (p. 87).

- <sup>55</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 408. The term "aesthetics of administration" was used in the title of Benjamin Buchloh's essay for the catalogue of *L'Art Conceptuel* to infer a critique of Conceptual art practice as reproducing the administrative concerns of a post-war middle class. "It still remains open for discussion," Buchloh wrote, "to what extent Conceptual art shares these conditions, or even enacts them and implements them in the sphere of the aesthetic... or to what extent it merely inscribes itself into the inescapable logic of a totally administered world, as Adorno's notorious term identified it." Buchloh, 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique', p. 48.
- <sup>56</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 408.
- <sup>57</sup> Kosuth thus risks underestimating the ability of a broader audience to form their own relationship with the work informed by their own experiences in the world. Twenty-seven years earlier, Kosuth had claimed that "[a]dvance information about the concept of art and about an artist's concepts is necessary to the appreciation and understanding of contemporary art." 'Art after philosophy', p. 137. In the intervening years there had been no de-privileging of the artist's informational framing of the work. Yet to the extent that familiarity with a body of ideas circulating around contemporary art, and around a particular artist's work, is determining of a *comprehending* audience, this operates as a limit to the inclusiveness of that audience. Though the appearance of Kosuth's article in a journal of art history clearly indicates its intended audience of academics and interested practitioners, there is, in this text, no acknowledgement of an audience for art outside those with such a professional involvement.
- <sup>58</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'The Play of the Unsayable: A preface and ten remarks on art and Wittgenstein', in Kosuth 'Art After Philosophy and After', 245-250 (p. 248). The text was first published in *Das Spiel des Unsagbaren: Ludwig Wittgenstein und die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ex. cat. (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1989).
- <sup>59</sup> Kosuth, 'The Play of the Unsayable', p. 249. See also Kosuth's comments in 'Intention(s)', where he observes that, "The history of recent art history leads one to conclude that there is a conservatism which pervades the art historical and critical establishment, in which convention necessitates a view of artists as bewildered children playing with lumps of wet clay, in dire need of the paternal art-historical and critical presence to swoop down and make sense of it all." p. 465.
- <sup>60</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 411.
- <sup>61</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', p. 411.
- <sup>62</sup> Kosuth, 'Intention(s)', n. 9 and n. 11, p. 411.
- <sup>63</sup> See, for example, Thierry de Duve's comments in the roundtable discussion 'Conceptual art and the Reception of Duchamp': "I think Kosuth is a mediocre artist. He did one incredible thing, however, very young, and it was that attempt at understanding something, at locating where the issue was. But he failed in interpreting it, as a theorist, and then he became worse and worse as an artist." p. 142.
- <sup>64</sup> Kosuth, '1975', 88-89. A footnote to this section of the text reads, in part: "Since such magazines [*Art News* and *Artforum*] are usually in the hands of the prevailing art establishment, the critics tend to act as lawyers for the maintenance of the status quo... by now artists at least should realise the myth of "objective" criticism/history to be understood for what it is: creative work *competitive* with the artist's, yet repressive and tenaciously self-serving in its role as "administrator" for the artists community." n. 5, p. 96.
- <sup>65</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'History For', *Flash Art* 143, Conceptual art supplement (November/December 1988), 100-102 (p.101).



- <sup>66</sup> Pierre Landry, 'L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective: An Interview with Claude Gintz and Juliette Laffon', *Le Journal du Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal* 1, no. 2 (July-August 1990), p. 1. Gintz was speaking specifically about the relationship between exhibition catalogues from the period under study and the catalogue produced for *L'Art Conceptuel*. However, his comments can, I think, be reasonably extrapolated to apply to the works of art included in the exhibition. Seth Siegelaub has commented on the museumization of work exhibited in *L'Art Conceptuel* that left the work looking like relics from a distant past: "But isn't this one of the more important functions of museums, to kill things, to finish them off, to give them the authority and thus distance from people by taking them out of their real everyday context? Even over and above the will of the actors involved with any given museum, I think the structure of museums tend towards this kind of activity: historicization. It is sort of a cemetery for art... the heaven for dead useless objects." Hans Ulrich Obrist and Seth Siegelaub, 'In Conversation', *Trans> arts.cultures.media* 6 (1999), 51-63. <[http://e-flux.com/projects/do\\_it/notes/interview/i001\\_text.html](http://e-flux.com/projects/do_it/notes/interview/i001_text.html)> (03/09/2003).
- <sup>67</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Necrophilia Mon Amour', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982), 58-63 (p. 61).
- <sup>68</sup> The challenge of 'anti-object' art to the practices and procedures of the museum is discussed, for example, by Lucy Lippard, 'Preface' to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973) 6-9; Thomas M. Messer, 'Impossible Art-Why It Is', *Art in America* 57, no. 3 (May/June 1969), 30-31; and Kynaston McShine 'Introduction' to *Information*, ex. cat., (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2 July-20 September 1970).
- <sup>69</sup> Suzanne Pagé, 'Preface', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, 11-12 (p. 11).
- <sup>70</sup> For example: in September 1973, Asher had the walls of the Galleria Toselli, Milan, sandblasted to remove the many layers of white paint and to reveal the original plaster, synthesizing the work and its gallery support. In 1974, Asher removed the dividing wall between the administrative and exhibition spaces at the Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, opening out the neutral exhibition space to reveal its economic underpinnings.
- <sup>71</sup> Michael Asher, *Writings 1973-1983 on works 1969-1979*, ed. by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983), p. 209.
- <sup>72</sup> Asher wrote: "I thinks its possible to construct a work that would address similar issues as my works before 1972 plus [to] have [it] consider its material and theoretical context to a retrospective; but I cannot figure out what that would be without recapitulating ideas which to me seem to be a bit redundant." Undated letter to Claude Gintz. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Asher has also said: "I don't know if museums regard the project of Conceptual art [as] finished or not when they do their exhibitions. Yet the further away Conceptual art gets from being experimental, the more that it will be over." Letter to the author, 13 May 2003.
- <sup>73</sup> Landry, 'L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective', p. 1.
- <sup>74</sup> The advertisements were published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 4 (Fall 1989); *Romagna Arte e Storia* 27 (September-December 1989); *Simiolus* 19, no. 1-2 (1989), 19, no. 4 (1989); *La Revue du Louvre* 4 (1989); *Daidalos* 33 (15 September 1989); *Apollo* 130, no. 332 (October 1989).
- <sup>75</sup> Michael Asher, undated letter to Claude Gintz. Archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
- <sup>76</sup> See note 64 above.



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<sup>77</sup> Michael Asher, letter to the author, 13 May 2003.

<sup>78</sup> The earlier history of Conceptual art had seemed to make possible a closer collaboration between artists and critics. See, for example, Lucy Lippard, *Six Years*, pp. 187-189.

<sup>79</sup> Asher, *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. ix.

<sup>80</sup> Buchloh notes this fact, indicating two exceptions. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'Editor's Note', in *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. vii. Although Buchloh is not specific, these are Asher's work at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois (June 8-August 12, 1979) which although not permanently installed, comprises part of the Museum's permanent collection, and an installation in the private collection of Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>81</sup> Asher, *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. ix.

<sup>82</sup> Asher, *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. 178. Asher notes the danger of aestheticizing the "alienated labor" of an objectified work team. He argues, however, that "a task both invented and referring back upon itself as *function* without actually performing that function (to display an object aesthetically) could not be truly aestheticized but only reveal the actual degree of hidden alienation within exhibition practice." p. 182.

<sup>83</sup> Asher, *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. 150.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Within the context', p. 162.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Frederick Dolan to Michael Asher, cited in Michael Asher, *Michael Asher: Writings 1973-1983*, p. 149.

<sup>86</sup> See Michael Cohen, 'Michael Asher: Rethinking Site Specific Critique', *Flash Art* 26, no. 173 (November/December 1993): 88-90.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Asher, letters to the author, 13 May 2003; 9 September 2003; 5 August 2004.

<sup>88</sup> Asher, letter to the author, 9 September 2003.

## Chapter Four

### Exhibiting the Immaterial

***Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 15 October 1995 – 4 February 1996.**

In October 1995 the Temporary Contemporary exhibition space of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Los Angeles, reopened on a permanent basis with the exhibition *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*. The exhibition was the first large-scale historical survey of Conceptual art to appear in the United States, and the most significant exhibition of this type since *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1989.<sup>1</sup> *L'Art Conceptuel* had emphasised the contribution of European-born artists to the early history of Conceptual art.<sup>2</sup> In the immediate aftermath of *L'Art Conceptuel* - not least as a result of Joseph Kosuth and Benjamin Buchloh's altercations over an authentic history of Conceptual art - it became clear that any such history would be a contested one, and that such a developmental model was unlikely to be accepted by all those involved or interested. It might not have been wholly surprising, then, that *Reconsidering the Object of Art* should make a particular argument for the centrality of American artists to a history of Conceptual art. That such an argument should be made in relation to the historically specific discourse of the 'dematerialization of art' was ironic, however, given the museum's traditional role as repository of material culture, and the difficulties presented for acquisition, storage and display by various forms of dematerialized art. What at first seems a paradox is understandable, though, if the 'dematerialization of art' is recognised as a discourse that emerged from the broader context of the hegemonic American Modernism of the 1940s and 1950s – a discourse that continued to favour those artists whose work was conceived within that context, even if intended as its critique. When subsequently adopted as the underlying concept for *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, dematerialisation provided the effective means by which the centrality of those artists to a history of Conceptual art might be confirmed.

However, the situation in which *Reconsidering the Object of Art* found itself was not nearly as straightforward as the requirement for a corrective to an earlier Eurocentric version of Conceptual art might have implied. Historically, the art infrastructure on America's West Coast had been relatively underdeveloped in

comparison to that on the East Coast, and artists had felt both isolated and discriminated against.<sup>3</sup> Although this situation did much to stimulate a sense of an independent artistic community on the West Coast, artists had reluctantly to recognise that the standards of quality by which they were measured were largely imposed from elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1990s, however, these inequalities had begun to be challenged. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition that had preceded *Reconsidering the Object of Art* at Temporary Contemporary in 1992, the notorious *Helter Skelter: LA Art in the 1990s*, Paul Schimmel had complained that “although Los Angeles has been grudgingly acknowledged as a flourishing art center, it has never been fully paid its due.” Schimmel continued that, “‘regional’ art need not bear the burden of provincialism. Although in the past many artists from LA have had to go to New York or to Europe in order to achieve recognition, garnering less support from institutions at home than those far away, this is no longer the case.”<sup>5</sup>

Following *Helter Skelter*, and marking the reopening of Temporary Contemporary, *Reconsidering the Object of Art* thus inherited some responsibility for representing the particular contributions of West Coast artists to a history of Conceptual art. The selection of artists necessarily reflected this responsibility, and as MoCA's director, Richard Koshalek, was keen to point out, about one third of the artists included in the exhibition had been active in California, fifteen of them in Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> It was by a somewhat questionable logic, therefore, that the exhibition's organisers, Anne Goldstein and Ann Rorimer, chose to frame the exhibition in relation to the concept of the ‘dematerialization of art’ - a concept that, this chapter argues, emerged from a critical discourse prevalent on America's East Coast, and that attributed to East Coast artists an especially significant role in the historical development of an American avant-garde.

The curators' working relationship dated back to an earlier exhibition, *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, shown at the same venue in 1989, which Goldstein had co-curated with Mary Jane Jacob, and for which Rorimer had contributed a catalogue essay.<sup>7</sup> *A Forest of Signs* had examined the work of a number of American artists whose careers were well established by the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s. Although understood as a critical examination of the construction of identity and the operations of power within the commodity culture during what Jacob referred to as the “age of Reagan,”<sup>8</sup> this work was



considered to have drawn upon the techniques and strategies of the Conceptual generation. As Rorimer explained, “[t]he current exhibition indicates the course that artists of the 1980s have followed along the ground broken by artists of the 1970s while illuminating at what point their paths diverge.” The difference was that the artists of the 1980s had “redefined their predecessors’ essential concern with reality as direct experience since their work denies an immediate point of contact with an existing reality and declares its own reality as representation.”<sup>9</sup>

*Reconsidering the Object of Art* recalled an earlier historical moment when the privileged status of art’s traditional media was being called into doubt. As Goldstein and Rorimer observed in their ‘Introduction’ to the catalogue (Fig. 45): “The most salient characteristic of this exhibition is the absence of painting on canvas (with some notable exceptions) as well as of materially-defined, three-dimensional sculptures.”<sup>10</sup> In a tacit acknowledgement of the influential formalist criticism of Clement Greenberg and his acolytes, Goldstein and Rorimer reminded the reader that,

[a]t the halfway point of the 1960s, major works had been realized that explicitly and literally defined themselves in some elemental and radical way as sculpture or as painting... in order to explicitly embody and address their own condition as objects within one of these categories.<sup>11</sup>

As the defining characteristics of painting and sculpture came increasingly to seem like limits, “artists... who have been associated with conceptualism... sought, literally and figuratively, to take art down from its pedestal,” Goldstein and Rorimer claimed.<sup>12</sup> The work of these artists, the exhibition insisted, was symptomatic of a crisis in Modernism and of the transition to a range of practices that were less certain in their morphology and, consequently, in their status as works of art.

Goldstein and Rorimer insisted that it was not their intention to try to define Conceptual art, since “certain artists in this exhibition would either reject the label or be incorrectly categorized depending on its definition.” Rather, they preferred to view Conceptual art as a “broad range of practices,” that had in common “the process of reconsidering the art object, and the objective of art.”<sup>13</sup> The fifty-five participating artists or collectives accordingly represented a wide spectrum, from those most often and most closely associated with Conceptual

art (Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Art & Language), those who chose to maintain a critical dialogue with it (Daniel Buren, Robert Smithson), and those perhaps best known for their work in the media of dance (Yvonne Rainer), performance (Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas), or film (Morgan Fisher, Michael Snow). (Fig. 46) It is undoubtedly true that the borders between artistic practices were more fluid during these years than they had previously been, but this is not to say that precepts could necessarily be unproblematically mapped onto one area of practice from another. Goldstein and Rorimer declared, nevertheless, that their intention for the exhibition was to “explore work that engaged in a shared dialogue and critique of conventions.”<sup>14</sup> They acknowledged the various meanings that had accrued to the term ‘Conceptual art’ over the three decades since 1965, but discovered a key strategy and unifying factor, however, in its “association with the primacy of the idea, in some cases to the point of the elimination of the physical object.”<sup>15</sup>

The ‘dematerialization of art’ was a notion first advanced by the critics Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler in an influential article for the February 1968 issue of *Art International*.<sup>16</sup> The article had not been expressly concerned with ‘Conceptual art,’ as the term had yet to achieve any real currency within the artworld. Nevertheless, Lippard and Chandler did equate “dematerialized art” with an “ultra-conceptual art” that “emphasize[d] the thinking process almost completely.”<sup>17</sup> The article is expressive of a symptomatic moment at which the artistic stakes were about to be raised in response to the questions of authorship posed in the aftermath of Minimalism. According to Lippard and Chandler, dematerialized art resulted from the then recent tendency for artists to have objects professionally fabricated according to a plan, and to regard the resultant object as merely an “epilogue” to an already fully elaborated concept.

Minimal art had seemed to make possible the disjunction between the mental and physical aspects of producing a work of art, between a work’s conception and its execution. If the work of art was no longer to be judged according to the trace of the artist’s hand inscribed upon an object, but rather according to the strength of its developmental concept, then one seemingly logical conclusion was that the object itself might become dispensable (if it was not already). Lippard and Chandler were not so ingenuous, however, as to believe the pleasures of aestheticism would be quickly or easily overcome: “the idea has to be awfully good,” they noted, “to compete with the object.” Pointing to the

strength of the traditional association between the work of art and the physical object, they admitted that while some of the artists whose work they had discussed held “that the idea is self-generating and self-conclusive, that building the sculpture or painting the painting is simply the traditional, expected step finally unnecessary to the esthetic... very little of their work is really conceptual to the point of excluding the concrete altogether.”<sup>18</sup>

The break with previous formal models and modes of appreciation was to be neither so easily achieved nor, perhaps, so desirable as the prospect of dematerialization, at first, seemed to imply. As Lippard and Chandler conceived of it, dematerialization did not represent a rupture with the formalist criticism of someone like Greenberg, but rather a form of self-criticism developing from one of its key premises. “The idea that art can be experienced in order to extract an idea or underlying intellectual scheme as well as to perceive its formal essence,” they claimed, “*continues from* the opposing formalist premise that painting and sculpture should be looked at as objects *per se* rather than as references to other images or representation.”<sup>19</sup>

Greenberg had, of course, abjured the kind of illusionism that would “alienate pictorial space from the literal two-dimensionality which is the guarantee of painting’s independence as an art.”<sup>20</sup> In his well-known essay ‘Modernist Painting,’ he had argued that, since the Enlightenment, the arts had avoided assimilation to entertainment, and thence to a form of therapy, only by demonstrating the inherent value of the particular experiences they individually yielded. Identifying Modernism as a self-critical tendency that had begun with Kant, Greenberg argued that Modernism proceeded by “the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” What was clear for Greenberg was that “the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium.”<sup>21</sup> Modernism, he insisted, involved a reduction to the essence of the medium, a process of self-criticism by which “the conventions not essential to the viability of a medium be discarded as soon as they are recognized.”<sup>22</sup> Such a concentration on factors specific and indispensable to the medium represented “the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence as an art.”<sup>23</sup>



Since the late 1940s, Greenberg's criticism had been assiduous in promoting an emergent American avant-garde comprised of abstract, post-Cubist, painters such as Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. This group of artists, who, as Greenberg pointed out, "came to notice in New York during and shortly after the war," had been responsible for a body of work through which, he thought, American art had come to lead the world.<sup>24</sup> It might not be surprising, then, if it were found that ambitious American artists of a later generation – especially those in New York – who were then seeking to move beyond Modernist formalism in the name of a progressive avant-garde, nevertheless retained some investment in criticism that located them in the vanguard of advanced culture. From such a perspective, any tendency toward dematerialization might be seen as an attempt to extend Modernist formalism beyond its limits, whilst ensuring that 'dematerialized' art could still rely on an historical context of development.

Although the discourse of dematerialization often stressed the democratising potential of an object-less art, such claims often originated from New York - an expression, perhaps, of the guilty conscience of the metropolitan centre of the international artworld. Although, for instance, it had seemed to Lippard, in 1969, that "one of the important things about the new dematerialized art" was that it provided "a way of getting the power structure out of New York," this was not so much about nurturing local differentiations as it was about encouraging understandings of works of art outside the comparatively closed cultural context in which they were produced. "Even if we do get the art *works* out of New York," Lippard claimed, "even if the objects do travel, they alone don't often provide the stimulus that they do combined with the milieu. But when the artists travel, whether they're liked or disliked, people are exposed directly to the art and to the ideas behind it in a more realistic, informal situation."<sup>25</sup>

Whereas, in February 1968, the identification of 'dematerialization' with a nascent Conceptual art could only be hinted at, by 1969 the association was more secure. Although dissident voices emanated from Art & Language in England, New York occupied a position at the discursive hub of what, by then, was recognized as an international avant-gardist tendency. Many artists were claiming their association with Conceptual art, but participation in the projects of the influential New York-based dealer and gallerist, Seth Siegelaub, at that time,

seemed to offer some assurance of the validity of such a claim. Since February 1968, Siegelau had organised a number of exhibitions and publications which drew upon a small but fairly consistent group of artists: Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Lawrence Weiner. By the beginning of the following year, four of that group – Barry, Huebler, Kosuth and Weiner – would have their Conceptual art credentials confirmed in perpetuity by taking part in the exhibition that the critic Ursula Meyer, in an early anthology of Conceptual art, identified as “the first exclusively Conceptual Art exhibition.”<sup>26</sup> That exhibition was *January 5-31, 1969* (also known as *The January Show*), organised by Siegelau in a rented office space at 44 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York.

Conceptual art's association with New York was, in no small measure, attributable to Siegelau's managerial and entrepreneurial prowess.<sup>27</sup> It was not the case that all Siegelau's artists were either native or naturalised New Yorkers, or that all his exhibitions before the *January Show* had taken place in New York. Indeed, Kosuth was born in Ohio, Huebler lived in Massachusetts, and Siegelau had organised exhibitions in Massachusetts and Vermont during 1968.<sup>28</sup> Rather, so assiduous a publicist was he, that, despite the fact that after April 1966 he no longer operated a permanent gallery space in the city, Conceptual art acquired its association with New York nonetheless. Moreover, Siegelau's presentational ideas were so strong that one critic was moved to observe that he was not simply “gallery director’ for the best of the conceptualists,” but that he was “obviously one of the best artists in his gallery, and in a sense his artists know it. They are subcontracting to his prime contract as a data organizer.”<sup>29</sup>

As Lucy Lippard has pointed out, Conceptual art did little to trouble the inflated and complacent New York artworld of the late 1960s,<sup>30</sup> but its close association with the city meant that artists in other localities often felt alienated from Conceptual art even if they felt largely sympathetic towards it. Although this was felt especially strongly in places where the United States was implicated in a history of colonialism or cultural imperialism,<sup>31</sup> it was sometimes also the case even on the North American continent. John Baldessari, an artist who in the late 1960s was living in National City, a southern industrial suburb of San Diego, California, has repeatedly stated his sense of isolation at that time from artistic practice in New York. He has claimed that he “didn’t have a clue” about the

artistic trends then prevalent in New York, that he “knew abstract expressionism was gone and pop was starting,” and that “Kosuth saw me as a pop artist, not a conceptual artist.”<sup>32</sup> From Kosuth’s perspective in New York it appeared that Baldessari’s “amusing pop paintings” amounted to “‘conceptual’ cartoons of actual conceptual work” and were “not really relevant” to any discussion of ‘purer’ forms of Conceptual art.<sup>33</sup> Baldessari, on the other hand, has been dismissive of the originary claims of some Conceptual artists, expressing scepticism about whether the emergence of art ‘styles’ can be linked to particular individuals and/or particular geographical locations. In an interview with Liam Gillick in 1995, Baldessari was asked about what Gillick perceived to be “the need” in his work “to puncture the more pompous proclamations around conceptual art, the rather more fixed positions.” Baldessari responded that:

I don’t think there are any progenitors of conceptual or minimal art or anything else for that matter. There is a kind of zeitgeist. We all read similar books, magazines and watch TV or go to the movies. So a person of reasonable intelligence could come up with similar ideas to someone else in another part of the world.<sup>34</sup>

Baldessari has commented on the attitude of hostility that would meet West Coast artists given an exhibition in New York: “It used to be that anybody from California that would show... would get uniformly trounced.” Californian artists did not receive such treatment because of perceived inadequacies of their work, but because New York artists and critics would adopt the attitude that “if we [New Yorkers] have to suffer through bad winters and high rents, you’re not going to get off so easy... come in and take the best and leave.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, for Baldessari, art practice in New York during the late 1960s was conducted within an atmosphere of cultural conservatism. “One thing that used to bother me on forays into New York,” the artist has said, “would be the sense that things had to fit into history or they weren’t viable and my attitude was always ‘don’t be a slave to history’”.<sup>36</sup> California’s distance from New York and the historicist allegiances of its art establishment, in fact, contributed to a liberatory situation in which Baldessari felt able to work without having to conform to preconceived models of practice. “One of the healthiest things about California,” he has emphasized, “is – ‘Why not?’ One of the reasons for this mentality is certainly ignorance of art history. There’s less history saying you can’t do it, so you do it.”<sup>37</sup>



It might be argued that comments such as these are entirely those that would be expected from someone who, perhaps, felt that his own claims toward origination had been passed over in favour of a version of Conceptual art's development that recognised different key players and different locations. Indeed, having forsaken traditional forms of painting in 1966/1967 in favour of *phototext* work that combined mechanically reproduced images with texts inscribed by professional signwriters, (see Fig. 47) Baldessari's claim to have produced an early form of Conceptual art is as strong, if not stronger, than any of the artists participating in Siegelau's *January Show*, with the possible exception of Kosuth.<sup>38</sup> Although he does not protest the point,<sup>39</sup> Baldessari might feel rightly aggrieved then if, in some sense, New York could be seen to have 'stolen' the idea of Conceptual art.

The cultural dominance of the East Coast and the appetite of New York to claim for itself the most vital aspects of American culture have been noted by others on the West Coast. David A. Greene, Associate Editor of the short-lived Los Angeles-based magazine *Art Issues* has provocatively claimed that:

It's a fact that all things start out here in California – the breadbasket of American culture – and wend their way east: first to New York, whereupon they rebound, like a rubber ball, back to centre and dribble around the rest of the continent for a while, to eventually roll under a sofa somewhere in Idaho. But a funny thing happens when home-grown cultural phenomena land on those eastern shores: they become naturalized and intellectualized, declared to have just, well, *appeared* as a result of a quirky confluence of deterministic factors in American history.<sup>40</sup>

Greene felt that, with important Californian artists receiving their first retrospective exhibitions in New York, art institutions in California had been unwilling or unable to recognise that the state had made an important contribution to American avant-garde art in the preceding few decades. "Local art institutions ignore their own backyard not due to a surfeit of riches," he complained, "but for reasons of conservatism and insecurity, a suspicion that east-coast cultural commissars might be correct compounded by a longing to be taken seriously by them."<sup>41</sup>

Focusing on the then recent *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, Greene clearly felt that a stronger case should have been made for the contributions to a "nascent American conceptualism" of artists such as Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha, Eleanor

Antin, William Wegman and Alan Ruppersberg, all of whom had been active in California during the period covered by the exhibition. Factors of geographical and structural inequality may have occasioned the improved quotient of Californian artists that Richard Koshalek took pride in, and this may have gone some way toward redressing any naturalization of Conceptual art to the East Coast, but, for Greene, the problem of its intellectualisation in terms quite foreign to it still remained. Greene complained that the exhibition catalogue demonstrated the “MoCA curators’ stubborn adherence to a Europhiliac definition of conceptualism and its history” that was disappointing given the persistence in much of the art world of a “text-book culture... that dictates that efficient critique is the ultimate goal of all conceptual art.” Goldstein and Rorimer’s allegiance to this type of understanding of Conceptual art, Greene thought, amounted to a betrayal of the work itself, which “when gathered together in [Temporary Contemporary’s] cavernous confines, is revealed to have little in common with a bunch of angry students and workers in Paris – and much to do with dissatisfaction with then-prevailing modes of art production and thought, coupled with brilliantly entertaining good humour.”<sup>42</sup>

But there is little to support Greene’s accusations in Goldstein and Rorimer’s *Introduction*. Although the curators note that much work included in the exhibition “was conceived and produced in the tumultuous period of the sixties,” the context they emphasize is overwhelmingly an American one, “characterized by the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy... the escalation and conclusion of the war in southeast Asia, Richard Nixon’s presidency, culminating in the Watergate scandal... and the 1970 murder of the students protesting the Vietnam war at Kent State.” Inserted toward the end of this list, and without disproportionate attention being drawn to it, is an acknowledgement of “the student protests of May 1968 in Paris.”<sup>43</sup> Such a reference to the social and political situation in Europe seems hardly an expression of Goldstein and Rorimer’s raging Europhilia.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the curators’ acknowledgment of the social and political context comes in the penultimate paragraph of the *Introduction*, following a number of passages that emphasise artists’ dissatisfaction with prevailing conceptions of the work of art as autonomous object of contemplation. In the plainest statement to this effect, “the initial phase of Conceptual art” is described as having been “characterized by its studied dismantling of, and ultimate break with, the Western tradition of

modernism,”<sup>45</sup> exactly the kind of motivation that Greene felt was obscured within the ‘text-book culture’ he complained of.

“Dematerialization,” Goldstein and Rorimer thought, “describes a critical break with the autonomous work of art,” and while art works were “often not dematerialized in a literal sense, they were nevertheless no longer contained within the object. Instead it became a point of reference and question.”<sup>46</sup> That the total dematerialization of the art object had always been an idealistic fantasy - at best, only partially achieved – had been admitted by Lippard herself. “[S]ince I first wrote on the subject in 1967,” she said, “it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term, that a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as ‘material,’ as a ton of lead.” For lack of a better term, however, she was prepared to continue to refer to a process of “dematerialization,” but was careful to qualify its use. In retrospect, it did not imply the total annihilation of the object, but rather “a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness).”<sup>47</sup>

Even for those artists whose work seemed to approach the ‘ultimate’ dematerialization, the implications of the term were far from ambiguous. For Siegelau’s *January Show*, Robert Barry had installed two pieces consisting of radio carrier waves, one at 88 megacycles, FM, the other at 1600 kilocycles, AM. (Fig. 29) The radio carrier waves simultaneously occupied the exhibition space but were imperceptible to visitors. The generating equipment was concealed within a cupboard, and the presence of the two works was confirmed only by means of text on panels mounted on the wall adjacent to the cupboard. Barry claimed to be interested in dealing with frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum other than those perceived as light, and which, therefore, also lay outside those traditionally relied upon in the appreciation of visual art.<sup>48</sup> In April that same year, he had travelled to California to present another project for Seth Siegelau in which small measured amounts of a number of inert gases (Helium, Neon, Argon, Krypton, Xenon) were released and returned to the atmosphere. (Fig. 48) The expansion of the odourless and colourless gases from measured volume to complete diffusion was again claimed to be beyond the perception of the viewer.



A month later, in May, Barry had contributed his *Telepathic Piece* to Siegelau's exhibition at the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. The piece consisted simply of a bracketed statement in the exhibition catalogue:

[During the Exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thoughts that are not applicable to language or image.]<sup>49</sup>

Previously, Barry had sometimes, reluctantly, allowed documentary photographs of his work because, he felt, they proved the point that there really was nothing to photograph, but as he told Ursula Meyer, his *Telepathic Piece* had been "the first work I did that really did not have a place to be photographed. There was nothing visual that could be tied to it."<sup>50</sup> Despite Barry's desire to bypass the static perceptible object in works such as his *Carrier Wave* pieces and *Inert Gas Series*, he did not deny the materiality of the things he chose to work with. Indeed, he felt that an artist's choice of *what* to work with was often more important than what the artist did *with* it once the choice had been made. For his own part, Barry would try to be as non-interventionist as possible. "In a sense," he admitted, "I suppose I could be called a materialist, in that I don't impose some process, some alien process, onto the material I have chosen. I just simply use it the way it is or think it's meant to be used."<sup>51</sup> Barry claimed strongly to believe in the real existence of the 'energies' that comprised his work and the characteristic forms they assumed. As he told the pseudonymous Arthur R. Rose in an interview printed a month after the *January Show*:

These forms certainly do exist, they are controlled and have their own characteristic. They are made of various kinds of energy which exist outside the narrow arbitrary limits of our own senses. I use various devices to produce the energy, detect it, measure it, and define its form.<sup>52</sup>

As Barry sought to develop works that bypassed even language or the mental image, as with his *Telepathic Piece*, he continued to claim, nevertheless, that the ideas he wished to communicate did have non-material substance, and that they were transmittable, either consciously or unconsciously. It was not his intention, Barry assured, to eliminate the art object, but rather to broaden the range of materials available for the production of the work of art, and to expand the range of perceptive faculties required to experience it. He, and other artists working in a similar vein, were "not really getting away from the object," he felt,

but “producing a different kind of object... not really destroying the object, but just expanding the definition, that’s all.”<sup>53</sup>

One obvious problem that Barry had to negotiate with these types of project was that of how to make the presence of the work known to the viewer. In an interview of May 1969, he talked with Patricia Norvell about his resistance to the kind of presentation or documentation that would impinge upon the art itself, or that might become its own object. Instead, he felt that his own work raised a number of fundamental questions about “just how much is needed, and how much needs to be known about a work of art, before it does exist.” He described for Norvell how he would “start first of all with the idea of *no* presentation,” asking himself as the next step:

what is the *least* presentation that I can get away with? Maybe it's just a sticker, given a title which is a descriptive title. And then if it's in a show, just put the sticker on the wall describing it.<sup>54</sup>

Barry felt keenly that making his work was an entirely different activity to presenting it, and that in trying to find even the most minimal of means to make its presence known to the viewer, he would inevitably be drawn into a situation of compromise. In this, he was forced to acknowledge the importance of conventionalised understandings of the art object in relation to which the radicalness of his own work was predicated. If his work was to be intelligible as art, it was so in its dependence on its art context. As he confirmed to Arthur R. Rose on the occasion of the *January Show*, “[b]y just being in this show, I’m making known the existence of the work. I’m presenting these things in an artistic situation using the space and the catalogue.”<sup>55</sup>

If the notion of dematerialization was difficult to pin down in relation to Barry’s work, his development as an artist in the year or two before 1969 nonetheless described a path of successive reduction in the physical appearance of the object, though he was evidently reluctant to describe it in these terms. Barry was initially defensive when asked by Norvell to explain how he had come to the work he was then involved with after having previously made paintings.<sup>56</sup> After some reticence, however, he described a fragmentary narrative of his artistic development tracing back from his work with telepathy and the unconscious through the *Inert Gas Series* and *Carrier Wave* pieces he had presented for Siegelau earlier in 1969, the installations of nylon monofilament he had been

working with in 1968,<sup>57</sup> (Fig. 49) as far as his earlier paintings, in which small painted panels had been placed so as to define the space between, or in which paint had been applied only to the sides of the canvas, leaving the front surface unpainted.

The work of Lawrence Weiner, another of the artists who had participated in the *January Show*, can similarly be seen to have followed a kind of reductive logic. Around 1964/5, Weiner was producing paintings that were variants on a single standard formula. Talking later about this work, he would claim that he had been trying to produce paintings that were not themselves unique objects, but only visualisations of what a painting should be, or that dealt only with the *idea* of painting.<sup>58</sup> (Fig. 50) Slightly later, Weiner would produce a series of paintings that involved a rectangular-shaped removal from the canvas, whose variations within a simple formula would be decided upon by the individual for whom the painting was intended. Significant later works of Weiner's such as *A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (1968, Fig. 51) or *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use* (1969, Fig. 52) both included in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, are clearly related to the earlier removal paintings, yet by 1969 Weiner was dissatisfied with the resultant reality of these subtractions. As he told Patricia Norvell:

the idea of a removal and an intrusion is much more exciting to me than the physical thing itself. The physical thing is still a hole, you know, and a hole by any other name is still a hole. The idea of making art out of a hole is exciting. But the hole is never terribly exciting.<sup>59</sup>

The events are well known by which Weiner subsequently came to the realisation that it might be possible to forego altogether the material realisation of the work. On the occasion of Siegel's exhibition at Windham College, Vermont, Weiner had returned to the sports field where his work was being installed (Fig. 53) to find that students, requiring space to play sport, had interfered with the work.<sup>60</sup> He had concluded, however, that the work's prior statement in language had guaranteed its existence. After this realisation, it became immaterial to Weiner whether his works were fabricated or not, and the responsibility for that decision passed to the interested third party – the 'receiver,' in Weiner's terminology. In the autumn of 1968, Weiner first conceived the statement that has accompanied the presentation of his work since its publication in the catalogue for the *January Show*:



1. The artist may construct the piece.
  2. The piece may be fabricated.
  3. The piece need not be built.
- Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver on the occasion of receivership.<sup>61</sup>

Joseph Kosuth derided Barry and Weiner for their reductivism in the second part of his notorious essay *Art After Philosophy*. It was Kosuth's opinion that the work of his *January Show* colleagues had "take[n] on a 'Conceptual Art' association almost by accident," and that it had in common the fact that "the 'path' to conceptual art" had come "via decisions related to choices of art materials and processes." Barry's work seemed "to exist conceptually only because the material is invisible," although it did have a physical state. Weiner, on the other hand, had dispensed with the need for fabrication but was still concerned with "specific materials and processes," and, according to Kosuth, he continued to describe himself as a materialist (as Barry also did).<sup>62</sup> Kosuth, however, considered himself to be working with a 'purer' form of Conceptual art, in that his art constituted an "inquiry into the foundations of the concept 'art'," not simply a novel innovation in its materials. He was concerned that Conceptual art was being considered a 'tendency' characterised by what he regarded as superficial, morphological, similarities that failed to attend to an artist's intentions. As he saw it, art criticism – and that of Lippard and Chandler was in no way discounted from this - was guilty of an attempt to detect "stylehood" based only on the "apparent 'immateriality' or 'anti-object' similarity amongst many 'conceptual' works of art."<sup>63</sup>

Although Kosuth was dismissive of Barry and Weiner's reductivism and their flirtations with the 'dematerialized' object, he had, nevertheless, followed a similar path of reductivism and experimentation with 'formless' materials in his own earlier career. After ceasing to make paintings in the traditional sense, Kosuth had begun to make works with glass because, as he told Jeanne Siegel in 1970, its transparency had allowed him to avoid questions of colour composition. Kosuth's first glass piece, *Any Five Foot Sheet of Glass To Lean Against Any Wall* (1965), had succeeded as a work that was "neither a sculpture (on the floor) nor a painting (on the wall)."<sup>64</sup> Yet for Kosuth the 'problem' of form still remained. As a response, he made a further piece in which three glass boxes, each inscribed with the single word 'Glass,' separately contained broken

glass, ground glass and stacked glass. In this way Kosuth felt he had been able to supersede the formal qualities of glass in the single state by presenting 'glass' in its categorical state. Kosuth dated the first use of text in his work, and his more general interest in language, to these early glass pieces, after which he gradually came to realise that the issues of meaning and context raised by using language could constitute the material of his work. Following his glass pieces, Kosuth next worked with water "which had the advantage of being 'formless' as well as 'colorless.'"<sup>65</sup> By the time of his well-known negative photostat reproductions of dictionary definitions, the *First Investigations* (1966-67), he had realised that he could "use the definitions alone in solving [his] dilemma about formless forms – in other words, by just presenting the *idea* of water – 'art as idea.'"<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 54)

'Art After Philosophy' was intended, in part, as an attack on formalist criticism, especially that of Greenberg, whom Kosuth derided as "the critic of taste."<sup>67</sup> Advocating a distinction between aesthetics and art, Kosuth considered that the appearance and aesthetic evaluation of any object employed within the 'art investigation,' was irrelevant to the question of how well it performed its artistic function. Formalist art and criticism, he thus thought, were based on an egregious error in accepting "as a definition of art one which exists solely on morphological grounds."<sup>68</sup> The physical resemblance of so many objects – painted canvas on (usually) rectangular stretchers – offered no guarantee of their artistic, that is, their conceptual relationship as works of art. For Kosuth, it was "obvious... that formalist criticism's reliance on morphology leads necessarily with a bias toward the morphology of traditional art... Formalist criticism is no more than an analysis of the physical attributes of particular objects which happen to exist in a morphological context."<sup>69</sup> This meant that formalist critics would never, and could never, comment upon those conceptual aspects of the work that contributed to an understanding of the nature and function of art since, for them, this was irrelevant to the morphological resemblances to earlier works by which an object's art status was confirmed.

Kosuth included the Minimalist artist Donald Judd amongst the influences on his own work; the older artist's name is invoked several times in the first part of 'Art After Philosophy.' Judd's own essay 'Specific Objects' had declared that "[h]alf or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture." For Judd, the specificities of the medium imposed limits upon what

was possible within painting and sculpture, but it seemed to him that these forms were now “less neutral, less containers, more defined, not undeniable and unavoidable” such that “much of the motivation of the new work is to get clear of these forms.”<sup>70</sup> What Judd’s thinking had made available to Kosuth was the possibility of work that was no longer defined in relation to the specifics of a particular medium, but which transcended their limits to gain greater access to the more general category of art. One could not be a painter, for instance, and question the nature of art since paintings were premised on the understanding that they were, *ipso facto*, works of art. As Kosuth argued, “the word art is general and the word painting is specific. Painting is a *kind* of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art.”<sup>71</sup>

Greenberg could never have accepted Judd’s notion of a work of art that was neither painting nor sculpture, since this would have been to acknowledge as a work of art something that had relinquished its claim to independence, and that thereby had isolated itself from any standard of quality. Kosuth, on the other hand, took from Judd’s ‘Specific Objects’ the notion that it was no longer sufficient for painters to question the nature of painting, nor for sculptors to question the nature of sculpture. “It comes as no surprise,” Kosuth remarked, once more in relation to Judd, “that the art with least fixed morphology is the example from which we decipher the nature of the general term ‘art’.”<sup>72</sup> No less essentialistic than Greenberg’s ‘Modernist Painting,’ ‘Art After Philosophy’ advocated an investigation, not of the nature of the medium, but of the nature of art itself. This investigation was to take place by approaching the work of art as ‘analytical proposition.’ Quoting the philosopher, A. J. Ayer, Kosuth wrote: “A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience.”<sup>73</sup> Works of art, then, were not to be verified empirically, but entirely within the context of art, as definitions of art, or their logical consequences. Works of art, Kosuth famously thought, were tautological.<sup>74</sup> If art was to divest itself of all that was extraneous to the definition of art, it followed, for Kosuth, that the art object, and its appreciation in terms of aesthetics, became irrelevant. As a result of a the reductive strategy employed in his own work, Kosuth had arrived at the conclusion that “objects are conceptually irrelevant to the condition of art,” but this was not to say “that a particular ‘art investigation’ may or may not employ objects, material substances, etc. within the confines of its investigation.”<sup>75</sup>



Kosuth eschewed illusionism, or, as he put it, “‘realistic’ art,” on the grounds that it “does not bring one to a circular swing back into a dialogue with the larger framework of questions about the nature of *art*,” but “[flings] one... out of art’s orbit into the ‘infinite space of the human condition.’”<sup>76</sup> Realistic art was guilty of framing art in synthetic, not analytic, terms; in requiring empirical verification, it could never be tautological. Although he did not appear to grasp the implications at the time, ‘Art After Philosophy’<sup>77</sup>’s assertion that “[a]rt’s only claim is for art”<sup>77</sup> revealed that, rather than representing its radical dismantling, Kosuth’s argument inherited much from Greenbergian Modernism and was merely divergent *from* it. Even in the later 1960s, the influence of Modernist formalism was abiding and difficult to elude: “I was trying to escape formalism,” Kosuth would later admit, “but I was trying to do it within its own terms, unfortunately.”<sup>78</sup> In the mid-1970s, he would partially recant his earlier allegiance to the tautological model, admitting that it had been “quintessentially modern.” Although his emphasis on the tautological condition of art had reproduced the Modernist ideology of scientism, it had done so, he insisted, with the intention of “initiat[ing] change by first clarifying and articulating, that is, raising one’s consciousness of the *present* in its particularity as the arena of one’s cultural engagement.”<sup>79</sup> In this way, his earlier “somewhat special use of the notion of tautology” could only have been properly understood “*operationally* as an hermeneutic.”<sup>80</sup>

Although Kosuth did not employ the tautological model in the service of dematerialization, the emphasis accordingly placed on the ‘idea’ of art over its object was clearly in accordance with Lippard and Chandler’s requirement that dematerialized art “emphasize the thinking process almost exclusively.”<sup>81</sup> His attraction to the tautological was profoundly revealing, as was the more general impulse toward dematerialization, of both the hegemonic status of Modernist criticism and the need for a number of (mostly) younger artists to challenge that hegemony by first demonstrating, then transgressing Modernism’s limits. However, the act of transgression inevitably occurs in a cycle of affirmation and disaffirmation, and, as if to confirm its existence, ultimately invokes a repressive authority.<sup>82</sup> To the extent that dematerialization seemed to call out for the admonishment of Modernism’s high priests, it was confirmation of the principles and tenets of Modernist dogma.

'The Dematerialization of Art' was undeniably important in establishing some recognizably common ground between such loosely defined areas as 'post-minimalism,' 'anti-form,' 'earth art,' and 'systems art' as emerged in the period of Modernism's crisis, and in making available a critical language through which such a diversity of practices could begin to be understood. However, those artists whose work it often purported to explain did not receive the concept of dematerialization uncritically. One of the first artists to criticise the notion was Terry Atkinson of the English group, Art & Language. In a letter to Lippard and Chandler dated March 1968, Atkinson complained that all the artworks (ideas) to which the writers had referred in the article were, "with few exceptions, art-objects. They may not be an art-object as we know it in its traditional matter-state, but they are nevertheless matter in one of its forms, either solid-state, gas-state, liquid-state."<sup>83</sup> When Atkinson then asked in the editorial introduction to the first issue of *Art-Language*: "Can this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what 'conceptual art' is, come up for the count as a work of conceptual art?", the question was posed partly as a ruminative response to Lippard and Chandler's dematerialization thesis.<sup>84</sup>

The following February, Atkinson's article, 'From an Art & Language Point of View,' took the Lippard and Chandler article as the stated starting point for a discussion of some of the perceived inadequacies of a number of artists who had gathered opportunistically "beneath the Conceptual flag" since its publication.<sup>85</sup> Three months later, the New York artist Mel Bochner would question the meaning of dematerialization in the visual arts, observing: "There is no art which does not bear some burden of physicality. To deny it is to descend into irony."<sup>86</sup> By May 1970, the concept of dematerialization was one that was already seriously discredited. Given that its credible lifespan was little more than two years (approximately, February 1968 - May 1970), it is surprising that Goldstein and Rorimer chose to frame *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, an exhibition that purported to cover the entire decade 1965-1975, in relation to this concept. Furthermore, it was unclear exactly how the concept was being used. While Lippard and Chandler had cited both the serial work of both Bochner and Sol LeWitt as significant precursors for dematerialized art, this aspect of their work was not strongly emphasized in the exhibition.<sup>87</sup> The emphasis on materiality (or its negation) also had repercussions for the selection and interpretation of work by artists - many of them conceived after dematerialization's critical redundancy - that explored issues of political, gender

and social difference,<sup>88</sup> or, in the case of Art & Language, that aimed to construct the social through its orientation to issues of practice.<sup>89</sup>

The editorial introduction to the first issue of *Art-Language* established the grounds for Art & Language's distinction between work which operated more-or-less securely within the traditional taxonomies of art, and that which transcended the preoccupation with the object to turn its attention, instead, to the epistemological underpinnings of the category 'artwork.' Art & Language shared the conviction of many artists in the mid-to-late 1960s "that [p]ainting and sculpture have physical limits and the limit of what can be said in them is finally decided by precisely those physical limits." However, as they were keen to point out, "to simply make the art object vanish provided no critique of its contingent existence." These "British conceptual artists," the editorial claimed, had "found at a certain point that the nature of their involvements exceeded the language limits of the concrete object. Soon after they found the same thing with regard to theoretical objects." In 1967, Art & Language works such as *Air-Conditioning Show* and *Air Show* (Fig. 55) had postulated theoretical objects as starting points for an examination of their (hypothetical) conditions of existence as works of art. But as the editorial explained:

Once having established writing as a method of specifying points in an inquiry of this kind, there seem[ed] no reason to assume that inquiries pertaining to the art area should necessarily have to use theoretical objects simply because art of the past has required the presence of a concrete object before art can be thought of as 'taking place.'<sup>90</sup>

What was needed, instead, was the development of a form of work that could take "as a point of initial inquiry the language-use of the art society."<sup>91</sup>

By February 1970, the association between dematerialization and Conceptual art had become much more widely accepted, as Atkinson noted in the article *From An Art & Language Point of View*, published in the second issue of *Art-Language*. Lippard and Chandler's article was regarded as having represented an early attempt to "classify... and make some sense of the actions from 'Minimal' across 'Conceptual' art." Although there were "points in the Lippard and Chandler writing that offer[ed] a sufficiently appropriate grip on an initial avenue into an exploration of an Art and Language point of view to warrant their use," it was Atkinson's contention that much of the work referred to in the article



remained “in a cloudy and unclarified ambience.”<sup>92</sup> The work of the younger artists who were by then being associated with “Conceptual art,” Atkinson claimed, was little more than an embellishment of the achievements of artists such as Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Donald Judd before 1967:

Following them has mostly entailed a repetitious raising of the same questions: once given the possibility of using gas-state matter, liquid-state matter, solid-state matter entities, actual or theoretical, the mere listing of as many gas-state, liquid-state or solid-state entities as possible is little more than merely a list.<sup>93</sup>

Most of the works of dematerialized or Conceptual art, it seemed to Atkinson, were being advanced from an under-developed theoretical position and “with an unreasonable appetite for novelty.” Citing the work of Lawrence Weiner, for example, Atkinson claimed that:

Weiner’s lists... all pertain in a strong sense to matter states, any claim that he does not use objects but only ideas is simply a tediously novel aphorism, the truth of which simply rests on what is meant by ‘use’ in this context, and if it is simply indicative of the fact that Weiner does not make objects, that in itself is a trivial claim for significance.<sup>94</sup>

Conceptual art, from the Art & Language point of view, was predicated on the necessity of eliminating the sophistry and mystification from the practice of art; it should “provide a useful tool in reducing the clumsiness of constructs in a loaded area.” Art & Language practice proceeded from the requirement that artwork (re)discover the depth and complexity appropriate to an adequately developed understanding of the context in which that practice took place, but with the proviso that the measures of that depth and complexity were not necessarily to be established by reference to the previous history of the plastic arts.

Modernist criticism had not only been significant in an American context, it was read widely in Europe, too, and was undeniably influential.<sup>95</sup> Inevitably, though, Modernism was received in Europe in a historical and cultural context in which the cultural specificities underlying Greenberg’s historicism were not shared. Charles Harrison has argued that it was this difference of context, however, that enabled European artists to mount a more effective critique of Modernism than their American counterparts:

Though Conceptual Art is unthinkable as an artistic movement without those developments in American Modernism which largely sustained it, it could be said that the critical project of Conceptual Art was primarily a European possibility. The pursuit of this project, that is to say, required emancipation from that historicist view of the reductive development of art which was a coercive condition of existence within the North American art world during the 1960s."<sup>96</sup>

Whereas the 'art as idea' of the American artists, in Harrison's view, merely substituted for the Modernist art object "*idea-tokens*" or "intellectual 'ready-mades'," European Conceptual artists distinguished themselves through their greater attention to the "contingencies of practice."<sup>97</sup>

In 1989, in his essay for the catalogue of *L'Art Conceptuel*, Harrison observed of Art & Language's practice of the late 1960s and early 1970s that it "can be identified with a specific form of critique of the art object. This critique," he claimed, "attends to the discourse within which that object is represented and accorded a value." Harrison continued:

The art object was not dissolved, not 'conceptualised' into immateriality. It was the assumption of its precedence that was abandoned. Whatever might be allowed to count as the 'work of art' was simply surrounded with the evidence of its own contingency and made strategically to coincide with the materials of its ratification.<sup>98</sup>

Contrary, therefore, to David A. Greene's claim that *Reconsidering the Object of Art* perpetuated a Europhiliac definition of Conceptual art and its history, it can be argued that the exhibition's emphasis on dematerialization *de-emphasized* the orientation to matters of practice adopted by European artists such as Art & Language, and privileged instead the object-substitutions of American artists rooted in (a rejection of) the dominant historicist discourse of American Modernism. If artists from America's West Coast did not have the profile in *Reconsidering the Object of Art* that Greene would have wished, this was not because the exhibition favoured a Eurocentric model of Conceptual art, but rather that the emphasis placed on (the negation of) the art object effectively privileged the contribution of those artists whose dematerializations were conceived under the considerable and widespread influence of Greenberg's New York-centred Modernism.

Even for a magazine such as *Artforum* - established in San Francisco with an initial remit to promote art and artists from the West Coast - Greenberg's work

formed, as Amy Newman has put it, “the *basso continuo* of art criticism.”<sup>99</sup> In California, John Baldessari was unhappy with the purported universality of Abstract Expressionism and the seeming exhaustion of painting that continued to struggle with its inheritance: “The milieu I was working with, my peers, were basically inheritors of Abstract Expressionism (but maybe fourth or fifth generation). It did seem to lack a kind of energy.”<sup>100</sup> His decision, in 1966/67, to abandon traditional forms of painting was not made out of dissatisfaction with the physical object of painting (canvas on wooden stretchers), but with Modernist abstraction and the specific competencies it demanded from the viewer.<sup>101</sup> The subsequent adoption of text and photography in his work has been attributed by some to the expansion of popular and consumer culture in the 1960s. While Baldessari himself has acknowledged the proliferation of text and photography in advertising and magazines, “...the curious thing was there wasn’t any text and photography in the art galleries and museums.”<sup>102</sup> Once he had made the decision to employ these more ‘democratic’ means, therefore, it was the very physical resemblance of his *phototext* works to painting’s traditional object that was to be the guarantee of their status as works of art.

This was the answer: that text and photographic imagery would be on canvas and stretcher bars. That would signal to people that this was *art*, and maybe then I could get this stuff through the door, so to speak, of a gallery or museum or wherever art was shown.<sup>103</sup>

Baldessari’s work in the period from 1966 to 1969 was often more open about its ambiguous relationship to the Modernist art object than was the work of many of his contemporaries. By virtue of its canvas and stretcher support, the work proclaimed its attachment to the tradition that it also critiqued, while in its explicit reference both to the ‘how to’ books aimed at the amateur painter and to the professional criticism of Greenberg, Barbara Rose and Max Kozloff, it passed ironic comment on received models of ‘correct’ practice in painting.<sup>104</sup>

Baldessari’s work of this period did not present the simple negation of the traditional art object, offering, instead, the ‘idea’ as its dematerialized surrogate. He did not simply assume that the work of art could survive such a dematerialization and still function as any kind of meaningful entity. Rather, the physical work of art became the vehicle through which meaning was revealed as contingent and contested. In a work such as *Clement Greenberg* (1967-1968), (Fig. 56) for example, Baldessari engaged a professional signwriter to inscribe



on a canvas the following passage from Greenberg's *Complaints of an Art Critic*, published in *Artforum* in October 1967:

Esthetic judgments are given and contained in the immediate experience of art. They coincide with it; they are not arrived at afterwards through reflection or thought. Esthetic judgments are also involuntary; you can no more choose whether or not to like a work of art than you can choose to have sugar taste sweet or lemons sour. (Whether or not esthetic judgments are honestly reported is another matter.)<sup>105</sup>

Greenberg's words were appropriated, recontextualized and subjected to critical scrutiny, his insistence on the 'immediate experience of art' problematized within a work that afforded minimal opportunity for appreciation other than through the kind of 'reflection' that was deemed irrelevant to the experience in question. By the relocation of this passage to the surface of his painting, Baldessari asserted the literal two-dimensionality of the surface, and the 'flatness' that, for Greenberg, had been the mark of painting's independence as an art. But just as illusionistic space - that which "recognizable objects can inhabit" - was suppressed, so too was Greenberg's "strictly optical third dimension."<sup>106</sup> With the foreclosure of both illusionistic *and* optical space, the surface of the painting became, instead, the site of a dialectical exchange with the tenets of Greenberg's Modernism.<sup>107</sup>

Baldessari has spoken of his desire for the work of art to have many levels of meaning; "a good work of art has all the layers of an onion," he has said.<sup>108</sup> *This is Not to be Looked At* (1968, Fig. 57) exhibited with *Clement Greenberg* in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, demonstrated this desire for complexity and multiple levels of understanding. The title of the work, a translation of *No Se Puede Mirar*, itself the title of an etching from Goya's series *The Disasters of War* (1820-63), is inscribed on a canvas to accompany a photomechanical reproduction of the November 1966 issue of *Artforum*, the cover of which reproduced Frank Stella's painting *Union III* (1966). The choice of illustration for the cover reflected the inclusion of Michael Fried's essay 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings.'<sup>109</sup> In Fried's essay, Stella had been rehabilitated to the Modernist narrative on account of his having 'resolved' the presumed conflict between optical space and the literal character of the support. Baldessari, however, redirects attention from the visual qualities of the object to the critical discourse within which the object is ascribed value. Meaning is not intrinsic to

visual experience, but is revealed to be the product of the object's functioning within a complex system of representations.<sup>110</sup> *This Is Not To Be Looked At* presents the viewer with an (equivocal) injunction,<sup>111</sup> but also a verbal pun that indicates the inherent contradiction between the autonomy being claimed on behalf of the object, and the professionalized discourse of its institutional support language; that is, between the 'immediacy' of visual experience (looking), and the time and effort required to read Modernism's explicatory texts. The implication is that *just looking* was never enough. Whether planned or, more likely, fortuitous, Baldessari's highlighting of representational and discursive systems in *This Is Not To Be Looked At* was amplified by the fact that Stella's *Union III* was on view at MoCA concurrently with *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, having been included as part of the exhibition, *Images of an Era: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, installed in adjacent galleries.<sup>112</sup>

Baldessari's work between 1966 and 1969 declared its distance both from the defiant localism of the Californian art scene, and from the still pervasive legacy of Abstract Expressionism. Although it emerged from, and reflected, his sense of isolation in California, it shared with the work of certain European artists the conviction that the art object was not problematic because of its objecthood, but on account of its being accorded a privileged status within the esoteric and rarefied experience of art implied by Modernist theory. It would be misguided to overemphasise his affinity with European artists – Baldessari's critique of Modernist formalism was clearly of a different nature to that of Art & Language, for instance – but, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Baldessari was often thought of as an artist whose sympathies were with European art, and it is certainly true that much of the early interest in the artist's work came from European galleries.<sup>113</sup> For his own part, Baldessari has confirmed that at this time in his career, it was, for him, "all about Europe," and he has attested to the personal significance of his early encounters with significant bodies of work by the European artists Yves Klein and Marcel Duchamp.<sup>114</sup> Considering David A Greene's claims that Californian art was subjugated to a Eurocentric version of Conceptual art in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, it is ironic that Baldessari - the West Coast artist probably most closely associated with Conceptual art – was probably more sympathetic to a tradition of European counter-Modernism than to the chauvinistic avant-gardism endemic in New York.<sup>115</sup> This being the case, Goldstein and Rorimer's decision to organise *Reconsidering the Object of Art* in relation to the notion of dematerialization privileged the dominant New York

model of Conceptual art in relation to what might have been a more hybridised West Coast version, and in so doing denied what may have been particular in the contribution of West Coast artists to the development of Conceptual art.

Goldstein and Rorimer hoped that *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975* would “provide a foundation for further historical examination of this most pivotal period of contemporary art, a history still relatively misunderstood and highly contested – particularly in the United States.”<sup>116</sup> As the first major survey of Conceptual art held in North America, however, the exhibition encountered a number of difficulties arising from the contradictions inherent in these ambitions. In attempting to develop, or posit an alternative to, the historical perspective established in the Parisian exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel* five years before, *Reconsidering the Object of Art* was expected to reflect the particularity of Conceptual art in its North American context. Whatever the extent to which its organisers were cognisant of a responsibility to the Museum's local constituency, the exhibition was regarded by some as a missed opportunity to insert West Coast artists more emphatically into a historical narrative of American Conceptual art. Despite the fact that ‘the dematerialization of art’ was conceived to explain and justify the disappearance of the conventionally exhibitable art object, it was nevertheless used in *Reconsidering the Object of Art* to facilitate Conceptual art's further accommodation to a museological art history. This had the unfortunate effect of locating all the artists and works in the exhibition in relation to a critical discourse that was both hazily defined and only briefly viable. With the exhibition's emphasis on issues pertaining to the material/non-material substance of works of art, it effectively privileged those works that responded to the growing awareness of the art object's contingent status by wishing it into oblivion, rather than those that turned their attention to the discursive systems through which the art object was accorded its particular value.



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- <sup>1</sup> *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990). The exhibition *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art* had taken place between 8 January and 23 February 1992 at the University Art Museum, University of California, in Santa Barbara, before travelling to the Santa Monica Museum of Art and the North Carolina Museum of Art later that year. However, this exhibition was both less ambitious in scale and historically more wide-ranging than either *L'Art Conceptuel* or *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, and included a number of artists then associated with 'Neo-Conceptualism' alongside first generation Conceptual artists. Those exhibiting were Art & Language, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, David Bunn, Sarah Charlesworth, Clegg & Guttman, Douglas Huebler, Mike Kelley, Joseph Kosuth, Louise Lawler, Glenn Ligon, Thomas Locher, Antonella Piemontese, Stephen Prina, Richard Prince, Buzz Spector, Lawrence Weiner and Christopher Williams. *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art* (Santa Barbara; Seattle: University Art Museum, 8 January-23 February, 1992), organised by Frances Colpitt and Phyllis Plous.
- <sup>2</sup> This was especially so in the case of the French artists Marcel Duchamp and Yves Klein, and the Italian Piero Manzoni whose work was seen as having established early models for many of the practices and procedures that would be adopted later by Conceptual artists not only in Europe and America, but throughout the world. Seventeen of the thirty-seven individual artists participating in *L'Art Conceptuel* were Europeans by birth. Also included in the exhibition was work by the artists' group Art & Language, whose four founder members were British.
- <sup>3</sup> John Coplans, one of the founding editors of the journal *Artforum* (published in California until spring 1967), has been particularly plain about the underdevelopment of the art infrastructure on the West Coast in the late 1950s and early 1960s. "You have to remember that in California there was nothing comparative at this time to the East Coast, to its libraries, its universities, its schools of art history, spread virtually from Washington through to Boston and, say, from Chicago eastwards. We were isolated people on the West Coast. The number of institutions was very small. Almost all the prominent German art historians had come to New York. So there was an incredible richness in the East, and we were poverty stricken in comparison. Regional, provincial, poverty stricken in comparison. Whatever resources we had, we put together and fed off each other and supported each other in every way possible." Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), p. 27.
- <sup>4</sup> See the comments of Philip Leider, another of the founding editors of *Artforum*, in Newman, *Challenging Art*, p. 29. "It is inescapably obvious," Terry Smith argued in a 1974 essay for *Artforum*, "that most artists the world over live in art communities that are formed by a relentless provincialism. Their worlds are replete with tensions between two antithetical terms: a defiant urge to localism (a claim for the possibility of "making good, original art right here") and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art, and the criteria for standards of "quality," "originality," "interest," "forcefulness," etc., are determined externally." 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum* 13, no. 1 (September 1974), 54-59 (p. 56). For more on this, see my discussion in Chapter Five.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Schimmel. 'Into the Maelstrom: L.A. Art at the End of the Century', in *Helter Skelter: LA Art in the 1990s*, ex. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 26 January-26 April 1992), pp. 19-22 (pp. 19-20).
- <sup>6</sup> Richard Koshalek, 'Preface: Building a Contemporary Tradition', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Ann Goldstein and

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- Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 15 October 1995-4 February 1996), p. 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Anne Rorimer, 'Photography-Language-Context: Prelude to the 1980s', in *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, ex. cat., ed. by Mary Jane Jacob and Ann Goldstein (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 1989), pp. 129-153.
- <sup>8</sup> Mary Jane Jacob, 'Art in the Age of Reagan: 1980-1988', in *A Forest of Signs*, pp. 15-20.
- <sup>9</sup> Rorimer, 'Photography-Language-Context', pp. 151, 153.
- <sup>10</sup> Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, 'Introduction', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 13-15 (p. 13).
- <sup>11</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14.
- <sup>12</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14.
- <sup>15</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968), 31-36. Lippard and Chandler's was not the only contribution to a critical discourse concerning the crisis affecting the traditional object of art. Other attempts to outline aspects of this situation were made, among others and with differing emphases, by Gordon D. Brown, 'The Dematerialization of the Object', *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 1 (September/October 1968), 56; Ursula Meyer, 'De-Objectification of the Object', *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 8 (summer 1969), 20-22; Gregory Battcock, 'Marcuse and Anti-Art, parts I&II', *Arts Magazine*, 43, no. 8 (summer 1969), 17-19, and 44, no. 2 (November 1969) 20-22; and Donald Karshan 'The Seventies: Post Object Art', *Studio International* 180, no. 925, (September 1970), 69-70.
- <sup>17</sup> Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 31.
- <sup>18</sup> Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 34.
- <sup>19</sup> Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', p. 36.
- <sup>20</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961), 101-108; reprinted in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. by Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (London: Phaidon, 1992), pp. 308-314 (p. 310).
- <sup>21</sup> Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', p. 309.
- <sup>22</sup> Clement Greenberg, '"American-Type" Painting', *Partisan Review* 22 (Spring 1955); reprinted in revised form in Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 208-229 (p. 208).
- <sup>23</sup> Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', p. 310.
- <sup>24</sup> Greenberg, '"American-Type" Painting', p. 209. Greenberg concluded his essay with the following flourish: "Literature-yes, we know that we have done some great things in that line; the English and French have told us so. Now they can begin to tell us the same about our painting." p. 229. In 1948, Greenberg had written that, "the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power." Clement Greenberg, 'The Decline of Cubism', *Partisan Review* (March 1948); reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, ed. by John O'Brian (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 211-215, (p.215).
- <sup>25</sup> Lucy Lippard, 'Preface', *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 5-9 (p. 8). The 'Preface' includes sections of an interview between Lippard and Ursula Meyer from December 1969 in which the cited comments appear.



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- <sup>26</sup> Ursula Meyer, 'Introduction', in *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. vii-xx (p. xiv).
- <sup>27</sup> On Siegelau's undoubted talents in this direction, see Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).
- <sup>28</sup> The exhibitions were: *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner*, Bradford Junior College, Bradford, Massachusetts (4 February-2 March 1968), and *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner*, Windham College, Putnam, Vermont (May 1968).
- <sup>29</sup> Jack Burnham, 'Real Time Systems', *Artforum* 8, no. 1 (September 1969), 49-55 (p. 54).
- <sup>30</sup> Lippard's essay 'Escape Attempts', published in the catalogue for *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, was a largely anecdotal account of her own involvement with Conceptual art. Lippard remembered that the New York art world at the end of the 1960s "was so full of itself that it didn't need to pay much attention to the Conceptual gnats nipping at its flanks," quoting her earlier comments from the 'Preface' to *Six Years* that, "in New York... the present gallery-money-power structure is so strong that it's going to be very difficult to find a viable alternative to it." Lucy Lippard, 'Escape Attempts', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 17-38 (p. 34).
- <sup>31</sup> See, for example, Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980', in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, ex. cat. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 28 April-29 August 1999), pp. 53-71.
- <sup>32</sup> John Baldessari, 'Starting with existing things', interview with Gary Simmons, *Flash Art* 31, no. 202 (October 1998), 110-112 (p. 110).
- <sup>33</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy Part II', *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969), 160-161 (p. 161).
- <sup>34</sup> John Baldessari, 'I will not make any more boring art', interview with Liam Gillick, *Art Monthly* 187 (June 1995), 3-7 (p. 4).
- <sup>35</sup> John Baldessari, 'I think I'm well enough attuned to culture to know what will trigger people's minds', interview with Marc Selwyn, *Flash Art* 135 (summer 1987), 62-64 (p. 63).
- <sup>36</sup> Baldessari, 'I will not make any more boring art', p. 4.
- <sup>37</sup> John Baldessari, 'John Baldessari: An interview', interview with Nancy Drew (edited by Carrie Rickey), in *John Baldessari*, ex. cat. (New York; Dayton, Ohio: The New Museum; University Art Galleries, Wright State University, 1981), pp. 62-65 (p. 63).
- <sup>38</sup> Douglas Huebler was making formica sculpture until 1968; his transitional 'site-sculpture projects' were developed for his *November 1968* exhibition with Seth Siegelau. Lawrence Weiner gave up painting in the spring of 1968 after realising the futility of producing paintings that aspired not to be 'unique objects', Robert Barry had not yet abandoned painting at the time of the Bradford Junior College symposium in February 1968. Joseph Kosuth dates his own *Proto-Investigations* to 1965, though Benjamin Buchloh has questioned whether their existence is verifiable before February 1967. See Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October* 55 (winter 1990), 105-143 (n. 18, pp. 122-123); and Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelau, 'Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art', *October* 57 (summer 1991), 152-157 (p. 153). See also my discussion in Chapter Three.
- <sup>39</sup> Baldessari claims not to have felt excluded from the history of Conceptual art: "It wasn't a problem because I'd been in international shows... all over the place. It wasn't a concern." Interview with the author, 9 November 2004.



<sup>40</sup> David A. Greene, 'LA Story', *Art Monthly* 193 (February 1996), 8-10 (p. 8).

<sup>41</sup> Greene, 'LA Story', pp. 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Greene, 'LA Story', p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Neither was Goldstein and Rorimer's selection of artists particularly oriented toward Europeans. A little over one third of the participating artists (nineteen out of fifty-five) were born in Europe. Of these, the Dutchman Bas Jan Ader had lived in California from 1963 until his disappearance in 1975, the German-born Hans Haacke was a long-time resident of New York City, and the British artist Victor Burgin was living in San Francisco at the time of the exhibition.

<sup>45</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 14. Greene links the notion of "effective critique" to the Paris protests of 1968, proposing a distinction between the socio-political concerns of a purportedly Europhiliac definition of Conceptual art, and what, presumably, he takes to be the more specifically artistic concerns of West Coast artists "dissatisf[ied] with then prevailing modes of art production and thought." In so doing, Greene fails to acknowledge the existence of a history of political activism on the West Coast, where, for example the Los Angeles *Peace Tower*, had been organised by the Artists' Protest Committee in 1966.

<sup>46</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 13. This was certainly experienced as a paradox in a retrospective survey exhibition pinned to the idea of 'dematerialization'. If museums have traditionally functioned as repositories of material culture, and if Conceptual art had, at times, attempted to eliminate the physical object and to replace it with the "pure" and object-less idea, what material artefacts could now be offered to the museum visitor as aids to an enhanced understanding of Conceptual art? How was it that 'dematerialisation,' with its questioning of the gallery system, the museum and the very possibility of *acquisition*, was now available as the organising principle behind an exhibition of *objects* that assisted in managing Conceptual art's entry into history?

<sup>47</sup> Lippard, 'Preface', *Six Years*, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> See Robert Barry, interview with Patricia Norvell, in *Recording Conceptual Art: early interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, Weiner by Patricia Norvell*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 86-100.

<sup>49</sup> *Catalogue for the Exhibition*, ex. cat. (Centre for Communications and the Arts, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 19 May-19 June 1969). Organised by Seth Siegelau.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Barry, 'Interview with Ursula Meyer', in *Conceptual Art*, 35-41 (p. 39).

<sup>51</sup> Barry, 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', p. 99.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Barry, 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 4 (February 1969), 22-23 (p. 22).

<sup>53</sup> Barry, 'Interview with Ursula Meyer', p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> Barry, 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', p. 86-87.

<sup>55</sup> Barry, 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> It had taken all of Patricia Norvell's powers of persuasion to prise from Barry such an account of his artistic development. In response to Norvell's question regarding how he had come to the work he was then involved with after having previously been a painter, Barry had at first responded that it was "really none of Norvell's business." Admitting that his motivations were things even he didn't completely understand, Barry continued that "I could sort of recount the work that I did before... and talk about some of the things I was involved with

then. But then where do you start? How far back do you go?" 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', p. 88.

<sup>57</sup> Barry's contribution to Seth Siegel's exhibition at Windham College, Putney, Vermont, 30 April – 31 May 1968, consisted of 1,206 feet of half-inch woven nylon cord, stretched twenty-five feet off the ground between two campus buildings, approximately three hundred feet apart. The monofilament defined an area of approximately 300 x 50 feet, although the transparency of the material rendered the piece virtually invisible.

<sup>58</sup> See Weiner's interview with Patricia Norvell, in *Recording Conceptual Art*, pp. 101-111; and 'Lawrence Weiner in Amsterdam: An interview with Willoughby Sharp', *Avalanche* 4 (spring 1972), 66-73. Weiner's so-called *Propeller* series of paintings were produced according to this method. Weiner obtained the standard image of the propeller from a television test broadcast and varied it in terms of colour, size, medium etc.. The paintings were exhibited in two one-person shows at Seth Siegel's Contemporary Art: 10 November – 5 December 1964, and 2 - 27 November 1965.

<sup>59</sup> Weiner, 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', p. 109.

<sup>60</sup> Weiner's piece was entitled: *A series of stakes set in the ground at regular intervals to form a rectangle – twine strung from stake to stake to demark a grid – a rectangle removed from this rectangle*. Windham College, Putnam, Vermont, 30 April-31 May 1968.

<sup>61</sup> *January 5-31 1969*, ex. cat. (New York: Seth Siegel, 1969).

<sup>62</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy, part II', pp. 160-161. Weiner later justified his continued allusion to materials by explaining: "I make a reference consistently to the utilization of materials so that it never becomes a mystical reference." 'Lawrence Weiner in Amsterdam', p. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy, part II', p. 160.

<sup>64</sup> Jeanne Siegel, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', in *Artwords: Discourse on the Sixties and Seventies*, ed. by Siegel (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 220-231 (p. 224).

<sup>65</sup> Siegel, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', p. 224.

<sup>66</sup> Siegel, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', p. 222.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 134-137 (p. 135).

<sup>68</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 135.

<sup>70</sup> Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', first published in *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965), 74-82; reprinted in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 809-813.

<sup>71</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 135.

<sup>72</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 136.

<sup>74</sup> "A work of art is a tautology," Kosuth wrote, "in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art." Art shared its tautological condition with logic and mathematics in that "the 'art idea' (or 'work') and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art for varification [sic]." 'Art After Philosophy', p. 136.

<sup>75</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy, part II', p. 160.

<sup>76</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 136.

<sup>77</sup> Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 137.

<sup>78</sup> Siegel, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', p. 222.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Kosuth. *Within the Context* (Ghent: Coupure, 1977); The Kosuth studio has been unable to locate an original copy of this text. I have quoted



- from the version reprinted in Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, ed. by Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 153-167 (p. 153).
- <sup>80</sup> Joseph Kosuth. '1975', *The Fox* 1, no. 2 (1975), 87-96 (p. 91).
- <sup>81</sup> Lippard and Chandler twice mention Kosuth in 'The Dematerialization of Art'. His name first appears in a list of examples of "ultra-conceptual or dematerialized art" including "some which have almost entirely eliminated the visual-physical object." Lippard and Chandler list Kosuth's "painting [sic] as idea as idea, a negative photostat on canvas of the dictionary definition of the word water, fall 1967; his Lannis Gallery Book Show, consisting of favorite books chosen by a group of artists, many of which were dictionaries, manuals, lists, mathematical works.", pp. 32-33. Later Kosuth's statement from the exhibition *Non-Anthropomorphic Art by Four Young Artists* (Lannis Gallery, February 1967) is cited: "All I make are models. The actual works of art are ideas. Rather than 'ideals', the models are a visual approximation of a particular art object I have in mind." p. 34.
- <sup>82</sup> Hal Foster has made this point in 'Obscene, Abject, Traumatic', *October* 78 (Fall 1996), 107-124.
- <sup>83</sup> Terry Atkinson, letter to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 23 March 1968, excerpts published in Lippard, *Six Years*, 43-44 (p. 43).
- <sup>84</sup> Michael Baldwin, Philosophy and Conceptual Art (conference), King's College, London, 4 June 2004. The unattributed editorial 'Introduction' to *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969), 1-10, was written primarily by Terry Atkinson.
- <sup>85</sup> Terry Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970), 25-60 (p. 26).
- <sup>86</sup> Mel Bochner, 'Excerpts From Speculation (1967-1970)', *Artforum* 8, no. 9 (May 1970), 70-73 (p. 73).
- <sup>87</sup> Bochner had jointly organised the important exhibition, *Art in Series*, mentioned by Lippard and Chandler. (Finch College Museum of Art, New York, 22 November-6 January 1968). Included in the exhibition were a number of artists also represented in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*: Bochner, Hanne Darboven, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Smithson. The two works of Bochner's included in *Reconsidering the Object of Art* were significantly later: *Language is Not Transparent*, (1970) and *Five Sculptures (From a Theory of Sculpture)* (1969-1972). LeWitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' and 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', often taken as having provided a general blueprint for Conceptual Art practice, but actually outlining LeWitt's own serially-minded aesthetic position, were included in manuscript versions. LeWitt noted in the latter statement that "These sentences comment on art, but are not art," and the inclusion of the manuscripts in *Reconsidering...* did little to clarify the confused relationship between seriality, 'dematerialization,' and Conceptual art. LeWitt was also represented by a single *Wall Drawing*, #153 (1973). Arguably, the serial tendency was best represented by a comparatively late work by Hanne Darboven, *24 Gesänge-B. Form* (1974).
- <sup>88</sup> This conflict was variously encountered in the display of works by, for example, Eleanor Antin, Victor Burgin, Hans Haacke, Joan Jonas, David Lamelas, Adrian Piper and Yvonne Rainer.
- <sup>89</sup> On this aspect of Art & Language's work, Charles Harrison has confirmed that "the social' was not and is not just what some avowedly virtuous and conscience-stricken artist or dilettante or academic or whoever wants to believe that it is. One thing that seems to distinguish A & L is that, instead of 'the social' being regarded as something that you could orientate yourself and your practice towards and connect to, it was conceived as that which you had to *make* – to realise in and through your work. That may have been one of the



factors driving practice away from a narrow conception of 'art'," Interview with the author, 9 June 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Editorial 'Introduction' to *Art-Language* 1, no. 1, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Editorial 'Introduction' to *Art-Language* 1, no. 1, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> Atkinson, 'From an Art & Language Point of View', p. 29.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Harrison has described, for example, how, in the late 1950s, the younger English artists who formed the Situation group "had their sense of themselves as artists and their practices decisively transformed" by what they had seen of New York painting, and by what they had read of the Modernist criticism accompanying it. The more representative of their works, Harrison claimed, seemed to express "an ambition to establish a professional identity within Modernism as Culture. This entailed vaunting some kind of commitment to the idea of teleological reductionism." Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: Editions E. Fabre, 1982), p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder', in Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 29-62 (p. 46-47).

<sup>97</sup> Harrison, 'Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder', 46-47, n. 48, p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Art Object and Artwork', in *L'Art Conceptuel*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>99</sup> Newman, *Challenging Art*, p. 13. Newman considers the internecine feuds between *Artforum's* contributors in the magazine's early years as representing the playing out of an "Oedipal psychodrama" in which Greenberg's legacy was battled with.

<sup>100</sup> Gea Politi, 'John Baldessari: Before Day Falls', *Flash Art* 37, no. 237 (July-September 2004). p. 81.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Harrison has commented upon the circularity inherent in Modernist criticism: "In the typical discourse of Modernist culture the value of the art object is predicated upon that form of experience or disposition for which it is supposed to be the occasion. The nature of the experience in question is in turn predicated upon the notional type – or class – of person to whom it is attributed: the ideally competent spectator." 'Art Object and Artwork', p. 63. Harrison has expanded his critique of Modernism's ideal spectator in 'Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder', see note 90, above.

<sup>102</sup> John Baldessari, 'I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art', p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> John Baldessari, interview by Hugh Davies and Andrea Hales in *John Baldessari: National City*, ex. cat. (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 10 March - 30 June 1996), pp. 85-103 (p. 87).

<sup>104</sup> Interview with the author, 9 November 2004.

<sup>105</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Complaints of an Art Critic', *Artforum* 6, no. 2 (October 1967), 38-39 (p.38). The passage comprises the article's opening paragraph.

<sup>106</sup> Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', p. 310 & p. 312.

<sup>107</sup> In July 1970, Baldessari burned all the paintings he had made between May 1953 and March 1966 that remained in his possession at that time. A public notice to this effect was printed in the *San Diego Union*, 10 August 1970. The destroyed paintings were made prior to his *phototext* work at a time when the artist felt he was struggling with the inheritance of Abstract Expressionism. Lucy Lippard has claimed that through the *Cremation Project*, Baldessari declared a *tabula rasa* ('Escape Attempts', p. 37). However, Baldessari has spoken in terms that suggest he regarded *Cremation Project* more as an act of practical housekeeping than as tokenistic *dematerialization* (see Davies and Hales, 'Interview with John Baldessari', pp. 92-93).

<sup>108</sup> Baldessari, 'I think I'm well enough attuned to culture to know what will trigger people's minds', p. 64.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Fried, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings', *Artforum* 5, no. 3 (November 1966), 18-27.

<sup>110</sup> Baldessari has explained that he tries to think of himself "as a person who sets up and structures a situation for meaning to occur." Baldessari, 'I think I'm well enough attuned to culture to know what will trigger people's minds', p. 64.

<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that the title *This Is Not To Be Looked At* does not function straightforwardly as a 'caption' that explains the image, neither does the image simply illustrate the text. Through the reciprocal recontextualization of text and image, their relationship is revealed to be subject to a continuous slippage. In this, the work anticipates the interest in the functioning and relationship of the linguistic and visual sign that would characterise Baldessari's later photographic and video work. His interest in this area reflects the influence of the structuralist anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the semiotician, Roland Barthes.

<sup>112</sup> *Images of an Era: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 15 October 1995 – 23 June 1996.

<sup>113</sup> Baldessari has remembered that when he first began to show people his early work, "somebody said: 'you know, you're more of a European artist,' and I had no idea what they meant, and I still don't. But, in fact, most of my shows were in Europe, you know; I had a response there. Maybe its because I'm a first generation American; my parents were from Europe and I think differently? I have no idea." Interview with the author, 9 November 2004.

<sup>114</sup> Amy Newman. *Challenging Art*, p. 119. The artist's encounter with the work of Yves Klein came on the occasion of the exhibition, Yves Klein: Le Monochrome, shown at the Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles. 29 May – 24 June 1961. "I can remember a major epiphany when I first saw [the] show of Yves Klein's paintings at Virginia Dwan," Baldessari has said. "All these same size canvases, all international Klein blue... I said 'This can't be art. This is blue paint.' And it was really a fork in the road for me." Davies and Hales, 'Interview with John Baldessari', p. 102. Of his first encounter with a body of Duchamp's work in reproduction Baldessari has said: "It was as if I had come across a long lost brother... all of a sudden I felt I had a home, that I wasn't so strange... It was probably partly to do with Duchamp's focus on language..." Marcia Tucker, 'John Baldessari: Pursuing the Unpredictable', in *John Baldessari*, ex. cat. (New York; Dayton, Ohio: The New Museum; University Art Galleries, Wright State University, 1981), pp. 7-50 (p. 10). Later, already familiar with Duchamp's work and reputation, Baldessari attended the exhibition *Marcel Duchamp: A Retrospective* at the Pasadena Museum of Art. 8 October – 3 November 1963. Interview with the author, 9 November 2004.

<sup>115</sup> This was so despite meeting, and forming friendships, with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Siegelau, Weiner and others on a visit to New York in 1968. "A dealer friend out here, Nicholas Wilder, got me into contact with [Richard Bellamy at the Greene Gallery, New York], and he gave me the names of a lot of those people. He said: "I don't know what you're doing, but here's the names of some people in New York you might want to look up." I guess that was when I was first aware of them, and I subsequently did make contact." Interview with the author, 9 November 2004. See also, Tucker, 'John Baldessari: Pursuing the Unpredictable.'

<sup>116</sup> Goldstein and Rorimer, 'Introduction', p. 15.



## Chapter Five

### **From International to Global: The Shifting Context of Conceptual Art** ***Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 28 April - 29 August 1999**

The exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s to 1980s* can be regarded as a nodal point at which two curatorial discourses coincided at the end of a decade in which they had achieved some considerable currency. In 1989, the major museum exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris)<sup>1</sup> had initiated a reconsideration of the Conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s that had been maintained throughout the following decade in a growing number of critical histories and retrospective survey exhibitions. Over very nearly the same period, beginning with the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre George Pompidou, Paris),<sup>2</sup> museum curators had become increasingly interested in the possibilities of the *transcultural* exhibition as a means to explore the implications of the burgeoning discourse of globalism and globalisation. As these two curatorial themes were brought together in *Global Conceptualism*, its organisers sought to revise and decentre the existing canon by broadening the geographical understanding of Conceptual art, and to challenge the inherent formalism of earlier historical representations.

A team of eleven section organisers was assembled with expertise in the art of particular world regions, and the work of over one-hundred-and-thirty-five artists from thirty countries was included in the exhibition. Yet although 'globalism' was employed as a critical tool with which to examine the prejudices and preconceptions of previous surveys of Conceptual art, the exhibition did not take the opportunity to scrutinise the ideological suppositions of 'globalism,' nor the exhibition's own embeddedness within that discourse. In seeking to challenge what it regarded as the formalist emphasis of earlier representations, it did not do so by re-emphasising the social dimension in the Western context, but by proposing the radical difference of 'conceptualism' as a globally dispersed practice. It thus established the significant distinction between Conceptual art as the formally derived art of the United States and Western Europe, and 'conceptualism' as a more socially determined, and socially responsive, practice in a variety of non-Western contexts. However, by coupling the concept of



'globalism' to that of 'conceptualism,' and by thereby transforming the latter into a universalising category, I argue, *Global Conceptualism* effectively nullified the local differentiations it otherwise meant to bring to light.

To attempt to discuss work from each of the regions covered by the exhibition would entail presenting an overview that would necessarily reduce the complexities of the local histories that the exhibition sought to push to the foreground. In any case, such an overview would suffer a disadvantage in terms of space, relative to the various accounts already provided in the catalogue. The transition from the moment of Conceptual art's first appearance as a distinct discourse (late 1960s) to the period of its revisitation in retrospective surveys (1989 – present) overlaps significantly with the transition from 'internationalism' to 'globalism.' In order not to reinforce the dichotomies of 'centre' and 'periphery' that were at stake in *Global Conceptualism*, or to set up a conflict of value between work originating from different regions, I intend to focus on the issues which underlay the shifts in the critical writing associated with Conceptual art, as these were articulated in relation to the evolving discourses of 'internationalism' and, later, 'globalism'. Where these issues were sometimes articulated in sources originating from the centre(s) (Western Europe, the United States, and particularly New York), I have been conscious that this approach risks perpetuating the Western-biased canon of Conceptual art.

The success of the 'global conceptualism' thesis, I believe, can only be measured according to the extent to which it reveals the complacency of Conceptual art in the face of cultural imperialism and conditions of uneven access to the infrastructures of the art world. If a critique of these same conditions that *Global Conceptualism* sought to investigate can be discovered at work within 'mainstream' Conceptual art, then the 'global conceptualism' thesis, itself, will have been shown to be based on a false assumption. Moreover, if this proves to be the case, then it might be argued that, far from radically decentring the canon, *Global Conceptualism* may, in fact, have succeeded in strengthening it by having provided just sufficient a shock to have occasioned a critical retrenchment.<sup>3</sup> (I am not unaware of the potential irony that my own contribution to the debate may be seen as a part of this retrenchment.)

The organisers of the exhibition, Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, structured the exhibition according to two "relatively distinct" periods in

the spread of conceptualist art practice as a global phenomenon. In their *Foreword* to the exhibition catalogue (Fig. 58) they explained how the first of these “waves of activity” occurred from the late 1950s to “around 1973,” and the second from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s. As they readily acknowledged, these periods corresponded with significant, and often traumatic, social, technological and historical developments. The first period largely coincided with the Cold War and the gradual dissolution of colonial power. The organizers noted that both developed capitalist countries and the Eastern bloc experienced similar demographic and sociological shifts contributing to a period of relative optimism, prosperity and geopolitical stability, but that by the 1960s the downside to this growth was becoming increasingly apparent in ecological deterioration, growing economic inequality, the international division of labour, increasing expenditure on arms and weaponry, and the war in Vietnam. By 1973, they propose, with the US withdrawal from Vietnam, the oil crisis, and further financial and industrial destabilisation, this period of economic expansion was brought to an end. From the earliest paragraphs of their *Foreword*, the organizers were anxious to assert that conceptualist practice did not assume an autonomous relationship with these historical events: “The first wave of conceptual, idea-based art that developed during this time in Japan, Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the U.S., Canada and Australia, responded to and participated in these massive social and political transitions by calling into question the underlying ideas of art and its institutional systems.”<sup>4</sup>

Almost ten years before, in January 1990, the former art dealer and exhibition organiser, Seth Siegelaub had responded to Benjamin Buchloh’s keynote essay in the catalogue for the exhibition *L’Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* by calling it “a standard, conservative, hermeneutically-sealed, textbook-type history” that had “little, if any, relationship to the social, economic, or cultural, i.e., historical period which it pretends to describe.”<sup>5</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss’ attempt to locate their own history of conceptualism firmly in relation to the social and economic developments of their extended period, reflected a change of historical and curatorial focus across a decade in which the art historical view of conceptualism as a derivation from the work of a few so-called Conceptual artists in the United States and Western Europe had come up for revision, and during which the question of globalism in its cultural as well as its economic and social formations had come to the fore.

*Global Conceptualism* brought together two terms whose meaning is far from stable. Most accounts of 'globalism,' or of 'globalisation,' point to the ambivalence of these terms. On the one hand, they can indicate a worldwide drive toward an economic system dominated by supranational corporate trade and democratically unaccountable financial institutions. On the other, they can also indicate the radical decoupling of time and space, achieved through accelerated communications technologies, in which borders are annihilated and nation states transcended. Where the former view leads to an understanding in which local cultures are subjected to homogenising influences, the latter recognizes the potential for emancipation from restrictive models of culture. Camnitzer has confirmed that the curators were sensitive to both these understandings. "[W]e believed in two kinds of globalism," he has said, "the euphemism for imperialism that is the standard usage, and the utopian horizontal structure."<sup>6</sup> Believing that the discourse of 'globalisation' had emerged sufficiently from notions of uniformity to be useful, the curators stated in their 'Foreword' that

the reading of 'globalism' that informs this project is a highly differentiated one, in which localities are linked in crucial ways but not subsumed into a homogenized set of circumstances and responses to them. We mean to denote a multicentred map with various points of origin in which local events are crucial determinants.<sup>7</sup>

For the organisers of *Global Conceptualism*, the emphasis was not on 'conceptualism' as a transnational system that reduces the diversity and vitality of art practices in distinct local contexts. Rather, conceptualism is taken to have responded to and participated in a movement of political, intellectual and cultural radicalism that occurred worldwide between the 1950s and the 1980s. As such, conceptualist movements in various localities around the world, though "inevitably connected by a complex system of global linkages... were also clearly spurred by urgent local conditions and histories."<sup>8</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss' claim was not that 'conceptualism' was disseminated from the artistic 'centres' of the United States and Western Europe, and adapted for use in the 'peripheries,' but rather, that it arose spontaneously, though not necessarily simultaneously, in numerous locations in response to prevailing local circumstances.



In challenging the familiar narrative of origination in the cultural centre and subsequent adoption in the peripheries, the organizers proposed 'conceptualism' not as a derivative version of Conceptual art, but as a tendency that pre-dated it. Though it is obviously a paradox that 'conceptualism,' as such a tendency, did not become recognizable or acquire its nomenclature until after the appearance of Conceptual art in North America and Western Europe in the mid- to late 1960s, Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss argued that many of its important characteristics - "a change in emphasis from the object to the idea; a prioritization of language over visuality; a critique of the institutions of art; and, in many cases, a consequent dematerialization of the artwork" – were "set in motion long before the anointing of Conceptual Art."<sup>9</sup> Conceptual art came to operate within *Global Conceptualism* as something of a special case: a sub-species of 'conceptualism' that, because of its privileged geographical relationship to the power structures of the art world, was able to ensure the hegemony of its own critical language in relation to a number of more localised discourses.

But if 'conceptualism' from the 1950s and earlier 1960s is not to be regarded as an inchoate Conceptual art, and 'conceptualism' from the later 1970s and 1980s is not to be regarded as a derivation from it, then some substantive means of distinguishing 'conceptualism' from Conceptual art needs to be established. The organizers' response to this requirement was to pronounce Conceptual art to be "an essentially formalist practice developed in the wake of Minimalism," while 'conceptualism' represents "a broader attitudinal expression that summarized a wide array of works and practices which... reimagined the possibilities of art vis-à-vis the social, political, and economic realities within which it was being made."<sup>10</sup> Thus, as a loose grouping of practices that centred upon the ephemerality of materials and actions, a conceptualist approach presented itself as one that might adapt itself to a variety of circumstances. Conceptualist works of art were usually inexpensive to make, and they could often be transported at no greater cost than that of transporting the artist him/herself. Exhibitions could be organized quickly among artists and could appear in unconventional spaces, thus challenging both market structures and the state-approved display of art. For those artists who wished for a more direct form of engagement with social and political issues, conceptualism allowed for a more collaborative approach, and in those countries where artists worked under repressive regimes, conceptualist work was both easily communicated and easily concealed. The

exhibition thus emphasised the radicalism of 'conceptualism' in its non-Western contexts, while Conceptual art was judged to be relatively conservative, being concerned only with questions intrinsic to art itself.<sup>11</sup>

The question of Conceptual art's formalism derives, at least for Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, from the nature of its relationship to Minimalism. The whole weight of the 'conceptualism'/Conceptual art distinction, and thus the whole of the 'global conceptualism' thesis, is made to rest on this. However, they do not elaborate the nature of the relationship, but are content to gloss it over in terms of Conceptual art's more-or-less uncritical inheritance from Minimalism, and its furtherance of the questions Minimalism raised. Grossly simplified, such a theory of succession would posit that Minimalism achieved a reduction of the modernist art object, for Conceptual art then to 'dematerialize' it, whilst preserving its formal characteristics. Minimalism would be unambiguously regarded as the outcome of a logic of medium-specificity and formal unity espoused in the Modernist criticism of Clement Greenberg and his followers, while Conceptual art would represent the continuation of Modernist formalism ad-absurdum: its statement *ne plus ultra*, even as it was simultaneously its critique.

Yet the matter of Minimalism's own formalism is hardly unambiguous. Minimalism as a practice and a discourse passed into the consciousness of the art world largely through the appearance, in the mid-1960s, of three key texts: Donald Judd's 'Specific Objects', Robert Morris' 'Notes on Sculpture, parts 1-3,' and Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood.'<sup>12</sup> A careful reading of the texts by Judd and Morris will reveal that Minimalism's two advocates situated their practice as dialogically poised between Modernist formalism and a literalness that contradicted it. Even as Judd's text, for example, preserved something of the teleology of Greenbergian Modernism, what was significant about it was the way in which Modernism's concentration on the formal essence of the medium came to be seen as describing a conventional limit against which work that was "neither painting nor sculpture" had then to pitch itself. For Morris, the position was no less ambiguous. Morris regarded the unitary forms of Minimalism as functioning between the perceptive space appropriate to the autonomous art object and the physical space inhabited by the literal object. For Fried, the critic who was principally responsible for extending Greenbergian criticism into the later 1960s, on the other hand, there was no possibility of a middle ground between the autonomous art object and the physical object in literal space. As is

well known, Fried criticised Minimalism for its 'theatricality', for its setting-up temporally- and spatially-dependent conditions for self-awareness. He ended *Art and Objecthood* with an insistence on "the utter pervasiveness – the virtual universality of the sensibility or mode of being that I have characterized as corrupted by theatre."<sup>13</sup> As will be seen, this claim for the universality of Modernist art – especially as it came to be regarded as enshrined within the international programmes of institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York - was one that was challenged by a number of the artists who would later come to be involved with Conceptual art.

Minimalism did not accept the tenets of Modernism uncritically, but it did succeed the Modernist art championed by Fried (and Greenberg before him) as the most successful and influential art of its day. It is no surprise, therefore, that the early Conceptual artists articulated their own practice in relation to the kind of art that, at that time, represented the dominant strain in the international art world. Joseph Kosuth, for example, acknowledged the importance of minimalist artists such as Donald Judd and, less so, Dan Flavin for his early Conceptual work.<sup>14</sup> He has also recognized that Minimalism opened up a space in which Conceptual art could exist both culturally and commercially, and that Minimalist critics lent early support to Conceptual artists.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, such support, in Kosuth's opinion, led to a confusion of Minimalism and Conceptual art that has seen the latter characterised as 'post-Minimalist' practice.<sup>16</sup>

As Art & Language have recalled, "minimalism was the big, White, fast art of the time." But what was important about Minimalism for Conceptual art was not its critique of Modernist formalism *per se*, but the way this critique had directed attention to the infrastructure that sustained the practice of art.

Minimalism had proceeded to reduce, or to remove altogether, the necessity of internal detail within objects, in favour of the 'external' relations between the object and its circumstances of display. Robert Morris wrote, "Every internal relationship reduces the public external quality of the object.' Without a ritualistic support linked with business, Minimal Art wasn't just there at all... Late professional modernist Minimalism caused attention to be focussed on the constitutive role of the art language, of the gallery, the museum, the magazine, and the accompanying criticism... If art objects now depended upon a framework of supporting institutions, what was required was not so much 'works' as work on the circumstances of work."<sup>17</sup>



What Conceptual artists like Art & Language took from Minimalism was the possibility (latent within it) of art's dialogic engagement with its supporting institutions, and the idea that this might be developed to constitute a broader cultural critique.

If Conceptual artists in Western Europe and North America were not thought by Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss to have sought *direct* social or political intervention in the way that they considered 'conceptualism' to have done, then this may have been for at least two related reasons: first, paradoxically, because of the continuing legacy of the historical avant-gardes (which did not exist in the same terms in non-Western contexts)<sup>18</sup> that sought to integrate art and the praxis of life; and second, because the liberal democracies of the West allowed the right of protest, and the channelling of dissent via more directly political routes. In 'continental' Europe, the legacy of a historical avant-garde (comprised of such groupings as the Futurists, Dadaists, Surrealists) was still keenly felt after the Second World War. Avant-garde ideas were perpetuated in the 1950s and 1960s by groups such as the Lettrists and the Situationist International, for instance, which had historical links with the Surrealists. As Claude Gintz, organiser of the Western European section of *Global Conceptualism* has argued, "conceptualism cannot be considered an autonomous practice without examining how it relates to Situationism, probably the last true avant-garde movement to appear in Europe in the 1950s."<sup>19</sup> In Britain in the 1970s, the issue of the relevance of the avant-garde and the continuing use of avant-gardist strategies was renewed as a subject for intense critical debate.<sup>20</sup> To the extent that the historical avant-garde had self-evidently failed to achieve the sublation of art with the praxis of life, it *had* succeeded in demonstrating the persistence of art's supporting infrastructure. As the survival of the European avant-garde was argued over at home, and as it had provided an originary model for a more recent American avant-garde,<sup>21</sup> radical art practice in the Euro-North American context necessarily had to take account of its limited social efficacy, and therefore, for a time, directed itself principally toward a form of intervention that would cause an interruption to the functioning of the institution of art in support of broader ideological structures.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of the 1970s, however, with the documents and traces of the historical avant-gardes having become the objects of a museum culture, the model of art's social function was on the verge of transformation as artists

became increasingly interested in re-conceiving the means of art's social engagement.<sup>23</sup> This did not prevent Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss from resuscitating the historical archetype in the form of "conceptualism's art-into-life platform," however.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of how 'conceptualism' functioned in its indigenous social and political contexts, North American and Western European visitors to *Global Conceptualism* (who may not have had the advantage of being cautioned in advance by a close reading of the catalogue) unavoidably encountered this work with the culturally specific expectations born of a familiarity with the function and history of the avant-gardes in their own countries. By inadvertently mapping this Western model onto a variety of non-Western contexts, *Global Conceptualism*, despite the best intentions of its organisers, effectively colonised cultural practice in these diverse contexts by incorporating it within the terms of a Western art historical discourse of avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes, within which 'conceptualism' was made to take its place.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, because of the cultural specificity of this discourse, non-Western practices were likely to be judged under criteria that may have been alien to those by which they were judged in their own contexts. In the familiar Western context of a 'failed' avant-garde, these examples of a globalised avant-garde were condemned to be regarded either as repeating that failure in naïve or inauthentic revivals of historical modes, or, equally problematically, as tokens of a faith in the authenticity (purity) of non-Western cultures.

It was an unfortunate consequence of *Global Conceptualism's* divided chronological focus that much significant work from Britain and the United States that sought to develop new social models for art was effectively excluded by the cut-off point ("around 1973") for the first section of the exhibition.<sup>26</sup> Even the work of those Conceptual artists who were thought to be the most concerned with questions intrinsic to the practice of art, as Kosuth and Art & Language often were, gained an increasingly social/political dimension as the 1970s progressed. Despite the growing antipathy between them, both Kosuth in the United States, and Art & Language in Britain, conceived of their practice in terms of a dialogical engagement with the wider culture, and not in the simple terms of an artist activism. Kosuth observed in 1979, for instance, that

Work which presupposes the possibility of political content within a given cultural form is taking an idealist position; the implication is that politics is located as content, and forms are neutral, perhaps transcendental. Philosophically, as a politics of culture, they are

agreeing with the formalists; the actual practice of art is apolitical, it only waits for the artist to become 'politicized'.<sup>27</sup>

Art & Language's position in the mid-1970s was summed up in the introduction to a collection of essays published to accompany their exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford in 1975,

So we work to establish the conditions within which it might be possible to speak of a social or socialist art and mean something non-trivial and defensible. This involves the development of an appropriate (and adequately sophisticated) body of theory; the identification of those with whom we can talk, whose ('class') interests we share; and the integration of the resulting dialogue in a historic practice which is genuinely reciprocal and thus non-parasitic.<sup>28</sup>

Both Kosuth and Art & Language called into doubt the conditions of possibility for a purely instrumental art by asserting that artists must retain a critical awareness of their own social position as artists. The issue could be stated in terms of *immanence*: political content does nothing to challenge the notion of disinterested aesthetic appreciation, but instead represents a denial of responsibility (a disavowal) and an exclusion from consciousness (a repression). For Charles Harrison, reconsidering the historical perspective of Art & Language in 2001

The point is not that the pursuit of significant formal or intentional identity necessarily involves submission to the idea of an essential aesthetic value, nor is it that art has to be seen to absolutize or to dehistoricize the contingent (the political). The point is rather that unless the given contingent material is such as to be transformable by or in the complexly self-describing system that is art, then it is probably better to treat it through practical politics or journalism; and if the system in question is such as to impose no limits on the admission of the contingent or the political, it is probably not worth considering as art. Conceptual Art is nothing if there is no power to its claim to be occupying the space of art, and that claim will have no power unless it entails a transformation of what art is, such that Conceptual Art is art.<sup>29</sup>

For Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss thus to dismiss Conceptual art as a formalist extension of Minimalism is thus to obscure one of the key issues raised by Conceptual art in its critique of Modernist formalism. Conceptual art's development from the mid- to late 1960s until the mid-1970s can be understood as a critique, not a mere negation, of the demand for autonomy placed on art by Modernism. In other words, Conceptual art might amount to a systematic



(though, perhaps, not always conscious) working through of a series of logical positions by which art was able to (re)gain some critical dialogical relationship with the culture of which it was a part.<sup>30</sup> Since the means by which art might rediscover its social dimension were by no means obvious at the moment of Modernism's crisis, this process of 'working through' was both necessary in Conceptual art, and its crucial critical function. Artists who assumed the neutrality of art as a place from which to comment on factors extrinsic to it effectively neutralised art as a form of praxis. To the extent, therefore, that 'conceptualism' (as defined by Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss) appears to be predicated on the possibility of direct social efficacy, while continuing to define itself in terms of art and not of practical politics, it fails to consider its own political and ideological embeddedness within the culture.

In his 'Introduction' to the catalogue for *Global Conceptualism*, cultural theorist Stephen Bann praised the curators for the ambitiousness of a project that broke with the Modernist heritage and its topology. With uncharacteristic hyperbole, Bann went on to declare that "Global conceptualism may be the visible proof that the Western hegemony in ways of seeing, ushered in by the perspectival science of the Renaissance, no longer holds sway."<sup>31</sup> However, the exhibition did not consciously and explicitly question how this might be done within its own conditions of existence. Exhibitions are not ideologically neutral, but function within the context of wider cultural discourses. As the critic and historian James Meyer observed:

this repackaging of Conceptualism for the '90s never considered its own social location. Using terms like 'globalization' and 'linkages,' the organizers... unwittingly rehearsed the buzzwords not just of the academy but of corporate culture as well. That is to say, the notion of Conceptualism proposed as a radical antidote to so-called formalist Conceptual art was articulated in the language of late-capitalist expansion, just as the show itself could be mounted only through the support of multinational corporations. One could hardly fault the curators for jumping on the global bandwagon, but the show's lack of reflexivity as to its implicit compliance with these social mechanisms undercut the force of its revisionist agenda.<sup>32</sup>

Meyer perceived that the exhibition operated as another term in the discourse of 'globalisation,' one that had been elaborated across a whole variety of cultural fields throughout the 1990s, and that had naturally become a part of the consciousness of curatorship and museum culture. In one familiar argument,

however, the issue of 'globalisation' equates to that of 'Americanisation,' and this necessitated that *Global Conceptualism* take careful steps to mitigate against the possibility that the show would be seen to champion North American Conceptual art as the originary model from which a worldwide dissipation of conceptualism followed. For Meyer, this necessity had led to a downplaying of North American Conceptual art in terms of the number and historical significance of works selected and in the amount of space allocated to the display relative to that for other regions:

Squeezing the US and Canada into a single antechamber dubbed 'North America' while according Japan and Korea entire installations suggested an overzealous attempt to rewrite history rather than a laudable effort to open up the Conceptual paradigm. The capacious salons devoted to Latin American work implied that Mexico City and Buenos Aires, more than New York and Los Angeles, were the dominant sources of Conceptualism in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>33</sup> (Figs. 59, 60, 61)

Such an understatement of the American contribution did represent, at the level of *content*, a corrective to what the organisers saw as the Western bias of previous critical accounts and surveys of Conceptual art. Comments such as those by Meyer previously cited indicate the extent to which the organisers were insufficiently attentive to the ways in which the exhibition itself was located discursively. Despite what were, no doubt, the best of intentions, *Global Conceptualism* was an exhibition conceived, designed and presented in one of the major metropolitan 'centres,' principally for the display of a variety of work drawn from the 'peripheries.'<sup>34</sup> The organisers, keen to allay criticism that they had resorted to 'ethnographic' methods in assembling the exhibition, had delegated to the eleven regional organisers the responsibility for their own selections of artists, and for the organisation of the regional exhibits in whatever way they wished. In this way, as Reiko Tomii, organiser of the Japanese section, has said, "every section... had its own space to speak in its own way... each section, locale by locale, had its thesis, recounted its story – and more or less revealed its attendant contexts."<sup>35</sup>

The organisers acknowledged the obvious drawbacks of an exhibition organised in terms of nations and regions, however. For example, the designation of regions according to "either historical or geographic conventions," was problematic in some cases "in that the grouping of nations according to

geographic proximity obscures deep cultural and historical differences and implies a misleading overall consistency of activity in that area."<sup>36</sup> For some reviewers of the exhibition, its organisation in terms of national or regional boundaries carried with it "a whiff of essentialism," or was reminiscent of "pavilion[s] at a world's fair."<sup>37</sup> This latter comment, made in a review, by Marcia E Vetrocq, published in *Art In America*, was especially pertinent as Vetrocq also reminded the reader that the Queens Museum of Art occupies the former New York City pavilion of the 1939 and 1964 world's fairs, (Fig. 62) and that from 1946 to 1952 the building served as the headquarters of the United Nations. (Fig. 63) While Vetrocq granted that one didn't want "to make too much" of the environment in which one first encountered *Global Conceptualism*, her comments did locate the exhibition in a moment of transformation between the 'internationalism' of the post-War years (roughly corresponding with the first period covered by *Global Conceptualism*), and the 'globalism' that replaced it gradually from the late 1980s, but more pervasively in the late 1990s.<sup>38</sup> The decline of 'internationalism,' and the rise of 'globalism,' suggested for Vetrocq a shift from a totalising view of the world to one in which the possibility of any unifying system becomes impossible:

Where 'international' sounds organized, mapped and administered, 'global' evokes the spontaneous, the ubiquitous, the unregulated. 'International' suggests borders breached and differences subsumed; 'global' conjures with a borderless infinity of points charged with local vitality and boundless potential.<sup>39</sup>

The chronological breadth of *Global Conceptualism* was effectively coterminous with the shift from 'internationalism' to 'globalism,' from the earliest appearances of 'conceptualism' in the 1950s, to its contemporary manifestations in South and Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup> As such, the exhibition might more thoroughly have examined the ways in which this shift was reflected in the practices and procedures of the art world - in particular of Conceptual art and 'conceptualism' - and how exhibitions, including the present one, participated in it.

In 1945, the United States had emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful nation in the world. Under the perceived threat of communism, however, and with Europe devastated and unstable, America embarked upon a period of economic and military expansion on the international stage. As America sought to assist the ailing economies of the 'free world,' it did so to



buttress these countries against the threat of communist subjugation, but also, not least, to generate economic growth and stimulate markets for American goods. For Max Kozloff, writing in an influential article published in *Artforum* in 1973, it was not as separate developments that “the most concerted accomplishments of American art occurred during precisely the same period as the burgeoning claims of American world hegemony.” Kozloff pointed to the ways in which American art of the 1940s and 1950s, had abandoned “its erstwhile support for left-wing agitation during the ‘30s,” and “now self-propagandized itself as champion of eternal humanist freedom.”<sup>41</sup> As it did so, this work made itself available, within the rhetoric of the Cold War, as a means to demonstrate both the cultural predominance of the United States, and the freedoms enjoyed by dissenting intellectuals in the capitalist West. However, Kozloff only hinted at the extent to which an institution such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, through the establishment of its International Council, came to operate as a quasi-governmental organisation. It was left to Eva Cockcroft, in an article published by *Artforum* the following year, to extend this aspect of Kozloff’s earlier article.

Cockcroft claimed that, since the early 1940s, MoMA had “engaged in a number of war-related programs which set the pattern for its later activities as a key institution in the cold war.” MoMA, in effect “a minor war contractor” with links to the CIA, had been instrumental in promoting the work of American artists – primarily the Abstract Expressionists – through touring exhibits and international exhibitions in Western Europe, Brazil, Venezuela, India and Japan, among other places.<sup>42</sup> MoMA had been responsible for the worldwide dissemination of American culture in a political climate characterised, as Kozloff had memorably put it, by “the illusion of national omnipotence, and the conviction, no less illusory, that all the world’s peoples wanted to be, indeed had a right to be, like Americans.”<sup>43</sup>

The 1950s, then, can be regarded as the decade in which American art, largely in the form of Abstract Expressionism acquired a status, at least for those who produced it and promoted it throughout the world, as an international art that seemed to trade in universal questions of individual freedom. During the same period, New York, with the Museum of Modern Art playing a key role in these developments, had acceded to its position of cultural pre-eminence. By the mid-to late-1960s, the situation had changed substantially. In the earlier part of the

decade, the United States had suffered a number of ignominies abroad and crises at home, and the myth of American omnipotence had been cast into serious doubt.<sup>44</sup> Over approximately the same period, the hegemony of Greenbergian Modernism (and of the Abstract Expressionism it championed) became weakened as its precepts were attenuated in the 'color-field' paintings of Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski and others, and as it faced new challenges from Pop and Minimalism.

As Conceptual art developed a number of the corollary aspects of the critique of Modernism mounted by Judd, Morris etc., these included a questioning of the power structures that sustained the art world and, within that, the position of New York as the central hub from which 'advanced' culture was thought to be disseminated. Early exhibitions of Conceptual art, such as Seth Siegelaub's well-known *Xeroxbook*<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 64) - which existed only in book form and was thus available for wide distribution - were seen by some artists as a means by which to counter the power structures embodied in the major metropolitan museums and the blue-chip commercial galleries. Sol LeWitt, an artist who had been included in the *Xeroxbook* was enthusiastic about the potential of these developments:

I think it's terrific, because, first of all, [Siegelaub is] taking away from New York the kind of hub of the universe. Because if you travel a lot, you see that a lot of artists around the world have similar ideas and are doing interesting things and can be grouped together much easier than just people that happen to live in New York.<sup>46</sup>

However, it was exhibition organisers like Siegelaub – who were more familiar with the practicalities of bringing together international exhibitions or projects in less conventional spaces and locations – who spoke more often about the challenge presented by such projects to the model of 'center' and 'periphery.' Between July and September 1969, Siegelaub had presented a project whose exhibits were distributed between various locations throughout the world.<sup>47</sup> (Fig. 65) At the end of that year Siegelaub felt able to say that

New York is beginning to break down as a center. Not that there will be another city to replace it, but rather that where any artist is will be the center. International activity. It is more important to send artists to exhibitions than to send art. Art centres arise because artists go there.<sup>48</sup>

Conceptual artists, who might often travel to construct their work on the spot or communicate their ideas in person, could, for Siegelau, contribute to the development of new artistic centres at a time when other economic or communicational factors influencing these developments were “becoming balanced throughout the world.” For many of its supporters, Conceptual art, by virtue of its relative ease of transmission, seemed to be responding and contributing to worldwide processes of social and cultural democratisation.<sup>49</sup>

This feeling was echoed the following year by the curator Kynaston McShine in his introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition *Information*, at MoMA.

McShine wrote

With an art world that knows more readily about current work, through reproductions and the wide dissemination of information via periodicals, and that has been altered by television, films, and satellites, as well as the ‘jet,’ it is now possible for artists to be truly international; exchange with their peers is now relatively simple. The art historian’s problem of who did what first is almost getting to the point of having to date by the hour. Increasingly, artists use the mail, telegrams, telex machines, etc., for transmission of works themselves – photographs, films, documents – or of information about their activity. For both artists and their public it is a stimulating and open situation, and certainly less parochial than even five years ago. It is no longer imperative for an artist to be in Paris or New York. Those far from the ‘art centres’ contribute more easily, without the often artificial protocol that at one time seemed essential for recognition.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, New York did continue to exert a powerful attraction as the centre for artistic promotion and as a source of, what the exhibition organiser and critic, Lucy Lippard, called, a stimulating “bar and studio dialogue.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, while Conceptual art’s ambition toward ‘internationalism’ was frequently stated in the key documents of the period, it was often more honoured as an idea than a practical reality. Despite what Sol LeWitt felt could be the globally democratising effect of projects such as the *Xeroxbook*, for instance, it remained a fact that all the contributing artists were American. Even the important and expansive *When Attitudes Become Form*, an exhibition characterised in the words of one of its organisers by its “extreme internationalism,” included a disproportionate number of Americans. Of the sixty-eight artists who were represented in either the Bern or London versions of the exhibition, forty were either American or working in America, while the remaining twenty-eight were working in Western Europe.<sup>52</sup> The only non-Americans or non-Europeans present were the Philippino-born



David Medalla, the South African Roelof Louw (both of whom were then working in Britain), and the Turkish artist, Sarkis (who was living in France).

Looking back on the early development of Conceptual art from the perspective of 1973, Siegelau still felt that Conceptual art had been unique in that it had appeared “simultaneously around the world”, and that it was “probably the first artistic movement which did not have a geographic center.” Michael Claura, a French critic who had maintained a somewhat equivocal relationship with Conceptual art, nonetheless, agreed that Conceptual art had emerged in a number of locations around the world without having been derived from a central model; “it is certain,” he said, “that conceptual art existed outside the United States before it was revealed to the public.” Moreover, this was possible because Conceptual art had challenged the notion of American culture as universal culture. It had allowed for local differences in the ways in which artists produced and conceived of their work, and did not require that artists in non-Western countries adopt principles that were alien to them: “the ideology that supports this form of work is not specifically American,” Claura thought.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, by the early 1970s it was felt by some erstwhile supporters of Conceptual art that the claims they themselves had made for Conceptual art, only a few years before, had been over-optimistic. Lucy Lippard had come to the conclusion that despite “whatever minor revolutions in communication” had been achieved by this kind of art, “art and artist in a capitalist society remain luxuries.” Lippard lamented the art world’s “resentful reliance on a very small group of dealers, curators, critics, editors, and collectors who are all too frequently and often unknowingly bound by invisible apron strings to the ‘real world’s’ power structure.” Among other factors, this made it “unlikely that conceptual art will be any better equipped to affect the world any differently than, or even as much as, its less ephemeral counterparts.”<sup>54</sup> It is clear, then, for Lippard, that while Conceptual art may have stimulated a more open consciousness in the art world, it had not succeeded in producing a shift in its power-base. While she did not mention New York by name, it was here that the dealers, curators, critics, editors and collectors that she referred to, for the most part, remained.

Kozloff’s article ‘American Painting During the Cold War’ (1973), and Cockcroft’s ‘Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War’ (1974), made significant contributions to an intense debate in the art world around the issues of

internationalism. In the early and mid-1970s, American art, through the continuing agency of institutions such as MoMA and the widely read *Artforum*, continued to exert a strong international influence. Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith were, together, well placed to comment on the effects of American influence abroad. In 1974 the three were living in New York and contributing to the activities of the Art & Language group. Burn was an Australian artist who had met Ramsden, an Englishman then studying at Melbourne, in 1963. Together, they had come to England in 1964, before moving to New York in 1967.<sup>55</sup> Terry Smith was an Australian art historian in New York on a Harkness Fellowship.

Burn, Ramsden and Smith worked together on *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*, (Fig. 66) the only issue of *Art-Language* to have been entirely written and edited in New York, but included in the section of *Global Conceptualism* dedicated to work from Australia and New Zealand.<sup>56</sup> In a section given the heading *The Unreality of this Culture*, Burn, Ramsden and Smith discussed some of the repercussions of American influence for artists from other cultures. Arguing that art was being sent abroad, not because of any intrinsic worth, but because of the “ideological...probably tacit...presuppositions of the senders,” they complained that “What is being transported and internalized in the local context is a set of values which dominates and disrupts any possibility of a non-reified culture emerging locally – in Australia or any place else...”<sup>57</sup> Works of art, they maintained, are not neutral vessels for the communication of eternal values, but are constituted as meaningful within the social contexts from which they derive and in which they occur; when art is transported from one cultural context to another it becomes virtually impossible to recover these meanings.

*Draft for an Anti-Textbook* was published only three months after Cockcroft's article for *Artforum* and echoed some of its claims regarding the connections between MoMA's International Program and United States foreign policy. “There's no coincidence,” Burn, Ramsden and Smith observed, “between the sudden swelter of MoMA shows to Australia from the mid-1960's [sic] onwards and the expanding U.S. ‘interests’ and investment in Australia and the commitment to U.S. policy in S-E Asia.”<sup>58</sup> The overall political and economic policy, they thought, was transparent, but was “buttressed with a ‘low-keyed’ program of cultural exports designed to flatter and woo the ruling class, including ‘intellectuals’, of various countries.”<sup>59</sup> Highlighting the exhibition *Some Recent*

*American Art*,<sup>60</sup> which had been organised by MoMA for circulation in Australia and New Zealand, Burn, Ramsden and Smith noted that a number of artists had been flown to Australia to discuss their work with Australian artists. However, although a particular artist may have been available to communicate and disseminate their ideas (an outward process of 'culturing'),

nothing of that artist's enculturation was available. So, in order to respond to that artist's culturing, for it to be a meaningful encounter, the local is forced into tacit reconstruction of the enculturing ideology – that's the insidious level it operates on, you're not directly influenced, it sneaks up from behind.<sup>61</sup>

As evidence of the success of the tacit policy of the United States to influence artists and intellectuals overseas, Burn, Ramsden and Smith repeated an observation of Cockcroft's that the exhibition at MoMA in 1961 granted to a number of Polish artists could be regarded as a reward for their having moved away from socialist realism to work that was influenced by Jackson Pollock and other American abstract artists.<sup>62</sup> For the institutions of the centre to reward artists from the periphery in this way has at least three effects: to confirm the 'universality' of the art produced in the centre, to re-enforce the centre's claim as the place in which the most advanced art is produced and from which it is disseminated worldwide, and to maintain the subordinate relationship of the periphery to the centre by perpetuating a system by which work from the periphery only becomes ratified when shown in the centre. Although one would probably not want to claim that New York has maintained, unchallenged, a position of such absolute power within the art world, there remains in place a system by which the metropolitan centres, with considerable financial resources at their disposal, continue to exercise a legitimating power based on their own notions of what constitutes an 'international' art.<sup>63</sup> For an exhibition such as *Global Conceptualism*, this presented an inevitable difficulty.

*Global Conceptualism's* treatment of North American Conceptual art as something of a special case within an international tendency gave rise to a particular tension in the catalogue essay for the exhibition's North American section. Peter Wollen did not subsume North American practice within the category of 'conceptualism', but continued to speak of Conceptual art as an independent regional entity with more-or-less distinctive characteristics. Moreover, Wollen was sceptical toward the very notion of 'conceptualism,' as



one that was only retrospectively applied to gather together many diverse practices in different countries and locations. He argued that the notion of 'conceptualism' represented a recuperation of Conceptual art - "the last avant-garde of all, the one that modernism found it impossible to digest"<sup>64</sup> - to a tidy history of modern art. In so doing, Wollen was reluctant to relinquish the claims of North American Conceptual art, and particularly that originating in New York, to have established a central starting point for an internationally dispersed artistic practice. For Wollen, the "very small but very vocal and productive phalanx" of Conceptual artists based in New York,

set the theoretical parameters that consequently made it possible for conceptual art to transform the landscape of the global art world in an enduring way. North American conceptual art, then, inevitably came to play a disproportionate role in the emergence of the much broader conceptualist movement... It very rapidly burst its Lower Manhattan bounds and became the site of an extremely complex and dynamic movement, with far reaching implications geographically, politically, and semiologically. It was as if the initial New York cohort created a crack in a dam that eventually broke and released a flood of innovative new art.<sup>65</sup>

For the curators, the usefulness of the term 'conceptualism' had been in the possibility it offered for establishing a set of meanings and conditions that might avoid being subsumed under the established rubric of Conceptual art. Moreover, that the term might enable the recognition of art produced in the peripheries that had seemed to precede the stylistic achievements of the Western mainstream.<sup>66</sup> Wollen's account is partly at odds with this thinking. In his view, the category 'conceptualism' can more properly be understood as tracing a shift in critical and historical framing; 'conceptualism' allows for the destabilizing of canonical 'Conceptual art' by incorporating a diverse range of practices that are taken to imply a critique of its supposedly formalist concerns.

The requirement for *Global Conceptualism* to distance itself from what it organisers saw as the inherent formalism of North American Conceptual art led to an emphasis on local conditions as determinant factors for 'conceptualism.' Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss acknowledged cross-cultural influence in their *Foreword*,<sup>67</sup> but this was unfortunately de-emphasised by the organisation of the exhibition itself into sections dedicated to national and regional showings. Each of the catalogue contributors, however, noted in some way that locally produced variants of 'conceptualism' existed, to a greater or lesser degree, in a dialogical

relationship with the 'mainstream' Conceptual art of North America and Western Europe. Restrictions placed on travel for some artists working under repressive state regimes, for instance, meant that it was often easier for these artists to meet in a Western city (or through the medium of a magazine produced there) than at home; New York and London continued to attract ambitious arts graduates keen to continue their studies; and the lure of a potentially lucrative career in the capitalist West was a consistent incentive to produce work that might be assimilable within the terms of Western art criticism. Most significantly, perhaps, the language associated with North American and European Conceptual art was circulated around the world in widely read journals such as *Artforum* and *Studio International*, influencing the critical contexts in which work was both produced and discussed. Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss' claim that inchoate conceptualist practices "received such added emphasis and focus" from the emergence of Conceptual art "as to essentially redefine the nature of the activity"<sup>68</sup> was reinforced, for instance, by Mari Carmen Ramírez who noted that "in many countries", the popularisation of the term 'conceptualism' occurred after the dissemination of Joseph Kosuth's ideas in specialized journals (*Studio International*) and regular weeklies (*Newsweek*).<sup>69</sup> Terry Smith claimed that the region of the southern Pacific was important in that it exemplified just this aspect of a "worldwide phenomenon: the impact of conceptualism – especially as it became institutionalized as Conceptual Art – on younger artists in local worlds tied to metropolitan centres."<sup>70</sup>

While it would not be correct to simplistically assert that 'conceptualism' represents the propagation and accommodation of the critical language of Western Conceptual art in local contexts, neither would it be correct to *over-privilege* 'conceptualism's local determinations. 'Mainstream' Conceptual art was influential outside New York and London, and arguably, in the early 1970s, came to occupy a position of institutionally legitimised hegemony in the international art world. With the apparent transformation of Conceptual art into a new 'style' that could be emulated, however, came the risk of misinterpretation, distortion and the consequent annulment of its critical function. The distortion of styles from the metropolitan centres when taken up in the peripheries had been noted by Terry Smith as a symptom of the 'provincialism' that appeared "primarily as an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values."<sup>71</sup> The possibility that Conceptual art might now be subject to

these same processes would indicate its own transformation into something of an 'Official culture.'

In an essay that was published in *Artforum* the same month that the text he jointly authored with Burn and Ramsden appeared in *Art-Language*, Smith had observed that these distortions happen because the early innovative struggles of artists are usually unavailable, and largely incomprehensible, outside of the limited cultural situation in which they arise. Further distortions occur, Smith pointed out, "when works are seen only in reproduction, and are accompanied by inadequate criticism and gnostic artists' statements. In short, models and prototypes arrive in the provinces devoid of their genetic contexts." In the severance of these 'styles' from their contexts, they appear to have arrived fully formed and with the inherent authority of their having emanated from the centre. As Smith put it: "They seem to issue, as it were, directly out of art, to be made by 'culture heroes,' and to take their predestined place as one of a succession of 'great moments' in art history." All this cannot help but "reinforce a vicious circle of conservatism."<sup>72</sup>

The strongly felt pressure upon artists from the peripheries to produce work that would be accommodated to the centre's vision of 'international' art is nonetheless felt by artists within their own *local* communities, reinforcing the sense of cultural distancing from the metropolitan centres. The effect of this, as Smith went on to explain, is that these artists' worlds are

replete with tensions between two antithetical terms: a defiant urge to localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of 'making good, original art right here') and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art, and the criteria for standards of 'quality,' 'originality,' 'interest,' 'forcefulness,' etc., are determined externally.<sup>73</sup>

Sung Wan-kyung, the regional organiser for the South Korean section of *Global Conceptualism*, (Fig. 67) observed that Western Conceptual art came to the attention of South Korean artists in the 1970s principally via Japan. Sung noted the seductiveness of this art for artists "who generally lacked access to global developments in contemporary art."<sup>74</sup> Conceptual art was encountered, however, in a situation in which the ideological and social meanings constitutive of the art was largely unrecoverable, and in which Conceptual art was "vaguely understood as another variation of antiform, together with happenings,



earthworks, and process art.” In the later 1970s, Sung pointed out, ‘conceptualist’ strategies were popular among the artists who comprised the grouping known as the ‘white monochromists.’ The ‘conceptualist’ output of the most influential of the white monochromists, Lee U Fan, can be seen as typifying the kinds of distortion, misunderstanding and tension that, according to Terry Smith, pertained under a situation of provincialism. As Sung pointed out

Lee crafted his own brand of conceptualism out of Eastern philosophy and a kind of nationalistic minimalism. Thus, the white-gray colours of white monochromism ostensibly induced reflection on a Korean ‘essence.’ Regardless of Lee’s original assertions, the pseudo-minimalist/conceptualist works of the white monochromists demonstrated a profound misunderstanding of conceptualism. Ultimately, these works were nothing more than hybridized aesthetic commodities that contradicted the principles of conceptualism itself.<sup>75</sup>

Smith argued that provincialism denied the artist from the periphery his/her agency in determining the distinctiveness of his/her own practice: “self-construction... constantly eludes him... larger forces control the shape of his development as an artist.”<sup>76</sup> He acknowledged that at the end of the 1960s it had seemed that “the time of a liberating ‘global village internationalism’” had arrived, and that the constraints of provincialism might be broken, but cautioned that “as long as strong metropolitan centres like New York continue to define the state of play, and other centres continue to accept the rules of the game, all the other centres will be provincial, ipso facto.”<sup>77</sup> For Smith, and his Art & Language colleagues in New York, the dominance of the Anglo-American discourse was undeniable, but it was by no means clear how to proceed in the face of this problem. All that could be implored was that the artist accept responsibility for the ways in which his/her work might be ideologically co-opted, since “the potential revisability of this culture is an essential part of praxis.” “We operate,” they admitted, “close[...] to a state of conscientious paralysis which reflects something of the paradoxicality of our modes of existence.”<sup>78</sup>

Under the prevailing conditions of provincialism, it seemed, the options for cultural workers were severely limited: either the individual could remain in his/her local context, in which case s/he “*cannot choose not to be provincial;*” or, accepting that the concept of ‘significance’ is determined in the centre, s/he could “get him or herself to New York and stay [t]here.”<sup>79</sup> To choose the latter option placed on the conscientious artist the responsibilities “which clearly follow

from recognizing art making for what it is: a thoroughly context-dependent activity, in which most of the contexts are socially specific and resonant throughout the cultural settings in which they occur and to which they travel.”<sup>80</sup> However, from another perspective, to locate oneself within the citadel of power in the art world could be construed as complicity with, and assent to, the status quo, a situation in which any sense of being able to act with even partial autonomy would be illusory. For some artists and critics working outside the centre, it would be better to remain where one was, and to work toward a deconstruction of the dominating ideology and a redeployment of its cultural materials.<sup>81</sup>

Even as the predicament of provincialism seemed to entail the polarisation of artists according to geography and critical position, Ian Burn’s own critical writing hinted at the kind of re-conceptualisation of these relationships that would not achieve a wider currency until the later 1990s. As early as 1973, Burn had asked rhetorically:

What is the missing element? It is some sense of *interplay* between divergent contexts and ideologies, of dialectical opposition to one’s own beliefs and contexts. It is also the strength of the interplay which counts and in turn strengthens and develops divergent contexts. Rejuvenation and the genesis of new ideas depend largely on cross-cultural fertilisations. This does not mean the present kind of ‘exchange’ with foreign artists whose success is already tacitly sanctioned in an American context. It means accepting other contexts for what they are, for what we can learn from them in contrast to what we can learn from ourselves, and not accepting them on the basis of how well they mirror (reinforce) the dominant program.<sup>82</sup>

In talking of “interplay” and “cross-cultural fertilisation,” Burn anticipated something of the language and the type of thinking that would emerge as part of the discourse of globalism and globalisation. Most accounts of globalisation, as I have indicated, draw attention to the ambivalence of the term. On the one hand, globalisation has been linked to policies of cultural imperialism that do not differ substantially, perhaps, from those operating within the International Council of MoMA. On the other, globalisation has also been thought to allow for a productive mixing of cultural elements; that is, a process of *hybridisation* within which individuals or groups are not simply the passive consumers of cultural products, but creatively engage with them, thus enabling new uses and meanings to emerge. In this view, rather than subjugating cultures to a

homogenising external influence, the transcultural encounter can contribute to local vitality. As Burn understood, the important thing was that the pattern of influence was not uni-directional; it should move in both directions, from the centres to the peripheries, and from the peripheries to the centres.

For some advocates of globalisation, the process of hybridisation can generate a 'third zone,' in which cultural oppositions and the geographies of centre and periphery are transcended. Such a view was taken by Elisabeth Sussman when jointly curating the exhibition *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*. Sussman argued that the seemingly polarised worlds inhabited by American and Soviet artists were, in fact, "interconnected", even though, before *glasnost* and *perestroika*, "officially" there existed no exchange between the two countries. Sussman noted that American art magazines, exhibition catalogues and popular music had long circulated in the Soviet underground, and that what had "crystallised intellectually" for her while working on the exhibition "was the idea of a third zone in cultural relations, a zone where separate nations are united by shared information, but where vital misrepresentations take place... Soviet Conceptual art was a hybrid of US and Russian tendencies," she argued, and that following the relaxation of travel restrictions for Russian artists, both "were alternatively foregrounded or misunderstood according to the audience to which the art was presented."<sup>83</sup>

It would be naïve, however, to imagine that cross-cultural influence is always equally experienced, even in the third zone. Indeed, Sussman conceded that "in general... 'Americanisation' may predominate."<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the notion of the third zone, as a space in which vital misrepresentations can occur *in both directions*, does provide a way of conceptualising relationships between the West and its Other that advances on the "unpleasant impasse" of provincialism, in which non-Western artists were condemned to produce progressively weaker mixes of local traditionalisms and imported features. Had *Global Conceptualism* been able to establish what Okwui Enwezor, the curator of the exhibition's African section, has elsewhere characterised as "a temporary context[...] of evaluation distinctly different from the stable site of the institution,"<sup>85</sup> then it might have proved possible to draw practices from the peripheries into the centre whilst simultaneously demonstrating that the centre no longer holds. If this had been the case, 'conceptualism' itself might have avoided the fate of becoming a



universalising system that, in fact, managed and absorbed difference, transforming it into continuity.

The organisers of *Global Conceptualism* did not take up the concept of hybridity, or the third zone.<sup>86</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss' conception of globalism was inescapably circumscribed by the problematic it wanted to escape. *Global Conceptualism* reconfirmed the old geographies of centre and periphery by perpetuating the system by which artists whose work confirms the preconceptions of a Western historical and critical discourse (in this case, of 'conceptualism') have their work legitimised by and within that discourse. What was new in *Global Conceptualism* was the rhetorical operation by which the centre disavowed itself as having produced an inferior, formalist version of 'conceptualism,' while it honoured the radicalism of work in other contexts. *Global Conceptualism* preserved the unequal relationship of centre to periphery, merely inverting the criteria for determining 'significance' in a new globalised context. The problematic relationships between the West and its Other, between Conceptual art and a purported 'conceptualism,' were not transcended, but complicated. The Conceptual art of North America and Western Europe, de-emphasised by the organisers to the point of near invisibility, nonetheless continued to be felt as a spectral presence in the rooms dedicated to representations of work from the other regions, the work of artists in non-Western contexts only acquiring its radicalised meaning in relation to a negation. All of this, however, is not to claim that the Conceptual art produced in North America and Western Europe was somehow inherently 'superior' to the 'conceptualist' work from the other regions included in the exhibition, rather that non-Western work was co-opted to a representation that served the political needs of the centre and, in being so, its role in dismantling the historically problematic dichotomy of 'centre/periphery' was negated.

- <sup>1</sup> *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, ex. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990). Exhibition organized by Suzanne Pagé, Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon, Angeline Scherf.
- <sup>2</sup> *Magiciens de la Terre*, ex. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 18 May-14 August 1989). Exhibition organized by Jean-Hubert Martin.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, the critical opinions of Robert C. Morgan, 'Conceptualism: Reevaluation or Revisionism?', *Art Journal* 58, no. 3 (Fall 1999), 109-111; and James Meyer, 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s', *Artforum* 38, no. 1 (September 1999), 162; 'James Meyer replies to Reiko Tomii.' *Artforum* 38, no. 3 (November 1999), 26.
- <sup>4</sup> Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, 'Foreword', in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, ex. cat. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, April 28 - August 29, 1999), pp. vii-xi (p. vii).
- <sup>5</sup> Seth Siegelaub, 'Kosuth and Siegelaub Reply to Buchloh', *October* 57 (summer 1991), 152-157 (p. 155). Buchloh's essay was entitled 'From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962-1969)' and appeared in the exhibition catalogue *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990), pp. 41-53.
- <sup>6</sup> Luis Camnitzer, interview with the author, 17 November 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', p. vii. The original title proposed for the exhibition, *Global Conceptualism/Local Contexts*, expresses this idea more adequately without courting the controversies of art historical precedence. However, "Points of Origin" was decided upon "precisely to emphasize the idea that there were multiple points of origin, none of them primary over the others. 'Local contexts' seems to imply that it was only a secondary or residual matter of contextual form that varied: our argument was that the 'conceptual' was not an a priori form that was adapted to context, but that it arose/originated in various places and in various forms." Rachel Weiss, interview with the author, 29 November 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', p. vii.
- <sup>9</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', pp. vii-viii.
- <sup>10</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', p. viii.
- <sup>11</sup> As László Beke observed of, what he mostly refers to as, "conceptualist art" in Eastern Europe: "the 'immaterial' nature of conceptualist works, and the 'poorness' of the media employed – 'just an idea,' words and concepts, paper and pencil, typewriter, postcards, a telephone call, ephemeral actions – made communication easier and censorship more difficult. This is why conceptualist art had to be invented in Eastern Europe, and its function as a strategy for evading authority should be considered a feature specific to its development in the region." 'Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 41-51 (p. 42). While Beke's characterisation of 'conceptualist art' in Eastern Europe supports many of the claims made by Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss on behalf of 'conceptualism,' it is noteworthy that his terminology partially collapses the distinction between 'conceptualism' and Conceptual art.
- <sup>12</sup> Judd's 'Specific Objects' was first published in *Arts Yearbook*, 9 (1965), 74-82. The three parts of Robert Morris' 'Notes on Sculpture' were published in *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), 42-44; *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966), 20-23; *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (summer 1967), 24-29; Fried's essay appeared in the same issue of *Artforum* as the third part of Morris' 'Notes on Sculpture.' 'Art and Objecthood' *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (summer 1967), 12-23.
- <sup>13</sup> Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 23.



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- <sup>14</sup> See Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy, parts 1&2', *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 134-137; *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969), 160-161.
- <sup>15</sup> See Joseph Kosuth, 'History For', *Flash Art* 143 (November/December 1988), 100-102.
- <sup>16</sup> See Joseph Kosuth, 'No Exit', *Artforum* 26, no. 7 (March 1988), 112-115.
- <sup>17</sup> Art & Language, 'Memories of the Medicine Show', *Art-Language New Series*, 2 (1998), pp. 34-35.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, Okwui Enwezor, 'Where, What, Who, When: A Few Notes on "African" Conceptualism'; Gao Minglu, 'Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong'; Mari Carmen Ramírez, 'Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980'; and Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Early Soviet Conceptualism', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 108-117; pp. 127-139; pp. 53-71; and pp. 99-107.
- <sup>19</sup> Claude Gintz, 'European Conceptualism in Every Situation', in *Global Conceptualism*, 31-39. Gintz does not demonstrate any causal link between Situationist ideas and those of Conceptual or conceptualist artists. Neither does he demonstrate their substantial familiarity with Situationist ideas, other than by repeating a claim made by Guy Debord that Yves Klein attended the first screening of Debord's *Hurléments en faveur de Dade* (30 June 1952). An account of the Lettriste Movement, the Lettriste International and the Situationist International, and their place within a European avant-garde, is provided by Stewart Home in *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1991). Home writes from a position self-consciously within the utopian tradition of the avant-garde, however, and admits, with ironic understatement, that he was unable to "entirely shed his subjective biases." p. 106.
- <sup>20</sup> Charles Harrison organised an exhibition called *The British Avant-Garde* (including a number of Conceptual artists) for the New York Cultural Center in 1971. The artists included were Keith Arnatt, Sue Arrowsmith, Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin, Victor Burgin, Colin Crumplin, Andrew Dipper, David Dye, Barry Flanagan, Gilbert and George, Harold Hurrell, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, Bruce McLean, Gerald Newman and David Tremlett. *The British Avant Garde*, ex. cat. (New York Cultural Center, New York, in association with Farleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey, 19 May-29 August 1971). A year later, Sigi Krauss and Rosetta Brooks presented *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain* at Gallery House, London. The exhibition was organised in three parts between 18 August-15 October 1972. The first two parts included Ian Breakwell, Stuart Brisley, Victor Burgin, John Dugger, David Dye, Gerard Hemsworth, David Lamelas, John Latham, David Medalla, John Stezaker and Steven Willats among others. The third part focused on film and video and included Artists' Placement Group (APG), Ian Breakwell, Stuart Brisley, Peter Gidal, David Hall, David Hall and Tony Sinden, John Latham, William Raban and Chris Welsby. Harrison and Brooks both voiced an anxiety over the continued usefulness of the term, however. Harrison stated that "the last thing I would personally want to do would be to justify my selection of the artists here in terms of any concept of the common avant-gardism of their activities; I'm confident that none of them would thank me for doing so." 'Virgin Soils and Old Land,' in *The British Avant Garde*, p. 3. In her introduction to the first volume of *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain*, Brooks argued that "so persistent is [us of the term 'avant-garde'], that artists and writers on the subject of art, must contend initially with its predominance, if only to eventually reject it as unworkable." *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain, Volume 1*, ex. cat. (London: Gallery House, 1972), p. 1. The debate



around the use of the term 'avant-garde' in Britain is briefly examined in John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London; New York: I.B. Taurus, 2002), pp. 75-76.

<sup>21</sup> See, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Guilbaut's book remains the key reference in tracing the birth of an American avant-garde, and the shift of dominance in the art world from Paris to New York in the post-War years. The exhibition *The British Avant Garde* (see footnote 14, above), part of a series of exhibitions at the New York Cultural Center dedicated to the contemporary 'avant-gardes' in various European countries, gives an indication of the continuing significance of a model of the European avant-garde in the United States.

<sup>22</sup> Claude Gintz claimed that conceptualism in Western Europe typically set itself the task of criticising the tradition of European art and its ideological role within liberal democracies: "European conceptualism seems to act as the invalidation of that glorious past – seen as expressing irredeemably lost values – or as a critique of that part of the ideological state apparatus to which artists and their audience were submitted." Gintz, 'European Conceptualism in Every Situation', p. 34. In the United States, as Peter Wollen argued, "From very early on, the attack on the traditional art object (especially painting) was seen, in political terms, as an attack on the commodification of the artworld... Conceptual artists wanted to create a new kind of relationship between artists, gallery, and public, a relationship that would challenge not only the commercial nature of the art world but also the idea of the viewer as passive consumer of sensations rather than thoughtful interlocutor. Text, photography, and found objects were incorporated into artwork not simply because they were interesting new media with which to work, but because they offered specific ways of engaging the attention of the art public and, as Victor Burgin observed, opportunities to reintegrate art into a wider cultural field of discourse, from which modernism had increasingly abstracted it." Peter Wollen, 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 73-85 (pp. 82-83).

<sup>23</sup> Rosetta Brooks had noted in her catalogue introduction to *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain* that "much of the work in the exhibition is attempting to redefine the basis of art activity along less paradoxical lines [than those implied by the concept 'avant-garde'] and in accordance with a variety of conventions which have previously been alien to the activity. There is evidence in much of the most significant work being engaged in by artists presently, a tendency towards a redefinition of the concept of art, of art's social function and its social purpose." *A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain, Volume 1*, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', p. ix.

<sup>25</sup> This possibility was felt by at least two of the contributors to the catalogue. "Is there such a thing as Conceptual art in Africa," Okwui Enwezor asked, "or is it just a term imported as part of a neocolonialist enterprise of modernist art history?" 'Where, What, Who, When', p. 110. Similarly, Reiko Tomii mused that the composer of a list of *gainen geijutsu* artists in Japan "may wonder if s/he has committed the sin of imposing the Western model of conceptualism, which is itself not free of controversy, on the reality of Japanese art." 'Concerning the Institution of Art: Conceptualism in Japan', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 15-29 (p. 16).

<sup>26</sup> This is especially true in the European section of the exhibition where, it could be said, only Victor Burgin genuinely represented this tendency. Other artists working in Britain such as Rasheed Araeen, Conrad Atkinson, Victor Burgin,

Margaret Harrison, Kay Fido Hunt, John Stezaker and Stephen Willats might reasonably have been included. In the North American section of the exhibition, work by artists such as Mary Kelly, Adrian Piper, Martha Rosler, and those around *The Fox* in New York (Ian Burn, Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge and others) was represented. This represented a problem for the coherence of Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss' argument 'conceptualism' thesis, and their argument that Conceptual art was essentially formalist. Section organiser, Peter Wollen, did not adopt the terminology of 'conceptualism' when discussing the work of these artists, but persisted instead with the use of 'Conceptual art.' 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art', pp. 73-85.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Kosuth, 'Text/Context: Seven Remarks For You to Consider While Viewing/Reading This Exhibition.' The text was published as a flyer in conjunction with the exhibition *Text/Context* at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, May-June 1979. As of 16 March 2003, both the Castelli Gallery and the Kosuth studio have been unable to locate an original copy of this document. The passage has been cited, therefore, from Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, ed. by Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 179-182 (p. 181).

<sup>28</sup> Art & Language, 'Retrospective Exhibitions and Current Practice (A Recommendation for Optimistic Amnesia)', in *Art & Language, 1966-1975* (Banbury: Art & Language Press, 1975), pp. 1-3 (p. 3).

<sup>29</sup> Charles Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), p. 45. For an earlier formulation of this position, before Harrison became formally allied with Art & Language, see his 'Notes Toward Art Work', *Studio International* 179, no. 919 (February 1970), 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> This is the broad thrust of Michael Corris' 'An Invisible College in an Anglo-American World', the introduction to *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, Practice*, ed. by Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-18.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Bann, 'Introduction', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp.3-13 (p. 3).

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s', p. 162.

<sup>33</sup> Meyer, 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s', p. 162. Reiko Tomii provided a reply to Meyer's criticisms in 'Word Weary', *Artforum* 38, no. 3 (November 1999), pp. 22, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Camnitzer has explained that, for this reason, it was important for the curators that the exhibition took place in an "ignored peripheral museum like Queens, and not in MoMA [the Museum of Modern Art] or something similar." Interview with the author, 17 November 2004. That *Global Conceptualism* took place in New York was not always perceived negatively, however, even by those situated in a peripheral relationship to the centre. Writing from Buenos Aires to the editor of *Artforum*, Jorge Helft declared it to be "of utmost importance that New York take note of creativity (in whatever medium) in other parts of the world." Indeed, it seemed for Helft that the more central the location for the exhibition, the better: "With all due respect to the Queens Museum... I would have liked to see it at a Manhattan venue, since it seems that many art lovers on that small island rarely cross over to other boroughs to see art (although they do so to get on airplanes)." 'You Snooze, We Lose', *Artforum* 38, no. 5 (January 2000), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Tomii, 'Word Weary', p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss, 'Foreword', p. xi. László Beke indicated the political implications of these issues by pointing out that "'Eastern Europe' is a geographical concept created by theoreticians of developed Western states as a synonym for the former 'socialist bloc.'" 'Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern



- European Art', p. 41. These complications were especially strongly felt in the context of a 'globalism' that purported to erase spatialities derived from Western Renaissance thought. See Stephen Bann's 'Introduction', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 3-13.
- <sup>37</sup> Joan Kee, 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s', *Parachute* 97 (January-March 2000), 50-51 (p. 50); Marcia E. Vetrocq, 'Conceptualism: an expanded view', *Art in America* 87, no.7 (July 1999), 72-77 (p. 74).
- <sup>38</sup> Vetrocq also informs the reader that in the open space in front of the Queens Museum stands the Unisphere, a giant globe-like structure, one-hundred-and-twenty feet in diameter, that was donated to the 1964 fair by the United States Steel Corporation and which commemorates early space flight. Whatever Stephen Bann's claims for the significance of *Global Conceptualism* as proof that the hegemony of Western ways of seeing no longer held sway, the Unisphere remained as a monument to the tenaciousness of the old order, a symbol of the techno-militaristic propaganda of the Space Race, and a reminder that more than three decades after its dedication to "Peace and mutual understanding," those aspirations were still unmet.
- <sup>39</sup> Vetrocq, 'Conceptualism: an expanded view', p. 72.
- <sup>40</sup> Although the second chronological period of the exhibition itself extended only to the 1980s, Apinan Poshyananda contributed an epilogue to the catalogue that considered the work of contemporary artists in South and Southeast Asia. "'Con Art" Seen from the Edge: The Meaning of Conceptual Art in South and Southeast Asia', in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 143-148.
- <sup>41</sup> Max Kozloff, 'American Painting During the Cold War', *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973), 43-54. Kozloff's article reprinted, in revised form, his catalogue introduction to the exhibition *Twenty Five Years of American Painting, 1948-1973* (Des Moines Art Center, Iowa. March 6-April 22, 1973).
- <sup>42</sup> Eva Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War', *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974), 39-41.
- <sup>43</sup> Kozloff, 'American Painting During the Cold War', p. 44.
- <sup>44</sup> Among other events, especially worthy of mention are the Bay of Pigs fiasco (1961); the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962); the assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963); the race riots in Watts, the assassination of Malcolm X, and the despatch of American combat troops to Vietnam (1965).
- <sup>45</sup> The official title of the book was *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner* (New York: Seth Siegelaub and John Wendler, 1968).
- <sup>46</sup> Sol LeWitt, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, June 12, 1969 in *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelaub, Smithson, Weiner* by Patricia Norvell, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 112-123 (p. 122).
- <sup>47</sup> This was the exhibition *July, August, September 1969*, 1 July-30 September 1969. The artists included (and the locations of their exhibits) were Carl Andre (The Hague, Netherlands), Robert Barry (Baltimore, United States), Daniel Buren (Paris, France), Jan Dibbets (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Douglas Huebler (Los Angeles, United States), Joseph Kosuth (Portales, United States), Sol LeWitt (Düsseldorf, West Germany), Richard Long (Bristol, England), N.E. Thing Co. (Vancouver, Canada), Robert Smithson (Uxmal, Mexico), and Lawrence Weiner (Niagara Falls, Canada/United States).
- <sup>48</sup> 'On Exhibitions and the World at large: Seth Siegelaub in conversation with Charles Harrison', *Studio International* 178, no. 917 (December 1969), 202-203.



<sup>49</sup> This view was not held by all those associated with Conceptual art, however. Terry Atkinson found Siegelau's notions of decentralisation and internationalism to be "fetishistic and besides the point." "It might be the case," Atkinson thought, "that significant art can be made most places today, whereas a few years ago it was in the main made in large metropolitan centres, but to make a policy-statement out of this is simply the other side of the coin to that policy which maintained that the metropolitan centres were the significant environment, sure significant art may well be made most places today, but lets [sic] find out whether it is significant before we start making policies about where it is made. This emphasis upon catalogue-exhibitions and 'ideas are faster than objects' seems to me, to rather wash over questions of how good the idea is." 'From an Art & Language Point of View', *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970), 25-60 (p. 50). In retrospect, it has seemed to some that the liberatory claims made on behalf of Conceptual art's purported internationalism were blind to the extent to which many of the activities constitutive of Conceptual art's purported critique of unequal international relationships were, in fact, reliant on many of the factors which structured those relationships. Michael Newman has argued, for example, that Conceptual art involved "a mimicry of the very forms of alienation it sought to contest" and a mimesis of the forms of bureaucratic administration: "the card files etc; entrepreneurial social action (the self-administered career), and international corporate communication systems (artists flying between the major metropolitan centres in the same airplanes as corporate executives). On the one hand, this enabled Conceptual art to free itself from national limitations (the legacy of the New York School in the US, the endemic provincialism of British art in the UK), and to develop in places without much direct access to the best works form the history of art (Eastern Europe, Latin America, Canada, the Far East and Japan before the museum boom), but on the other hand limited art to a defensive mimesis of the properties of social subjectification it opposed in its political program." 'Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An Unfinished Project?', *Kunst and Museum Journaal* 7, nos. 1, 2, 3 (1995), 95-104 (pp. 99-100).

<sup>50</sup> Kynaston McShine, 'Introduction', in *Information*, ex. cat., ed. by McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2 July – 20 September 1970). The exhibition was seen by some as a stratagem by which MoMA attempted to absorb criticism of its conservative agenda. See Les Levine, 'The Information Fall-Out', *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971), 264-267.

<sup>51</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, 'Preface', in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 5-9 (p. 8).

<sup>52</sup> *When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information: Live In Your Head*, Kunsthalle, Bern, 22 March–27 April, 1969; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 28 August–27 September, 1969. In his introduction to the London version of the exhibition, 'Against Precedents', Charles Harrison wrote that "The exhibition is characterized by its extreme internationalism, by its variety, and by the breadth of possibilities it suggests." Unpaginated. Bruce Altschuler has observed that artists of the various nationalities represented did socialise with one another, particularly the Germans and Americans, but that the Italians "largely kept to themselves." 'Dematerialization: The Voice of the Sixties', in *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994): 236-255 (p. 253).

<sup>53</sup> Michael Clauro and Seth Siegelau, 'L'Art Conceptuel'. This interview first appeared in *Xxe siècle* 41 (December 1973), 156-159. It was translated into English for inclusion in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander

Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 286-290, from where I have cited this passage (p. 287).

<sup>54</sup> Lippard, 'Postface', pp. 263, 264.

<sup>55</sup> In 1977, after the disintegration of the Art & Language group in New York, Burn would return to Australia and Ramsden to England.

<sup>56</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, *Draft for an Anti-Textbook* (September 1974).

<sup>57</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, pp. 90-91.

<sup>58</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, p. 95.

<sup>60</sup> *Some Recent American Art*, ex. cat. (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria with permission of Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1973).

<sup>61</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, p. 91. Burn, Ramsden and Smith's comments represent a disillusionment from the view expressed, perhaps somewhat ingenuously, by Lucy Lippard only five years earlier: "[W]hen the artists travel," Lippard had thought, "whether they're liked or disliked, people are exposed directly to the art and to the ideas behind it in a more realistic, informal situation..." Lippard, 'Preface', p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, p. 96; and Cockcroft, 'Abstract Expressionism', p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> Despite there having already been a number of attempts to shift the dynamic of the relationship between centre and periphery, the curator Gerardo Mosquera was still able to complain, in 1994, that the centre's new interest in the art of the peripheries had done little to effect significant change. "It is true," Mosquera claimed, "that there is a more open consciousness, a more multicultural relativism and an attraction for the Other. But the specific gravity in international circuits of those exhibitions and publications relating to the periphery's visual arts is still disproportionately low, although it has increased. The scheme centre-periphery has become more flexible but remains untouched. We are still far from a globalised art scene." 'Some Problems in Transcultural Curating' in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. by Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press in association with The Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994), pp. 133-139 (p. 135). At the time of writing, although New York undoubtedly remains the locus of greatest institutional power in the art world, there is some evidence emerging of a willingness on the part of the centre to examine the functions of its power, and to recognise the challenges presented to it by the emergence of a system of 'peripheral' biennials in locations such as Havana (where Mosquera was a founder and a member of the curatorial team in 1984, 1986 and 1989), Dakar, Johannesburg and São Paulo. See, for example, the roundtable discussion, 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003), 152-163. A more cynical view on these recent developments might be that they represent an attempt to recast the challenge of the so-called 'peripheral' biennials in the critical terms imposed by the centre.

<sup>64</sup> Wollen, 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art', p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> Wollen, 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art', pp. 73, 85.

<sup>66</sup> Rachel Weiss, interview with the author, 29 November 2004; Luis Camnitzer, interview with the author 17 November 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss note in their *Foreword*, for example, that, in Japan, the relationship with the United States as a post-war force of occupation led to an "entanglement" of local and international discourses," while in a number of Latin American countries the legacy of the United States' presence as colonial power resulted in the appearance of an "autonomous version – or even inversion" of conceptualism, as understood in the North."



'Foreword', p. x. The words or phrases contained in single inverted commas indicate Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss' own citations from the respective catalogue essays by Reiko Tomii and Mari Carmen Ramirez in the same volume.

<sup>68</sup> Camnitzer, Farver and Weiss. 'Foreword', p. viii.

<sup>69</sup> Ramírez, 'Tactics for Thriving on Adversity', p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> Terry Smith, 'Peripheries in Motion: Conceptualism and Conceptual Art in Australia and New Zealand' in *Global Conceptualism*, 87-95 (p. 87).

<sup>71</sup> Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum* 13, no. 1 (September 1974), 54-59 (p. 54).

<sup>72</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', p. 55. The last phrase is cited from Robert Hughes, ed., *The Art of Australia* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 314.

<sup>74</sup> Sung Wan-kyung, 'From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea', in *Global Conceptualism*, 119-125 (p. 119).

<sup>75</sup> Sung, 'From the Local Context', pp. 119-120.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', pp. 56, 58.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', p. 57.

<sup>78</sup> *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, pp. 92, 93. One response to this problem was the series of public discussions organised and led by Terry Smith for Art & Language that coincided with MoMA's travelling exhibition *Modern Masters: From Manet to Matisse* when it appeared at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. The discussions aimed to set before the Australian public some of the issues of 'official' history and cultural imperialism, and included a series of 'blurts' transmitted by telex from Art & Language in New York. See, Terry Smith, 'Review: Fighting Modern Masters', *The Fox* 2 (1975): 15-21; Michael Corris, 'Another Look at the Social Dimension of Indexing', <[http://blurting-in.zkm.de/e/another\\_look](http://blurting-in.zkm.de/e/another_look)> (11/03/03); Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith, *Art & Language Australia 1975* (Banbury; New York; Sydney: Art & Language Press, 1976).

<sup>79</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', pp. 57, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', p. 59.

<sup>81</sup> Mari Carmen Ramírez has claimed that such tactics were characteristic of the practices of many artists in Latin America who, "by reason of their colonial legacy, have for centuries been situated in a dialogic relationship with various artistic traditions of Europe and the United States. As with any other tendency originating in non-hegemonic areas, however, the work of these artists engaged in a pattern of assimilation/conversion largely guided by the internal dynamics and contradictions of the local context. This dialectical exchange resulted in an autonomous version – or even inversion – of important tenets of European and North American Modernism." 'Tactics for Thriving on Adversity', pp. 53-71. Alexander Alberro has proposed the metaphor of 'cannibalism' in discussing the relationship of the Brazilian artists, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles to mainstream Modernism. (See his paper, 'Cannibalism, Tropicalia and Conceptual Art', given at the symposium, *Conceptual Art*, Courtauld Institute, London, 20 May 2004.) Where this metaphor yields further associations of 'consumption,' it does not seem specific to a Brazilian context but could be applied, for example, to John Latham's action *Still and Chew* in which pages from Clement Greenberg's seminal *Art and Culture* were chewed, spat out and distilled (see my discussion in Chapter Six). In the Soviet Union, although they were not responding to an externally imposed ideology but, instead to that imposed internally by the State, Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid's *Kotlety "Pravda"* (*Hamburgers "Pravda"*) (1975) employed similar means to recycle the products of a dominating ideology. Komar and Melamid



tore pages from the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and ground them up to produce an unappealing and indigestible greyish 'burger,' thus rendering the published propaganda chromatically and ideologically neutral.

<sup>82</sup> Ian Burn, 'Art is what we do, culture is what we do to other artists', in Burn, *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991), pp. 131-139 (p.138). The article drew on issues arising from Burn's ongoing conversation with Mel Ramsden.

<sup>83</sup> Elisabeth Sussman, 'Curator's work: The Pragmatics of Internationalism', in *Global Visions*, pp. 164. See also Sussman's essay, 'The Third Zone: Soviet "Postmodern"', in *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. by David A. Ross (Tacoma, Washington; Boston, Mass.: Tacoma Art Museum; Institute of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp. 61-72, in which the Bayonne series of Vitaly Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, especially, is taken to be representative of the state of hybridity and to establish "a mythic 'non-place' between the ideals of East and West."

<sup>84</sup> Sussman, 'Curator's work', p. 164. The point is reinforced by Victor Tupitsyn in his catalogue essay for *Between Spring and Summer*. Tupitsyn points out, for instance, that "while the simulation of the Western art infrastructure in a Socialist environment gave birth to a host of unforeseen problems," including the frustrated expectation of artists that "the West would turn into a fairy-tale prince appreciative of their devotion to true art," at the same time "an increasing number of Western artists... are becoming engaged in exploring Soviet exhibition spaces" giving rise to the "Orientalist belief that the East might soon become 'rediscovered' as a new aural space for American and European art." Victor Tupitsyn, 'East-West Exchange: Ecstasy of (Mis)Communication', in *Between Spring and Summer*, pp. 89, 97.

<sup>85</sup> Roundtable discussion, 'Global Tendencies', p. 154.

<sup>86</sup> "Thematic synthesis," as Marcia E. Vetrocq pointed out, "was not the mission of 'Global Conceptualism,' nor was the investigation of artists' biographies and the impact of education, travel and displacement on their work. But what might we have surmised about cultural origins if we had experienced Opalka's evanescent numbers next to the insistent black calligraphy of Rachid Koraïchi, an Algerian artist who turns texts into pulsing patterns of genuine calligraphy and invented symbols. Consider that Opalka (categorized as Western Europe, not Eastern Europe) lives in France but is of Polish ancestry, was educated in Poland and supplements his number paintings with audiotapes of counting in Polish. Fold in the fact that Koraïchi was educated in Paris as well as Algiers before fundamentalism led to his exile in Tunisia, and that his preoccupation with writing as image stems from, rather than standing in opposition to, his native visual tradition. An artist's 'point of origin' cannot account for the interplay of life and work, nor can 'Conceptualism' embrace all this and more and remain a meaningful category." Vetrocq, 'Conceptualism: an expanded view,' pp. 76-77.

## Chapter Six

### Empty Slogans and a Whiff of History? The Fate of Conceptual Art in Britain

**Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975, The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 4 February - 2 April 2000**

How should one describe the *type* of art which the Whitechapel Art Gallery's *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* set out to re-examine? More particularly, how should one do this in the context of an academic project that considers the representation of *Conceptual art* in retrospective survey exhibitions? The difficulty of these tasks was announced in the very title of this exhibition, for while *Live In Your Head* explicitly declared itself as a historical survey of the decade 1965-1975, the phrase 'Conceptual art' was itself conspicuously absent. Instead, the subtitle proclaimed the exhibition's intention to explore the rather more nebulous categories of "concept and experiment." And if the exhibition was not about Conceptual art, still less was it about *British* Conceptual art: eligibility for inclusion was not determined by nationality, but by the artist's having produced work in Britain.

All this makes *Live in Your Head* exceptionally difficult to discuss in any terms other than those that it established for itself. Its title and premise deftly disarmed in advance any criticism of its treatment of Conceptual art by insisting that this was not, in any case, what the show was about. Nevertheless, reviews of the exhibition published in both the national and the specialist art press generally echoed the view that "something of the sort [was] central to the subject in hand."<sup>1</sup> The exhibition is worth considering, then, precisely because it raised these vexed issues of definition, of internationalism versus provincialism, of chronology and of Conceptual art's geographical 'homes.' Proceeding from an initial discussion of the way in which curatorial decisions on these matters predetermined the chaotic pluralism of the exhibition display, this chapter then moves on to examine how the profusion of competing approaches produced a radically de-contextualizing effect which severed much of the work from the locus of its meaning.

In its earliest stages of planning, *Live in Your Head* had been conceived as an exhibition that would be about "British conceptual and experimental art" of a

certain period.<sup>2</sup> The initial idea and the proposed title, *Live in Your Head*, had been suggested by the Whitechapel's Head of Programming, Judith Nesbitt, but development of the exhibition had then been passed to Andrea Tarsia, the Whitechapel's new curator. In April 1999, ten months before the exhibition was scheduled to open, Tarsia approached Clive Phillpot, Librarian at the Visual Arts Department of the British Council, to assist with the curation. As Lampert noted, Phillpot was the friend and contemporary of many of the artists in the exhibition. In his present position, and before that, as Librarian at Chelsea School of Art (1970 – 1977), and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1977 – 1994), he had also been "the person responsible for several of the best libraries of the period."<sup>3</sup> Phillpot describes the role he was being asked to perform thus:

It seemed like they [the Whitechapel Art Gallery] needed someone to work with Andrea, who had perhaps witnessed some of the contemporary events, who might be an advisor, or, as I soon learned, actually co-curator of the exhibition and co-editor of the catalogue. So, it seemed like it was my job in a way to research what might be in there and who might be in there, from my own experience.<sup>4</sup>

For a number of reasons, Phillpot had immediate reservations about the project he was taking on. First, he was unhappy with the idea of an exhibition that would deal explicitly with British Conceptual art, since:

Art & Language aside, Conceptual Art seemed to me to be a particular historical moment that was something to do with New York in the late sixties, and people like Kosuth and Barry and Huebler and Weiner. Therefore it seemed that to restrict ourselves to conceptualism in England was very weird when essential elements of this happened in New York – and other places, of course.<sup>5</sup>

If he was uneasy about the use of the term 'Conceptual Art' in a British context, Phillpot was equally so about the word 'British' itself. The period was one in which international travel was becoming more and more affordable, and both the increased mobility of artists and the portable nature of much of the work that was being produced, supported a critical rhetoric of internationalism and of cross-cultural influence. In their *Introduction* to the catalogue for the exhibition, (Fig. 68) Tarsia and Phillpot declared their intention to avoid "facile or bogus nationalisms" and pronounced themselves fully aware of the seeming contradiction of organising an exhibition of art in Britain from "a period that was so overtly internationalist and globalised in its manifestations." Yet they added that it would also be desirable to question the rhetoric of this internationalism:



“the limited points of reference used to define the period, and the extent to which we have yet to appreciate the true significance of artistic practices outside Western countries.”<sup>6</sup>

Rejecting the designation ‘British,’ Tarsia and Phillpot elected to use instead the phrase “in Britain.” This had at least two advantages. First, it would allow for the inclusion of some of the many artists who had come to Britain from abroad during the period in question, and whose “contribution to the development of artistic practices in the UK has been lasting and profound.”<sup>7</sup> Second, in combination with the curators’ disavowal of the term ‘Conceptual art’, it exempted them from the task of having to define *British* Conceptual art in relation to its American counterpart, and thereby of defending it against the hegemonic status given to the American variety in most earlier accounts. Nevertheless, for Rosetta Brooks, who admitted to the “frivolous, tongue-in-cheek, maybe even paranoid hypothesis” of her catalogue essay, the exhibition provided an opportunity to challenge the orthodoxy that had consigned “British conceptual pioneers” to historical oblivion.<sup>8</sup>

Catherine Lampert, the Whitechapel’s director, recalled in her ‘Foreword’ to the catalogue that, “[a] year ago when the Whitechapel began planning this show, we wished to avoid an archetypal ‘historic’ approach as well as any provincially British twist.”<sup>9</sup> Despite this, the intention of the exhibition was easily misunderstood when its curators were able to declare that many of the artists working in Britain at this time were “still awaiting appraisal in a British context,” moreover, that the exhibition set out to “redress that situation, and to clarify the points of origin of a formative generation in British art.”<sup>10</sup> For Phillpot and Tarsia, one responsibility of *Live in Your Head* was to rectify the under-representation of British art in the various international exhibitions that had previously examined the artistic legacy of the 1960s and 1970s. There had been several international shows, Phillpot has noted, “that inevitably included only a sprinkling of artists who had worked in Britain. It seemed to me that it was a good time to reveal the depth of experiment and change in Britain at this time.”<sup>11</sup> While, on the one hand, an exhibition about art in Britain during this period opened itself to criticism on account of what may have been perceived as its nationalistic representation, there was, on the other hand, an opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which changes in art’s global infrastructure had begun, at this time, to make the ideal of a ‘universal’ language of art seem attainable; if the exhibition

could sufficiently reflect these changes, then the 'national' exhibition might be revealed as not so 'national' after all.<sup>12</sup>

In her 'Foreword' Lampert also observed how recent exhibitions such as *Out of Actions* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles had "made it clear that the extreme will to tear up the old blueprints for art was as forceful in Japan, Brazil and California as it was in Vienna, New York and London."<sup>13</sup> By locating the Whitechapel's *Live in Your Head* in the context of a major international exhibition such as *Out of Actions*, Lampert gives an indication of an ambition for the Whitechapel to be recognised as a part of the global network of major art institutions. As part of this network, and by contributing to the recent series of international surveys examining the period, it might have been the case that, as Lampert hoped, "the critique and conversation generated by the exhibition [would] lead... to further reassessment of the period."<sup>14</sup>

Such a reassessment might recognize at last the historical innovations of artists working in Britain. While Phillpot and Tarsia distanced themselves from the term 'Conceptual art,' Brooks seemed still to want to settle a score over the 'true' origins of the movement, claiming that its roots lay in "a uniquely European experience (the aftermath of World War II)," in "European, philosophical existentialism and twentieth century cosmology."<sup>15</sup> It was her contention that, since the end of the 1960s, the European perspective had been suppressed and the British conceptual pioneers consigned to oblivion in order to bolster the American orthodoxy. The foreseeable criticism, then, was that a good number of the artists included in *Live in Your Head* would be unfamiliar to both a domestic and an international public, but if this was case, their presence was to be expected in an exhibition that challenged previously accepted histories of the period. *Live in Your Head* thus allowed both curators and director to articulate between the internationalist agenda of the institution and a localised neglect.

While the chronology (1965-1975) advanced by the exhibition afforded an opportunity to foreground the significant precursors of Conceptual art activity in Britain, it was on this matter of chronology that Phillpot and Tarsia's evasiveness about Conceptual art was most conspicuous. "Exhibitions and publications," they claimed, "have tended, in the past, to view the period from 1968 to 1972 as definitive." Definitive of what, the curators did not say, but it seems likely that they intended, if not exactly Conceptual art, then certainly what might be termed

'conceptual tendencies.'<sup>16</sup> Expanded to cover the full decade from 1965-1975, it was doubtless the curators' hope that the exhibition might seem less specifically *conceptual*. But 'conceptual tendencies' are not so easily restricted to a precise time scale. On the one hand, Phillpot and Tarsia argued that (what they preferred to call) the "experimental practices" of John Latham, David Medalla, Gustav Metzger and Stephen Willats all stemmed from before 1968; yet the first three of these were precisely those artists identified by Brooks as being "conceptual pioneers." On the other hand, it was Phillpot and Tarsia's claim that "it was not until the mid-seventies that a more fundamental shift occurred towards a 'New Image' in photography and, gradually, towards 'Neo Expressionism' in painting;" but, as I have observed in Chapter Two, these tendencies were often explained at the time in terms of a reaction against the joyless austerity of conceptual practice then ongoing. In any case, Phillpot and Tarsia thought the brief time span of 1968-1972 too restrictive. By expanding the time frame to the decade 1965-1975, the curators intended to downplay the importance of specifically conceptual practices: "to bracket an historical moment rather than a definable movement."<sup>17</sup>

The main title which Phillpot and Tarsia had also inherited from Nesbitt was itself borrowed from the catalogue subtitle to Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form*, an influential and historically significant exhibition of post-minimal and conceptual work which was shown in Bern in the spring of 1969, (Fig. 69) and then travelled, arriving in revised form at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in the late summer of that year.<sup>18</sup> Of those artists who would later come to appear in the Whitechapel's *Live in Your Head*, the earlier exhibition in Bern had included only Barry Flanagan, Richard Long and David Medalla, alongside more than sixty others. When the show reached London, Long was no longer present, though Victor Burgin, Roelof Louw and Bruce McLean had been added. With the addition of these latter three, Charles Harrison, the exhibition's organiser in London, sought to increase the proportion of artists working in the home country.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, the exhibition retained a strong bias toward American artists, with Italians and Germans comprising the strongest European contingents.<sup>20</sup> If the Whitechapel's reclamation of the *Live In Your Head* tag was intended to invoke the memory of the earlier show, its use seemed curiously inappropriate for an exhibition of (what in Nesbitt's original conception was to be) *British* conceptual and experimental art, unless, of course, its use implied a correction of an earlier deficiency in representation.



The phrase *Live In Your Head* had apparently only been suggested to Szeemann in a casual remark by the artist Keith Sonnier,<sup>21</sup> and although it had appeared above the main title on the cover of the *When Attitudes Become Form* catalogue in Bern, (Fig. 70) it had been deliberately removed to the inside for its London reprint. By the time of the ICA exhibition the phrase already seemed glibly disposable: “an emptily avant-garde slogan,” as Harrison has described it. In its reprisal for the Whitechapel retrospective, it was judged by some to be both dated and tragically comic.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as Barry Schwabsky pointed out, there was an ambiguity to the title that might have important consequences for interpretations of the exhibition and the work it contained:

Whatever the case was first time around, today there are two different pronunciations of the title in circulation... either ‘Live’ is pronounced with a short ‘i,’ in which case one is being urged to philosophical idealism, if not out-and-out solipsism; or else it’s pronounced with a long ‘i,’ in which case the word is not a verb but an adjective, one promising a kind of perpetual presence while at the same time evoking the musical culture of a particular era (*The Who Live at Leeds; Aretha Live at Fillmore West*).<sup>23</sup>

On the one hand, by appropriating this title for a new exhibition, Phillpot and Tarsia rendered the artists susceptible to accusations of privateness;<sup>24</sup> on the other hand, they risked the exhibition being regarded as an exercise in pure nostalgia.<sup>25</sup> Phillpot has admitted to having had “misgivings about the title for a long time,” but, these problems notwithstanding, he gradually came to think of it as “a catchy come-on with an historical whiff.”<sup>26</sup>

Phillpot and Tarsia acknowledged that the period from 1965 to 1975 was characterised by a remarkable diversity of practice and that to focus on what were already regarded as “seminal” works would do little to expand the understanding of that time. Thus, they sought to present “a more inclusive look at the wide range of practices that characterised this fertile period.” They indicated some of the labels – “Conceptual art, arte povera, land art, experimental art, process art, systems art” – that were attributed to the art under consideration, and acknowledge that the difficulty in ascribing such labels “caused as many internal rifts as there were collective utopian visions.” With the benefit of hindsight, Phillpot and Tarsia argued, the period might be regarded as one in which “the typically modernist notion of unified movements dissolves and

fragments.”<sup>27</sup> This would seem an adequate justification for the considerable diversity of work included in *Live in Your Head*, but if there was an inherent danger in the curators’ desire to present a broadened perspective of the period, it was that such inclusiveness, without a rigorous organising principle, could easily lead to a chaotic profusion of competing approaches in the work shown.

Such an organizing principle was not obviously discernable at *Live in Your Head*. The exhibition was not arranged to support any chronological narrative; this would have been to reinstate the archetypal historical approach that the director had wished so much to avoid. Neither was it organised thematically (if such a thing might even have been possible), or according to a provincial geography which might have examined the influence, and sometimes partisan approaches, of polytechnic and art school teaching departments in which many artists were at that time employed, and of which most were products.<sup>28</sup> To present the work of more than sixty artists, as *Live in Your Head* did, alongside each other without significant contextualizing information to distinguish between quite disparate practices, gave the impression that all this activity co-existed in the same spaces, and at the same time, without difficulty or dispute. Michael Baldwin of Art & Language has admitted that there may have been “[a] sort of camaraderie of the new,” but has emphasized that this existed only “for a short time – I’d say for a matter of months – in the late 1960s when con-art got its name, and [for] a few shows.”<sup>29</sup> By the 1970s, this early spirit of co-operation and bonhomie had begun to dissipate, and the situation became one in which advocates of competing paradigms of practice frequently became embroiled in open conflict. Other artists involved in *Live in Your Head* have also disputed the image of the period as characterised by an acceptance of ‘anything goes’ experimentalism. “[It] was more like war,” Susan Hiller has claimed:

The theory people were trying to upstage everyone else by writing, publishing and arguing; the political people were trying to keep painters and non-political conceptualists out of the Artists’ Union; the dealers were extolling British landscape photography and calling it conceptual; performance artists quite conspicuously were doing what they always do, the sound poets and concrete poets lived in their own world, the painters were painting... etc.<sup>30</sup>

With the broadened perspective of artistic practice at this time, the kind of “provincial twist” so distasteful to Catherine Lampert might actually have better



enriched the visitor's understanding of this period of artistic and theoretical ferment.

For Charles Darwent, critic at *The Independent* newspaper, the unfamiliarity of many of the artists included in *Live in Your Head* could be accounted for "precisely because they thumbed their noses at bourgeois things like public galleries and art history."<sup>31</sup> John Latham's *Art and Culture* (1966-1969, Fig. 71) was one work that seemed to indicate its maker's disdain for such bourgeois institutions, though perhaps for this very reason, it is remembered as an historically important work. As *Art and Culture* was exhibited in *Live in Your Head*, it consisted of a leather case containing a damaged copy of the Clement Greenberg anthology after which the work was named, letters, photostats, labelled phials filled with powders and liquids, and various other materials. The accompanying text panel, one of the few informative labels provided in *Live in Your Head*, explained how Latham, at that time employed on the teaching staff of St Martin's School of Art, invited a number of students to join him for an event (given the title, *Still and Chew*) in which pages from a copy of *Art and Culture* - which had been borrowed from the art school's library - would be chewed and spat out, the resulting residues treated with chemicals, fermented and distilled. When, some time later, Latham was issued with a notice for the return of the book, he presented the library instead with a glass jar labelled 'Art and Culture' which contained the book's distilled mass. The following day he received a letter dismissing him from his teaching post.

*Art and Culture* was one of very few works borrowed from overseas for *Live in Your Head* (being now a part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York) but Phillpot had been determined to include it in the show. For him, the work was "absolutely seminal:"

Latham, at that time, and before '65, was extremely important in establishing a different kind of art in this country. And his friends' chewing and spitting out of Clement Greenberg's 'Art and Culture' to make a new culture was punningly symbolic of this new beginning.<sup>32</sup>

That Latham's work now resides in the permanent collection of the august Museum of Modern Art might appear to confirm that the transgressive power of its original action has diminished with the passage of time, but that power would always have been felt more keenly within the petty bureaucracy of the education

system than within an art world solicitous of the latest neo-Dadaist affront to bourgeois taste. Although Latham's piece retains a certain notoriety in anecdote, at *Live in Your Head*, enshrined in a glass or perspex case, (Fig. 72) it appeared rather innocuous. For visitors who were unfamiliar with the work, the recovery of any frisson of criticality could only have come through reading the exhibition text. *Art and Culture* was, however, located in a prominent freestanding position, a short distance into the main gallery on the Whitechapel's ground floor, and slightly to the left. Phillpot had indicated that the work was seminal in ushering in the forms of the new art, but it was also "essential to the exhibition."<sup>33</sup> *Art and Culture* served to indicate a pre-history of the period by referencing Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, and thereby also to orientate the rest of the exhibition in relation to the crisis suffered by Modernism in the early 1960s. This somewhat tokenistic use of a 'key' work was repeated in the similarly prominent positions in the lower gallery allocated to the only painting in the exhibition, Bob Law's *Number 95. Mr. Paranoia IV 20.11.70* (1970) and to the reconstruction of Roelof Louw's sculpture *Pyramid: Soul City* (1967). (Figs. 73, 74, 75) Law's imposing painting – over two metres by four – consisted of a blank surface with an uneven black line delimiting its edge; Louw's *Pyramid* was constructed from six thousand oranges which visitors to the exhibition were free to remove. As Phillpot has admitted, these two works were present to indicate the exhaustion of existing cultural categories: "here was a painting that was somewhat empty. It's like the end of painting... The vanishing pyramid was like the end of sculpture."<sup>34</sup>

In his essay for the catalogue of *Live in Your Head*, Phillpot made a similar argument concerning the demise of the traditional art object during this period. The *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS), which took place in London in 1966, organised principally by Gustav Metzger, John Sharkey and Heathcote Williams, had been an especially important event, Phillpot argued, since it had brought together an international cast of artists, poets, musicians and scientists. It was especially noteworthy in that "[u]nusually, an international tendency in the arts was articulated and given impetus in Britain."<sup>35</sup> DIAS was construed by its organisers as a response to the threat of the bomb and the politics of the Cold War; the various events set out to consider the question of how art might be brought into the social realm, and to reveal art's potential as a form of protest and political agitation. In indicating the significant influence of DIAS for a generation of British artists in the later 60s and 70s, Phillpot suggested that the work of these artists could best be understood in relation to its broad social



context, and that it proceeded from a feeling "that perhaps the cultural base had been burnt out."<sup>36</sup>

DIAS had responded to tendencies which had, for a number of years, been developing within progressive forms of art, and which would continue to develop into the later 1960s and the 1970s. These tendencies toward a reduction in the physical form of the art object, and the attendant notions of the "tabula rasa" and the "void" constituted for Phillipot,

as great a rupture in the practice of art as had happened during the "moment of cubism" at the beginning of the century. Just as the intensity of their researches led Picasso and Braque to reduce their palettes, and their dependence on paint, while form and signification were pushed into unknown territory, so artists in the 60s reduced their dependence upon hand-crafted images and objects, and then dispensed with the attendant media altogether. But what comes after nothing? The Cubists took their transformation of depiction to a new frontier but did not feel able to cross it. Rather, they returned to their earlier preoccupations, utilising the new language of depiction they had pioneered. Some artists in the 60s, however, came to the brink and leapt into the void.<sup>37</sup>

Having claimed that a sense of rupture was widely felt by artists of the period, Phillipot then embarked upon a fairly conventional, and more-or-less sequential, narrative in which first language, then photography (or photo-text), the "unmediated object," performance and, finally, socially engaged or activist work come to occupy the void. Phillipot seemed to conceive of the void primarily in material rather than theoretical terms: the void being one "beyond painting and sculpture," where "materials like paint and clay" are left behind.<sup>38</sup> The so-called "dematerialisation of art," first advanced by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, was undoubtedly one of the key critical discourses of the late 1960s, but to attend only to the physical aspect of the works – either as the latest and most radical formal innovation, or as the reiteration of the avant-gardist 'least possible object' – denies the extent to which they represented a critical response to the aesthetic doctrine of the dominant Modernist theory. As I indicated in Chapter Four, the problem for artists in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s lay not with the object as such, but with the prevailing model of the ideally disinterested viewer and the 'presentness' that was supposed to be discovered through the act of looking. In many, perhaps the majority, of cases, any tendency toward 'dematerialisation' was incidental to the requirement felt by artists to restore to the work some form of 'content' –

however minimal or ephemeral were the means – which would secure the viewer's productive mental engagement.

With the possible exception of 'sound' or 'visual' poetry, this was true across the range of practices included in *Live in Your Head*, and it was the return to various forms of content, rather than any tendency toward formal reduction, that was perhaps the one unifying factor between artists with such different concerns as Conrad Atkinson and the Art & Language group, for example. Conrad Atkinson, an artist whose overtly political, community-centred art practices (discussed later in this chapter) were extremely influential throughout the 1970s, admitted to the continuation of certain formal considerations in his practice at that time, but explained how these were always secondary to the message he sought to communicate. Looking back on his earlier practice in 1978, Atkinson described how this had been an attempt "to escape from formal investigation and reinstate subject matter." "It was partly looking for a new subject and partly looking for a new form," he conceded, "but I knew which side I was on – I was on the side of the subject-matter, because formal innovation is a dead end."<sup>39</sup>

The conversationally-based practice of Art & Language did not orientate itself to the notion of 'the social' as something 'out there' in the 'real world' but, instead, tried to construct a notion of 'the social' as something extensible from the group's own inter-relations. Although in this, and many other respects, the group's practice was very different from that of Conrad Atkinson, it demonstrated the necessity, as Charles Harrison has put it, "to find its way back to some sense of content, depth, complexity, rigour, of a kind that art had been capable of sustaining in the past, but couldn't achieve by the same means anymore."<sup>40</sup> In the mid-to-late 1960s, with ever more exotic variants of the dematerialised or imaginary art object being proposed, Art & Language's recourse to various theoretical and philosophical perspectives from beyond the realm of the arts was consistent with the attempt to discover a defensible position from which the nomination of such exotic entities might be sustained. As Michael Baldwin has remembered: "it seemed to me that I had some responsibility to try and get my head round it, to try and be, to some degree, adroit, since what I was doing was so strange. Since there was nothing to see, I'd better start getting a little bit informed about it. And that was a responsibility which was, to a degree, social and cultural."<sup>41</sup>



A further danger in an approach, such as Phillipot's, that attempts to identify the significance of the work of this period with its negation of the materially-defined work of art is that it may seem to put the cart before the horses - 'dematerialised' work appearing to have *produced* the crisis in Modernism, rather than having emerged as a *response to*, and then as an exacerbation of, an already experienced breakdown in its viability. (I refrain from saying that the work was *produced by* Modernism's crisis and this would imply a crude determinism.) In this regard, Peter Osborne, the philosopher and writer on art, has provided a useful analysis.<sup>42</sup> Osborne has described how Conceptual art emerged following changes in the relationship between art and art criticism in the first half of the 1960s at a time when Modernism's viability was being tested against the emergent practices of Minimalism. As I have indicated in earlier chapters, Minimalism can be regarded ambiguously as the ultimate expression of formalist reduction, but also as representing a challenge to some of the key tenets of Modernism - 'presentness' and 'instantaneousness' probably chief among them.<sup>43</sup> In Britain, however, the extent to which Minimalism also raised serious questions for Modernist criticism may have been missed, it being often regarded as a more rigorous outgrowth of 'hard-edge' painting.<sup>44</sup> Osborne has described how these changes in the relationship between art and its criticism involved both the increasing art-critical emphasis on the essential nature of works of art and their legitimate form, and an eagerness on the part of many artists associated with Minimalism to participate themselves in these debates. This led to the erosion of traditionally maintained categorical distinctions: art-practice expanded to incorporate aspects of what previously was considered art-criticism (or art-theory).<sup>45</sup> In the early 1960s, the forms of abstract painting and 'relational' sculpture still being championed in Modernist criticism had come to appear vacuous, their meanings only established through a sophisticated critical discourse external to them. Not only, then, were the practices of the later 1960s and early 1970s an attempt to reinvest the artwork with 'content,' but, arguably, the move toward linguistic models of communication was a consequence of the vigorous critical debate between Modernists and Minimalists through which language itself came to be seen as the most potent representational form.

If, as I have claimed, the notion of art-practice in the late 1960s was expanding to incorporate aspects of what had previously been thought of as art-criticism or art-theory, the possibility that there might be a reciprocal expansion in the category of art-criticism to incorporate aspects of art-practice were generally

resisted. This was the case even with critics as keen to acknowledge the fluidity of the contemporary situation as Lucy Lippard. In David Lamelas' *Publication*, a thin volume exhibited at *Live in Your Head* in a vitrine containing a number of artists' publications, Lippard recalled: "When I wrote a critical text (not wholly recognizable as such) for the Museum of Modern Art's *Information* catalogue, it was put into the body of the book with the artists' contributions and I was listed with the artists. This confuses matters and I didn't know about it until too late. I rather like its confusing matters but I don't like to be listed as an artist."<sup>46</sup>

Lamelas' book was itself an attempt to investigate the significance of language in the visual arts at this time. Lamelas had been invited by Nigel Greenwood to present a conventional exhibition in his gallery space, but proposed instead an exhibition in book form. Lamelas wrote to a number of artists and critics inviting them to respond to three statements: "1. Use of oral and written language as an Art Form. 2. Language can be considered as an Art Form. 3. Language cannot be considered as an Art Form." Their published responses became the exhibition.<sup>47</sup>

Clive Phillpot had had a long association with artists' books; he had set up the Special Collections Library while at Chelsea School of Art, he had developed the Artists' Book Collection at the Museum of Modern Art, and had written a number of books and articles on artists' publications.<sup>48</sup> At the time of *Live in Your Head*, he was Librarian in the Visual Arts Department of the British Council where he was responsible for an extensive archive of artists' books. Because of his association in this area, he had not suggested that artists' books be included in the exhibition. Instead, it was Andrea Tarsia who proposed this.<sup>49</sup> Because of limitations of space, however, artists' books could not be shown in the main space of the gallery, but a number of books were presented in the foyer of the Whitechapel. (Fig. 75) Phillpot seems to have found this a rather unsatisfactory compromise, it being "rather unfortunate [that] there was just this tail of books out in the lobby."<sup>50</sup> The books were not present to provide background information on the artists since Phillpot was reluctant to provide ancillary reading matter:

I was against that, quite honestly. I wanted a more visual experience... It seemed to me that those works on the wall and on the floor are something you can deal with, as "real art"... I was all for the paramountcy [sic] of the works. So I personally didn't want to clutter them up with ancillary things to read as well.<sup>51</sup>



Separated from the main body of works, the books were likely to be overlooked. Moreover, confined within a vitrine, they could not be handled or read. Had the focus of the exhibition been somewhat different – a show of artists' books of the sort with which he is often associated – Phillpot conceded that “you would have had to [have] things to handle, I'm all for that.” Instead, “[t]he artists' books were a gesture, to say ‘these were important’... it would have been nice if you could have read some of them. But it was such an arbitrary selection that I didn't want to do anything more than that.”<sup>52</sup>

Phillpot considered magazines important enough to display in the upstairs main gallery, however, since he felt that these said “more about group manifestations than other kinds of material.”<sup>53</sup> A number of magazines were shown, demonstrating the variety of these publications, from the rigorously theoretical to the dada-esque, and including also the cassette magazine, *Audio Arts*. Again, these materials were displayed under glass, inaccessible to the gallery visitor. (Figs. 76, 77) In many cases there will have been conservation issues with these materials, but the curators arguably showed little concern or initiative in devising means by which such issues might have been, at least partly, overcome. This was unfortunate since, despite the inclusion of Robin Crozier's mail art piece *Portrait of Robin Crozier* (1973-75), the dynamic of communication and exchange that characterized the working procedures of many artists at the time risked being occluded.

Around one year after *Live in Your Head*, the Norwich Gallery held an exhibition entitled *Conception: Conceptual Documents, 1968-1972*.<sup>54</sup> The curator of this exhibition, Catherine Moseley, was equally as constrained as the curators of *Live in Your Head* by the fragility and scarcity of the materials she was working with. As Moseley noted,

[a]rtists' work in published form was, by its very nature, intended to be handled, portable and immediate... However as these conceptual documents age, they become perceived as precious... The circumstances of their display, in an exhibition, in a gallery, necessitated the imposition of a degree of physical protection, including frames, glass topped vitrines and low light levels.<sup>55</sup>

But Moseley was more sensitive than were Phillpot and Tarsia to the contradictions imposed by the exhibition, and also to the requirement to remain

sensitive to the conditions of communication utilised by, and realised through now historic documents. "The content of an historic exhibition... enables some degree of access to, and knowledge of, these works but at the same time restricts their accessibility," she observed. In the design of the exhibition catalogue and "dispatch," Moseley attempted to compensate for this. The dispatch, a publication circulated to all those on the Norwich Gallery's mailing list, was consciously modelled on the *Bulletins* developed as a means of disseminating artists' works by Adriaan Van Ravensteijn at Art & Project in Amsterdam, beginning in 1968. Similarly, the exhibition catalogue was intended to provide, wherever possible, a site or a vehicle for the artists' works, rather than their secondary illustration. Thus, although on the one hand it documented a historical exhibition, to a limited extent, it also performed the same function as earlier catalogues-as-exhibition. Since "[c]atalogues for temporary exhibitions can be read," as Moseley pointed out, "by anyone, anywhere, over a longer timespan than a six week exhibition confined by its physical location and its intrinsically finite nature,"<sup>56</sup> the works included were granted an indefinite lifespan.

The condition of static unreadability imposed on book works and magazines at *Live in Your Head* was unfortunate, but by their very nature, these materials continued at least to signify their function of interaction, even if they were unable actively to perform it. The same thing could not be said of some other works exhibited. Art & Language's *Index 01*, originally shown at *Documenta V* in Kassel (previously discussed in Chapter Two), (Figs. 21, 22) gathered all the texts written by the group since 1968 into a series of eight filing cabinets, the texts within being accessible to exhibition visitors at a convenient height for reading. On the walls of the room housing the filing cabinets were a number of photographically enlarged sheets on which was displayed a system of citations by which discursive units from these texts were analysed for their relations of compatibility. A revised version of the *Index*, designated *Index 02*, was shown at the Hayward Gallery exhibition *The New Art*, on which occasion it was described by Charles Harrison as "offering 1) means of information – and process – retrieval for the spectator, and 2) means to an internal reflexive consciousness among the Art-Language community."<sup>57</sup>

Given the extent to which the *Index* was intended as a functioning tool through which the conversational work of Art & Language might be publicly examined



and recovered, it was unfortunate that at *Live in Your Head, Index 01* (Fig. 78) appeared with the drawers to the filing cabinets securely locked, and its texts inaccessible within. This was especially disappointing since *Index 01* had been shown with the drawers unlocked the previous autumn (1999) at a survey of Art & Language work, 1972-1981, at PS1 in New York.<sup>58</sup> While on display in New York, however, the work had been defaced by visitors to the exhibition, and it had consequently been a condition of the loan to the Whitechapel, and of the work's insurance, that its drawers remain closed.<sup>59</sup> Prior to the opening of *Live in Your Head*, Clive Phillpot and a number of others involved in organising the exhibition had "looked through the items in the file drawers of *Index 01* and began to understand the indexing better." The requirement that the drawers remain locked only became known around the time of the opening, however, when a member of the gallery staff informed the curators of the lender's stipulation.<sup>60</sup> Under the conditions of display imposed upon *Index 01*, and with no explanation provided, the visitor without prior knowledge had either to conclude that the work was designed to be inaccessible – "the grand allegory of art's contemporary privateness," for which Rudi H. Fuchs had (mis)taken it as long ago as its installation in *The New Art*<sup>61</sup> – or that it should be regarded as a kind of minimalist installation. Despite the unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances that produced this situation, it was nonetheless symptomatic of an exhibition in which the visual, under Phillpot's guidance, took precedence over the conversational, discursive, linguistic and textual aspects of art from a period in which these frequently came to the fore.

For at least one reviewer of the exhibition, however, the requirement for the filing cabinets to remain closed was quite welcome. Laura Cumming, writing in *The Observer*, commented that "[w]orst of all," amongst "some of the most fatuous, self-absorbed and nihilistic work you'll ever see" were "the Art & Language team who have covered the walls with impenetrable codes and installed several filing cabinets full of their deadening critical theories. Mercifully, these cabinets can no longer be opened. They have long since been commodified into collector's items."<sup>62</sup> In their refusal of the unique art-object, its commodity-status, and of connoisseurship, the artistic practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s have usually been thought of as posing a critique of the gallery and museum system. Cummings thus highlights a question about the degree of ease with which these practices can (after sufficient time has been allowed to elapse) be safely

returned to an institutional environment as the now precious objects of the collector's attention, and as providing the materials of an historical curiosity.

This question had previously been raised on the occasion of the Tate Gallery's mounting of a display of 'Conceptualism' in 1993. In a letter to *Art Monthly*, John A. Walker had criticised the Tate display for creating "the impression of a series of 'precious' objects," as if the quite ordinary items and textual reproductions on display were "unique, or worth more than a few pounds, or aren't reproducible by anyone who wants to." Walker went on to assert that, "the radical impulses of Conceptual art implied a transcendence of art galleries and museums," and claimed that what had shocked him was "the recuperative power of the museum, its ability to disguise those radical impulses, to simplify, homogenise and sanitise, to remove any sign of the contradictions, passions and the politics associated with Conceptual art."<sup>63</sup> Several reviewers of *Live in Your Head* noted the implied critique of the work of this period, and the paradox of its being displayed some thirty years later in a major historical exhibition. Here was a philosophical problem for museum professionals, argued Charles Darwent, "Do you: (a) respect the spirit of the art in question and show something else instead; or (b) ignore that spirit and show it anyway, in the belief that you are serving some kind of greater art historical good?"<sup>64</sup>

Some work in *Live in Your Head* did appear to have suffered from being subjected to the conditions of its display in an historical exhibition. John Dugger's *Banner for Chile (Chile Vencera)* (1974), for example, had been made as a spectacular backdrop for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square, London, in support of Chilean resistance to the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet. (Fig. 79) For *Live in Your Head*, it had originally been planned to hang the banner in a visually commanding location at the far end of the ground-floor gallery, but because of the requirement to construct a number of temporary rooms in this area, it had to be moved upstairs. (Fig. 80) In the larger downstairs space, some sense of the banner's impact and function might still have been recoverable; in the smaller gallery upstairs – where the banner could not be unfurled to its fullest extent – it appeared contained *by* the space rather than commanding *of* it. (Fig. 81) Other, works, however, maintained a more difficult presence in the exhibition. Roelof Louw's *Pyramid (Soul City)* was, in a sense, a victim of its own success. By the end of the opening event, even before the public had had a chance to encounter the work, the six thousand oranges had



been reduced to an untidy pile only a few layers deep. Over the course of the exhibition, Louw's *Pyramid* was rarely restored to its initial form. (Fig. 82) As Phillpot has admitted, no one on the Whitechapel's staff could regularly spare the time to maintain the work's more standardised appearance.<sup>65</sup>

*Pyramid (Soul City)* had first been made for the Arts Lab, (Fig. 74) an experimental arts complex founded in 1967, and a venue for the wider 'counter-culture' in London at that time. As Charles Harrison has recalled, Louw's philanthropic intention was to "provide the hippies with some vitamin C."<sup>66</sup> By the early 1970s, however, the idealism of the counter-culture had faded, and many artists became involved in forms of art that sought to re-imagine art's relationship to society, often in terms of more class-conscious, feminist or community-based practices.

Conrad Atkinson's installation *Strike at Brannans*, (Fig. 83) shown at the ICA in 1972, was one of the earliest and most influential exhibitions in this respect. Atkinson had been invited to present an exhibition at the ICA and had decided to make "a last gesture against art"<sup>67</sup> by making the subject of his exhibition the nine-month-old strike at the Brannans thermometer factory in his hometown of Cleator Moor, Cumbria. Spending a number of weeks in Cleator Moor, Atkinson's subsequent installation at the ICA consisted of a presentation of the data he had collected: case histories, wage slips, diaries, photographs and video made in collaboration with the strikers. *Strike* could not be shown at *Live in Your Head*, however, since the work had been dismantled and dispersed immediately upon its de-installation from the ICA exhibition. Atkinson was represented by another work, *A Shade of Green, an Orange Edge* (1975), that documented his investigations of the troubles in Northern Ireland during the mid-1970s.

Social-documentary work of this type typically has a built in obsolescence determined by the topicality of the issues with which it is concerned. Around 1975, for example, Atkinson was invited to remake *Strike* for an exhibition in Australia. For the artist, this was "completely missing the point of the dynamic of the thing." The re-made *Strike* would have existed in entirely different circumstances to the original; only three years after its first inception, the work was already "art history not reality." The most satisfying thing about it, as Atkinson told the critic Richard Cork, was that some of the photographic

elements of the installation were now hanging in the homes of the striking workers rather than on the walls of art galleries.<sup>68</sup>

Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly and Kay Fido Hunt worked with Harrison on *Strike at Brannans* and similar working methods were employed in their own collaborative exhibition *Women and Work: A Document of the Division of Labour in Industry*, shown at the South London Gallery in 1975. (Figs. 84, 85) *Women and Work* was the result of the trio's examination of the working conditions experienced by the mostly female workforce at the Metal Box factory in Southwark over a period of approximately two years. Its presentation at the South London Gallery incorporated photography, film, sound recording, printed documents and data analysis. Phillpot had very much wanted to acquire *Women and Work* for the Whitechapel retrospective, and although it was initially difficult to trace, sections of the original exhibit occupied a significant position on the left-hand wall of the first gallery, in close proximity to the work of Latham, Law and Louw. (Fig. 75)

Historically, a significant difficulty with work of the type produced by Atkinson, or Harrison, Hunt and Kelly, was the disjunction between the site of its production (the strikers' community, the factory shopfloor), and that of its presentation (the art gallery).<sup>69</sup> For whom, it was asked, was this art intended: for the communities with whose co-operation it had been produced, or for a gallery-going elite? The critic James Faure Walker considered this the central paradox of 'social art:' "does it have to be seen to be social to be social? Why, having made the trek into the social heartland, is it necessary to address the 'small circle of initiates' that they should have left behind?"<sup>70</sup> The need to 'report back' to their colleagues in the artworld, however, was not usually regarded by the artists themselves as a betrayal of the work's context-specificity, since the 'real work' was thought to already have been done in the community, in helping socially disadvantaged groups to discover a voice through which to express their opinions, grievances and concerns. As Conrad Atkinson told Tim Rollins, when looking back on his work of the 1970s:

[I]n some ways you can see the high art gallery exhibitions as trophy rooms, but it doesn't bother me if these objects have left the realm of practice and have turned into "art." The actual work has been so vigorous, so varied, and so collaborative, that I've really not had the



time to contemplate the art status of the pieces. This material performs differently according to different uses.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, there was even a usefulness to be found in presenting community-based work *specifically* for an art audience in that it might awaken artists' consciousness of their own institutional and social locatedness, and provide a model for further forms of socially engaged art practice.<sup>72</sup> But the contradictions were not entirely overcome. If the 'real work' was indeed carried out in 'the field,' and if its effectiveness was to be measured by its social agency – one positive effect of *Strike*, according to Atkinson, was the unionisation of Brannans' London factory – then why did such work need to maintain an art identity at all? Why could it not satisfy itself as single-issue politics or community action?

The fact that these practices *did* self-consciously maintain their 'art' identity meant the survival in the work of aesthetic considerations that were superfluous to a purely social function, and that, arguably, diluted its message. Such considerations were justified by Atkinson in terms of the requirement to organise the various materials in a cohesive and comprehensive manner: "how to make it all comprehensible, how to make it all fit into the system to draw the picture. All those decisions have to be made... and they are the kinds of decisions I remember making when I was painting still life at Carlisle in the late fifties."<sup>73</sup> But such work was typically more ambiguous in its mode of communication than was straightforward reportage. As Faure Walker noted, "the presentational style is post-conceptual... The information panels exhibit themselves, so to speak, as much as they inform, or function socially. They are more like tokens, scorecards of hours spent in people contact, on mural work, on local political campaigns, paraded for an audience of witnesses." The real content of social art, he felt, was "an *idea* about social art addressed in large measure to other artists."<sup>74</sup>

Despite the contradictions involved in showing what Faure Walker disparagingly referred to as "social art," and despite its often built-in obsolescence, it would demonstrate a cavalier approach to their subject for curators of historical survey exhibitions to disregard these developments. Phillpot has confirmed the importance of trying to reflect the social and political dimension of art practice during the 1970s, but has admitted that the inclusion of selected works in *Live in Your Head* could only ever be a token gesture toward the historical context within which artists were working: "in the end, what you're left with is just these

artefacts around the walls.”<sup>75</sup> There is undeniably a process of transformation in the retrospective survey exhibition that works against the recovery of any palpable sense of the works’ social and cultural contingency, but this should not be taken as evidence of curatorial conspiracy. It is rather that, as a visual medium, there are natural and inevitable limits to what the exhibition is able to *show*.

In the spring of 2000 the idea of “social art,” it seemed, was once again of interest to artists and the gallery-going public alike. *Live in Your Head* was the first of a number of exhibitions that year that set out to examine both the social and political concerns of artists, as well as art’s own function in society; among these were *Democracy!* at the Royal College of Art, (Fig. 86) the Whitechapel’s own *Protest and Survive*, and the Wolverhampton Art Gallery’s *Look Out: Art-Society-Politics*.<sup>76</sup> This revival of interest in the social and political dimension of art occurred at the end of a decade during which a generation of “Young British Artists” (YBAs) had attained an unprecedented international profile. As a number of reviews of *Live in Your Head* confirmed, there was a wide acknowledgement of an affinity between the work of the older generation of the 1960s and 1970s and that of the YBAs. Writing in *The Spectator*, Martin Gayford observed that, for some years, the art of the period 1965-1975 had been thought of as “an aberration... Nowadays it is recognised as the basis of the much discussed young British art of the Nineties (Hirst, Emin and co.). If you want to see the origin of Turner Prize art, got to the Whitechapel. Most of the ideas were thought up 30 years ago.”<sup>77</sup> The presence in the exhibition of Michael Craig-Martin seemed tacitly to confirm this inheritance. Between 1974 and 1998, Craig-Martin had been employed as a tutor at Goldsmith’s College, from where a number of the most prominent artists of the younger generation had emerged. Positioned near the entrance to the exhibition, (Fig. 75) his work, *An Oak Tree* (1973), took on an iconic significance for a number of reviewers of the exhibition<sup>78</sup> as well as in the publicity materials produced by the Whitechapel itself. (Fig. 87)

Yet the commercially successful British art of the 1990s had a far more ambiguous relationship with that of the generation surveyed by *Live in Your Head* than these reviews were prepared to acknowledge. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, there had occurred an almost complete transformation of the economic, social and cultural circumstances of art production. Where artists in the 1960s and 1970s worked in relative anonymity, often supporting their



practice through teaching, the making of art in the very late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries had become a highly professionalized and business-minded endeavour, with a number of contemporary artists acquiring the status of celebrity. The artist Alexis Hunter has acknowledged that there may have been “a direct visual link between concept art and Brit Art,” but, she has said, “there is a huge gulf as well;” the differences being detectable in “Brit artist’s love of the market place and the support they get from it, the solidarity with each other, their knowledge about branding and business acumen (they way they work through commission and get someone else to sponsor the work before someone else makes it for instance).”<sup>79</sup> On the one hand, then, the work seen in *Live in Your Head* could be considered a significant precursor to that of the nineties generation of artists; on the other, the exhibition’s excavation of a number of more explicitly political and socially-engaged practices could be seen as offering a critique of the predominantly individualistic agenda of that same generation.

Phillpot and Tarsia’s reluctance to define the sense in which the phrase “concept and experiment” was being used, or to provide any significant contextualizing information, had produced a considerable de-historicizing effect that separated the works on display from their contingent meanings. Thus, these works were pictorialized, put to use in a snapshot of a historical moment, and rendered available, in many cases, to spectacularization. Works of modest ambition or scale, for instance, were made more visually arresting by enlarging them beyond their original size. David Medalla’s photographic collage *Launching the Great Wall of China into Orbit as a Satellite around the Moon* (1969) as well as his *Listen to the Sonar Trees!* (1969), were reproduced in the form of enlarged photocopies. Phillpot recalls that Medalla “took a casual attitude to the presentation of his work”, as did the visual poet, Bob Cobbing. Nine of Cobbing’s poems were enlarged and presented on the wall, as Phillpot “liked the idea of mega-graphics.”<sup>80</sup> (Fig. 88) The reproduction of these works prompted a series of questions concerning their ontology, as Phillpot acknowledged: “do these photocopies constitute the art or not? What is the validity of these things?” Such questions were posed rhetorically by much “post-object” or Conceptual art. For many artists working with language and text, as well as installation and varieties of performance, the same work presented in different locations would necessarily differ in response to the possibilities suggested, and the limits imposed, by each new situation. With this in mind, and considering Medalla’s and Cobbing’s indifference on the matter, Phillpot’s decision to go ahead with

the photocopied enlargements of their work might have seemed not inappropriate: a pragmatic response to a practical dilemma. As Phillpot observed, “[i]t didn’t seem to matter to the visitors.”<sup>81</sup>

As the co-curator of a retrospective survey exhibition, Phillpot was confronted with the problem of how best to reconcile the responsibilities of historical objectivity with the curatorial imperative of visual interest. For his critics, it may have seemed that the latter demand won out at the cost of the former. Art & Language, for example, found *Live in Your Head* “picturesque, which Conceptual Art was not... A considerable number of modest items, “ they claimed, “had been fixed up – rendered picturesque – for this show. Some typewriter and foolscap poetry had been enlarged and made fierce in black and white.”<sup>82</sup> Art & Language also pointed to the fact that Hamish Fulton’s 1967 typewritten *Times of Lifts from London to Andorra and from Andorra to London* had been recreated for the exhibition in vinyl lettering “two and a half metres high.”<sup>83</sup> The decision to present Fulton’s work in this way reflects both Phillpot’s liking of “mega graphics” and the influence in Fulton’s recent work of materials and graphic styles from what he calls “urban advertising.” Fulton has admitted recently that his views on the forms of presentation that his work can take have shifted over the course of his career; he now regards any installation of his work as a temporary manifestation in an evolving process of presentation that does not limit the realisation of the piece to one particular medium.<sup>84</sup> For Fulton, it seems, it had been less important to preserve the original modes of presentation which were available to artists during a particular moment in time than it had been to remain faithful to the thinking that found artists ready to discard the traditional media of painting and sculpture to embrace new, more open, forms of production and presentation.<sup>85</sup> Although, for Art & Language, the visual aggrandisement of works of modest scale and similarly modest ambition occasioned “one historical solecism or another,” Phillpot, as curator, was not to be held personally responsible. He was, perhaps, “beleaguered by the agendas and exigencies of a professional curatorship in which he did not share.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the very circumstance of the museological survey demanded “lowest common denominator Conceptual art’: blank-ish or tastefully textual medium sized dry goods; moderately well known artists on centre stage front.” Under such conditions, the failure to sufficiently illuminate the contingent circumstances under which other more strategic enterprises were carried out was “both shameful and inevitable.”<sup>87</sup>



In keeping with Phillpot's hope that the exhibition's title might convey a "historical whiff," most reviewers responded nostalgically to works which served as reminders of a more idealistic time – these "funny old relics" that still "breath an air of liberty,"<sup>88</sup> as one put it. But responding to the lack of visual pleasure to be found in so many "dull expanses of text and monochrome displays of obsessive chart-making," it was left to Waldemar Januszczak, in a review for *The Sunday Times*, to ponder whether such work really manifested its resistance to social and artistic institutions. "To a remarkable extent," Januszczak averred, "the 1965-1975 conceptual art epidemic was the product of institutional complicity. The Arts Council conspired with the art colleges to embark upon a programme of mutual support." The fact that an "untalented generation" were indulged was, for Januszczak, forgiveable; less so, the aesthetic consequences of this institutional succour: Much of *Live In Your Head*, he wrote, "looks as if it has been prompted by the posters at a council meeting. Surely this is the first time in art that the textures of bureaucracy were deemed inspirational?"<sup>89</sup>

Despite the input of a co-curator (Phillpot) whose presence had been solicited precisely because he had witnessed at first hand many of the most significant artistic developments in the period 1965-1975, *Live in Your Head* encountered serious problems as it sought to represent what is, in fact, a mythic 'spirit of the times.' Insofar as that 'spirit of the times' is understood to have been avowedly internationalist, the curators performed a series of strategic manoeuvres by which they hoped to steer the exhibition away from any accusation of provinciality, or that art in Britain was the poorer (old-country) cousin to a sophisticatedly cosmopolitan American Conceptual art. Refusing, nonetheless, to define the terms by which it might have been possible to talk about British Conceptual art, *Live in Your Head* extended an invitation to an assortment of practices which, despite being representative of a considerable diversity of artists' work during the period, neglected to examine the extent to which these various practices were, at best, ontologically independent of each other, or, at worst, ethically contradictory or conflictive. Although many of the artists present were rescued from historical anonymity, their specific contributions were often misrepresented, and the value of those contributions negated, by an exhibition that dislocated works of art from their contingent conditions of production.

- <sup>1</sup> The particular phrase was Barry Schwabsky's: 'It's All in Your Mind', *Art in America* 88, no .9 (September 2000), 54-57 (p. 55).
- <sup>2</sup> See, Clive Phillpot and Matthew Higgs, 'In Conversation', in *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (No. 1)*, ed. by Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead; Newcastle upon Tyne: Baltic; University of Newcastle, 2000), pp. 53-94 (p. 56.)
- <sup>3</sup> Catherine Lampert, 'Foreword', in *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Phillpot and Tarsia (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 4 February-2 April 2000), pp. 4-5 (p. 4).
- <sup>4</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 55.
- <sup>5</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 56.
- <sup>6</sup> Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, 'Introduction', in *Live in Your Head*, pp. 6-7 (p. 6).
- <sup>7</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', p. 6. In this regard, Phillpot and Tarsia mention David Lamelas (Argentina), Michael Craig-Martin (Ireland), Susan Hiller (USA), Roelof Louw (South Africa), Rasheed Araeen (Pakistan), David Medalla (Philippines), and Alexis Hunter (New Zealand).
- <sup>8</sup> Rosetta Brooks, 'An Art of Refusal', in *Live in Your Head*, pp. 32-34 (p. 32).
- <sup>9</sup> Catherine Lampert, 'Foreword', in *Live in Your Head*, pp. 4-5 (p. 4).
- <sup>10</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 57.
- <sup>12</sup> Such an argument was made by Donald Karshan in a brief article entitled 'The British Avant Garde' published in the exhibition catalogue of the same name, New York Cultural Center, May 19 – August 29, 1971 (catalogue published in London by *Studio International*, 1971), p. iv.
- <sup>13</sup> Lampert incorrectly refers to this exhibition as *Art and Actions*; its correct title was, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 8 February-10 May 1998. 'Foreword', p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup> Lampert, 'Foreword', p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Brooks, 'An Art of Refusal', p. 32.
- <sup>16</sup> These dates correspond with those of a number of exhibitions often considered as 'bookends' to the period of Conceptual art. In 1968, the exhibition organiser Seth Siegelaub presented both *November 1968*, an exhibition by Douglas Huebler thought to have been the first exhibition to have existed catalogue form only, and the well-known publication *Xeroxbook* (properly titled *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner*). The latter date of 1972 corresponds both to the exhibition *The New Art* (Hayward Gallery, London) and *Documenta V* (Neue Galerie and Museum Fridericianum, Kassel). Phillpot and Tarsia themselves note the significance of *The New Art* as marking "the moment of official recognition and assimilation of some of the work being produced in Britain.
- <sup>17</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> *When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information: Live in Your Head* was at the Kunsthalle, Bern from 22 March–27 April 1969, from where it travelled to Museum Folkwang, Essen, and as a revised version to Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 10 May–15 June, and to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 28 August–27 September.
- <sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that although Burgin, Flanagan, Long and McLean were British by birth, Roelof Louw was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and David Medalla in Manila in the Philippines.



- <sup>20</sup> The version of *When Attitudes Become Form* shown at the ICA included thirty-eight Americans, ten Italians and six Germans (two of whom were working in the United States).
- <sup>21</sup> Harald Szeemann, 'How does an exhibition come into being? Diary and travelogue of the preparations and consequences, and only of these, for the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form (Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information)"', in *Painting Object Film Concept: Works from the Herbig Collection* (New York; London: Christies, 1998), pp. 36-49 (p. 44).
- <sup>22</sup> Harrison's comments appeared in 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975', a review of the exhibition published in *100 Reviews Backwards*, ed. by Matthew Arnatt, Matthew Collings and Cornelia Grassi (London: Alberta Press, 2002), pp. 79-82 (p. 79); the latter judgement was made by Art & Language in 'Concept and Experiment in Britain?', *Modern Painters* 13, no. 2 (summer 2000), 23-25 (p. 23).
- <sup>23</sup> Schwabsky, 'It's All in Your Mind', p. 55.
- <sup>24</sup> Such an accusation had been made about a number of the same artists twenty-eight years earlier on the occasion of the exhibition *The New Art* at The Hayward Gallery, London: Hayward Gallery, 17 August-24 September 1972. See R. H. Fuchs, 'More on *The New Art*', *Studio International* 184, no. 949 (November 1972), 194-195. See Chapter Two.
- <sup>25</sup> Perhaps nostalgia was unavoidable for interested parties of a certain age. Richard Cork observed that "Visiting *Live in Your Head* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery is, for me, a powerfully nostalgic experience. It charts the explosion of radical initiatives that revolutionised British art between 1965 and 1975. As a raw 22-year-old graduate, I was pitched into the middle of this restless innovation when the *London Evening Standard* made me its art critic. The year was 1969 and I soon realised that a widespread desire for renewal was transforming all our ideas about what "art" could be." 'Back to the Eyes of the Storm', *The Times*, 9 February 2000, p. 43. Tom Lubbock, who is a number of years younger than Cork, wrote that "Going round the Whitechapel's new show called *Live in Your Head*... the thought kept recurring: all this was happening while you were alive – and you knew none of it." Lubbock added that "*Live in Your Head* is expressly a revival or a nostalgia exhibition." 'It was the thought that counted; Turn-on or turn-off, Sixties conceptual art was a turning point', *The Independent*, 8 February 2000, p. 13.
- <sup>26</sup> Clive Phillpot, interview with the author, 14 January 2003.
- <sup>27</sup> Phillpot and Tarsia, 'Introduction', p. 6.
- <sup>28</sup> Bruce McLean has confirmed that students (and occasionally staff) at different institutions frequently regarded each other with a suspicion bordering on antagonism: "People were very snotty about each other. We were St. Martins' students and we were the dregs of humanity... you know: 'they're the fly-boys, they're flash'... that was the feeling I got from the other areas, you know, the Slade." Interview with the author, 31 January 2005. Michael Archer's essay for the catalogue of *Live in Your Head* hints at the tensions and antagonisms that existed within teaching departments during the period, 'Out of the Studio', in *Live in Your Head*, 24-30. However, a more detailed account is given by John A. Walker, 'Radical Artists & Art Students versus Management & Bureaucracy during the 1970s', *Journal of Art and Design Education* 20, no. 2 (May 2001): 230-237.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Baldwin, interview with the author, 12 March 2005.
- <sup>30</sup> Susan Hiller, interview with the author, 7 March 2005.
- <sup>31</sup> Charles Darwent, 'Now You See It, Now You Don't', *The Independent*, 6 February 2000, p. 5.
- <sup>32</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 61.

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- <sup>33</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 61.
- <sup>34</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 60. The placing of key works by Latham and Louw near to the entrance to the gallery seemed designed to present the visitor with the immediate suggestion that moves first made by artists in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s were being repeated in some of the most internationally acclaimed works of the 1980s and 1990s. For the moderately well-informed viewer, Latham's *Art and Culture* might be seen to have established a precedent for Huang Yong-Ping's iconic and self-explanatory work "A History of Chinese Art" and "A Concise History of Modern Painting" *Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987), in which the Chinese artist had reduced two standard texts of Eastern and Western art history to an undifferentiated *papier-mâché*. The fact that Huang had recently been included in the Queen's Museum's *Global Conceptualism* only underscored Latham's still relatively unacknowledged importance. Louw's *Pyramid*, on the other hand, could be understood as having prefigured both the piles of wrapped confectionary by the Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, from which viewers were also free to help themselves, and the well-known photographic work, *Tourista Maluco (Crazy Tourist)* (1991), by the Mexican, Gabriel Orozco, for which the artist had arranged single oranges on empty market tables in Brazil.
- <sup>35</sup> Phillpot mentions the names of the Americans Ray Johnson, John Cage and George Maciunas alongside those of the Europeans Gustav Metzger, Yves Klein and Ben Vautier, as examples of artists who had already been working with the idea or reducing art to nothingness for some years prior to 1966. 'From Nothing', p. 9.
- <sup>36</sup> Phillpot, 'From Nothing', p. 9.
- <sup>37</sup> Phillpot, 'From Nothing', p. 9.
- <sup>38</sup> Phillpot, 'From Nothing', pp. 10, 12.
- <sup>39</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview by Richard Cork, *Studio International* 191, no. 980 (March/April 1976), special issue: Art and Social Purpose, 176-184 (p. 179).
- <sup>40</sup> Charles Harrison, *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, conference, Kings College, London 4 June 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> Michael Baldwin, *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, conference.
- <sup>42</sup> Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy', in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. by Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion, 1999), pp. 47-65 (esp. pp. 49-50).
- <sup>43</sup> See my discussion of Michael Fried's essay, 'Art and Objecthood', in Chapter One.
- <sup>44</sup> Tony Rickaby, interview with the author. 17 November 2004.
- <sup>45</sup> See Terry Atkinson's editorial introduction to the first issue of *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969), subtitled for this issue only, *The Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1-10.
- <sup>46</sup> Lucy Lippard, in David Lamelas, *Publication* (London: Nigel Greenwood, 1970). Excerpts from *Publication*, including this passage, were reproduced in Lippard's own *Six Years: The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966-1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996; originally, New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 186-191 (p. 189).
- <sup>47</sup> Lamelas, *Publication*. The artists and critics who contributed to *Publication* were Keith Arnatt, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Michel Claura, Gilbert & George, John Latham, Lucy R. Lippard, Martin Maloney, Barbara M. Reise, Lawrence Weiner and Ian Wilson. Hanne Darboven was invited to contribute but declined.
- <sup>48</sup> These include *Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, ed. by Phillpot and Trevor Fawcett (London: The Art Book Company, 1976); *Artist/Author*:



- Contemporary Artists' Books*, ed by Phillpot and Cornelia Lauf (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1998); 'Art Magazines and Magazine Art', *Artforum* 18, no. 6 (February 1980), 52-54; and 'Books, Book Objects, Bookworks, Artists' Books', *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982) 77-79.
- <sup>49</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 59.
- <sup>50</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 83.
- <sup>51</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p.83.
- <sup>52</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p.83.
- <sup>53</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 59.
- <sup>54</sup> *Conception: Conceptual Documents, 1968-1972*, Norwich Gallery, Norwich School of Art and Design, 24 January-3 March 2001. The exhibition later toured to the City Museum and Art Gallery and Henry Moore Institute Library, Leeds, 10 March-22 April 2001, and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia 12 October-2 December 2001.
- <sup>55</sup> Catherine Moseley, 'A History of an Infrastructure', in *Conception: Conceptual Documents, 1968-1972*, ex. cat., ed. by Catherine Moseley (Norwich: Norwich Gallery, Norwich School of Art and Design, 24 January-3 March 2001), pp. 154-167 (p. 162).
- <sup>56</sup> Moseley, 'A History of an Infrastructure', p. 162.
- <sup>57</sup> Charles Harrison, 'Mapping and Filing', in *The New Art*, ex. cat., ed. by Anne Seymour (London: Hayward Gallery, 17 August-24 September 1972), pp. 14-16 (p.15).
- <sup>58</sup> *The Artist Out of Work: Art & Language 1972-1981*, PS1, Long Island, New York, 12 September – 12 December 1999. *Art-Language*, new series, no. 3 (1999) was available throughout the exhibition, and effectively substituted for an exhibition catalogue
- <sup>59</sup> Mel Ramsden, *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, conference. *Index 01* is owned by Daros Art Education. Ramsden had been in possession of a key to the cabinets, but claims now to have lost it.
- <sup>60</sup> Clive Phillpot, interview with the author, 4 February 2003. An anonymous review of *Live in Your Head* for the listings magazine *Time Out* reported how there had been "some confusion at the Whitechapel Gallery. No one is sure whether a set of filing cabinets may be opened. The security guards are saying no. Meanwhile a worried assistant phones the powers that be: 'I don't know, it keeps changing' comes her reply." 'A Height for Heads: Freaky Conceptual Brit-Art from the '60s and '70s', *Time Out* no. 1539, 16-23 February 2000. Archive of the Whitechapel Art Gallery.
- <sup>61</sup> Fuchs, 'More on *The New Art*', p. 195.
- <sup>62</sup> Laura Cummings, 'Revisit 1967, you bourgeois sucker', *The Observer*, 13 February 2000, p. 8.
- <sup>63</sup> John A. Walker, 'Display not to indicate Conceptual art', letter to *Art Monthly* published in issue no. 166 (May 1993), 31-32 (pp. 31-32).
- <sup>64</sup> Darwent, 'Now you see it, now you don't', p. 5.
- <sup>65</sup> Clive Phillpot, interview with the author, 4 February 2003.
- <sup>66</sup> Harrison, 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain', p. 80.
- <sup>67</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview by Richard Cork, p. 179.
- <sup>68</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview by Richard Cork, p. 183.
- <sup>69</sup> This difficulty was exacerbated by the work's reappearance in the context of a historical exhibition that dislocated these works not only spatially, but also temporally.
- <sup>70</sup> James Faure Walker, *The Claims of Social Art and Other Perplexities*, *Studio International* 191, no. 980 (March/April 1976), special issue: *Art and Social Purpose*, 16-20 (p. 18).

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- <sup>71</sup> Conrad Atkinson, 'Art as Social Action: An interview with Conrad Atkinson', interview by Timothy Rollins, *Art in America* 68, no. 2 (February 1980), 119-120 (p. 120).
- <sup>72</sup> See Atkinson's interviews with Cork and Rollins.
- <sup>73</sup> Conrad Atkinson, interview by Richard Cork, pp. 177-178. Atkinson attended Carlisle College of Art.
- <sup>74</sup> Faure Walker, *The Claims of Social Art*, pp. 18, 20.
- <sup>75</sup> Phillpot and Higgs, 'In Conversation', p. 76.
- <sup>76</sup> *Democracy!*, The Royal College of Art, 14 April-12 May 2000; *Protest and Survive*, The Whitechapel Art Gallery, 15 September-12 November 2000; *Look Out: Art-Society-Politics*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 16 September-11 November 2000.
- <sup>77</sup> Martin Gayford, 'Thinking the unthinkable II', *The Spectator*, 12 February 2000, pp. 45-46 (p. 46).
- <sup>78</sup> See Gayford, 'Thinking the unthinkable II', for example. James Meyer noted that "Craig-Martin deserves as much acclaim for his art as for his role of mentor to the current Goldsmith's group." 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975', *Artforum* 38, no. 10 (summer 2000), p. 178.
- <sup>79</sup> Alexis Hunter, interview with the author, 11 November 2004.
- <sup>80</sup> Phillpot and Higgs 'In Conversation.' p. 63. The nine poems were: from *Subsequence* (1970); two pages from *Beethoven Today* (1970); from *This Book is a Movie* (1971); *Mary Rudolf's Chromosomes* from *In Any Language* (1973); *Action Poem No. 1* (1974); and two pages from *The Five Vowels* (1974).
- <sup>81</sup> Phillpot and Higgs 'In Conversation.' p. 63.
- <sup>82</sup> Art & Language (Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, Mel Ramsden), 'Concept and Experiment in Britain?' *Modern Painters* 13, no. 2 (summer 2000), 23-25 (p. 23).
- <sup>83</sup> Art & Language, 'Concept and Experiment in Britain?' p. 25. The actual dimensions of Fulton's text were 400 x 122 cm. Art & Language also remarked that a number of other works "which were possessed of an appropriately limited scale and careful finish in their original photographic form appeared as sloppy blow-ups (Long, Burgin)." Long's photographic works *England* (1967) and *Reflections in the Little Pigeon River, Great Smoky Mountains, Tennessee* (1968) appeared in the exhibition on loan from the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, while *Two Lines Walked Through Dust-Covered Grass by the Roadside* (1969) was lent from the artist's own collection. Victor Burgin's *Sensation* (1975) was on loan from the Arts Council Collection. Contrary to Art & Language's impression that these works had been enlarged for exhibition at *Live in Your Head*, Phillpot has confirmed that, as far as he was aware, they were all shown in their original form. He has pointed out, however, that one of Long's works, "possibly *Little Pigeon River*," exists in two states, one large, one smaller, and that this may account for Art & Language's misapprehension that an enlarged version was shown at *Live in Your Head*. Clive Phillpot, interview with the author, 4 February 2003.
- <sup>84</sup> See, *Hamish Fulton: Eyes Feet Road: Three Connecting Walks, One Coast to Coast Route*. Illuminations. 2002. Video produced alongside 'Walking Journey', Fulton's large-scale exhibition at Tate Britain, 14 March-4 June 2002. "Because the main subject is the experience of walking," Fulton says, "then, in a sense, walking isn't an art medium – you can go for a walk and not make any art – so therefore this question of what the mediums [sic] are is quite open. And then, with words, you can change from a mailing card, and that same text can then go into a catalogue, could go from a catalogue into a



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print, it could go from a print into a wall work. It can then continue: it could then go into a video, it could be an animated text, it could be many, many, different things. I think the possibilities are quite infinite, really."

<sup>85</sup> In talking about the recreation of works for the exhibition *Conception: Conceptual Documents 1968-1972*, at the Norwich Art Gallery, 2001, the curator, Catherine Moseley, has claimed that the possibility lay in the distinction between Conceptual art and the "conceptual document." The document, Moseley argued, "is seen as a product of, or conduit for, conceptual art. Rather than a more purist hesitation to re-make works using contemporary methods and materials, this enabled a continuation of the centrality of the idea and is also in keeping with the pragmatism evident in this area of conceptual art." 'A History of An Infrastructure', p. 163.

<sup>86</sup> Art & Language, 'Concept and Experiment in Britain?', p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Mel Ramsden, interview with the author, 12 March 2005. Art & Language's first 'indexes,' such as *Index 01* were, in part, a response to such structural problematics – the necessity to discover some means by which work might be functionally both independent and contingent.

<sup>88</sup> Lubbock, 'It was the thought that counted', p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Waldemar Januszczak, 'I think, therefore I am disappointed', *Sunday Times*, 13 February 2000, section 9, pp. 14-15 (p. 15).

## Conclusion

### *How is critique 'enacted' or 'performed' through art?*

The concept of art is elaborated and sustained not only by the production of individual works of art, but also through the practices of agents of a system set up to support their circulation: museums, galleries, art publications. If artists are to mount a critique of art, they must develop a form of practice that, whilst continuing to be identifiable as art within the parameters put in place within that system, can also present a 'blockage' to its normal operation. This is clearly a paradox. If it wishes to continue to function as art – that is, to be identifiable as such within the system designed to facilitate its circulation – a work will obviously be acting against its own interests if it seeks to bring about the failure of that system. On the other hand, if an individual chooses to circumvent the entire system of museums, galleries and publications, then that person will both surrender their identity as an artist and effectively exclude their work from consideration as art, since art is understood as that which occurs in an art context.

Artists are, for the most part, accepting of the conventions of the gallery exhibition as these presume specific codes of conduct between artist, institution and audience. It is simplistic to regard artists and museums/galleries as being implicated in an inherently antipathetic relationship. Artists, as much as museums/galleries, uphold and maintain these conventions; they constitute their professional and self-identity as artists. Daniel Buren knew this. "In the artistic milieu," he said, "the pillar of the artistic system is the artist himself."<sup>1</sup> But if the model of artist and institution locked in inevitable conflict is simplistic and inadequate, must we therefore conclude that artists' desires to criticize and transform the institutions of art are fanciful and self-deluding; that, as Buren claimed, avant-garde artists and museums/galleries are allied in a powerful relationship which is in fact a reflection of the dominant bourgeois ideology? Or, might it be possible to develop a form of art that by its very incorporation into the museum and gallery system could reveal the system's contradictions and limitations? This, of course, was the function Buren imagined for his own work. His "propositions," as he termed them, did not "disturb" their location; rather, "[t]he place in question appears as it is. It is seen in its actuality."<sup>2</sup> One possible complaint against Buren's thinking might be that, although he recognized the



complicity of the avant-garde artist in the maintenance of the 'system,' his own work offered only a repetitious disclosure of location after location. On the one hand this repetition was desirable in that it might thwart the system in its desire for novelty, on the other hand, such a strategy risked critical stasis, and the incorporation of the ostensible critical device as another signature 'style.'

"If the artist has anything against the art system," Buren said, "he should start by rebelling against himself as an artist, i.e. against his own product as a culture gadget."<sup>3</sup> All forms of so-called institutional critique, however, have proved themselves susceptible to appropriation as a new legitimating device for institutions keen to demonstrate their own liberal credentials. For the artist, the reality of the situation is either to accept that he or she colludes with museums, galleries and publications to maintain the status quo, or to cease to *be* an artist, and thus to cease to provide the products for the gratification of the bourgeois culture. But between the opposing positions of the conservative artist producing reactionary art for the spectacular culture, and the radical, but self-deluding, avant-garde bent on the total overthrow of the system, is there another way? Is it possible for artists to recognize and acknowledge the function of art within the dominant culture, and yet to continue to produce a kind of art that, because of its awareness of this situation, might not only reveal the operations of the culture, but might also bring about some critical transformation of them? Such a practice would entail that the artist reject any notion of art's radical autonomy and, instead, recognize its function in support of an ideology that also presupposed institutions of equally autonomous value; it would need to incorporate these awarenesses into its own structure, and to make explicit the relationship between the work of art and its sites of institutional validation.

Joseph Kosuth was one artist who, in the mid-1970s, advocated such a model of practice. Kosuth proposed an "anthropologized art" that would not be "naïve" toward its own *ethnologic*," that, although "tautological in the particularities of its own structure," would nevertheless "function[...] dialectically *in situ* – that is, culture *qua* art."<sup>4</sup> By 1975, the argument of 'Art After Philosophy,' his widely read essay of six years before, revealed itself to have been mired in the positivistic paradigm of Modernism which he had, in fact, meant to overturn. The emphasis was no longer on the work of art as the tautological definition of the still autonomous category of art,<sup>5</sup> but on art as a critically engaged social practice. Kosuth now emphasized the dialectical character of practice. For the artist, this

meant “attempting to affect the culture while he is simultaneously learning from (and seeking acceptance of) that same culture.”<sup>6</sup> In the artist's own milieu, that the work of art “meets the demands of the *ethnologic* and alters existing norms of art is a demonstration of its dialectical functioning. *Its* alteration by the institutional supports of those ‘norms of art’ (galleries, museums, and magazines) is as well a demonstration.”<sup>7</sup>

Problematically, however, the dialectical function he describes remains, for Kosuth, the privilege of art and artists. The artist is distinguished from the anthropologist, for example, in that the latter is always external to the culture being studied and never, therefore, a part of the social matrix. “[T]he artist, as anthropologist,” by contrast, “is operating within the same socio-cultural context from which he evolved. He is totally immersed, and has a social impact. His activities embody the culture.”<sup>8</sup> Neither does Kosuth consider that the practices of everyday life – shopping, cooking, walking, reading, dwelling, speaking and so on – can and do have a dialectical dimension; they arise within a culture, they are its expression, and yet they transform the culture through their re-appropriation of the products and spaces (physical and metaphorical) allocated to them within the dominant order. Setting aside, for now, these rather substantial objections to his analysis, in this thesis, I share with the (later) Kosuth the view that the artist who seeks to achieve some critical transformation of ‘art,’ its ‘system,’ or of the broader ideological structures in which it is implicated, can only do so if he or she works with an understanding of the reciprocal processes by which ‘art’ is constituted in the culture, and by which it may contribute to the culture’s transformation.

As a consequence of the artist’s increased attentiveness to the socio-cultural context of his or her production, the artist’s work will inevitably take on a greater spatial and temporal specificity. In emphasizing this aspect of works of art as the locus of their real criticality, do I therefore condemn them to act only as an index of the social and cultural conditions that produced them, conditions that they can never completely and faithfully replay for later viewers? Does the dialecticality I claim for the work render it almost immediately obsolete? Does it describe a work of art that makes itself available for its containment by history? Or can such works retain a critical function in the present; can they still occasion a shift in the system’s equilibrium? Given that most of the artists whose work was included in the four exhibitions that I have examined in the major part of this thesis were still



alive at the time the exhibitions took place, it is remarkable how few of them took the opportunity to regard showing in these exhibitions as an opportunity for the continuation of their critical practice. With the notable exception of Michael Asher (whose project for *L'Art Conceptuel* I considered in Chapter Three), most artists were generally accepting of the standard conventions of the historical survey exhibition and have willingly presented, or recreated, key works in either their personal development, or in the development of Conceptual art. This may have been because these artists no longer identified themselves with Conceptual art (if ever they did) – their own practices may have moved on, and they may have had no desire to revisit old working practices. Equally, it may have been because their initial identification with Conceptual art was merely an identification with the fashionable art of the time, and, in itself, no guarantee of their disinclination to have their personal contributions recognized by art history.

### ***Historical exhibitions***

In recent decades, the large-scale historical survey exhibition has become the most important site for the construction, maintenance and, occasionally, the challenge of art historical narratives and ideas. It is a structural paradox of the historical exhibition that it must present itself as a 'natural' form that appears to arise from the objects and practices it surveys. (Exhibitions that make a virtue of their own constructedness must necessarily abandon the pretence to objectively survey a field of activity.) In general, the survey exhibition must aim to impose a systematic logic on a heterogeneous range of objects and practices, to apply a consistent interpretive schema and thus to stabilise (if only momentarily) the identities of the works of art it includes. This may be especially the case, however, with the historical survey exhibition, which aims to 'rescue' the works within it from the disorderliness of previous historical representations, and to reveal them in their 'proper' meaning.

It is one role of the retrospective survey to identify the ineffable (not to say, mythical) quality – the 'zeitgeist' – that somehow connects a heterogeneous grouping of works and secures the cohesiveness of its own representation, and to communicate this across time to the contemporary viewer. Although the exhibition must allow the works to 'speak for themselves' in discovering this quality, in reality, any sense of it is, in fact, a product of a highly artificial construction. An exhibition is never the neutral vehicle that it (usually) claims to

be: it is structured by the demographics of the institution, the subjective positions of its organisers, the requirement to secure sponsorship, limitations of architectural space, availability of works, and so forth. At the same time, it will deploy a number of devices to allow its works of art to communicate: labels, explanatory texts, lighting, leaflets, catalogues, educational strategies. The exhibition is thus involved in a complex negotiation between the primary experience offered by the works of art and the distancing effect of the exhibition's staging.

The complexity of this negotiation is particularly felt in relation to Conceptual art, which frequently attempted to make visible the mediation of experience by the institutional and discursive networks of culture. To continue to display works of Conceptual art as discrete objects, independent of each other, their institutional framing and the logic of curatorial selection and display, would thus be to depoliticize these works and to negate their criticality. On the other hand, to foreground the *mise-en-scène* would either be to co-opt them to the exhibition's own aesthetic production, or to subject them to a museological didacticism that denied their own informative and instructive potential. Even with the provision of reading rooms and other contextualising devices, it would be a practical impossibility to present sufficient background material that the work of every artist could be understood fully in terms of the contingent conditions of its production and in its differential relationship to the work of other artists in the exhibition. Moreover, the ephemerality of many of the materials employed in works of Conceptual art has given rise to issues of conservation, no less pressing than with more traditional forms of art, that have generally necessitated some degree of physical protection – framing, display within vitrines, low lighting levels, for example – and that cannot help but produce a sense of the works' museumification.

### ***Formation of the canon***

In having taken a critical view of the exhibitions examined in this thesis, I do not mean it to be understood that there is some ideal exhibition of Conceptual art that is waiting to take place, that if the very many significant problems encountered in the staging of a historical survey of Conceptual art could be overcome, that Conceptual art might be revealed in its 'true' form. To imagine that this could be the case would be idealistic on two counts. First, it would fail to



recognize that exhibitions must be planned and co-ordinated in a world of practical considerations, and that these will determine what is finally achievable. Exhibitions take place in real time, and in real spaces. They must be planned significantly in advance and accommodated to the timetable of the host institution. Curators must work to deadlines, with the available resources of the institution, and within the constraints of its architectural space. Frustratingly, many factors will be beyond the curator's control: works may be unavailable, budgets may be limited. Second, it would assume Conceptual art to be an ultimate truth, a finite category, fixed and unchanging, to which the exhibition can grant access. But, this thesis has argued, Conceptual art does not exist other than as a linguistic construct, a critical term which facilitates the discussion and evaluation of particular works of art. Conceptual art does not precede the exhibition; along with criticism, history, teaching, etc., exhibitions have an important role in producing (and maintaining) the sets of meanings implied by the term.

There can be no body of work that can be looked to as definitively Conceptual. It is an irony of the four major exhibitions of Conceptual art discussed in this thesis that they have all been conceived of by their curators as non-canonical representations. Insofar as this has been the case, the canon itself is still awaiting definition. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the canon is constantly being re-defined, negatively, by that which exceeds it and demonstrates its problematic limits. The organizers of *L'Art Conceptuel* were careful to point out that their exhibition was envisioned as "a 'perspective,' and not as a presentation of any orthodoxy based on a few exclusive names;"<sup>9</sup> *Global Conceptualism* was motivated by the impulse to "expand and decentre the canon;"<sup>10</sup> while *Live in Your Head* included a number of artists so non-canonical that they were not only unfamiliar to the exhibition's public, but were equally so even to some of the other artists participating in the exhibition.<sup>11</sup> Though the organizers of *Reconsidering the Object of Art* were similarly disinclined to engage in a "process of terminological definition,"<sup>12</sup> and although this exhibition was no less arbitrary in its selections than those others, arguably, it has been this exhibition that has come the closest to defining the canon of Conceptual art. Here was a large-scale exhibition, nearly half as big again as its predecessor in Paris, staged by a major international venue, and with an extensive and well-researched catalogue behind it to substantiate its claims to authority. As subsequent exhibitions moved further away from any

representation that could be considered canonical, *Reconsidering the Object of Art* has been left to appear as the definitive exhibition of Conceptual art. It is, in large part, through its catalogue that the exhibition has attained such a status. The specifics of its display may be long forgotten, but through the familiar presence of the catalogue in academic and research libraries, the exhibition has been granted a significant afterlife. As the curator Donna DeSalvo has recently observed, the erudition of the catalogue, and in particular the inclusion of a comprehensive 'Chronology of Group Exhibitions and Catalogues, 1965-1975', has continued to make it the first point of reference for anyone interested in researching the Conceptual art of the period.<sup>13</sup>

DeSalvo was the curator of the exhibition *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, held at Tate Modern, London, in the summer of 2005. Although *Open Systems* did not set out, expressly, to survey Conceptual art, and although the term itself did not "adequately describe the diverse array of material practices and individual positions that characterised these years," for DeSalvo, it "remained a useful framing device."<sup>14</sup> She explained in her catalogue essay that the exhibition investigated the notion of the system as that which "allowed each of the artists represented... to surpass the idea of the art object as something that has a purely metaphorical relationship to the world and to propose instead that the art object functioned as an analogue or equivalent for lived experience." What the artists in the exhibition had in common was that each of them "situates their work in real time and space, asking viewers to navigate a scenario in order to experience something that could be perceived as an aesthetic system."<sup>15</sup> As DeSalvo explains, all this activity was occurring at the same moment that the significant advances in communications technologies that we now understand as the foundations of a 'global society' were also taking place. She even cites Seth Siegelaub, organiser of some of the best known and most influential exhibitions of Conceptual art, to the effect that,

The debut of conceptual art is unique because it appeared simultaneously around the world. Prior to this artistic movements were very localized with all the leaders living in the same city (and usually the same neighbourhood)... Conceptual art, which is an inappropriate name, was probably the first artistic movement which did not have a geographic center.<sup>16</sup>

It is curious, therefore, that none of those 'Conceptual' artists most closely associated with Siegelaub - Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and



Lawrence Weiner - were represented in the exhibition.<sup>17</sup> It is most often a fruitless activity to speculate on the reasons why individual artists have been omitted from an exhibition - there may be many reasons, not all of them conscious or under the control of the curators. However, for *none* of the so-called 'Siegelraub mafia' to have been included in *Open Systems*, and for other artists usually considered to be central to any understanding of Conceptual art to have been similarly omitted, suggests their *purposeful* exclusion. It also raises the question of how far an exhibition can move away from representing the 'canon,' and still be thought of as dealing with that which the canon is supposed to define. If DeSalvo was somewhat cautious in her use of the phrase 'Conceptual art,' *Open Systems* was nonetheless regarded by its professional public (and one might reasonably think, its general public also) as an exhibition on this very subject. The exhibition did not proffer a distinctive 'systems art,' but as Anna Dezeuze observed in a review of the exhibition for *Art Monthly*, "dr[ew] on the popularity of the notion of systems in this period to chart the development of Conceptual art."<sup>18</sup> What, then, was the significance of the exclusion of Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner, Art & Language, for example?

In her catalogue essay, DeSalvo praised the Queens Museum's *Global Conceptualism* as one among a number of exhibitions over the previous decade that had shared the perception "that something vibrant was happening in many places at the same time," and like this earlier exhibition, *Open Systems* meant to emphasize the work of artists for whom "the development of a more culturally, socially and politically responsive art became paramount."<sup>19</sup> That the systems thus being employed were 'open,' suggests both their reflexiveness and the artists' understanding that these were human constructions for understanding the world, therefore, fallible and imperfect. By contrast, the 'closed' system would be mired in the myth of its scientific objectivity, reproducing the conditions of its own knowledge. If certain artists associated closely with Conceptual art were excluded from *Open Systems*, it was partly, then, because their story was the familiar one of Western dominance and of dissemination from the 'centres,' but, more particularly, because their work sought to understand its own functioning within the mechanisms and structures of the art world, and thus within a 'closed' system.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that to dismiss Conceptual art on account of its attentiveness to its condition *as art* is to overlook the extent to which this

entailed the recognition of art itself as a social practice, and one that has a role to play in the construction and maintenance of ideological formations. (Some) Conceptual art was intended to produce the kind of self-knowledge that has necessarily to precede any critique of the culture made under art's name. One could still quibble with DeSalvo's selection of artists, though, even within *Open Systems* own frame of reference. Why, for instance, was Alighiero e Boetti included on account of his having "invented an imaginary postal system featuring letters never mailed,"<sup>20</sup> while Douglas Huebler, who used a real postal system in the realisation of more than one of his works,<sup>21</sup> was not? Why, too, was Gerhard Richter's series of painted reproductions of images from an encyclopaedia, *48 Portraits* (1972) present, when Kosuth's photo-reproductions of dictionary definitions from his *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)* series (1966-1968, see Fig. 54) were omitted? Exhibitions, we can only conclude, are always *partial* representations (in both senses of the word). They organize a field of knowledge from the subjective position of the curator and according to particular institutional agendas, they are limited by very real practical considerations, they contribute to but never secure a body of knowledge, and they are never its 'last word.' *Open Systems*, DeSalvo admitted, was "less a comprehensive history than a proposition."<sup>22</sup> We can extend that claim to apply to *all* exhibitions.

### ***The controversies of a new approach***

To examine exhibitions of Conceptual art for the distinctive ways in which they organise and advance their particular 'propositions' is likely to be controversial, first among those artists who regard 'Conceptual art' as an incomprehensible misnomer,<sup>23</sup> and second, among those who would regard this approach as occasioning a withdrawal from the study of works of art as the primary resource of art history. In response to the first of these complaints I would argue that this project, in fact, shares much of that scepticism toward the term 'Conceptual art.' Although it is used throughout this thesis, the term is not here intended to denote a definitive body of works or practices, or to fix particular sets of meanings. Rather, it is understood as a critical/historical construct whose meaning can shift subtly (sometimes, more palpably) across the many contexts of its use. Although the organizers of the exhibitions I have discussed here have mostly been ambivalent about the use of the term, as my discussion of the *Open Systems* exhibition indicates, it continues to be used in a very general sense to allude to an indefinable, but nonetheless significant, shift in artistic sensibilities



that both responded to and brought to a head the crisis in Modernist criticism and theory – perhaps, as Peter Wollen has claimed, “the single greatest shift in art since the Renaissance.”<sup>24</sup> In response to the second complaint, a more substantial one, I would again assert that exhibitions are worthy of study in their own right. Other than as photographic reproductions in books and magazines, works of art are most often encountered in the context of exhibitions presented by galleries and museums. Exhibitions mediate the experience of works of art for the viewer and encourage their interpretation in terms of certain narratives extrinsic to the works. This is true both of the one-person exhibition and of the themed or single-subject exhibition. Whereas the first may appeal to a unifying logic of psychobiography or of stylistic development, for example, the second will present the work of a number of artists in a context that asks the viewer to discover the *significant* common characteristics between their works. Since the late 1960s, exhibitions have increasingly come to be seen both as offering their own aesthetic experience, and as being the “authored” production of their curators. No longer are they regarded as neutral vehicles for the experience offered by discrete and autonomous works of art. It has been the underlying conviction of this thesis that exhibitions should therefore be examined for their own politics of representation – for the curatorial and institutional voices they embody and for the ways in which they insert themselves into existing cultural discourses.

It might still be argued that to devote one’s critical attention to the exhibition is to confirm the regrettable ascendancy of the organizer-author and to contribute to the further evacuation of affective meaning from the work of art. In order to combat the situation in which the exhibition exhibits itself, it might be argued, it will be necessary to return one’s attention to specific works of art. To refuse to consider that works of art can be appropriated to serve other representational practices, however, would be to deny that the work of art is able to find its audience only by means of its exhibition. More significantly, it would also be to deny an artist’s responsibility for his or her production as it enters and becomes a part of the real world beyond the studio – to work with a depoliticised understanding of practice, in other words.

A further objection that might be levelled against a project such as this is that it furthers only the hermetic discourses of the academy. While from one side of the fence, for example, it might be seen that “the increase in writing about

exhibitions reinforces the respectability of the topic as worthy of study,"<sup>25</sup> from the other, the objection might be that that this can lead only to the self-serving repetition of academic tropes. That Conceptual art, as much as the phenomenon of exhibitions, has been the subject of a growing academic interest necessitates still greater caution if one is not to write a tautological art-history-as-art-history. To maintain the rigid distinction between the so-called "primary" writings of artists and the "secondary" writings of scholars, however, may not be productive in thinking about Conceptual art: by absorbing the critical function into the production of the work of art itself, Conceptual artists themselves rendered the distinction unsustainable (though, for some, this was to have unforeseen and unfavourable implications).<sup>26</sup> It might be added that examples of "primary" writing explicitly concerned with Conceptual art are, in any case, limited in number, since, with a few notable exceptions, most artists have questioned the validity of the term to describe their own practice. This is not to say that artists associated with Conceptual art have not written about their practice (they have, often voluminously, and their writings have filled several critical anthologies on the subject), only that the identification of such writing as being about Conceptual art is, most often, not one that these artists have made themselves. This has given rise to a situation in which those few artists willing to discuss their work explicitly in terms of Conceptual art have, arguably, been allowed to define a notion of 'proper' conceptual practice. It would be unwise, therefore, to accept only their opinions of what should be understood by the term. It is not the aim of this project to recover whatever meaning the term may have for those artists who were accepting of it; rather, it is to acknowledge that it has long been the property of anyone who, with some minimal qualification to speak, wishes to advance a claim on its behalf.

To approach Conceptual art with such an understanding is to make oneself vulnerable to the criticism that one's work deals primarily with secondary interpretations – as I was informed by one artist that I spoke to while researching this project, that it relates "only to the residue of anecdote and rumor within the academic community."<sup>27</sup> That consideration must be given to the context in which works of art function, both discursively and in terms of the material conditions of their production, distribution and consumption, was one of the fundamental claims of Conceptual art, however. This claim has not only been accepted by subsequent generations of artists (being taken up and elaborated upon in various forms of 'institutional critique'), but it has also contributed to the



growth of academic interest in museum and exhibition practice. Those who feel that such an approach only confirms the exhibition as the ultimate bestower of meaning are likely to be suspicious of the attendant shift in the ways in which works of art are talked about.

While some artists regard themselves as makers of specific objects, without metaphorical function, that assert their autonomy regardless of the context in which they are encountered, it is surely the case that exhibitions are undeniably one of the sites, probably the *primary* site, as Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne have argued, where the cultural meanings of art are established and administered. But while, traditionally, the autonomous work of art has been the privileged object of the art historian's and the art critic's gaze, and, more recently, the museum has been deconstructed to reveal its ideological underpinnings, there has been comparatively little attention paid to the exhibition itself as the mediating mechanism between the two. Although the approach adopted in this thesis inevitably risks being criticized on the grounds that it is itself a symptom of the power of exhibitions to administer cultural meanings, the intention has been to draw on Conceptual art's own critique of the mechanisms and procedures which structure the art world, and to bring this to bear in an analysis of the ways in which the history of Conceptual art has itself been constructed through the medium of the retrospective survey exhibition.

- <sup>1</sup> Daniel Buren, 'Mise En Garde, no. 3', cited in Buren, 'Round and About a Detour', *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971), 246-247 (p. 246).
- <sup>2</sup> Buren, 'Round and About a Detour', p. 246.
- <sup>3</sup> Buren, 'Round and About a Detour', p. 246.
- <sup>4</sup> Joseph Kosuth, '1975', *The Fox* 1, no. 2 (1975), 87-96 (p. 90). Kosuth was much influenced by the work of the social anthropologists Bob Scholte and Stanley Diamond (with whom he studied during the mid-1970s at the Graduate Faculty of the New York School for Social Research). His ideas were also developed in discussion with other members of the Art & Language community in New York at that time.
- <sup>5</sup> For Kosuth in 1969, the viability of art lay in its autonomous character: "art's ability to exist will depend on its *not* performing a service – as entertainment, visual (or other) experience, or decoration – which is something easily replaced by kitsch culture and technology... art shares similarities with logic, mathematics and, as well, science. But whereas the other endeavours are useful, art is not. Art indeed exists for its own sake." 'Art After Philosophy', *Studio International* 178, no. 915 (October 1969), 134-137 (p. 137).
- <sup>6</sup> Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', *The Fox* 1, no. 1 (1975), 18-30 (p. 25).
- <sup>7</sup> Kosuth, '1975', p. 90.
- <sup>8</sup> Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', p. 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Suzanne Pagé, 'Preface', in *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective*, ex. cat., ed. by Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), pp. 11-12 (p. 11).
- <sup>10</sup> Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, 'Foreword', in *Global Conceptualism: points of origin, 1950s-1980s*, ex. cat., ed. by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), pp. vii-xi (p. xi).
- <sup>11</sup> Tony Rickaby, interview with the author 17 November 2004; Bruce McLean, interview with the author, 31 January 2005.
- <sup>12</sup> Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, 'Introduction', in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, ex. cat., ed. by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.; London: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 1995), pp. 13-15 (p. 13).
- <sup>13</sup> *Open Systems*, conference, Tate Modern, 16 September 2005.
- <sup>14</sup> Donna DeSalvo, 'Where We Begin: Opening the System, c. 1970', in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, ex. cat., ed. by Donna De Salvo (London, Tate, 2005), pp. 10-23 (p. 12).
- <sup>15</sup> DeSalvo, 'Where We Begin', p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup> Seth Siegelaub, cited by DeSalvo in 'Where We Begin', p. 12. The citation is from Michel Claura and Seth Siegelaub, 'L'Art Conceptuel', in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 286-290 (p. 287). This interview was first published in French in *Xxe siècle* 41 (December 1973), 156-159. It was translated into English by Blake Stimson for publication in the *Anthology*.
- <sup>17</sup> Although Siegelaub was most closely associated with these four artists, in the series of exhibitions he organized between 1968 and 1970, he also worked with many others. Of these, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Bruce Nauman and Robert Smithson were represented in *Open Systems*.
- <sup>18</sup> Anna Dezeuze, 'Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970', *Art Monthly* 283 (July/August 2005), 33-34 (p. 34). At a conference at the Norwich School of Art and Design in February 2005, *Open Systems* was being anticipated as "the Tate's summer exhibition of Conceptual art." Lynda Morris, *New Research into Conceptualism in Europe*, conference, Norwich School of Art and Design, 25 February 2005.



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- <sup>19</sup> DeSalvo, 'Where We Begin', p. 11.
- <sup>20</sup> DeSalvo, 'Where We Begin', p. 21.
- <sup>21</sup> *Site Sculpture Project 42° Parallel Piece*, 1968, *Location Piece #3A: American Alphabet Survey*, 1969, for example.
- <sup>22</sup> DeSalvo, 'Where We Begin', p. 12.
- <sup>23</sup> There are numerous examples of artists expressing their scepticism about the usefulness of the term. It will suffice to give only one: "Let's forget this term, conceptual art. It's a blind alley, it means nothing, it's an ego trip for some people because they can tune in with certain already established oral philosophers, but it doesn't make any sense." Lawrence Weiner, 'At Amsterdam', interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* 4 (spring 1972), 66-73 (p. 73).
- <sup>24</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art, in *Global Conceptualism*, pp. 73-85 (p. 81).
- <sup>25</sup> Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Furguson and Sandy Nairne, 'Introduction' in Greenberg, Furguson and Nairne, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-4 (p. 3).
- <sup>26</sup> Joseph Kosuth, for example, has complained of the emergence of a "professional class of writers [the members of which seem] to want celebrated careers *like* those of artists while they keep their protective perch, and its detached view, with the perquisites and power of recorders of history." "Maybe I'm partly to blame," he has conceded, "writing as I did... that 'this art annexes the function of the critic, and makes a middleman unnecessary.' I didn't realize at the time that the art historians might join our ranks *under cover*." 'Intentions', *Art Bulletin* vol. 78, no. 3 (September 1996), 407-412, (p. 411).
- <sup>27</sup> Lawrence Weiner, interview with the author, 21 December 2004.

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1. The Palais de Tokyo, photographed from the south. The Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris is housed in the east wing. Image source: [www.museums-of-paris.com](http://www.museums-of-paris.com)

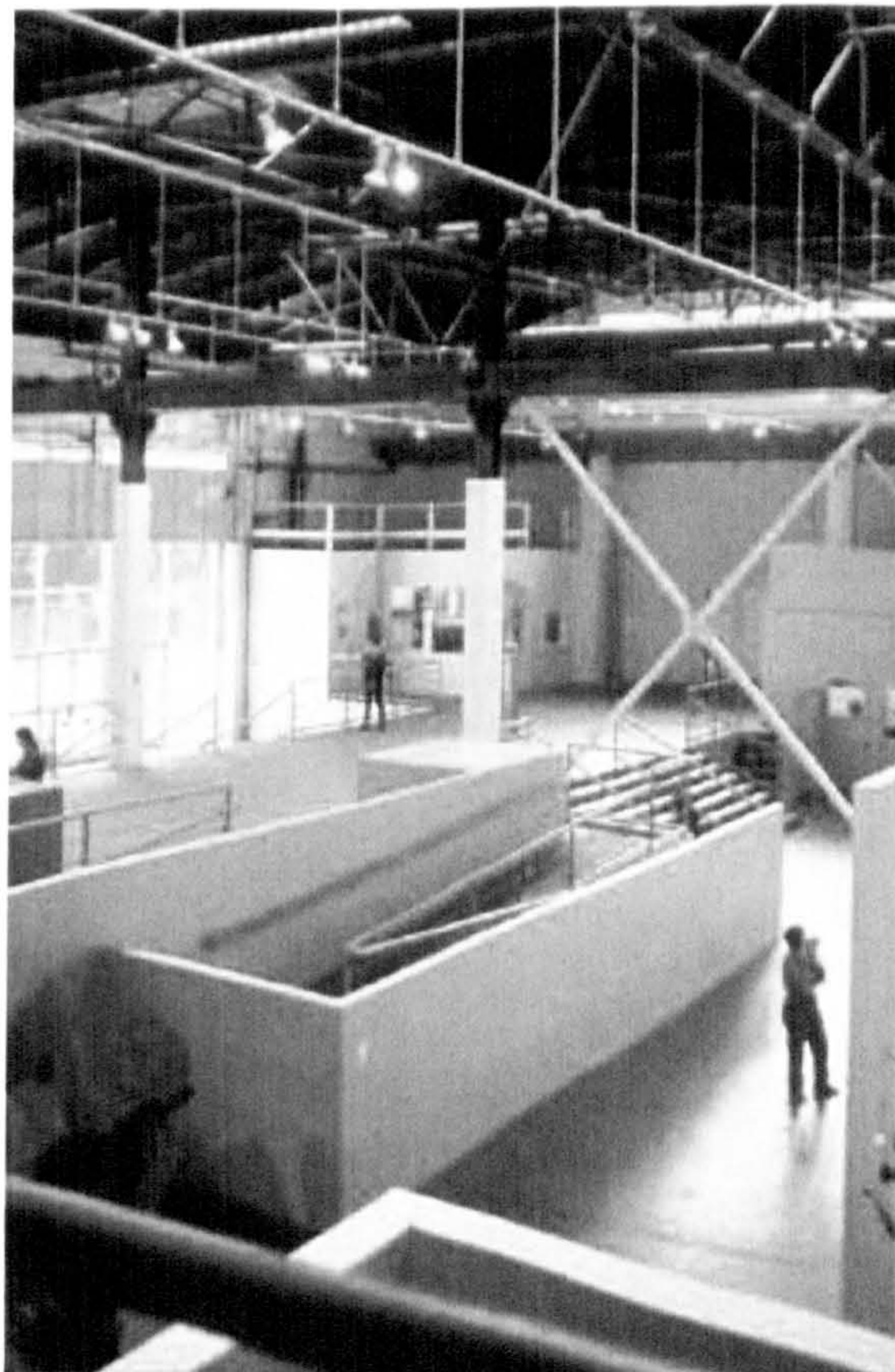


2. The Geffen Contemporary, formerly Temporary Contemporary, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Image source: [www.westadams-normandie.com](http://www.westadams-normandie.com)





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3. Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadows, New York. Photo: Sarah Kunstler.

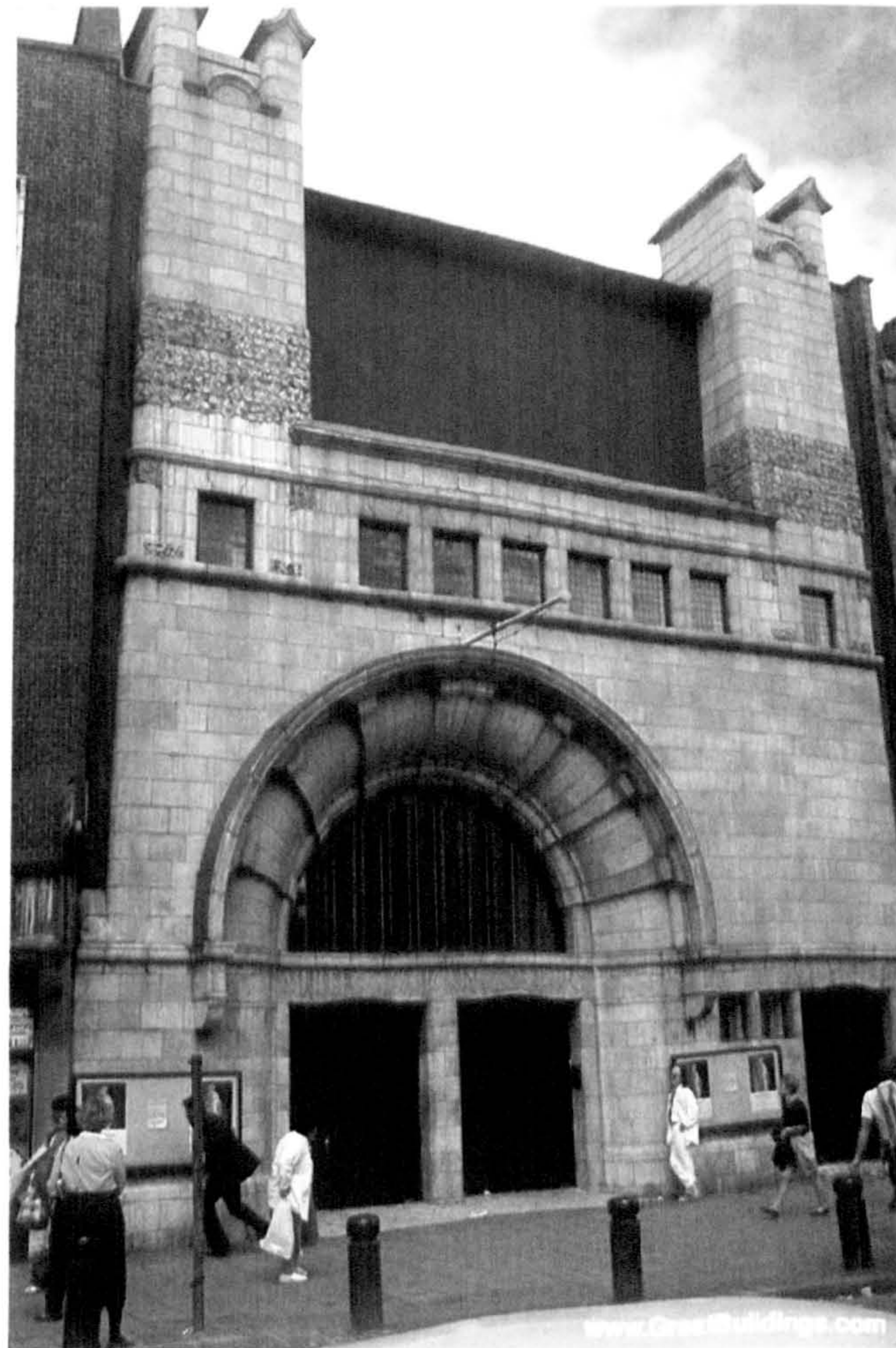


4. The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. Image source: [www.greatbuildings.com](http://www.greatbuildings.com)



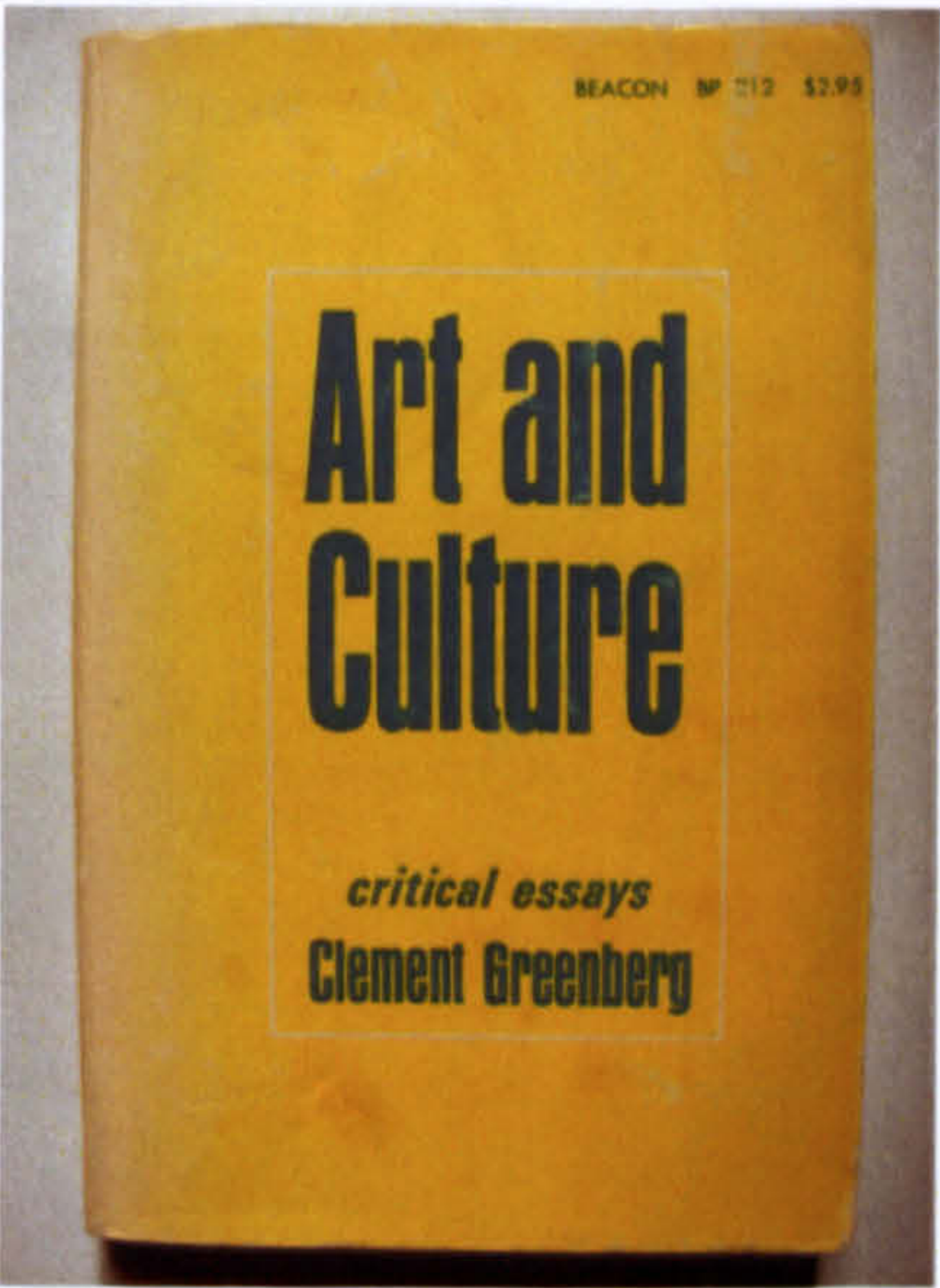


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5. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1961).



Location Piece #17  
Turin, Italy

On March 17, 1973 the artist arbitrarily selected then focused on a specific location some distance away from where he was standing in the *Piazza Vittorio Veneto* (A); he wanted to see what 'was going on across the river' (the Po) at a place that he had never seen before and that he never intends to see again (B: the corner of *Via Cosmo* and *Via Villa d. Regina*)

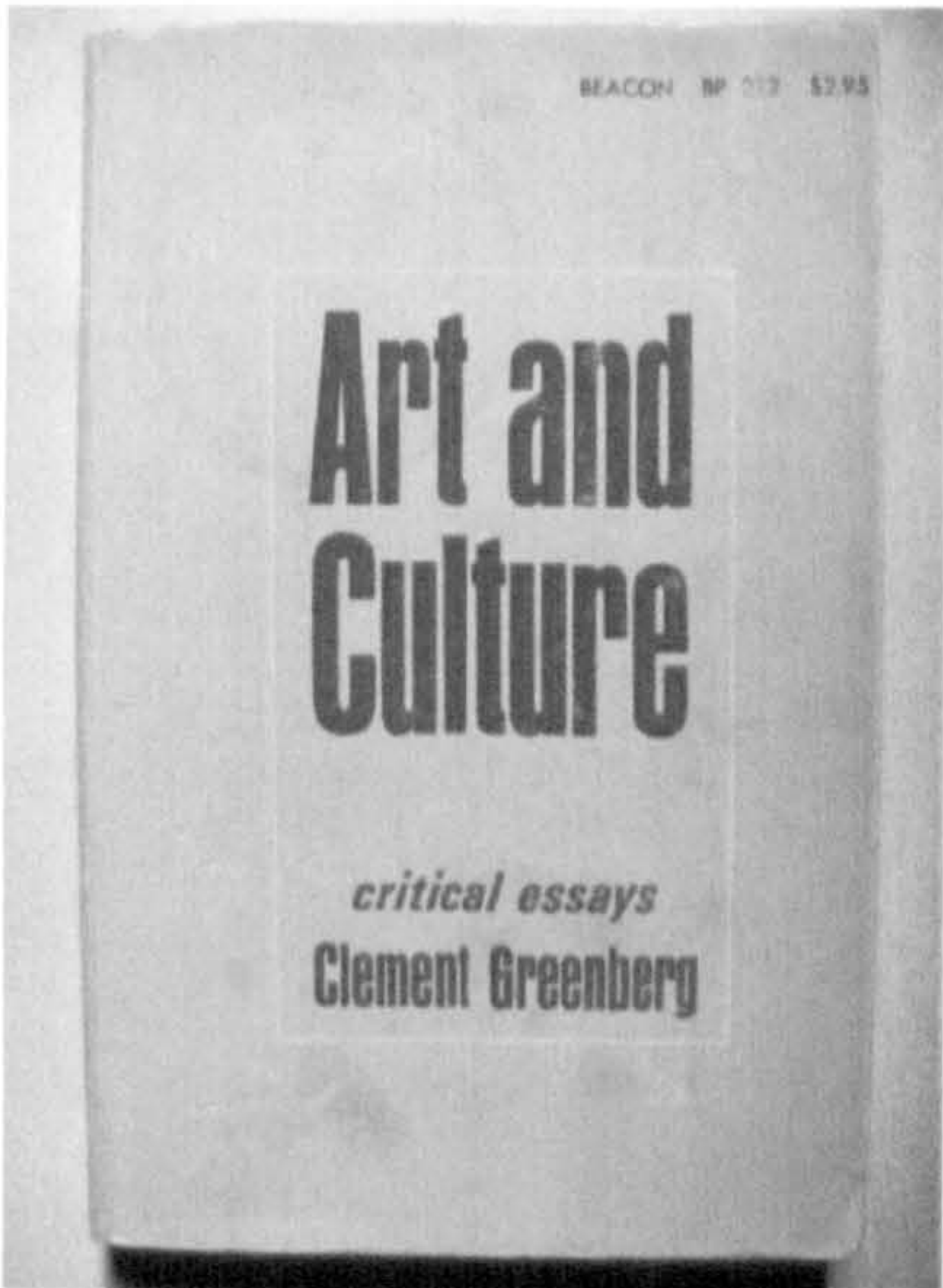
The selected location was walked to, one photograph was made and then the artist walked away at once; back in America he processed the film and discovered that at the instant that the photograph was made a man was looking directly at the artist and that man bears a strong resemblance to the artist... at least more so than most everyone else in this world.

Five photographs join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.

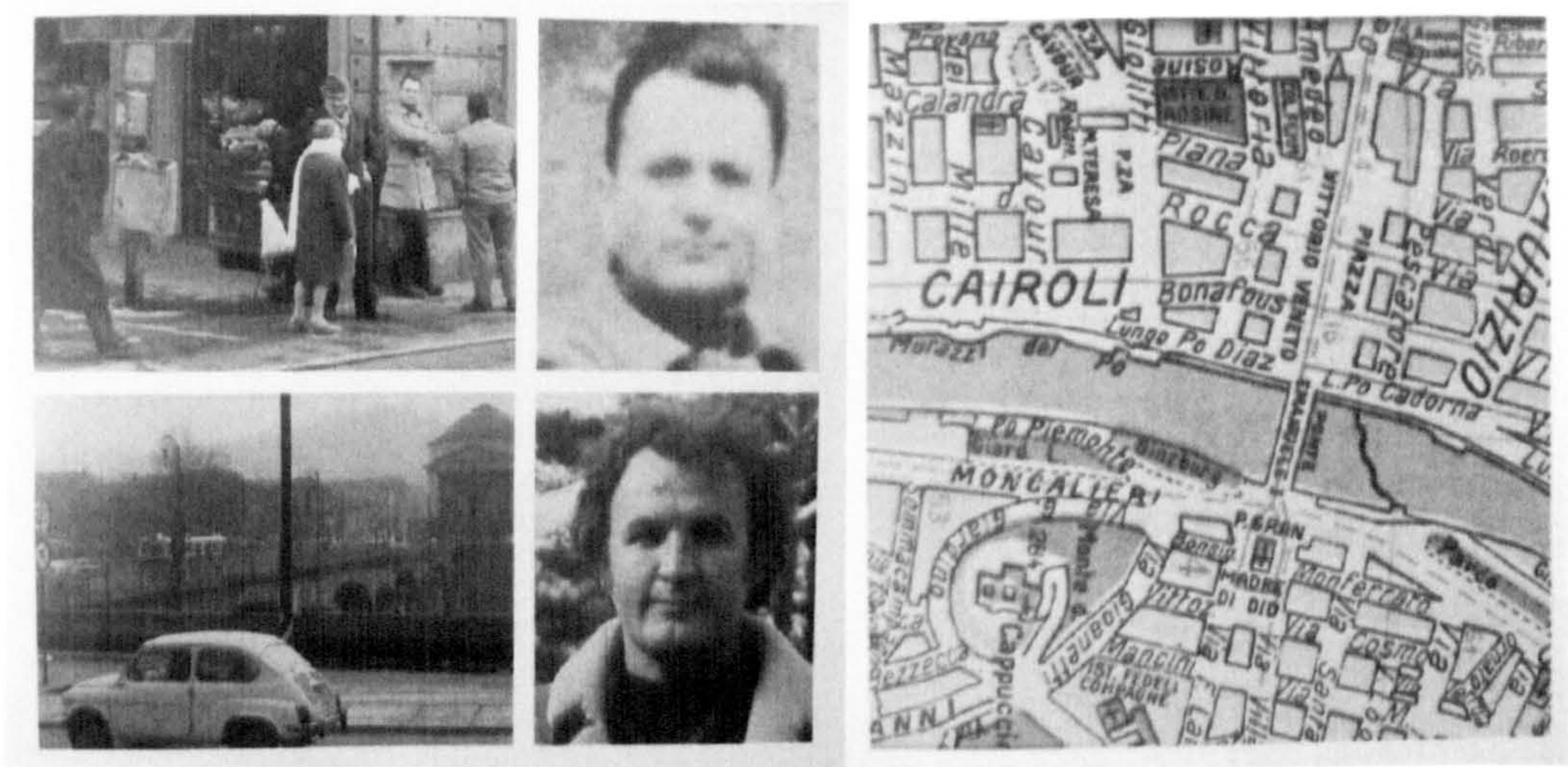
December, 1973

6. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #17, Turin, Italy, December 1973*, 1973, five photographs and type-written statement. Collection and photo: FRAC Limousin, Limoges.





5. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1961).



Location Piece #17  
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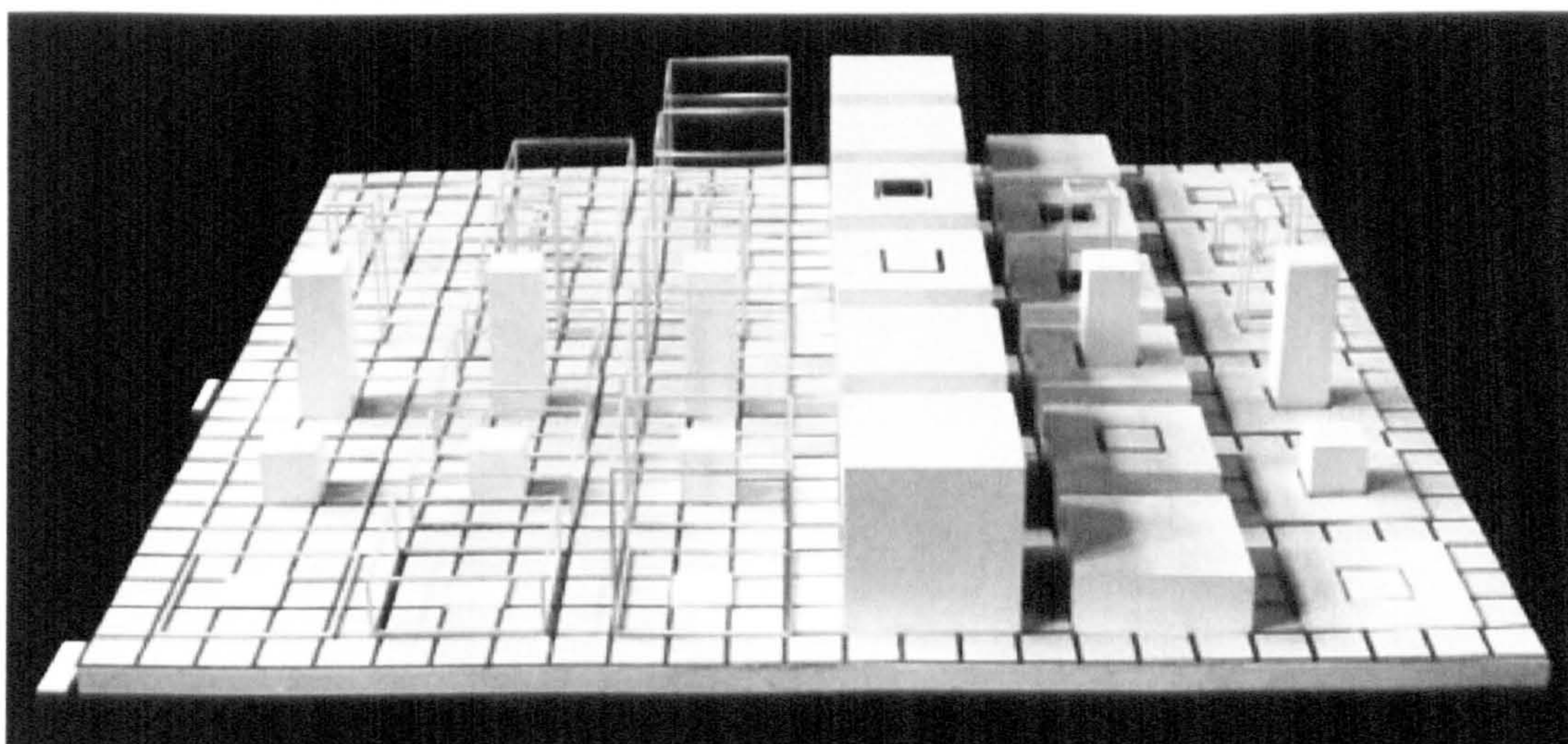
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7. Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project #1, ABCD*, 1966-68, baked enamel on steel, (24 x 178 x 178 cm). Collection: Charles Saatchi. Image source: [www.bombsite.com](http://www.bombsite.com)

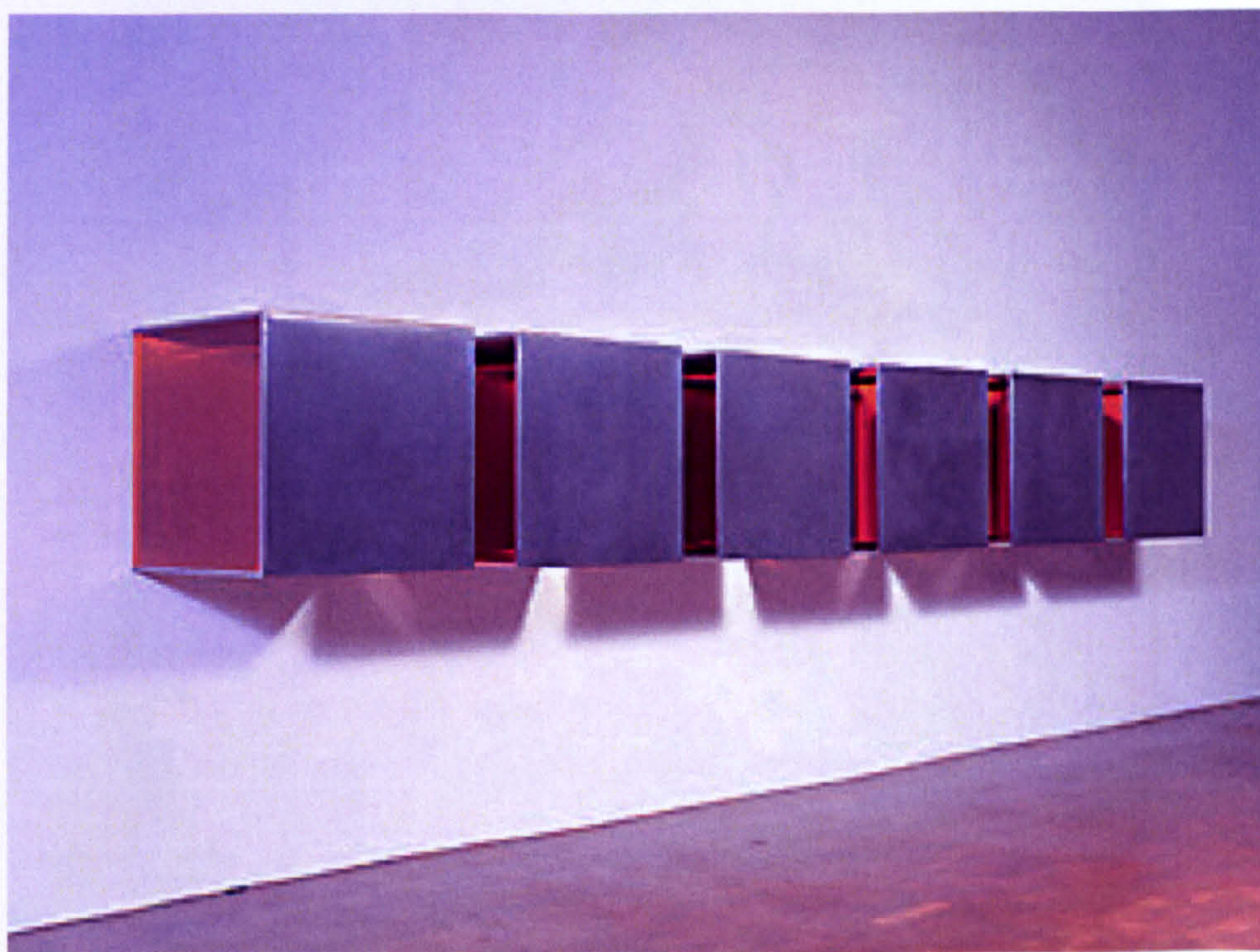


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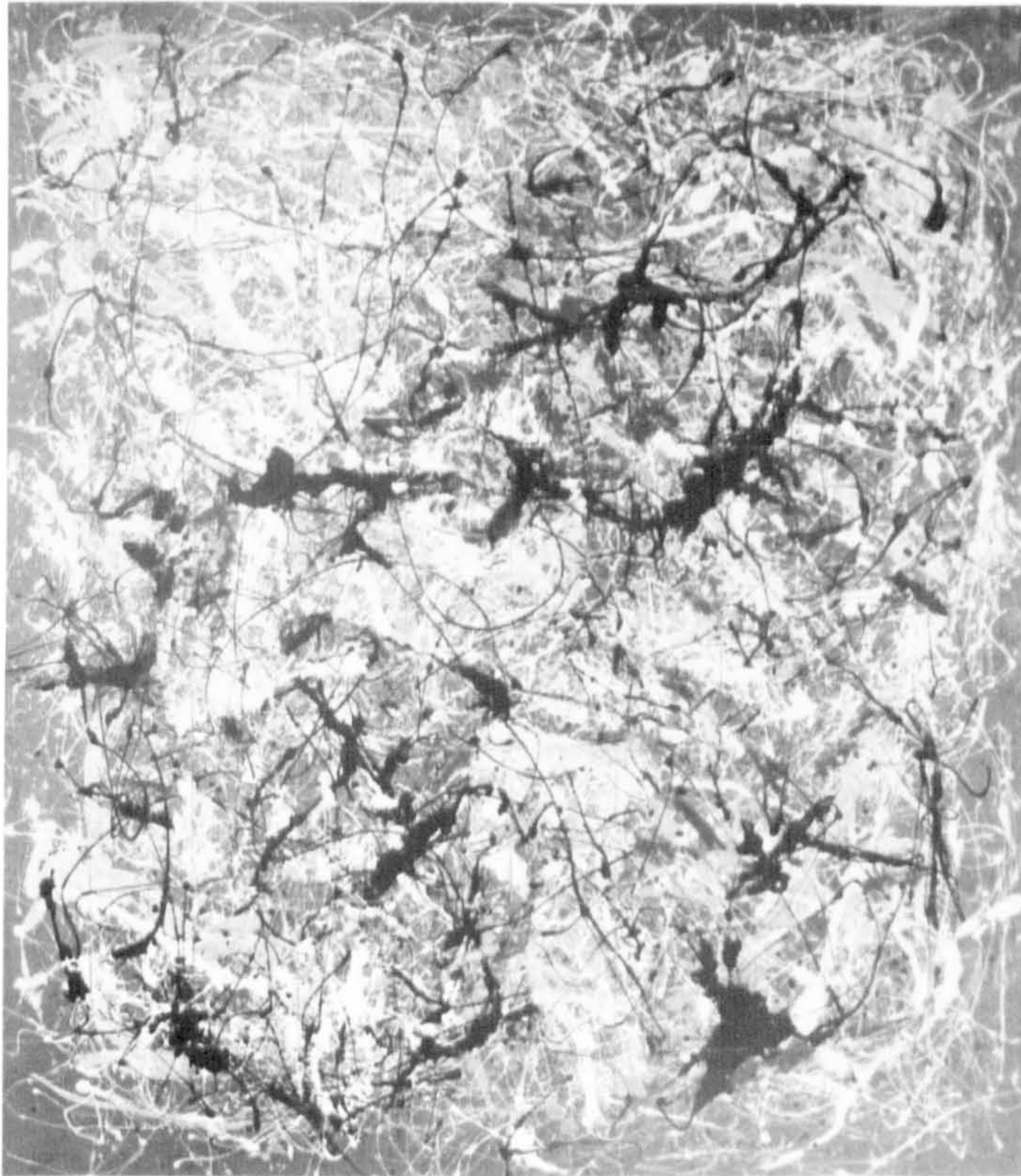


9. Art & Language, *V.I. Lenin by V. Charagovitch (1970) in the Style of Jackson Pollock*, 1980, oil and enamel on board mounted on plywood (239 x 210 cm). Collection and photo: Galerie de Paris.

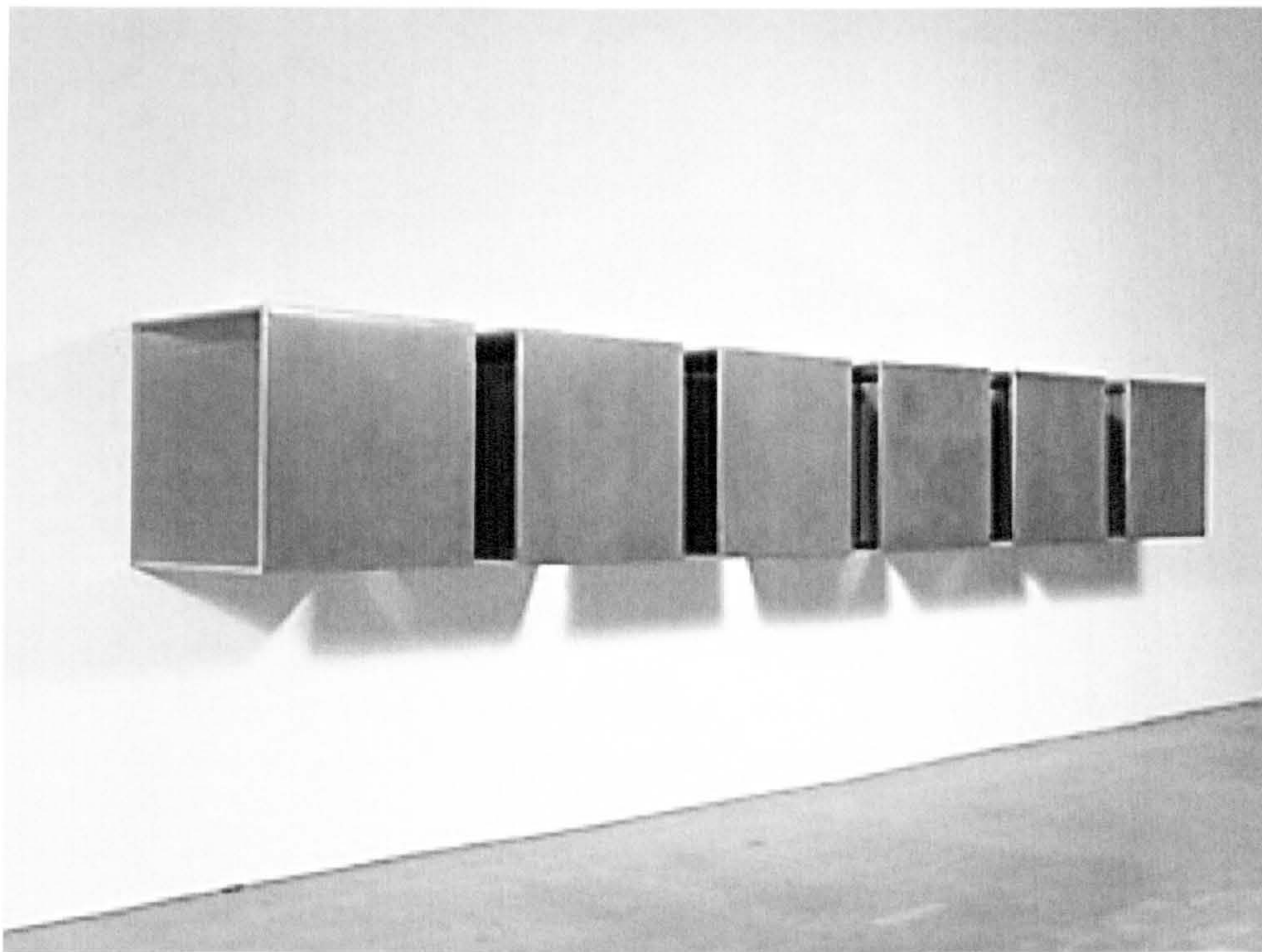


10. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1966, stainless steel and plexiglass (6 units, each 86 x 86 x 86 cm). Collection: Milwaukee Art Museum, Layton Collection. Photo: Donald Judd Foundation; VAGA, New York.



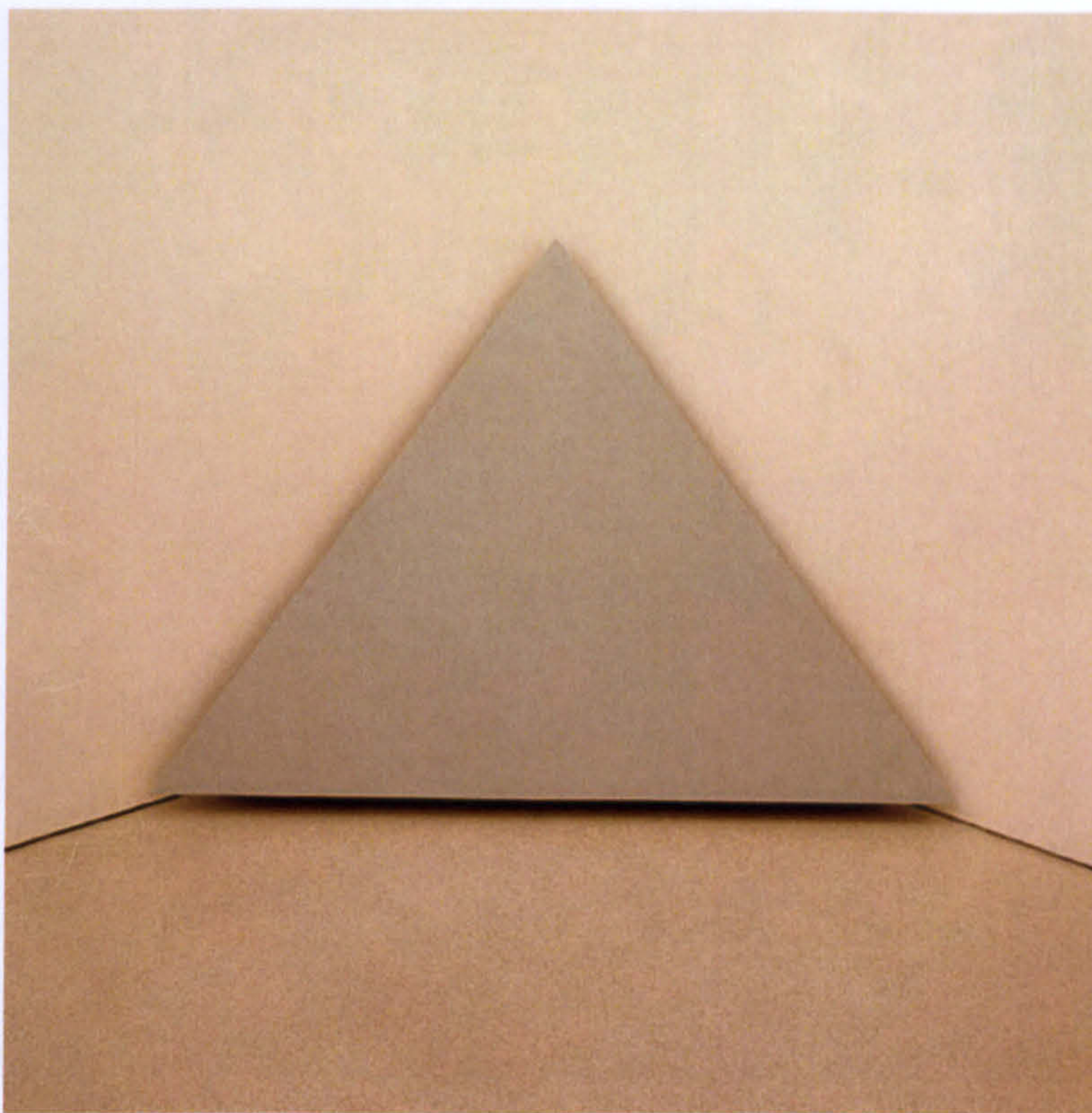


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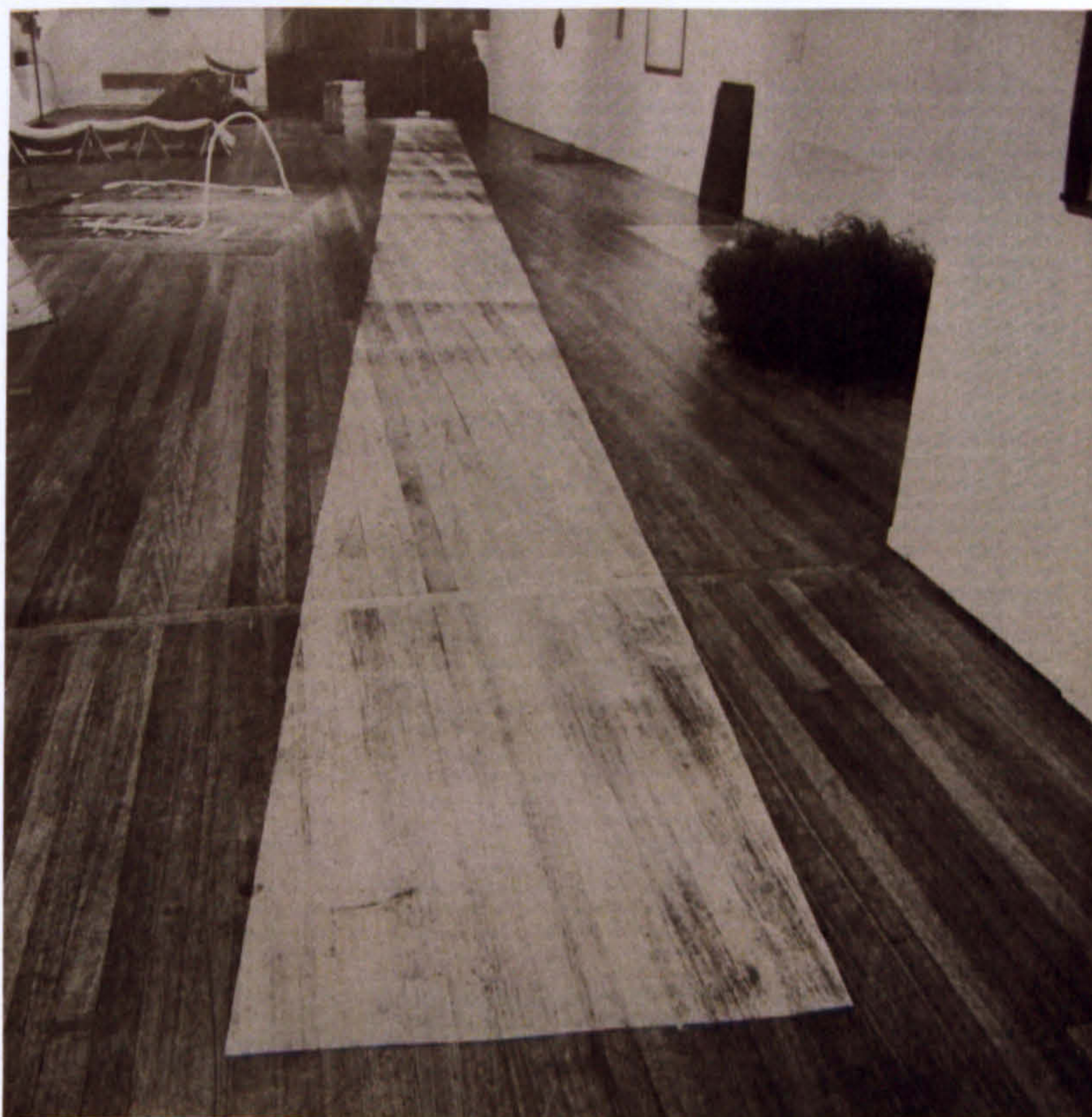


10. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1966, stainless steel and plexiglass (6 units, each 86 x 86 x 86 cm). Collection: Milwaukee Art Museum, Layton Collection. Photo: Donald Judd Foundation; VAGA, New York.



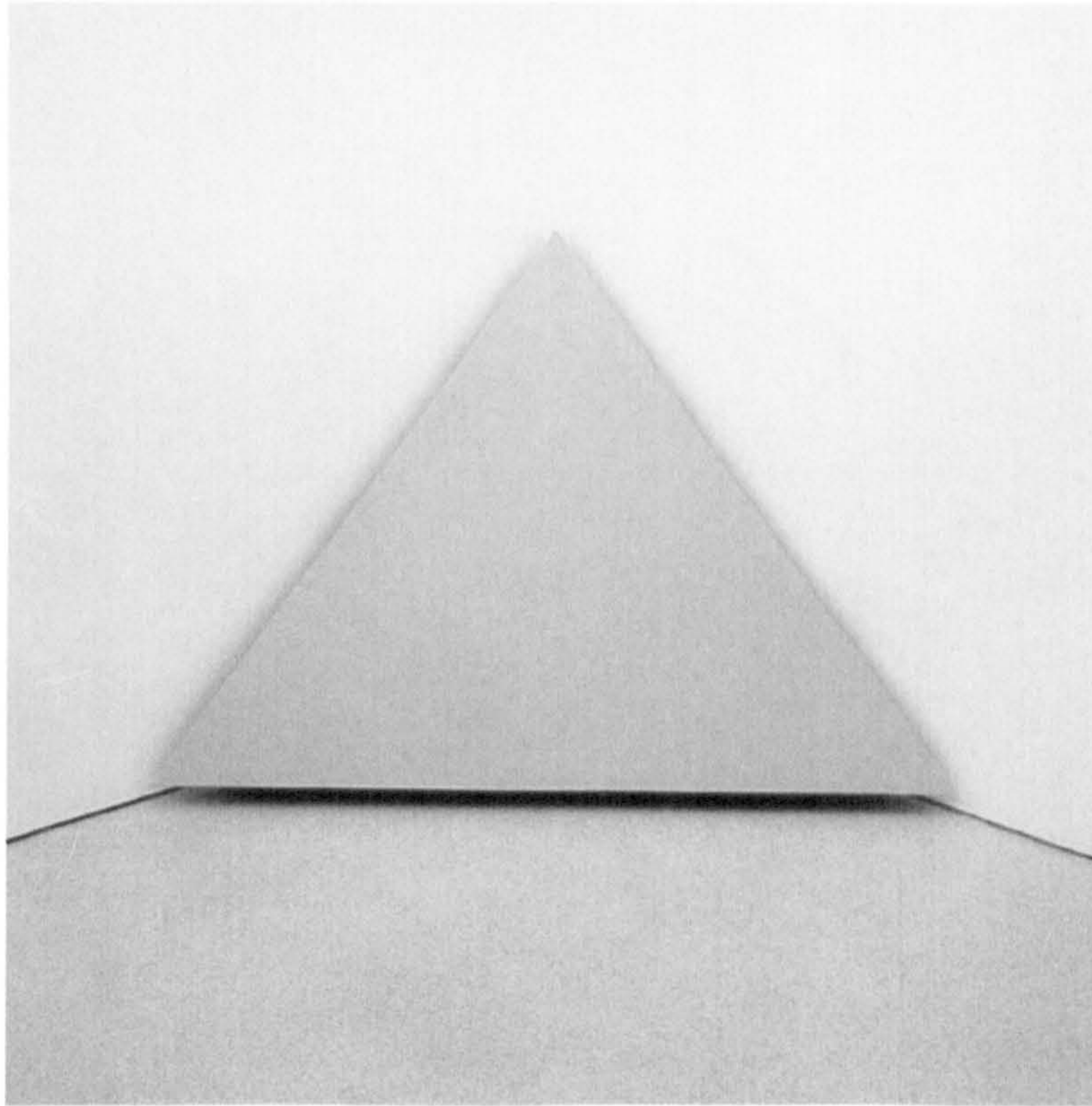


11. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 1964, painted plywood and pine (183 x 259 x 129.5 cm). Collection: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Panza Collection. Photo: Robert Morris; Artists' Rights Society (ARS), New York.

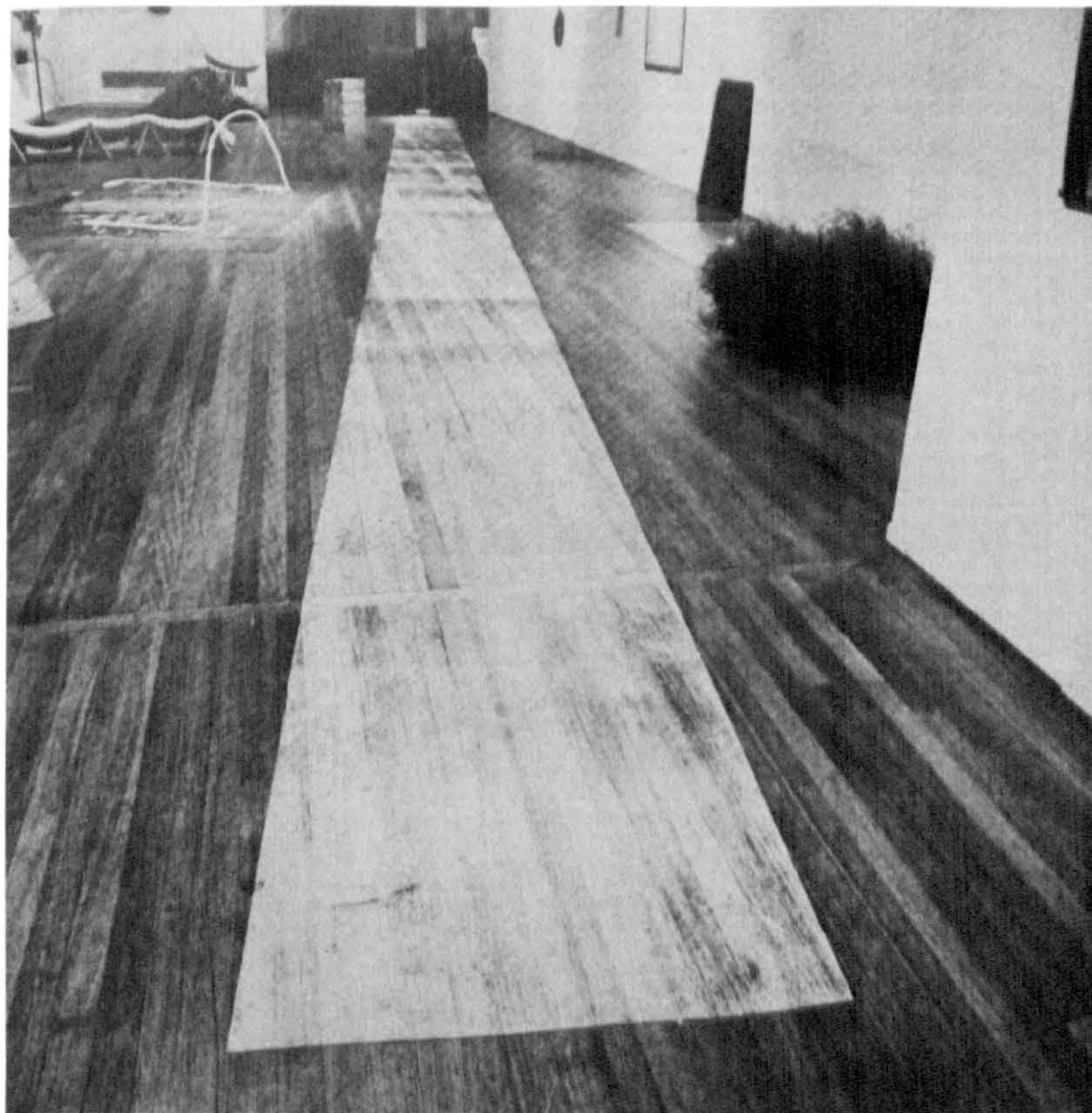


12. Victor Burgin, *Photo Path*, 1967, photographs stapled to floor (dimensions variable). Installation view: *When Attitudes Become Form*, ICA, London, 1969. Photo: Mick Dean.





11. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 1964, painted plywood and pine (183 x 259 x 129.5 cm). Collection: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Panza Collection. Photo: Robert Morris; Artists' Rights Society (ARS), New York.

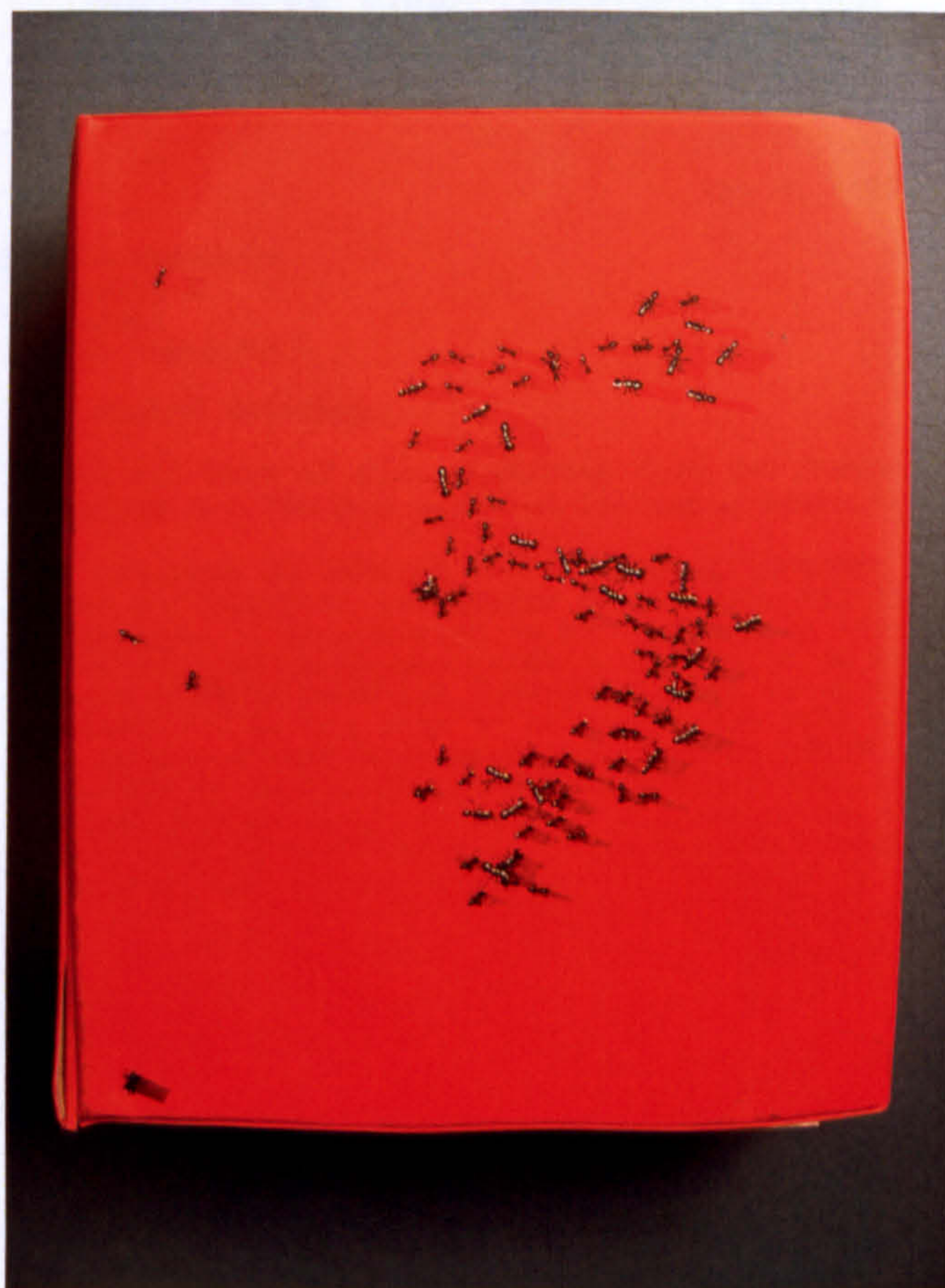


12. Victor Burgin, *Photo Path*, 1967, photographs stapled to floor (dimensions variable). Installation view: *When Attitudes Become Form*, ICA, London, 1969. Photo: Mick Dean.





13. Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950, oil, enamel and aluminium on canvas (221 x 300 cm). Collection and photo: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

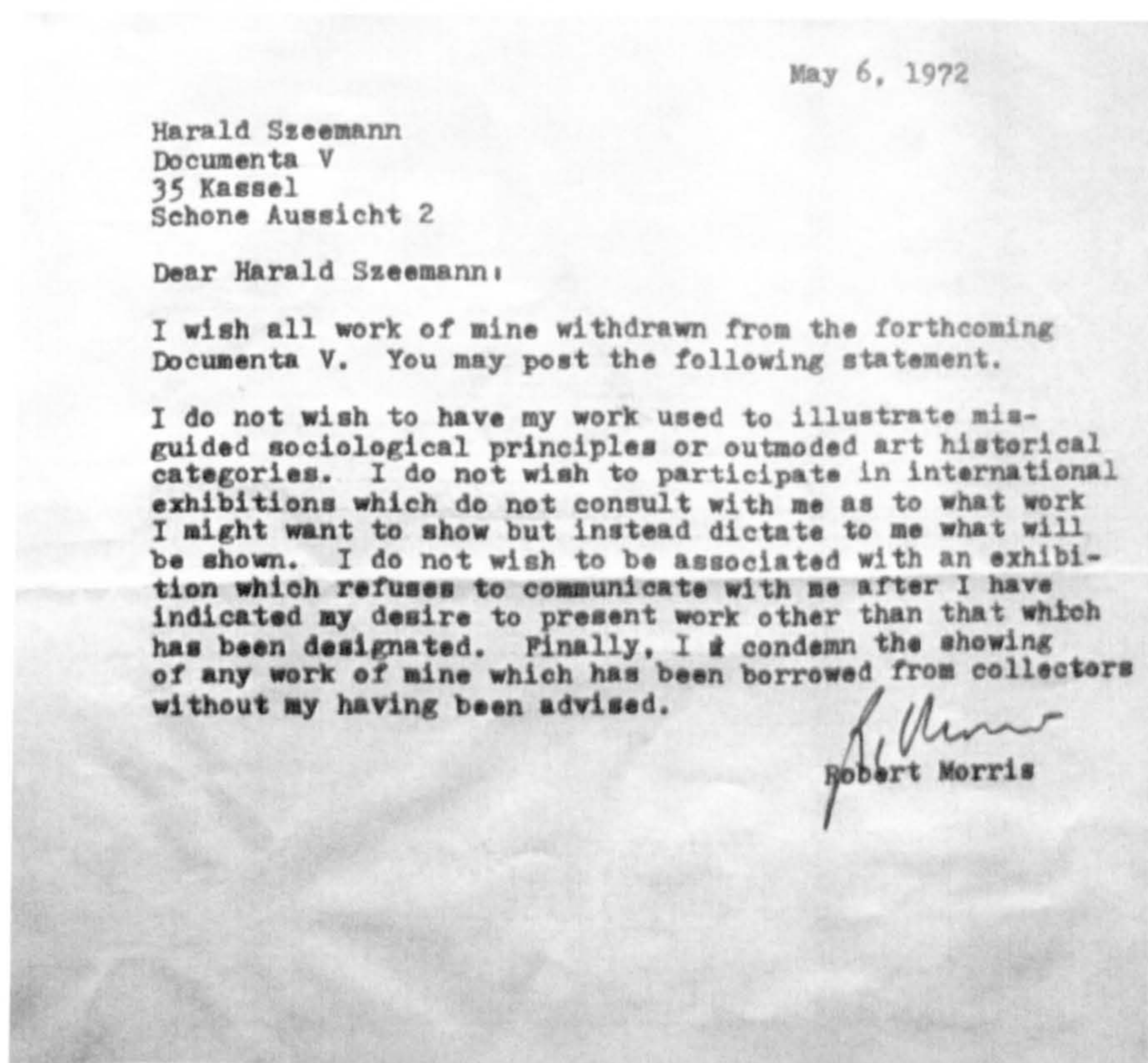


14. Catalogue for the exhibition, *Documenta V: Befragung der Realität: Bildwelten heute*. (Kassel: Neue Galerie and Museum Fridericianum, 1972). Cover design by Ed Ruscha.



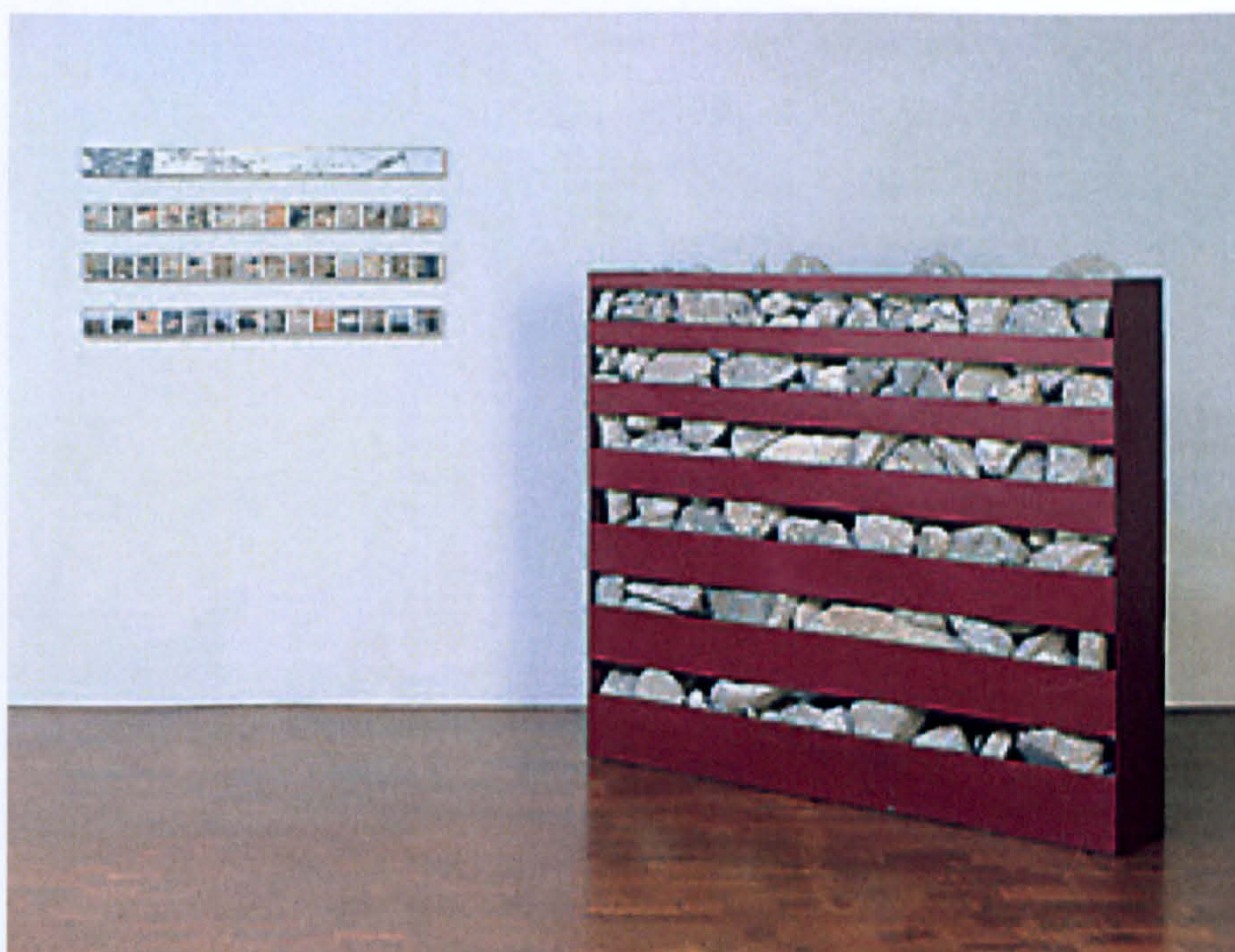


15. The *Documenta V* team in the *Documenta* office (from left to right): Jean-Christophe Ammann, Harald Szeemann, Ingolf Bauer, Arnold Bode, Peter Iden, Bazon Brock. Photo: Documenta Archive.



16. Letter from Robert Morris to Harald Szeemann, 6 May 1972. Photo: Documenta Archive.





17. Robert Smithson, *Non-Site, Line of Wreckage, Bayonne, New Jersey*, 1968, painted aluminium, concrete fragments, framed map, three framed panels of photographs. (Aluminium and concrete: 150 x 178 x 32 cm; map and photo panels: each, 9.5 x 104.5 cm). Collection: Milwaukee Art Museum. Photo: Estate of Robert Smithson; VAGA, New York.



18. David Medalla working on the construction of the *Peoples' Participation Pavilion* at *Documenta V*, 1972. Photo: John Dugger.





19. Drawing for David Medalla and John Dugger's *Peoples' Participation Pavilion*, reproduced in the *Documenta V* catalogue (16.198).



20. Joseph Beuys in the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*, *Documenta V*, 1972. Photo: Documenta Archive.





21. Art & Language, *Index (01)*, 1972, text on paper, index cards, file cabinets (cabinets: 23 x 29 x 62.5 cm). Installation view: *Documenta V*, Kassel, 1972. Collection: Daros Art Education. Photo: Charles Harrison.

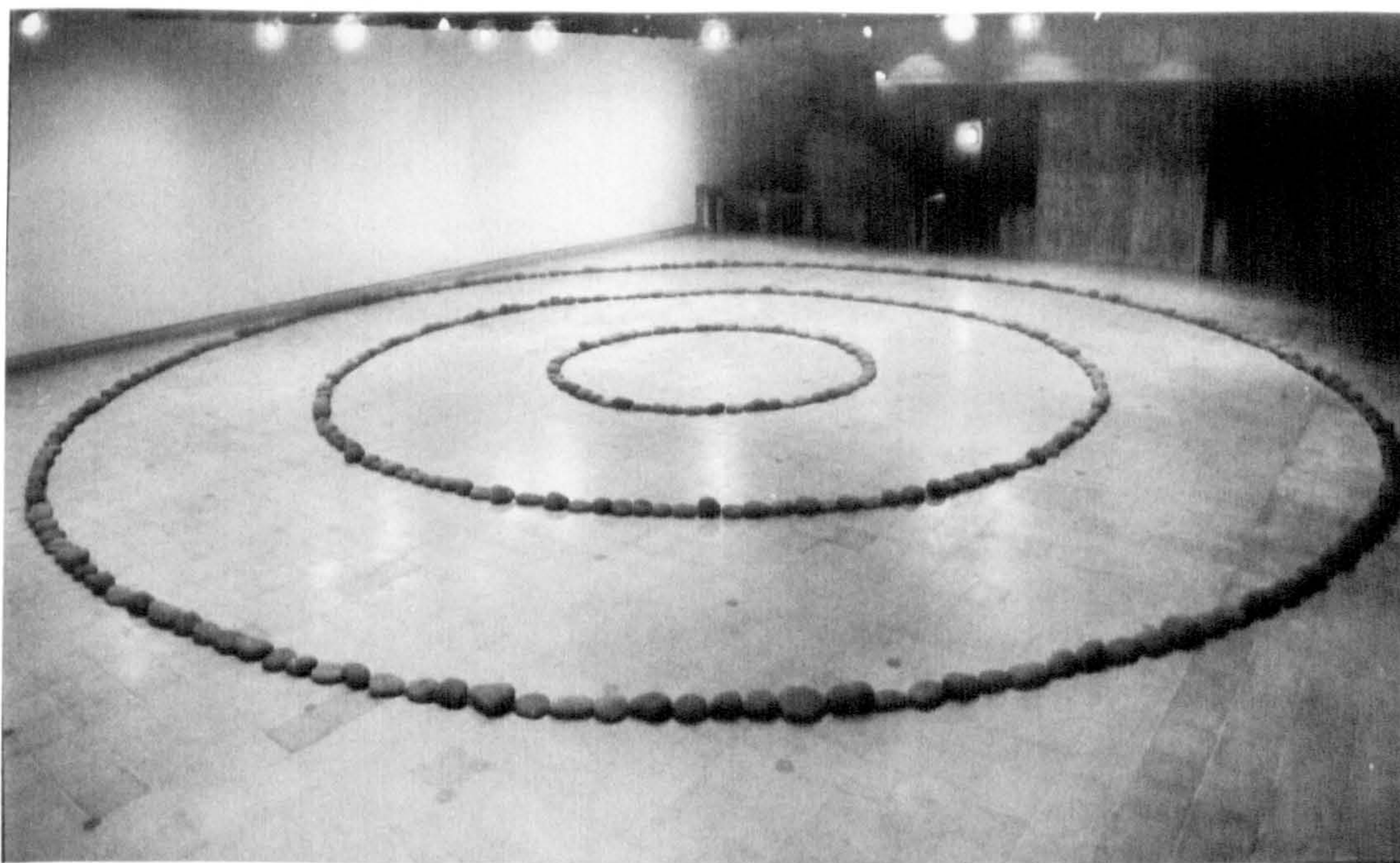


22. Art & Language, *Index (01)*, 1972, text on paper, index cards, file cabinets (cabinets: 23 x 29 x 62.5 cm). Installation view: *Documenta V*, Kassel, 1972. Collection: Daros Art Education. Photo: Documenta Archive.





23. Daniel Buren, untitled installation at *Documenta V*, Kassel, 1972, striped paper, showing also political posters mounted over Buren's installation. Photo: Maria Gilissen.

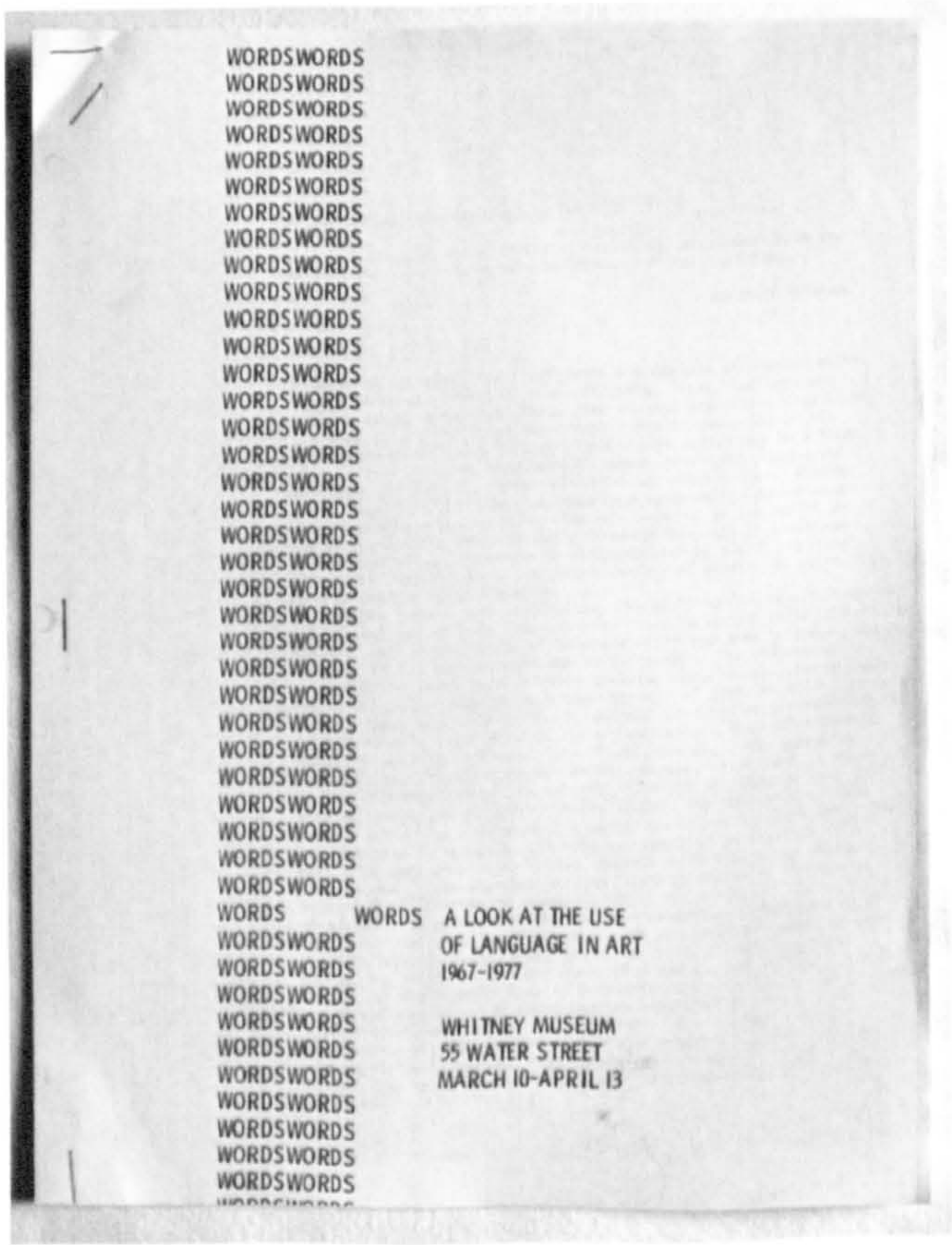


24. Richard Long, *Three Circles of Stones*, 1972. Installation view: *The New Art*, Hayward Gallery, 1972. Photo: Hayward Gallery.



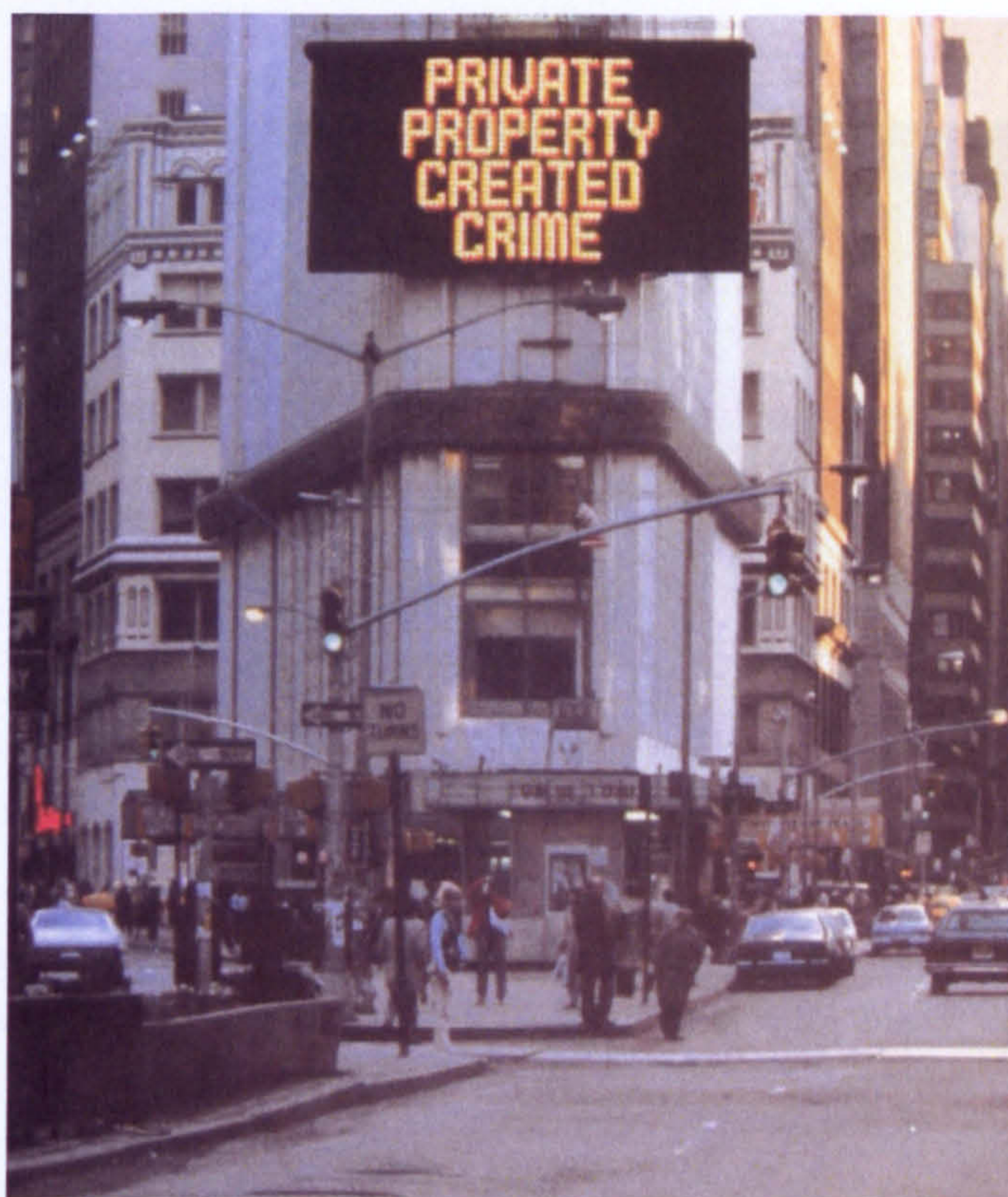


25. Victor Burgin, *This Position* (1969), *Room* (1970), *All Criteria* (1970), *From Seel* (1971), *Bracketed – Performative* (1971) and *IV 2* (1972). Installation view: *The New Art*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1972. Photo: Hayward Gallery.

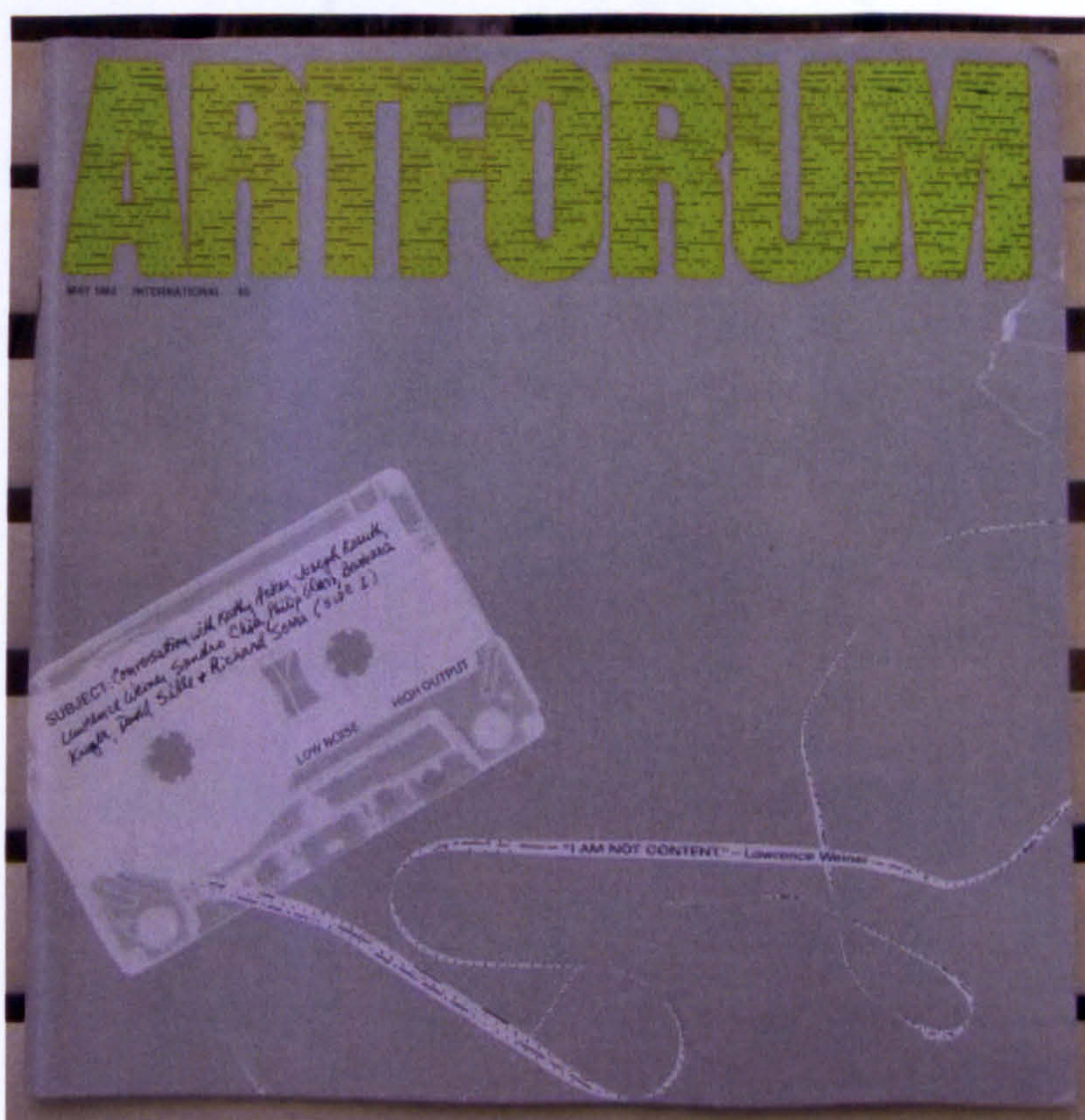


26. Photocopied catalogue for the exhibition *Words: A Look at the Use of Language in Art: 1967-1977*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977.



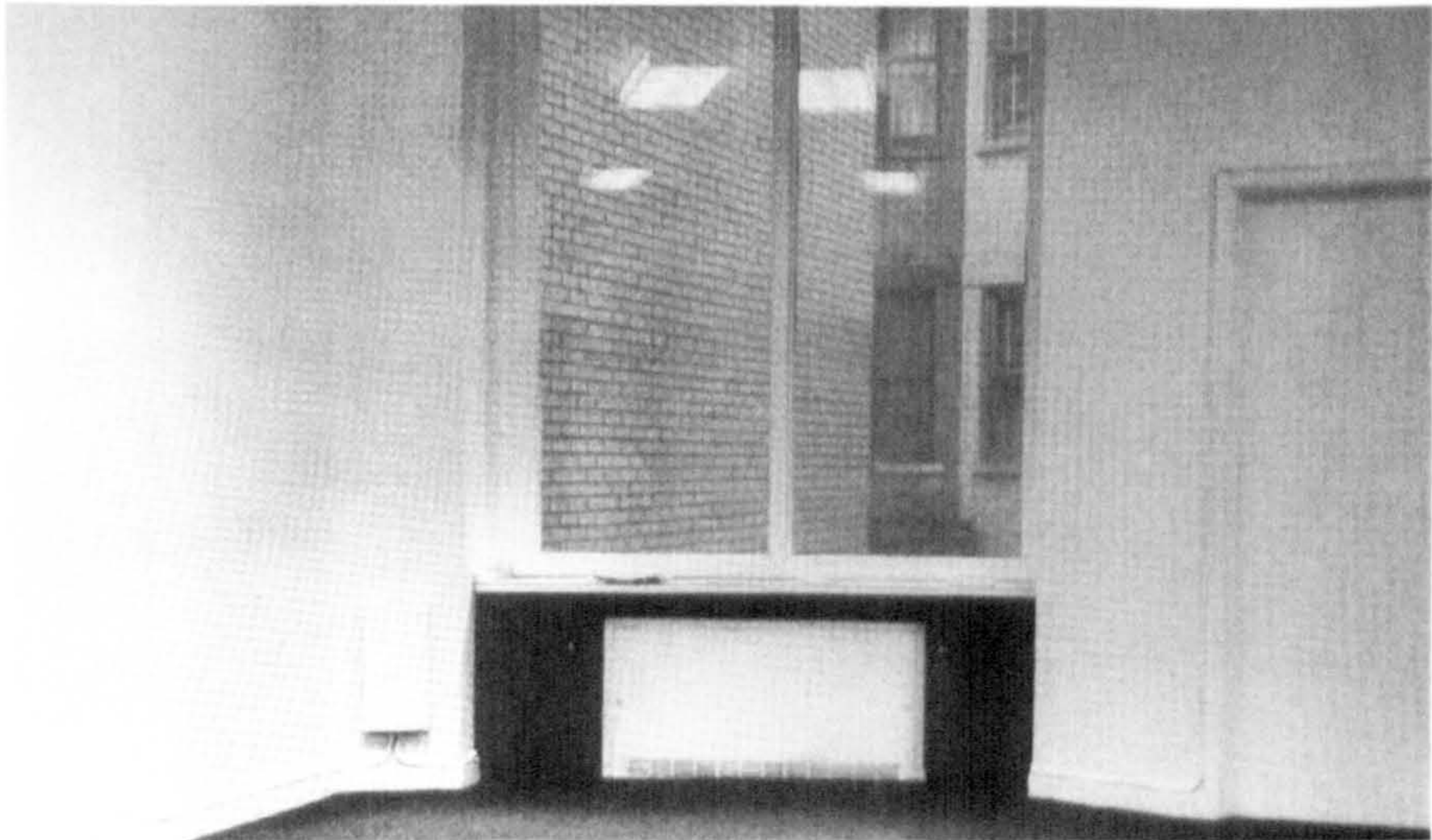


27. Jenny Holzer, from *Truisms*, 1977-1979, *Private Property Created Crime*, Spectacolor sign (6.09 x 12.19m), Times Square, New York, 1982. Photo: Lisa Kahane.

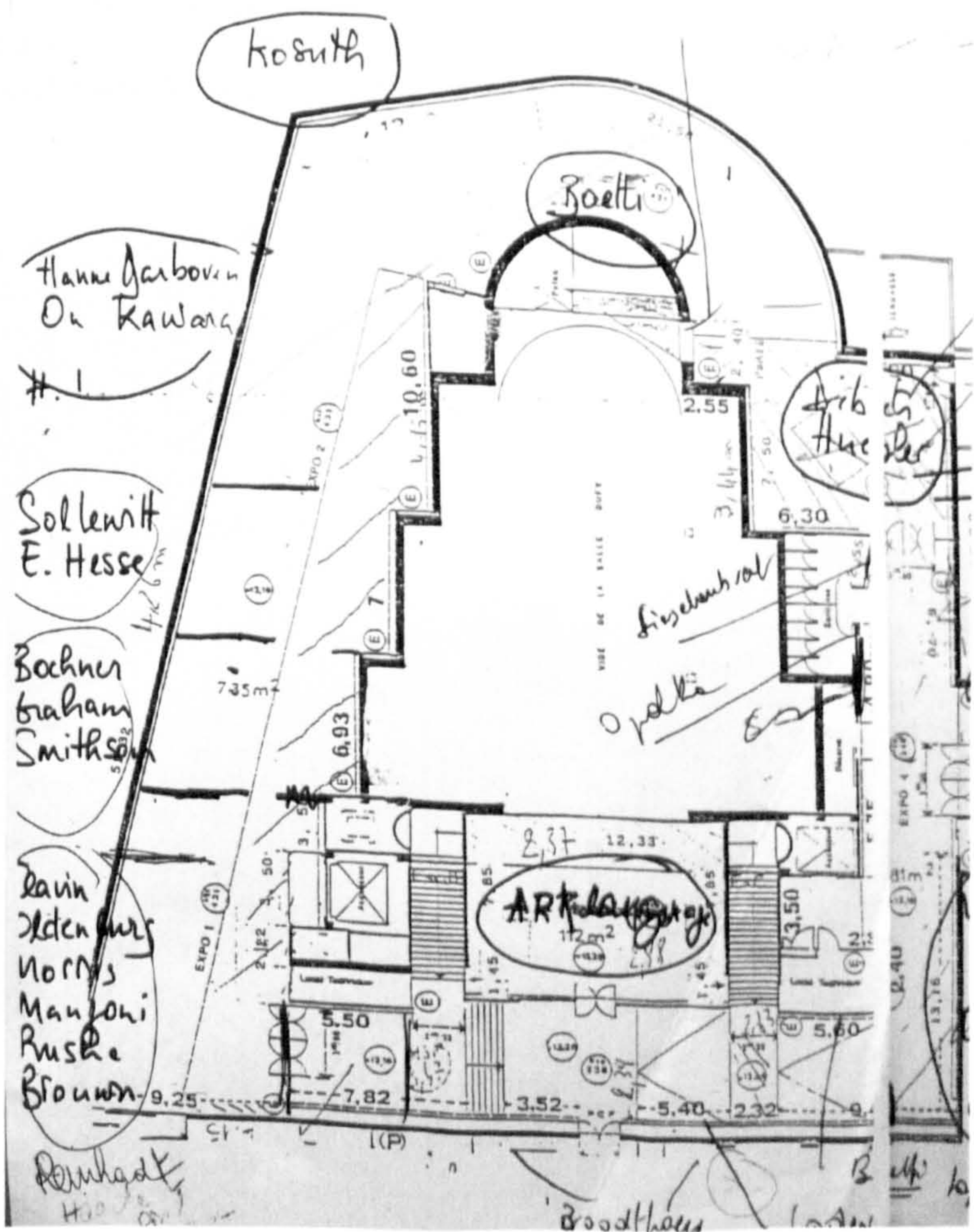


28. *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982). The issue included Douglas Huebler's essay 'Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?', and a conversation between Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Kathy Acker, Sandro Chia, Philip Glass, Barbara Kruger, David Salle and Richard Serra.





29. Robert Barry, *88 mc Carrier Wave (FM)*, 1968, and *1000 kc Carrier Wave (AM)*, 1968, as installed at the exhibition *January 5 – 31 1969*, New York, 1969.  
Photo: Robert Barry.



30. Working plans for *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, showing the first sequence of rooms (clockwise from bottom left).



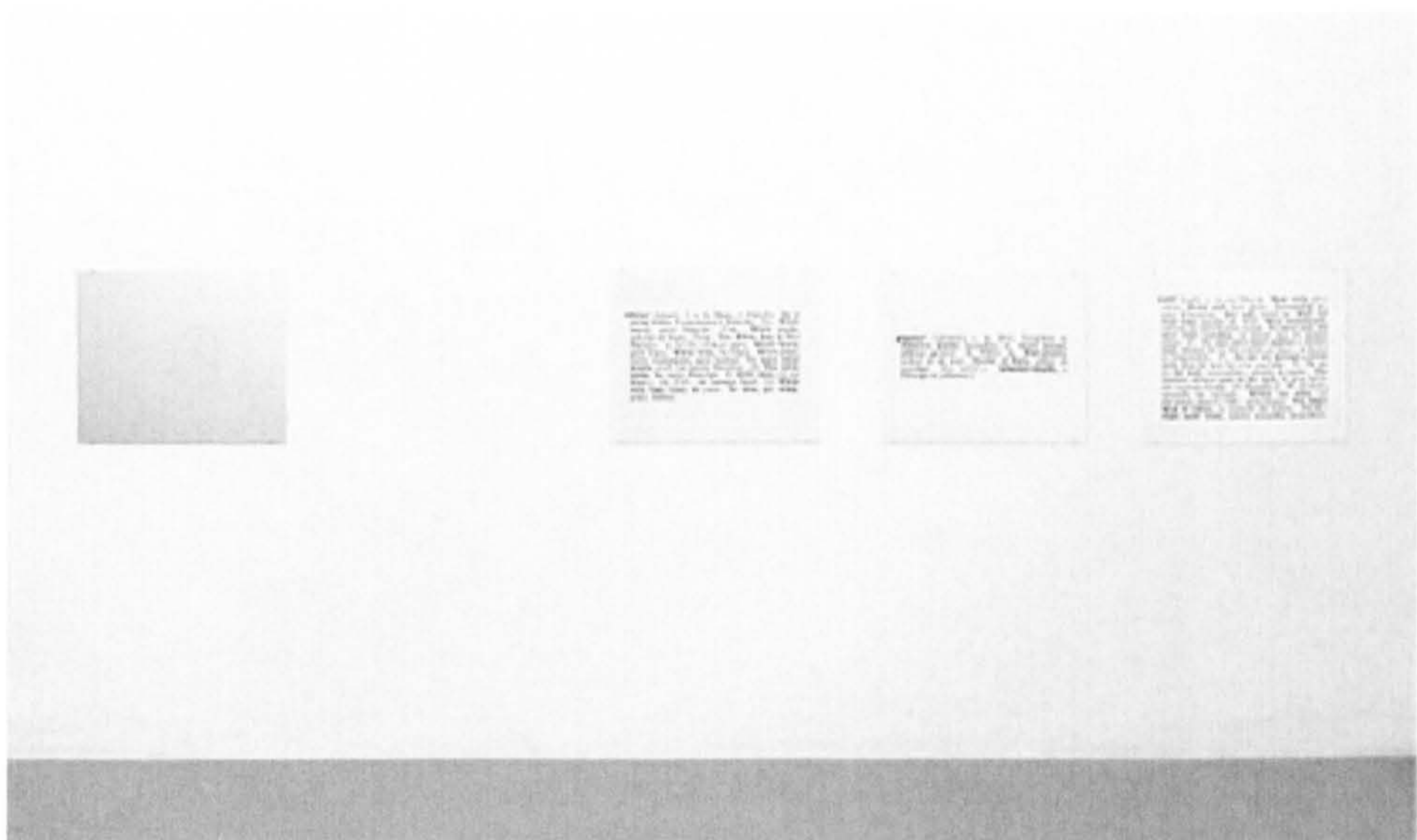


31. Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, traces of ink and crayon on paper with mat and label hand-lettered in ink, in gold-leafed frame (64 x 56 cm, including frame). Collection: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Robert Rauschenberg; VAGA, New York.

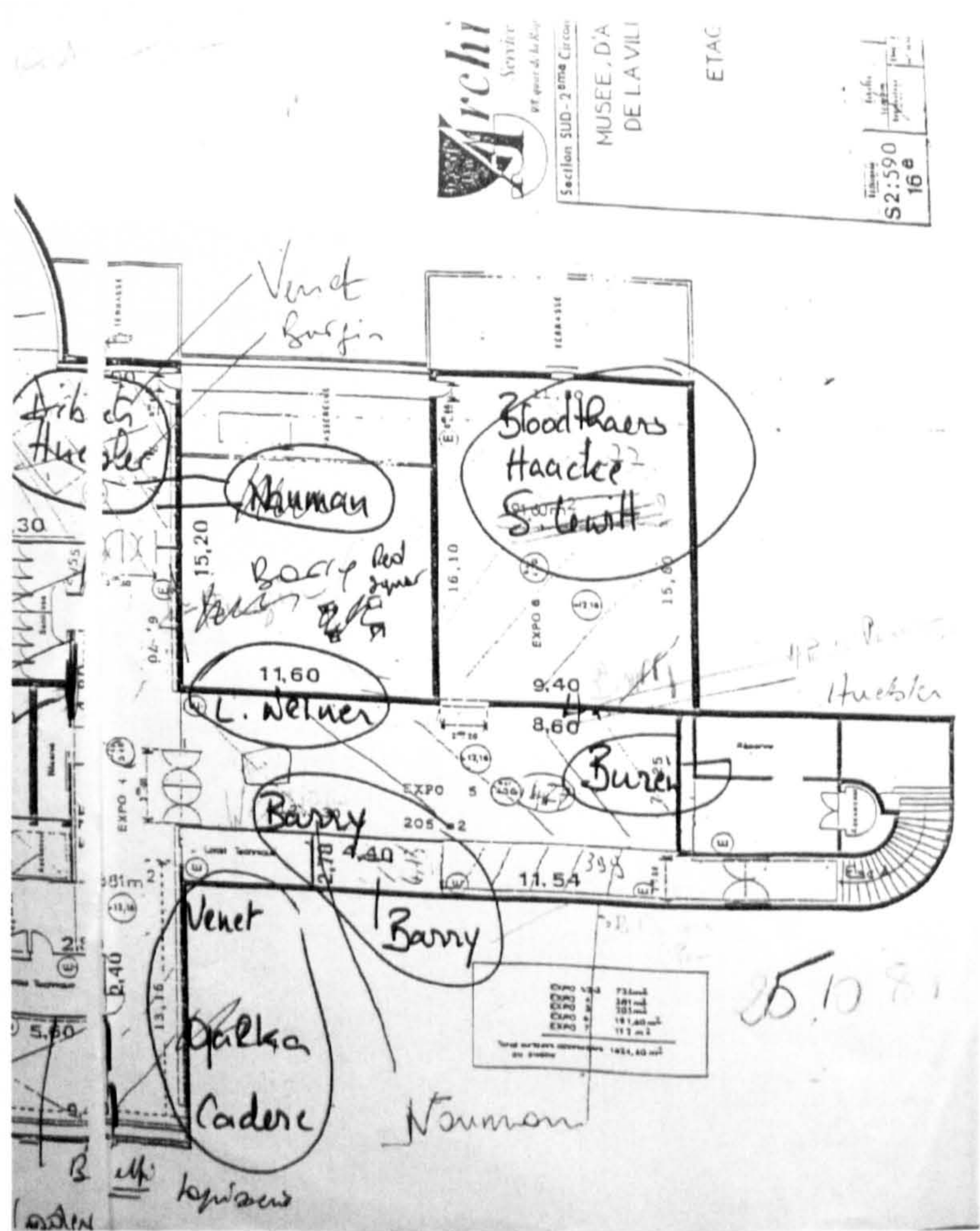


32. Mel Bochner, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, 1966, four loose-leaf files with photocopies, presented on four plinths (notebooks: 30 x 28 x 10 cm; plinths: 91 x 63.5 x 30.5 cm). Photo: Mel Bochner/Sonnabend Gallery.





33. Joseph Kosuth, *Wall: One and Five (English and Latin)*, 1965, photograph of wall, three photographs of dictionary definitions of the words: “white,” “plaster,” “wall” (each, 54.5 x 91 cm). Installation view: Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain de Nice, 2004. Collection: Leo Castelli. Photo: MAMAC, Nice.

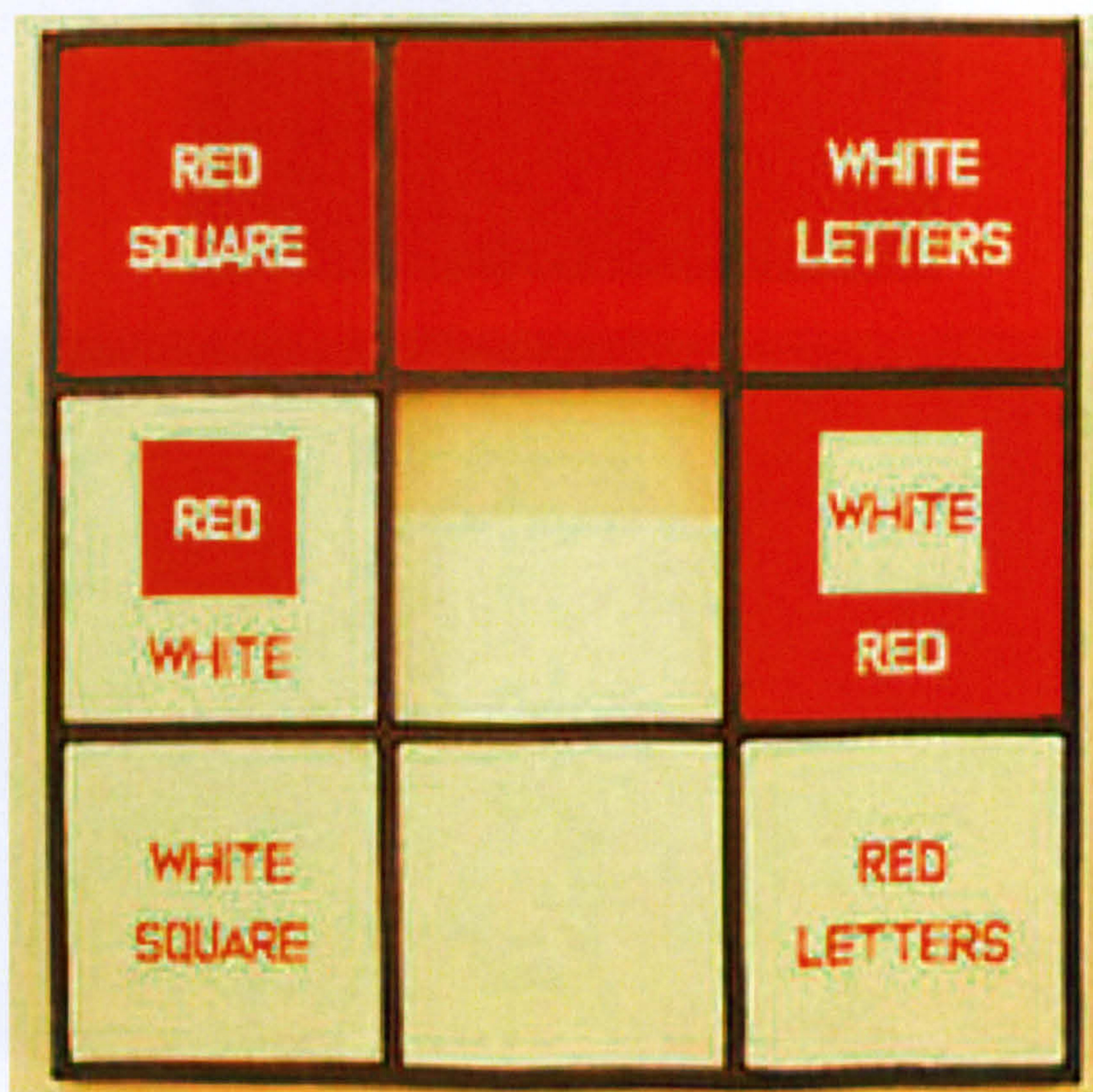


34. Working plans for *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, showing second section of the exhibition encompassing works by Asher, Buren, Burgin, Broodthaers and Cadere.





35. *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspetive*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).



36. Sol LeWitt, *Red Square, White Letters*, 1962, oil on canvas (91.5 x 91.5 cm). Private collection. Photo: Thomas Dreher.



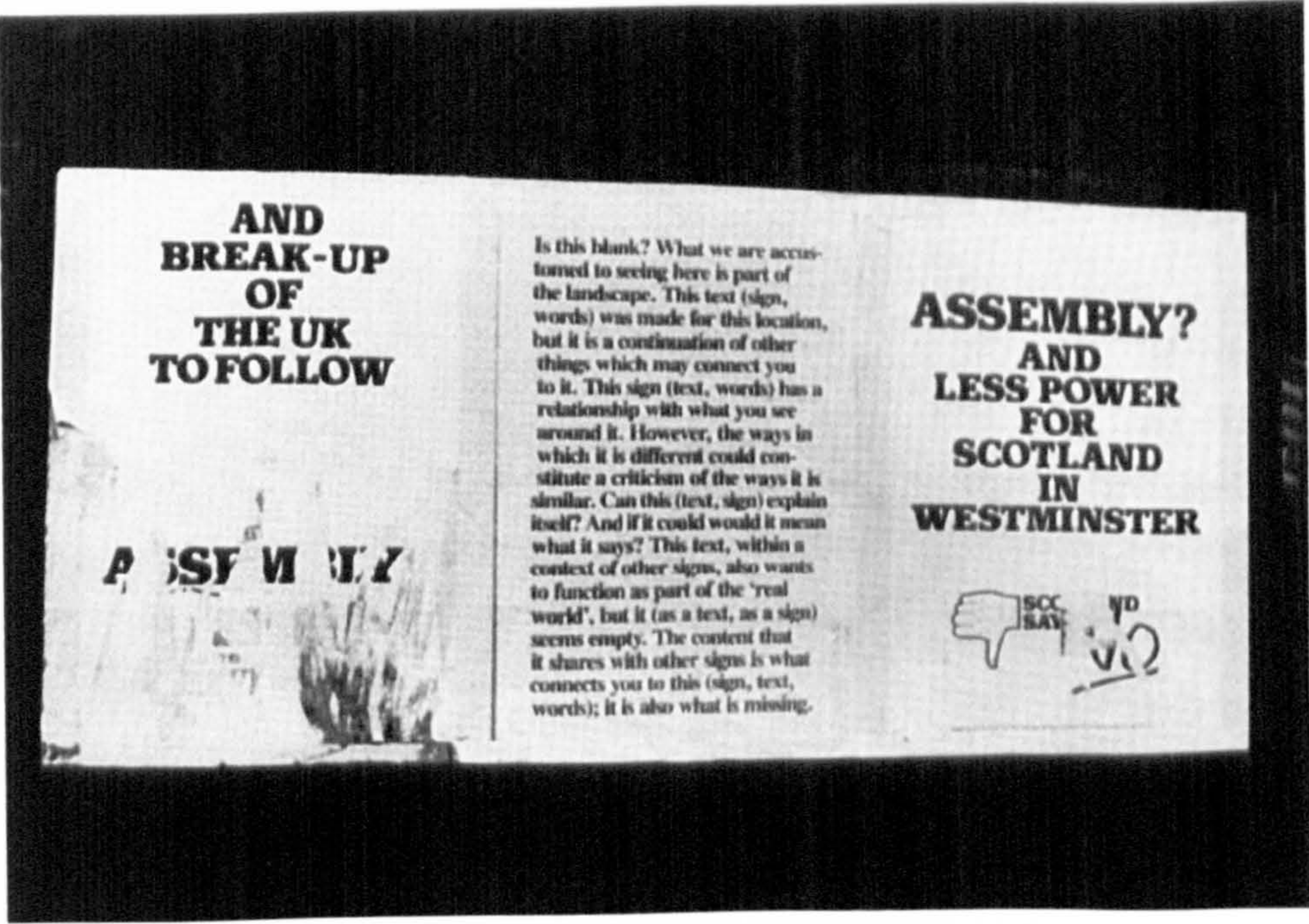


37. Joseph Kosuth, *Second Investigation, 1. Existence (Art as Idea as Idea)*, 1968, documentation as installed in the exhibition *January 5 – 31, 1969*, New York, 1969. Photo: Siegelau Collection and Archives.



38. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #1, New York – Los Angeles*, 1969, thirteen photographs, text on paper, American Airlines Systems Map. (photographs: each, 31 x 36 cm; text on paper: 40.5 x 34 cm; map: 40.5 x 70cm). Collection and photo: FRAC Limousin, Limoges.





39. Joseph Kosuth, *Text/Context*, 1979, billboard display, Edinburgh, 1979. Photo: New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh.

**l'art conceptuel,  
une perspective**

Giovanni Anselmo	Marcel Duchamp	Bruce Nauman
Art & Language	Dan Flavin	Claes Oldenburg
Michael Asher	Dan Graham	Robert Rauschenberg
John Baldessari	Hans Haacke	Edward Ruscha
Robert Barry	Eva Hesse	Niele Toroni
Mel Bochner	Douglas Huebler	Bernar Venet
Alighiero e Boetti	Jasper Johns	Lawrence Weiner
Marcel Broodthaers	On Kawara	Ian Wilson
Stanley Brouwn	Yves Klein	
Daniel Buren	Joseph Kosuth	
Victor Burgin	Sol LeWitt	
André Cadere	Agnes Martin	
Hanne Darboven	Piero Manzoni	
Jan Dibbets	Robert Morris	

26 octobre 1989 - 21 janvier 1990

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris  
11, avenue du Président Wilson - 75116 Paris

Catalogue avec notes et documents.  
Préface de Suzanne Page.  
Essais de Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Claude Gotti,  
Gabriele Quercio, Charles Harrison.

40. Advertisement for the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989-90).





41. View of the bookshop at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris during the exhibition *L'Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective* (1989-1990). Display includes the journals carrying Michael Asher's announcement. Photo: Michael Asher.

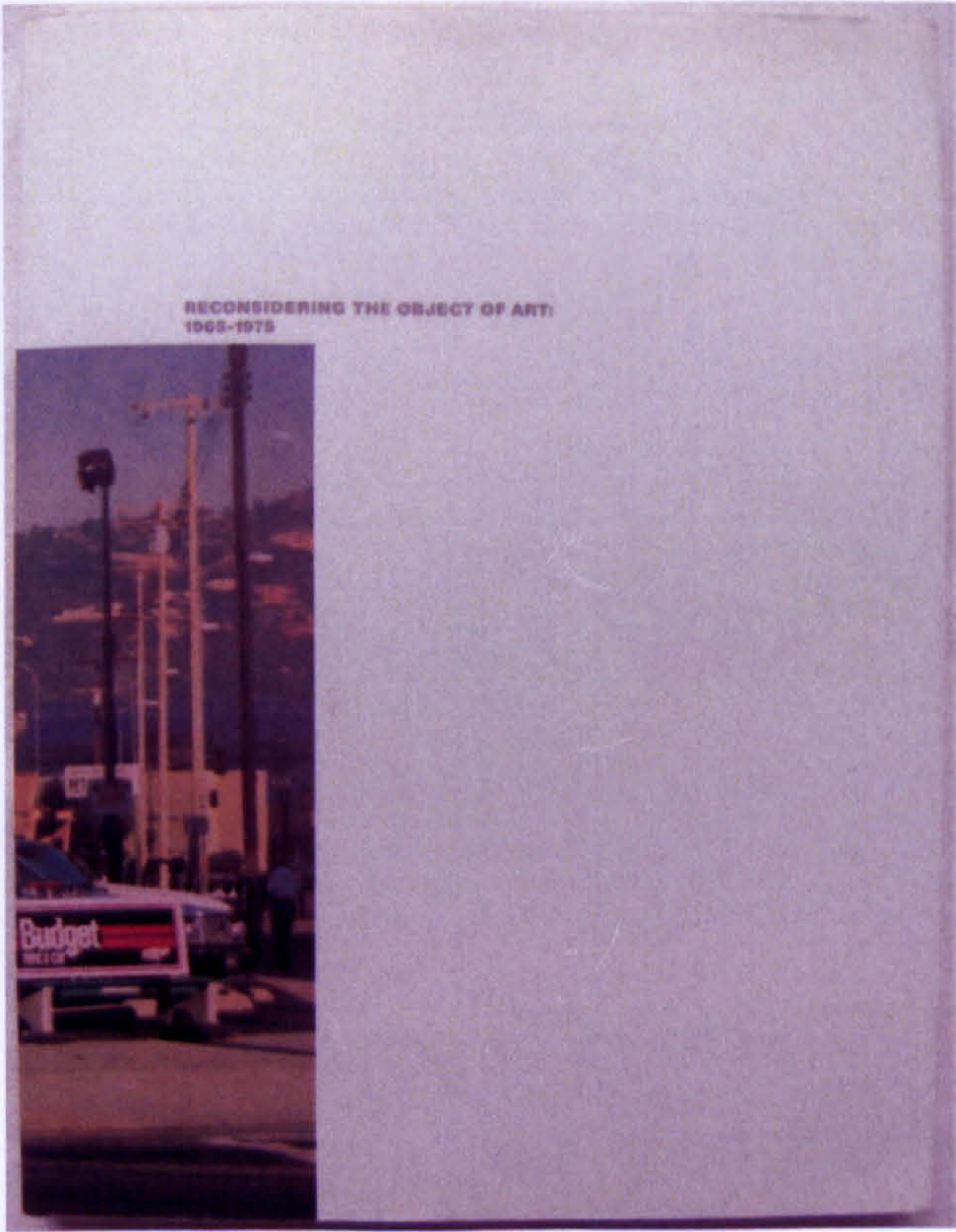


42. Michael Asher, installation at Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1977, viewing east in installation, showing group of paid participants and visitors in exhibition area and employee at work in office/bookstore area. Photo: Bob Smith.

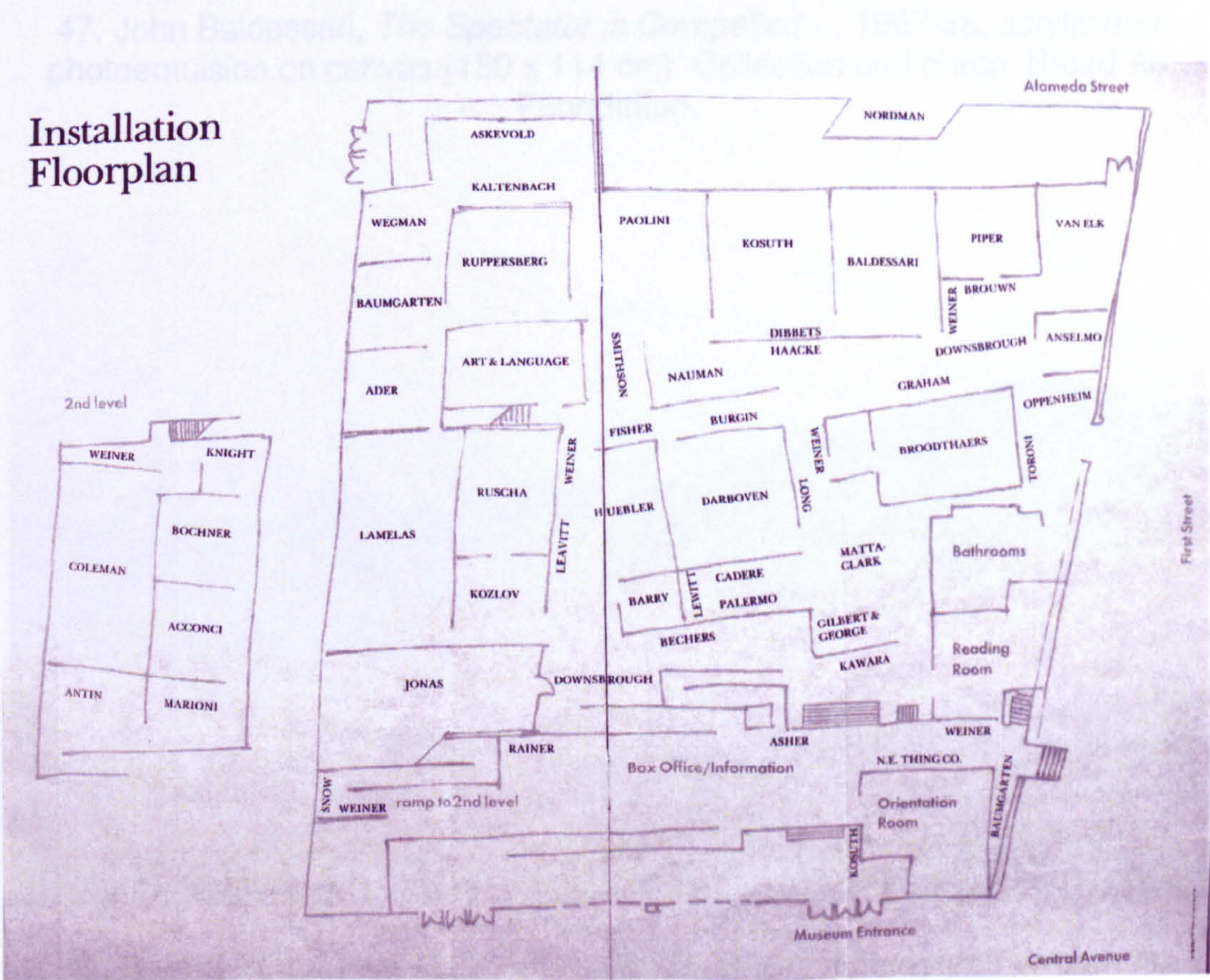






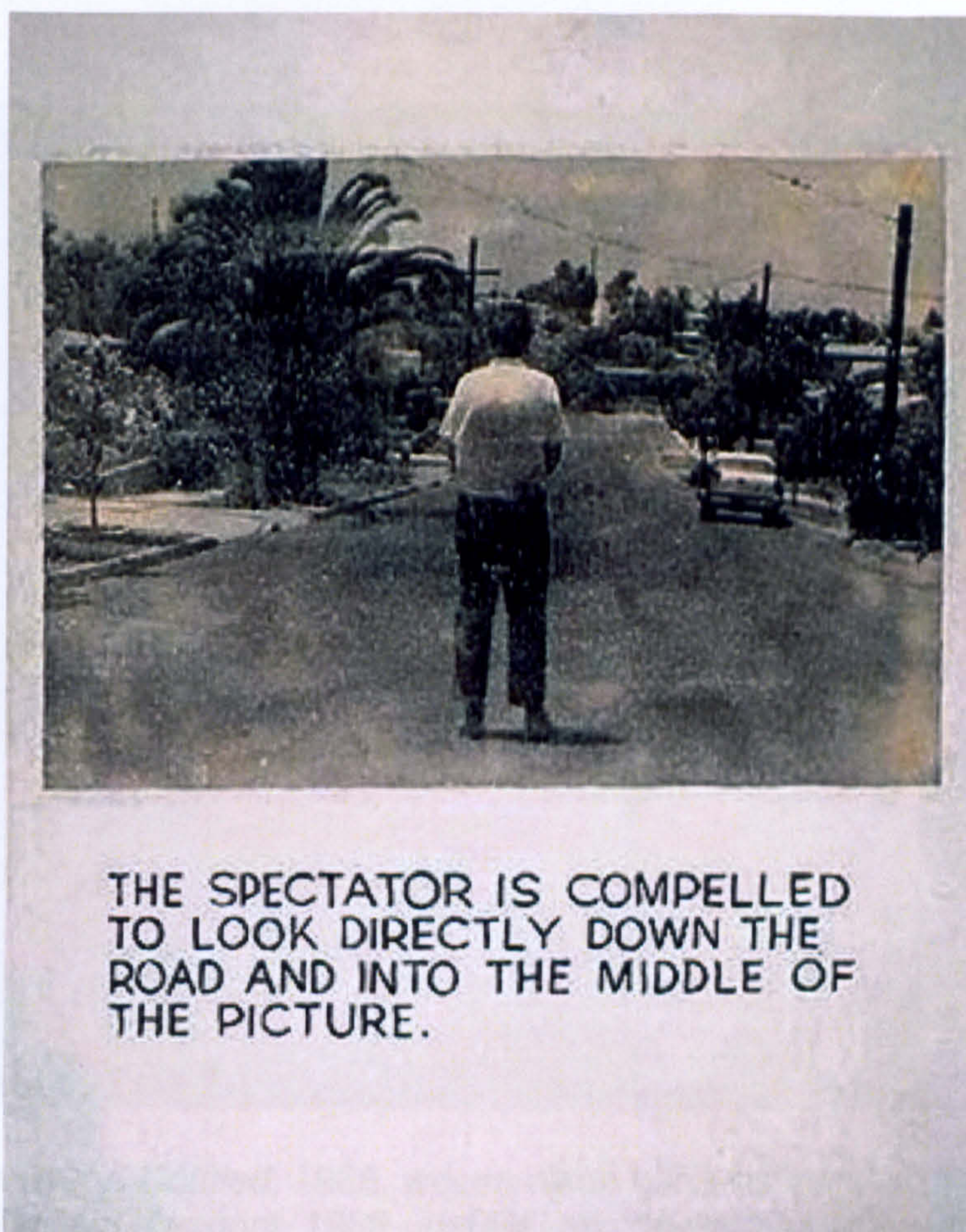


45. *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965 – 1975*, exhibition catalogue, edited by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995 – 1996).



46. Installation floorplan of *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



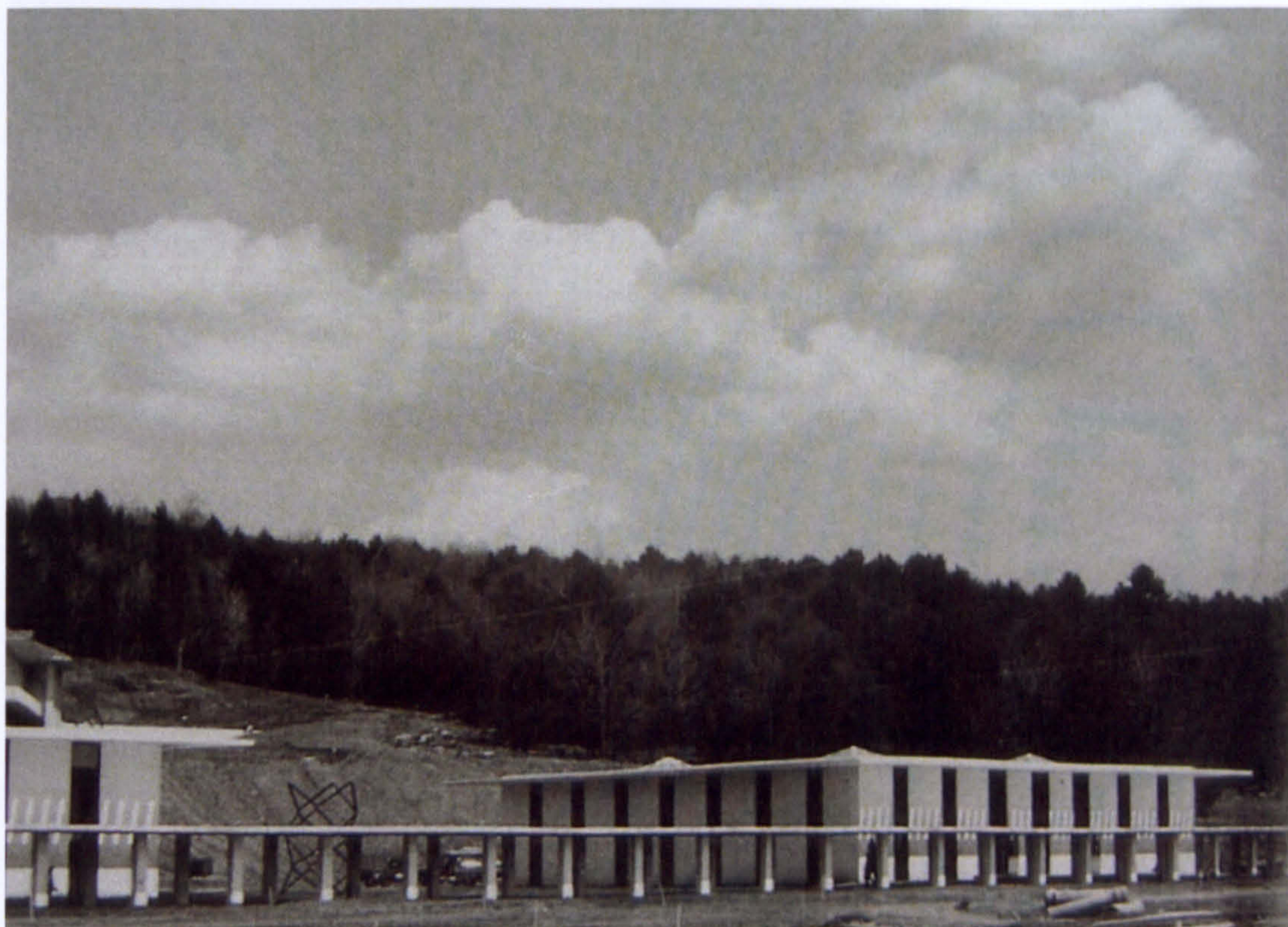


47. John Baldessari, *The Spectator is Compelled...*, 1967-68, acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas (150 x 114 cm). Collection and photo: Broad Art Foundation.



48. Robert Barry, *Inert Gas Series: Helium* (From a measured volume to indefinite expansion. On the morning of March 6, 1969, somewhere in the Mojave Desert in California, 2 cubic feet of Helium were returned to the atmosphere.), 1969. Photo: Robert Barry.



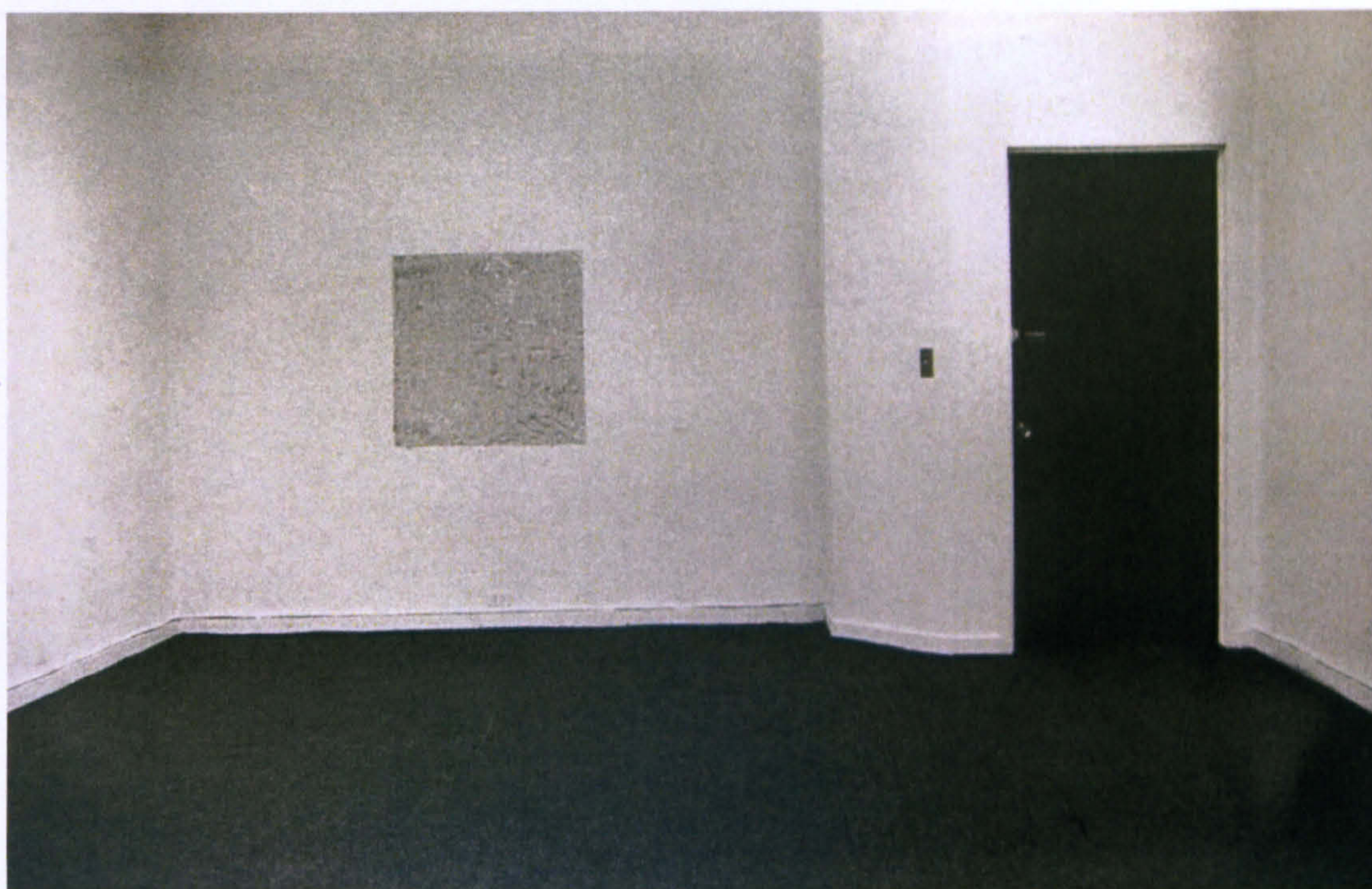


49. Robert Barry, *Untitled*, 1968, woven nylon cord, as installed at Windham College, Putney, Vermont, 1968 (installation approximately 8 metres above ground, forming 92 x 15.25 metre area). Photo: Siegelaub Collection and Archives.



50. Lawrence Weiner, installation of *Propeller* paintings at Seth Siegelaub Fine Arts, New York, 1964. Photo: Siegelaub Collection and Archives.





51. Lawrence Weiner, *A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall*, 1968. Installation view, *January 5 – 31, 1969*, New York, 1969. Photo: Siegelau Collection and Archives.

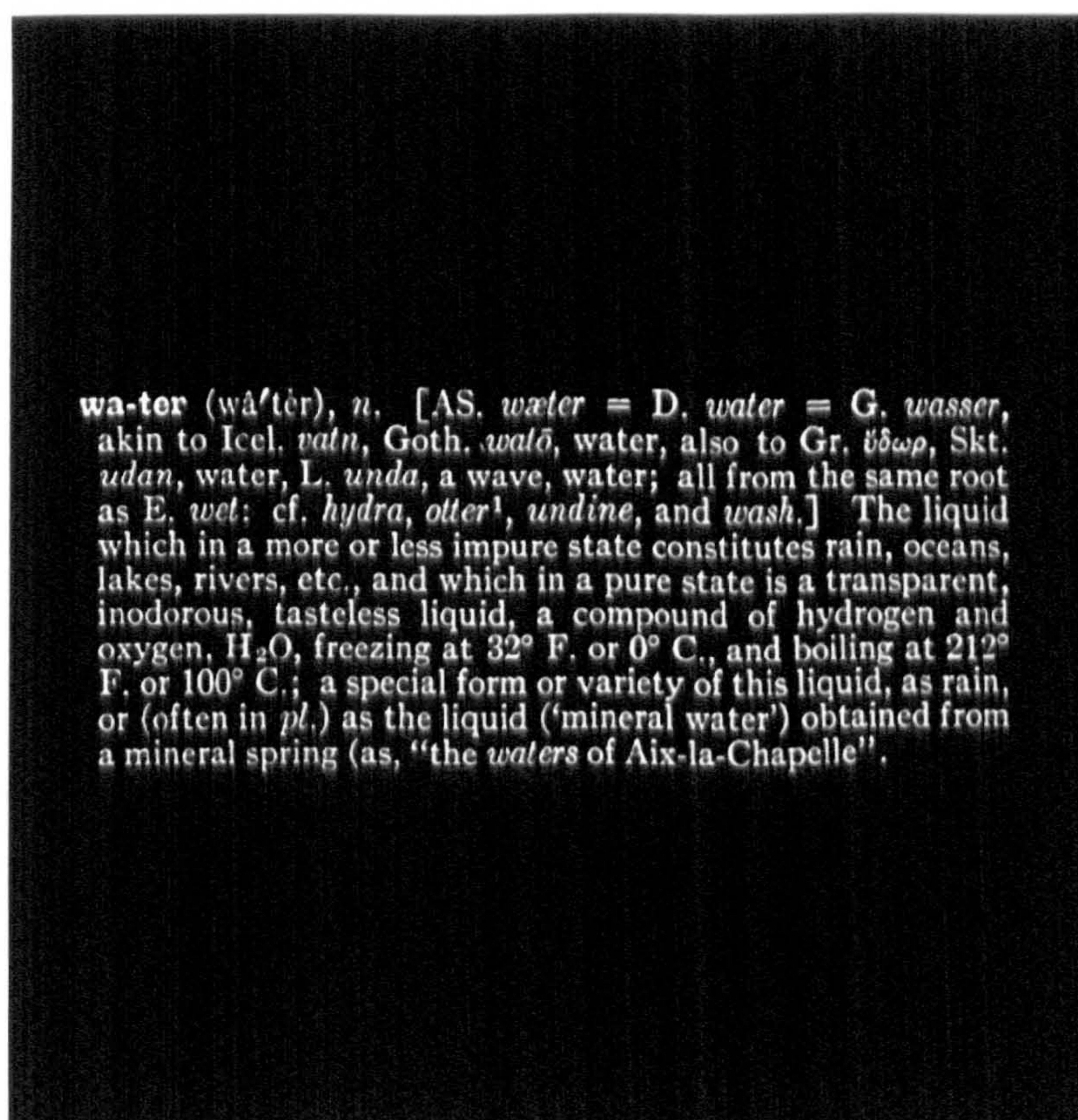


52. Lawrence Weiner, *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use*, 1969. Installation view: *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965 – 1975* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995-96), showing also André Cadere's *Barre de Bois Rond* on floor. Collection: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Hahn Collection. Photo: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



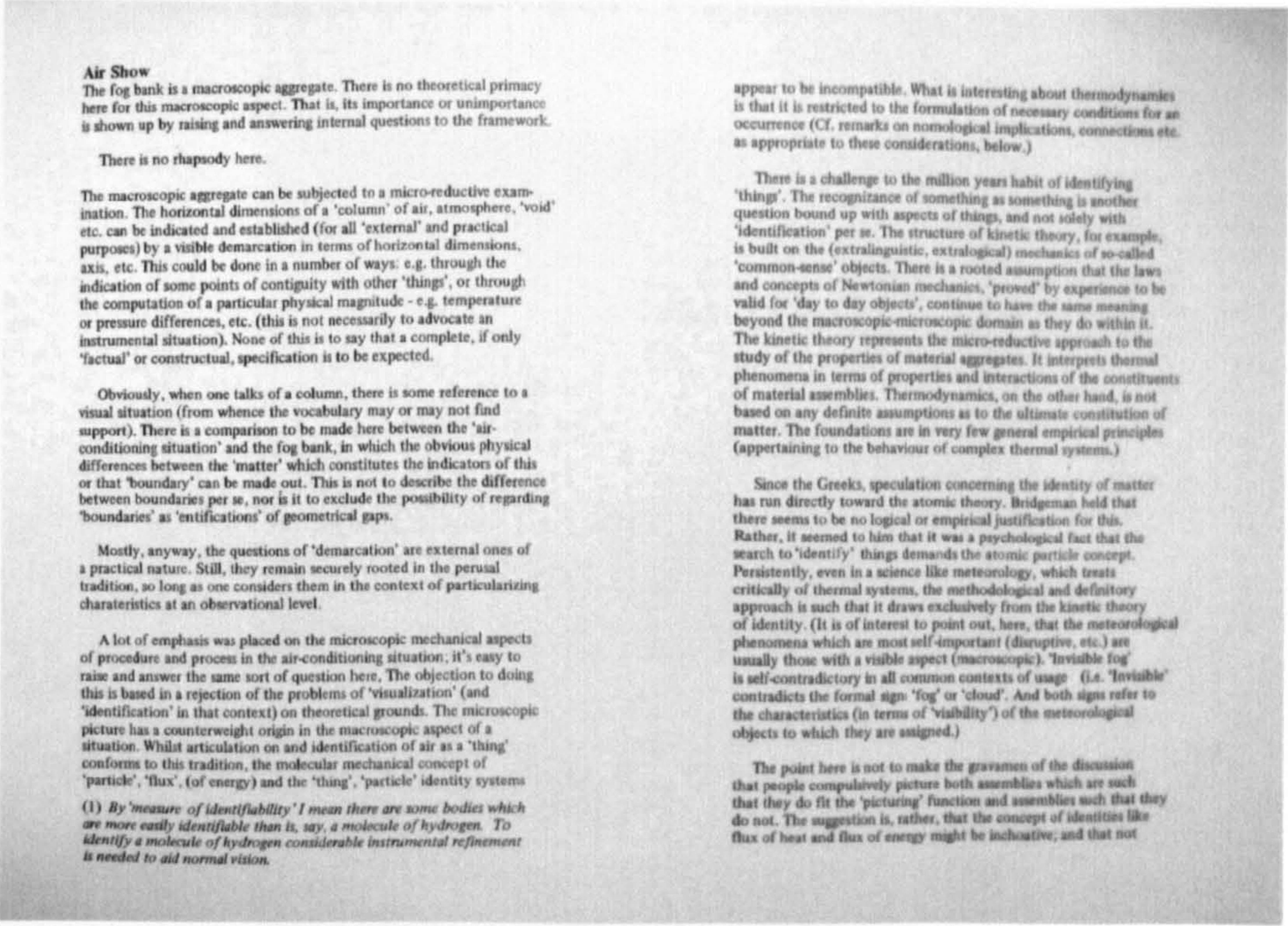


53. Lawrence Weiner, *Staples, Stakes, Twine, Turf*, as installed at Windham College, Putney, Vermont, 1968 (0.15 x 21.3 x 30.5 metres). Photo: Siegelau Collection and Archives.

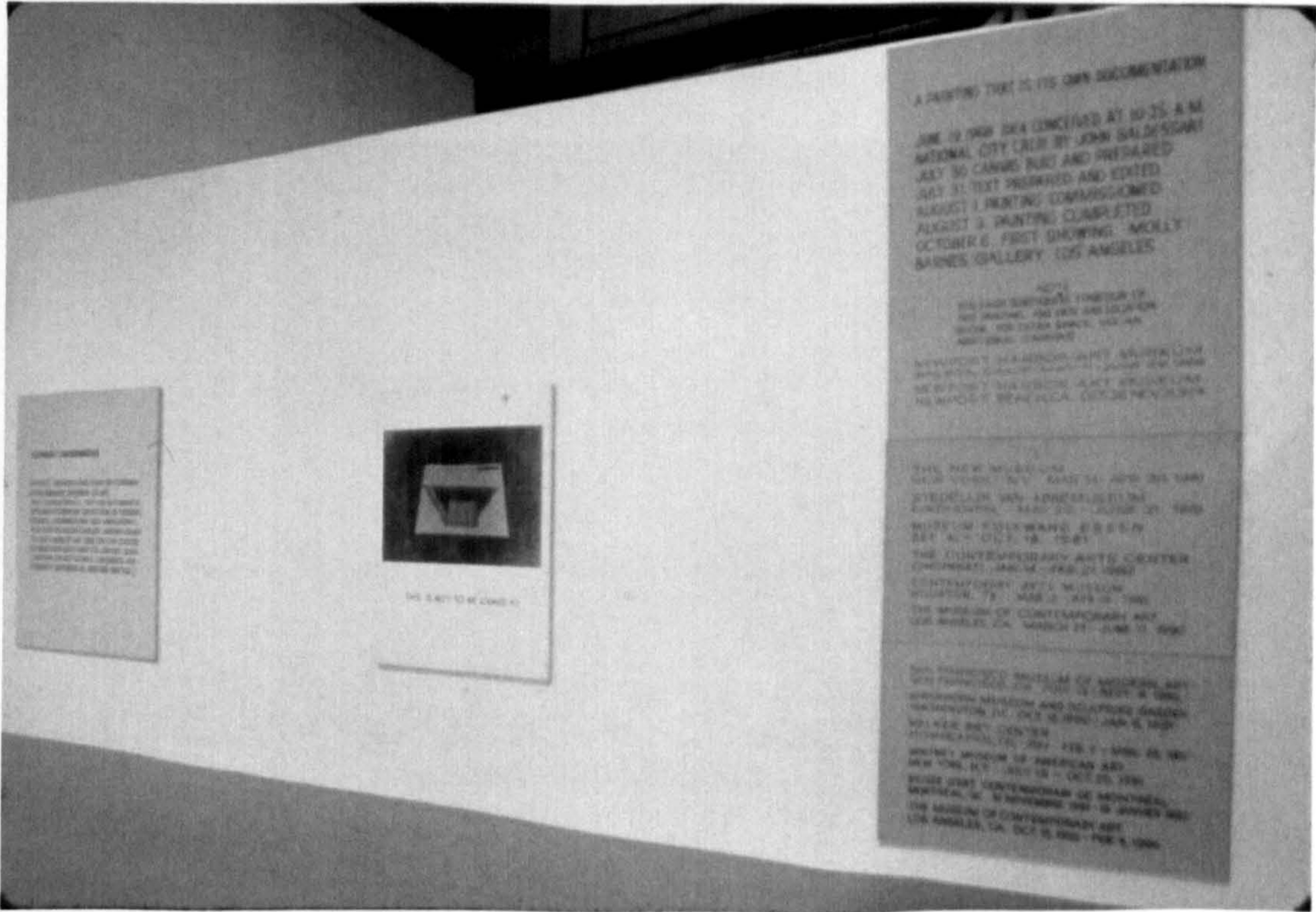


54. Joseph Kosuth, *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) (Water)*, 1966, photostat mounted on board (122 x 122 cm). Collection: Solomon R. Guggenheim. Photo: Joseph Kosuth; Artists' Reserved Rights Society (ARS), New York.



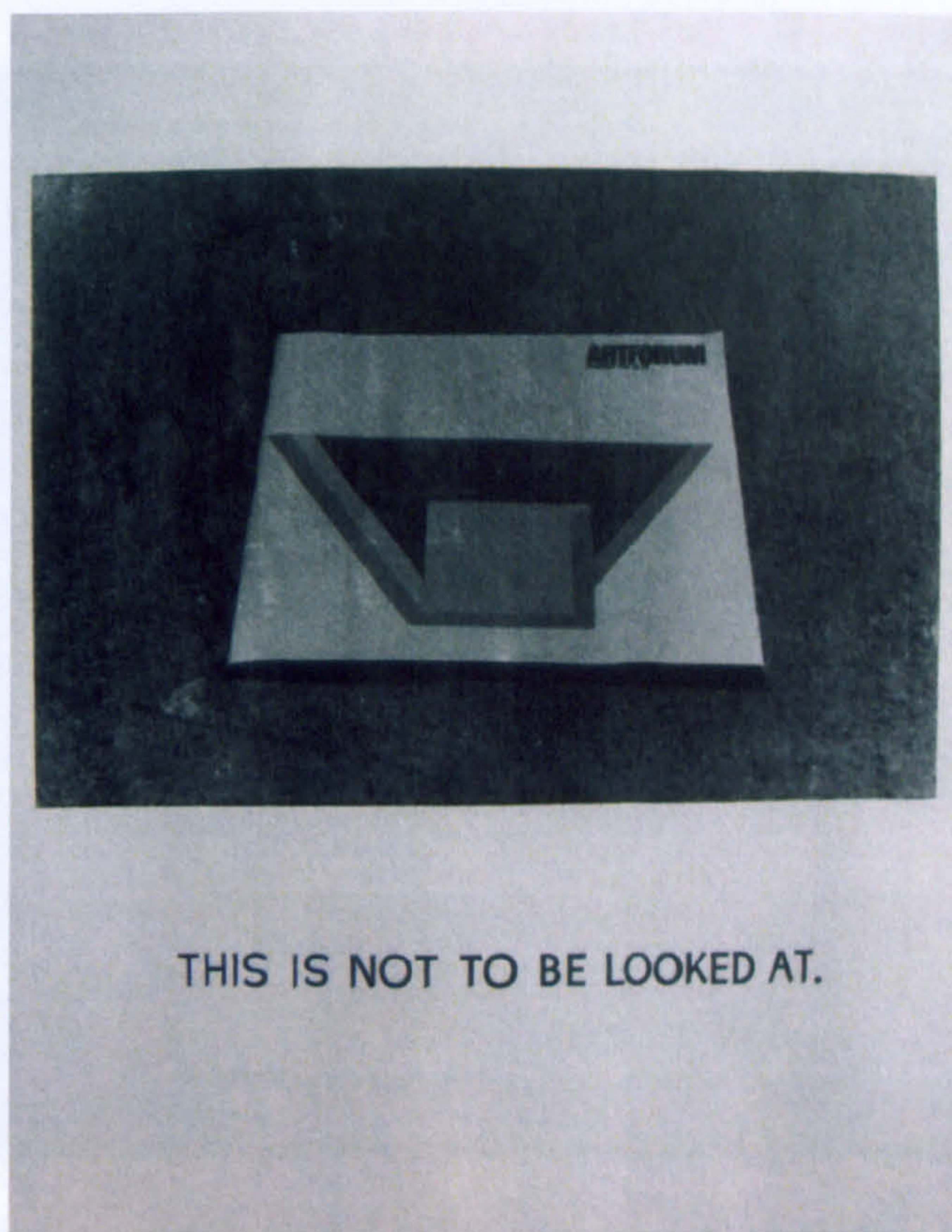


55. Art & Language, *Air Show* (detail, pages 1 and 2), 1966, text on paper.

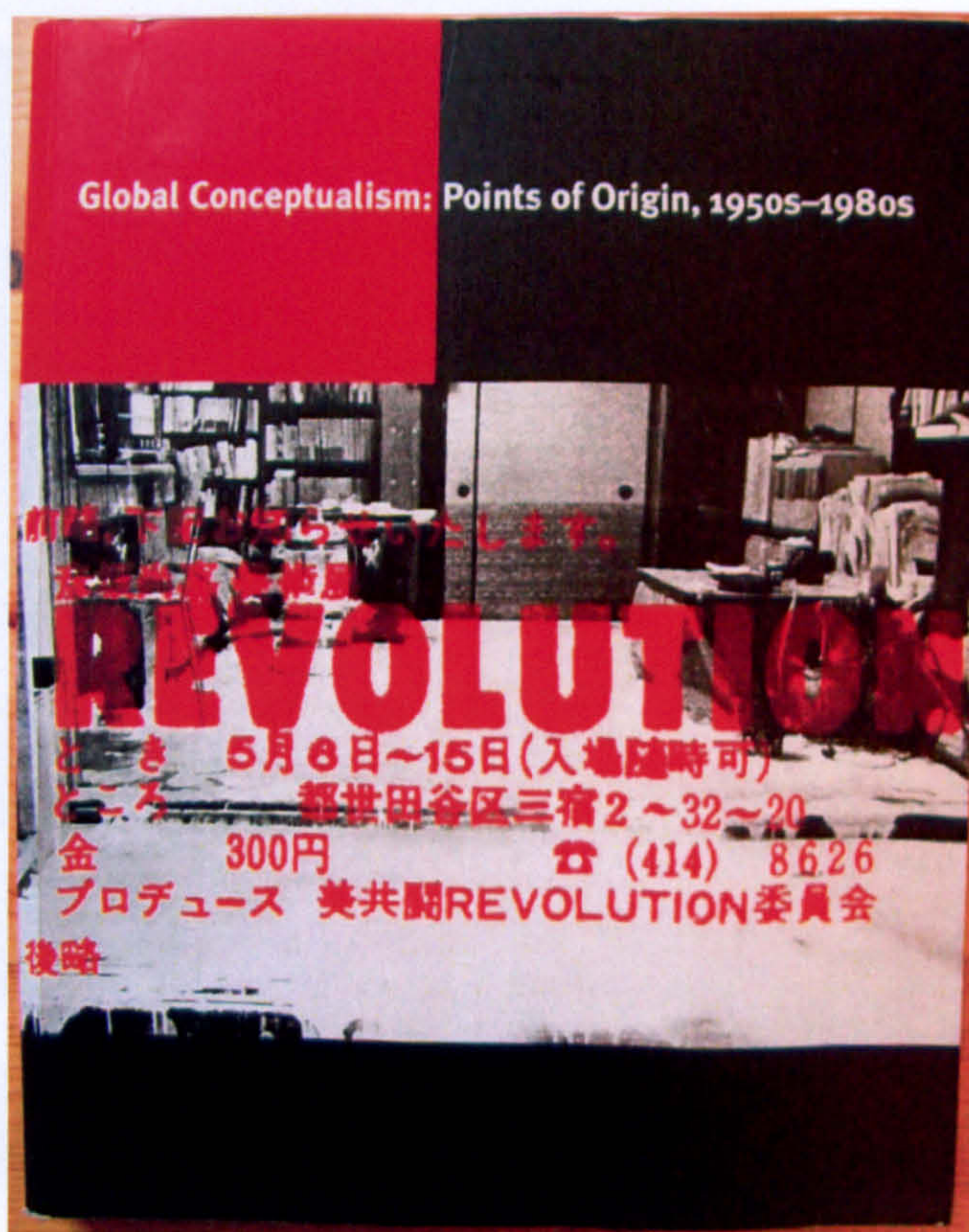


56. John Baldessari, three works as installed at *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 1965 – 1975 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art. 1995-1996), from left to right *Clement Greenberg*, 1967-68, acrylic on canvas (173 x 145 cm); *This is Not to Be Looked At*, 1968, acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas (150 x 114 cm); and *A Painting That is its Own Documentation*, 1968 – present, acrylic on canvas (259 x 143.5 cm as exhibited). Photo: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



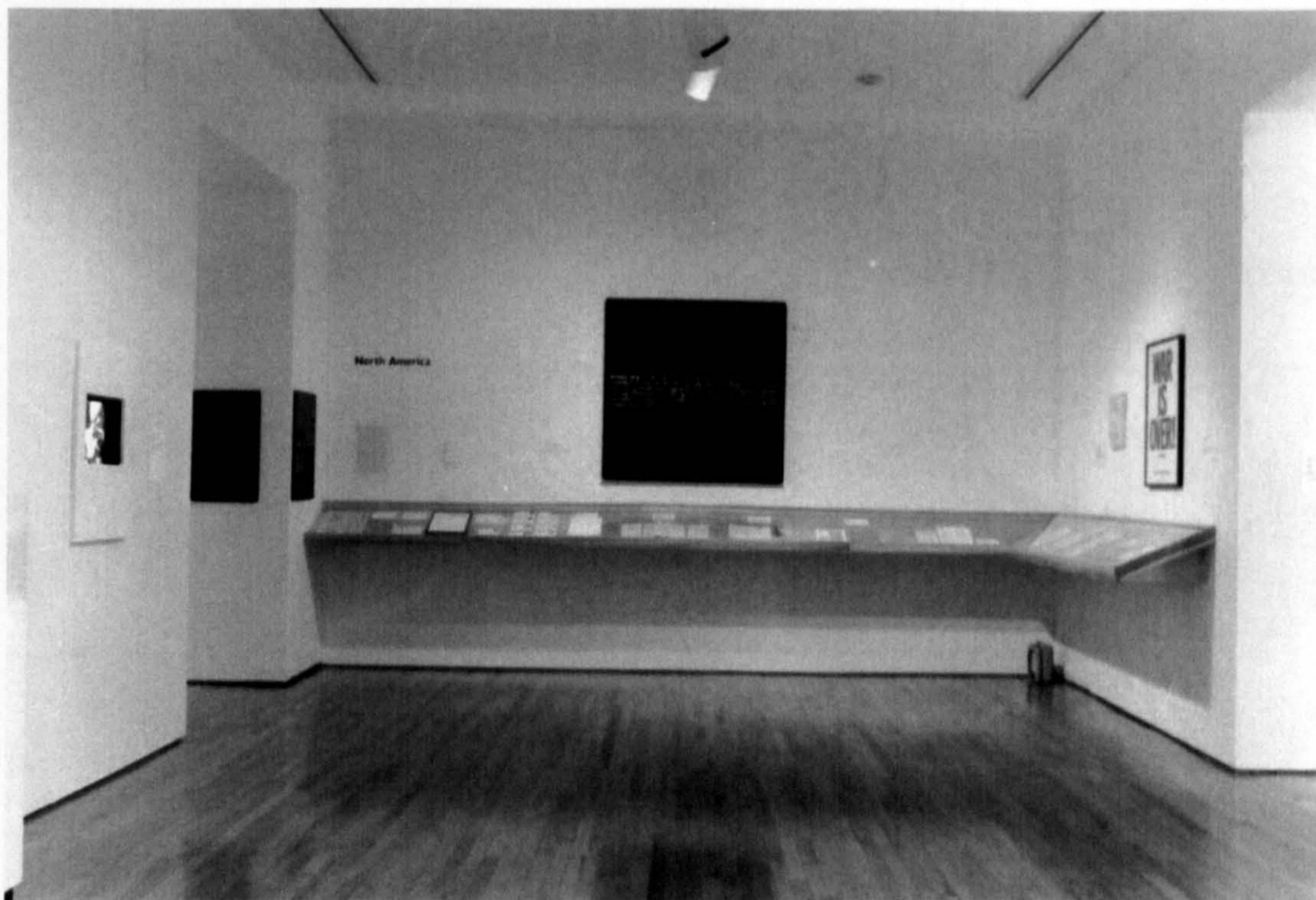


57. John Baldessari, *This is Not to Be Looked At*, 1968, acrylic and photoemulsion on canvas (150 x 114 cm). Collection: Councilman Joel Wachs. Photo: John Baldessari.



58. *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s*, exhibition catalogue, edited by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).



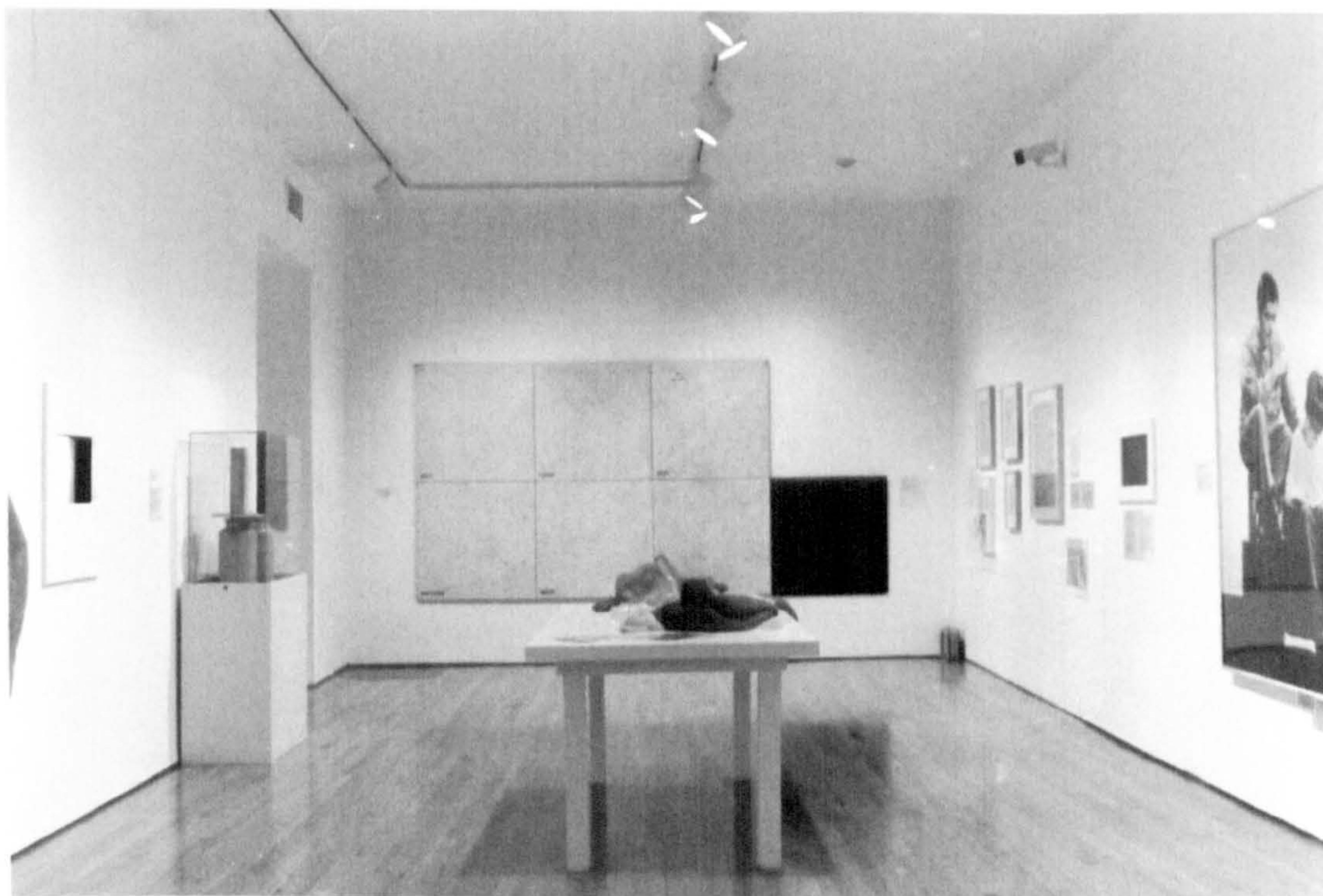


59. Installation view of the North American section of *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).  
Photo: Queens Museum of Art, New York.



60. Installation view of the Japanese section of *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999). Photo:  
Queens Museum of Art, New York.





61. Installation view of the Latin American section of *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).  
Photo: Queens Museum of Art, New York.

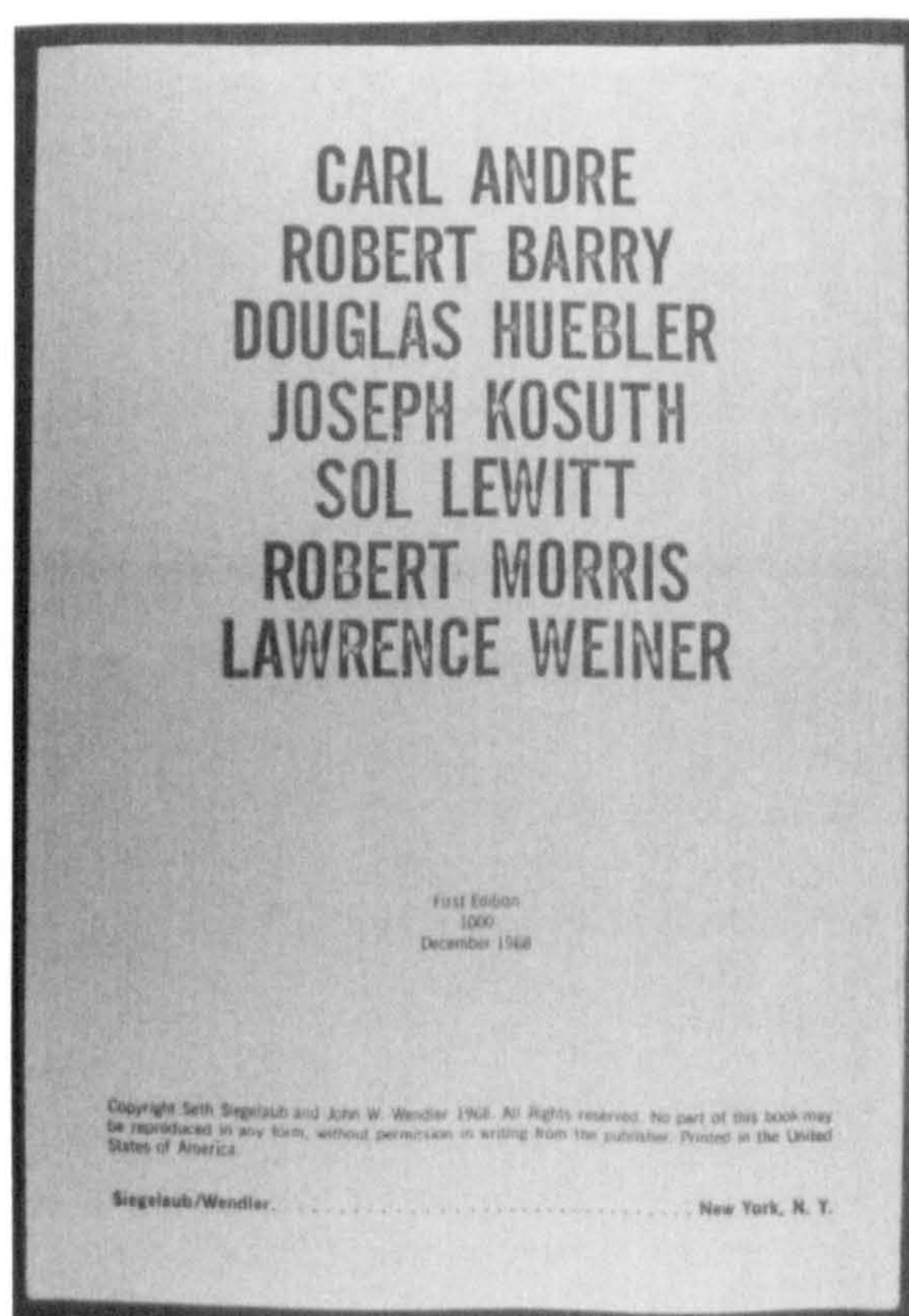


62. North façade of the New York City Building of the 1939 World's Fair, now the Queens Museum of Art, showing (left) the Trylon and Perisphere. Photo: Queens Museum of Art, New York.



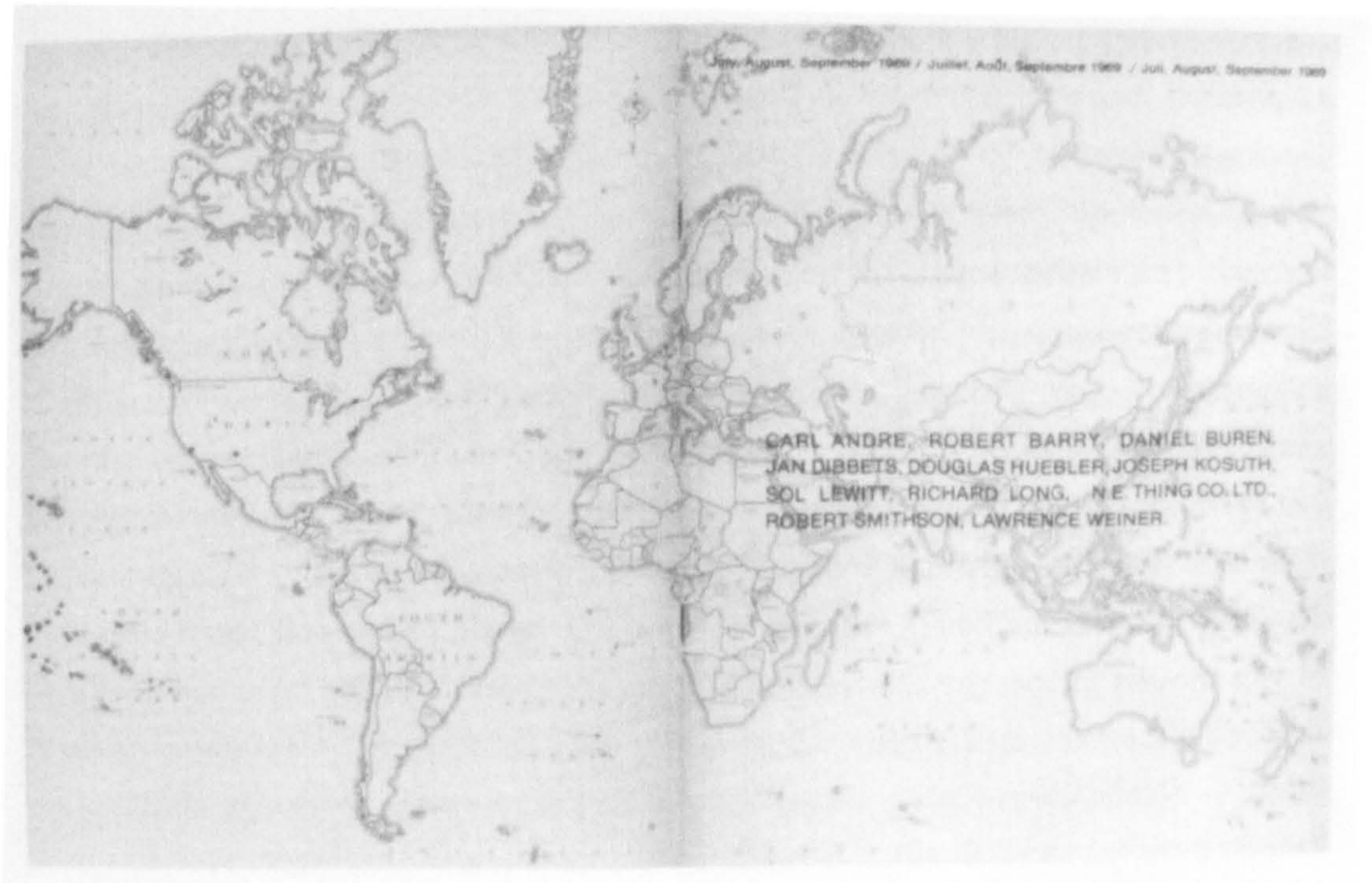


63. The New York City Building, now the Queens Museum of Art, taken during the period when the building was used as the headquarters of the United Nations (1946-52). Photo: Queens Museum of Art, New York.

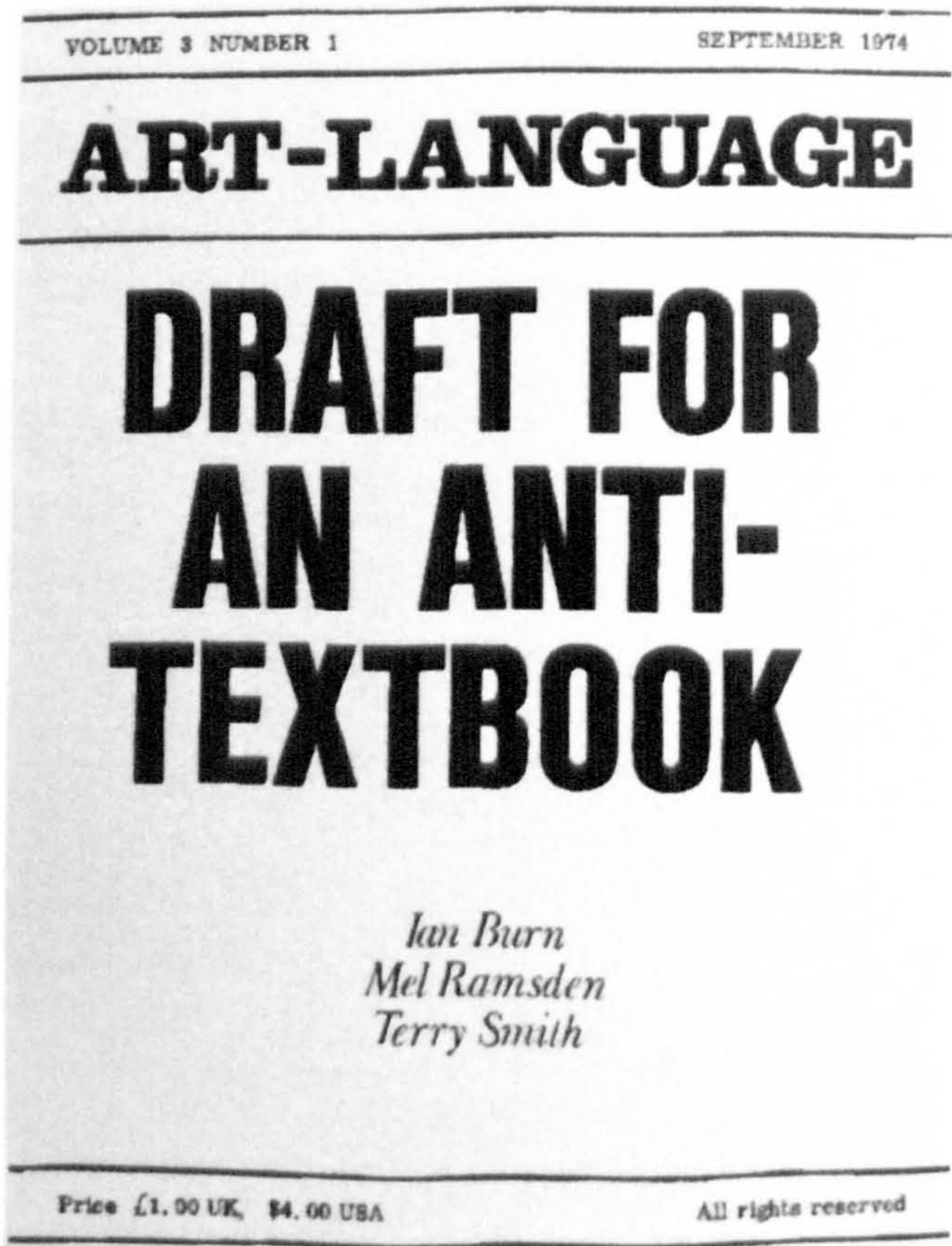


64. Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner (also known as *Xeroxbook*), 1968, book of photocopies.





65. *July, August, September, 1969*, exhibition catalogue, edited by Seth Siegelaub.

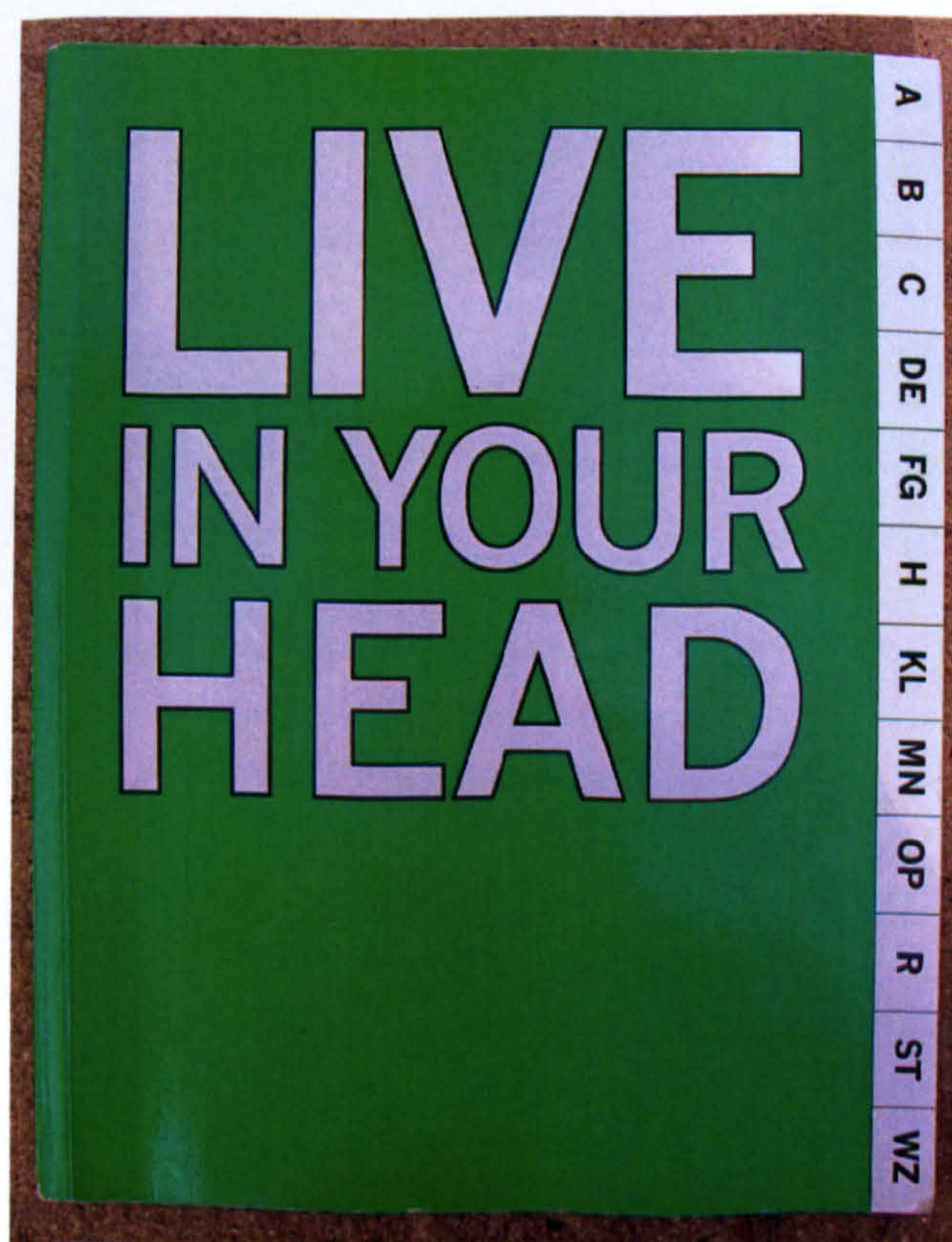


66. *Art-Language* 3, no. 1, *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*, 1974.





67. Installation view of the South Korean section of *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 2000). Photo: Queens Museum of Art, New York.

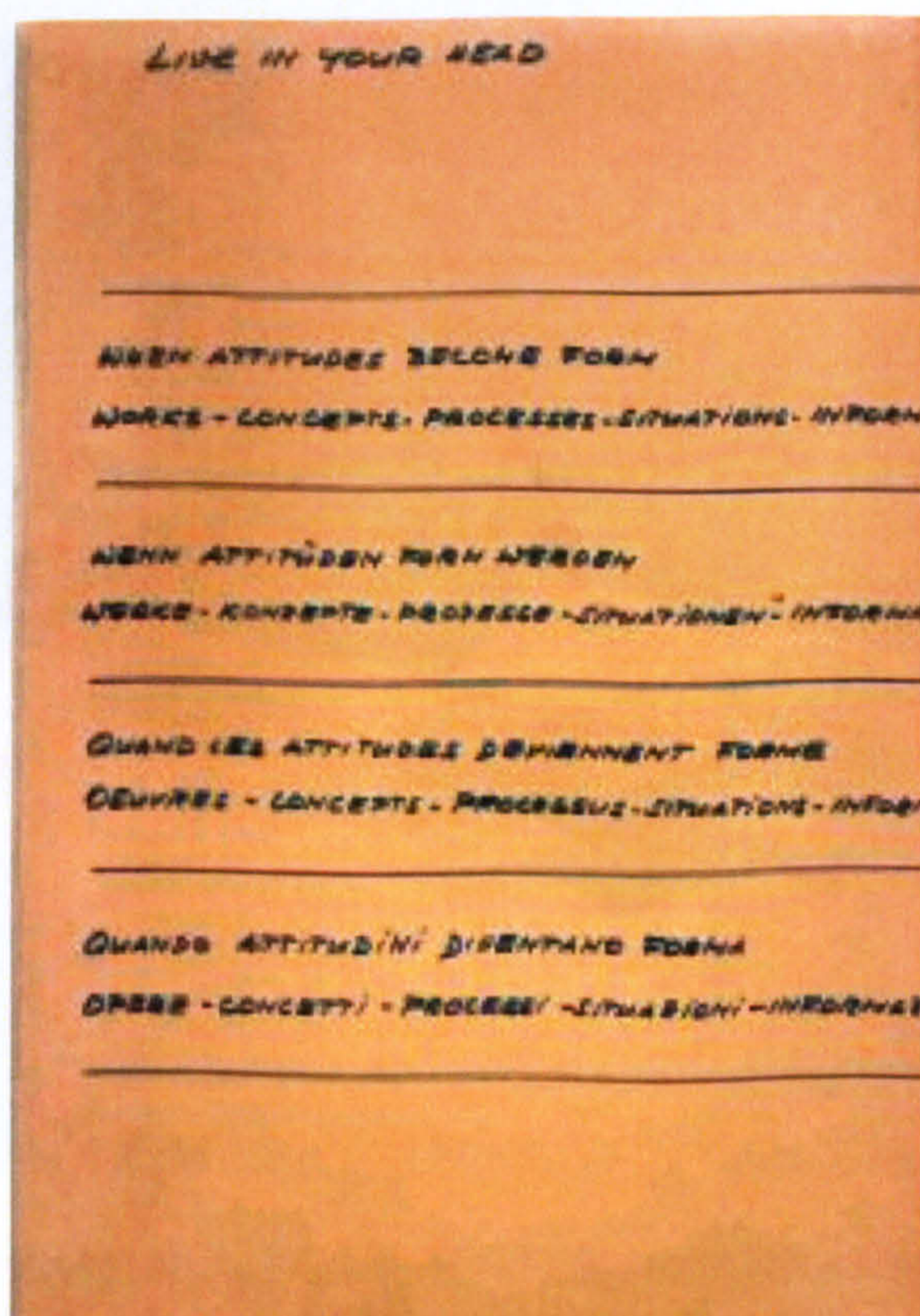


68. *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975*, exhibition catalogue, edited by Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000). The catalogue was available with four different colour covers: green, yellow, blue and red.





69. Installation view: *When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information: Live in Your Head*, Kunsthalle, Bern, 1969. Image source: <<http://domscud.interfree.it/ansto2.htm>> (11/01/2006)



70. *When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Procedures – Situations – Information: Live in Your Head*, exhibition catalogue (Bern: Kunsthalle, 1969).



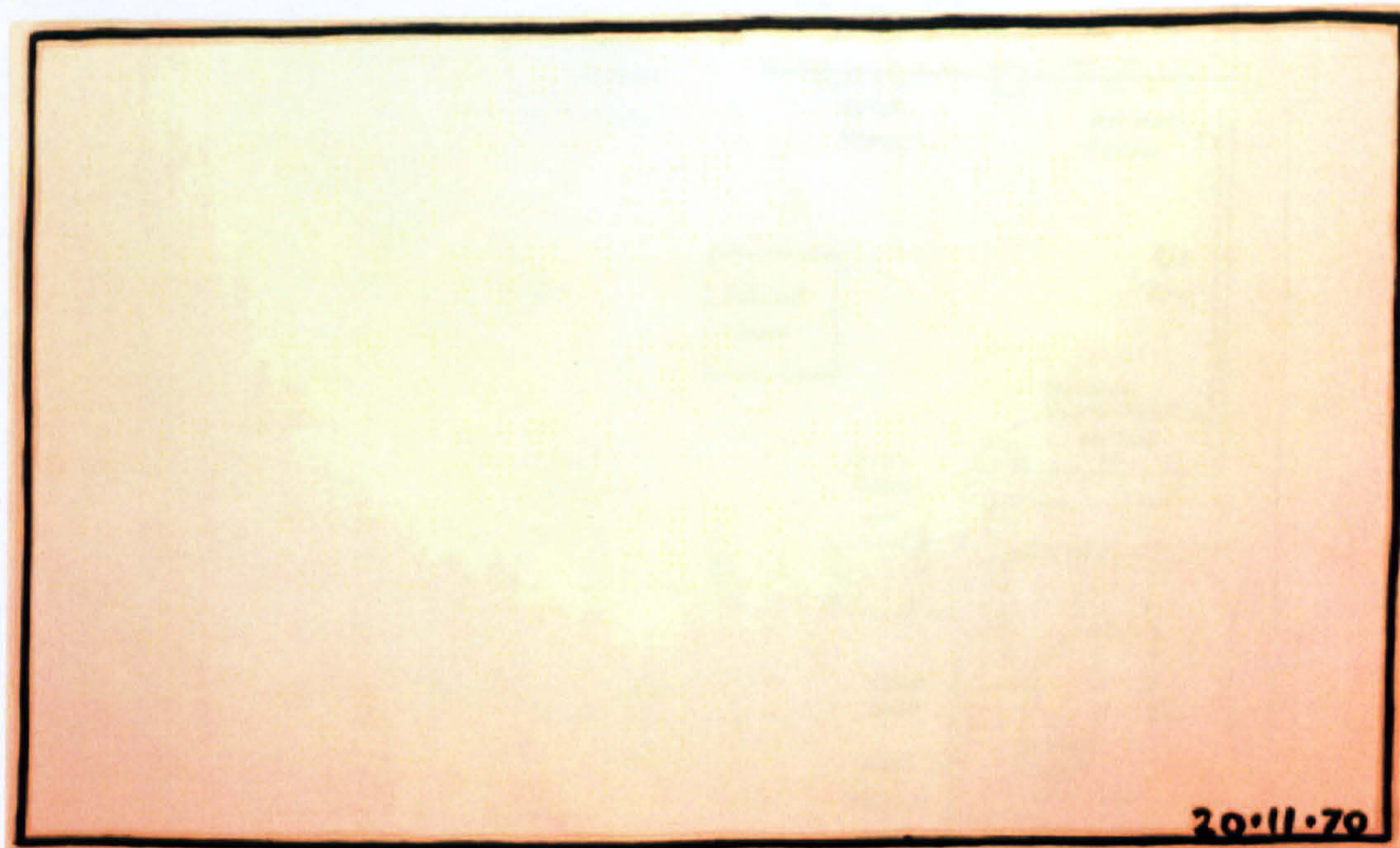


71. John Latham, *Art and Culture*, 1966-69, leather case containing book, letters, photostats, labelled phials containing powders and liquids, other materials (8 x 28 x 25 cm, closed). Collection and photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York.



72. John Latham, *Art and Culture*, 1966-69, leather case containing book, letters, photostats, labelled phials containing powders and liquids, other materials (8 x 28 x 25 cm, closed). Installation view: *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000). Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.



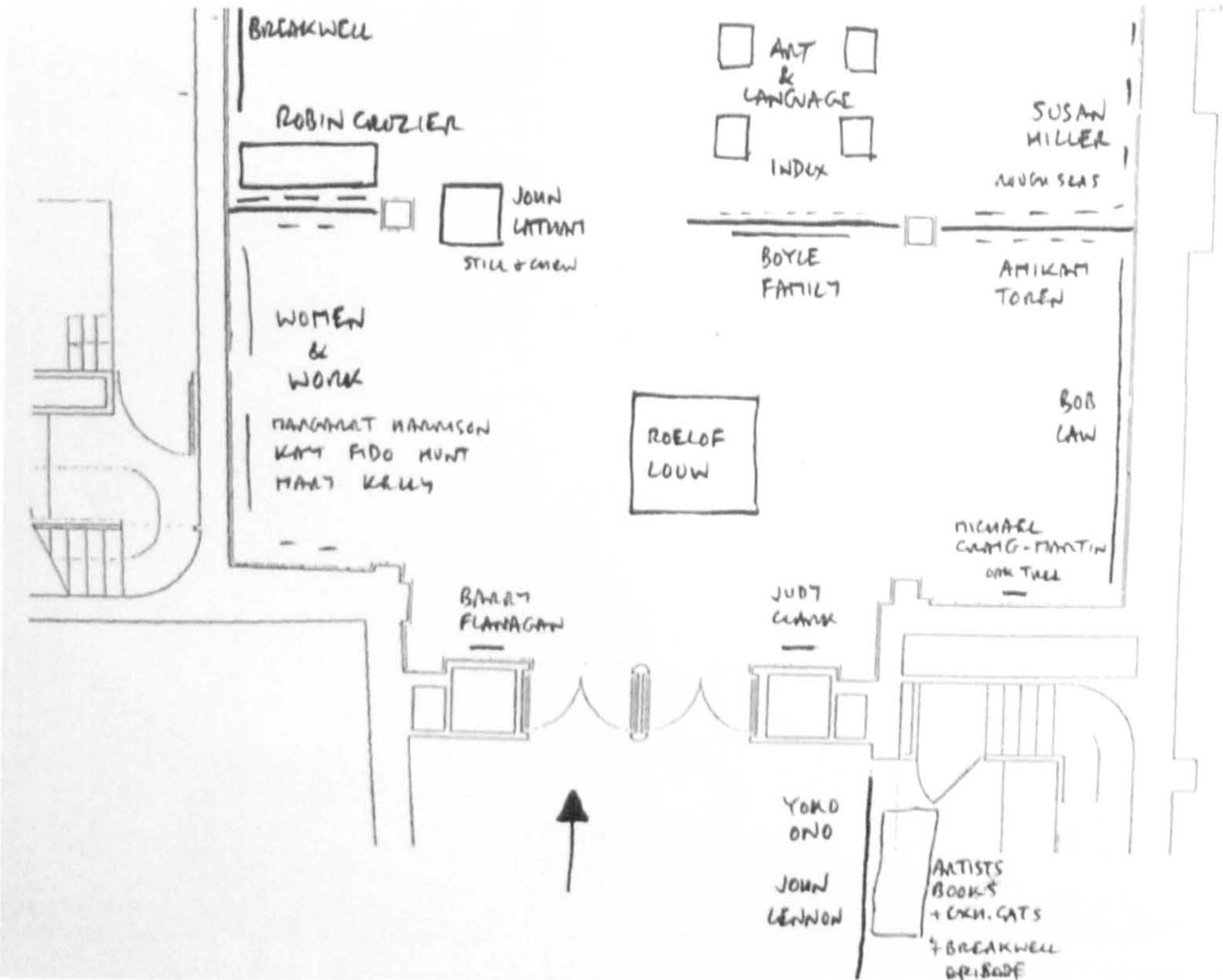


73. Bob Law, *Number 95. Mr Paranoia IV 20.11.70*, 1970, oil on canvas (240 x 418 cm). Collection and photo: Bob Law.

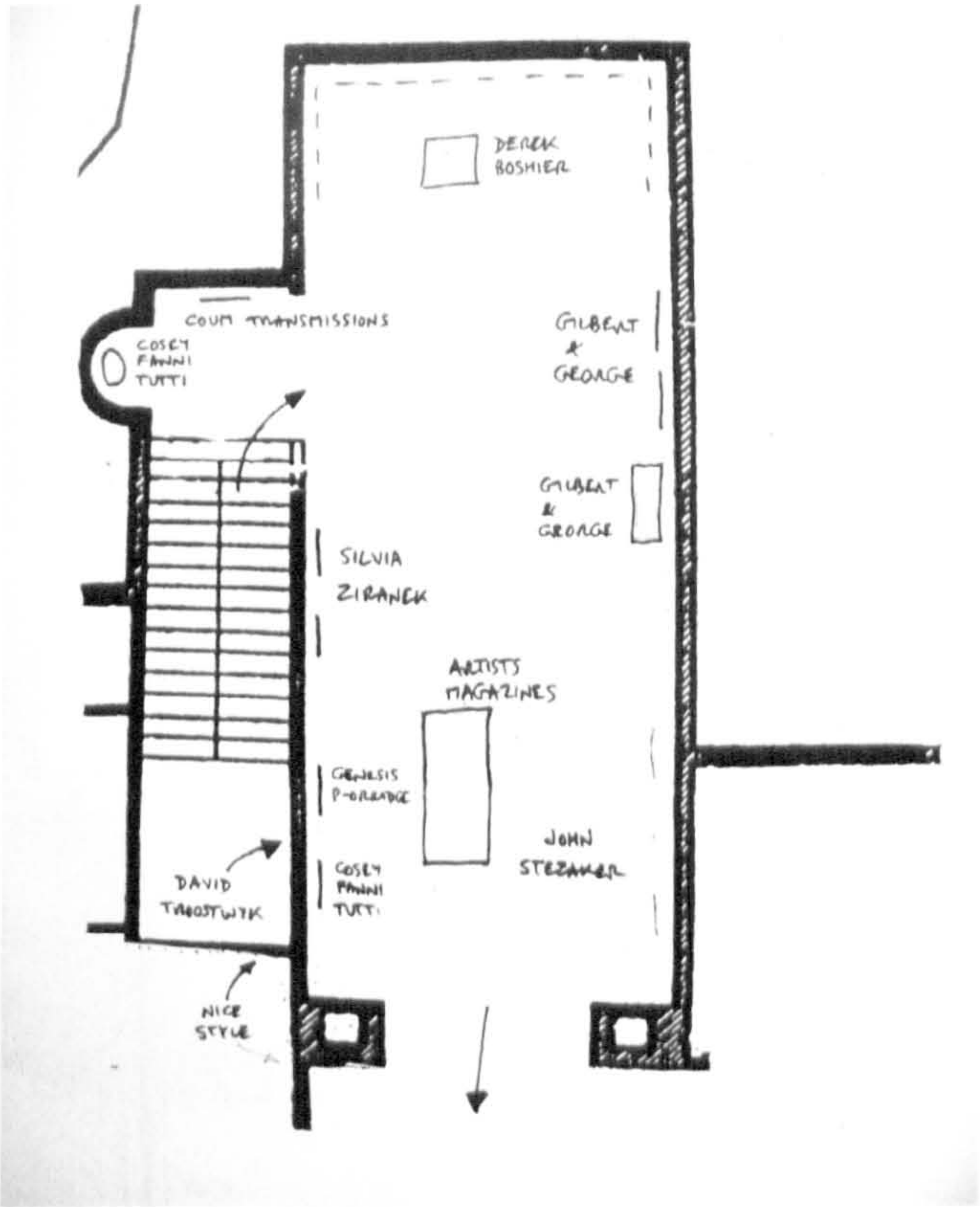


74. Roelof Louw, *Pyramid: Soul City*, 1967, oranges (dimensions variable). Installation view: Arts Lab, London, 1970. Photo: Roelof Louw.



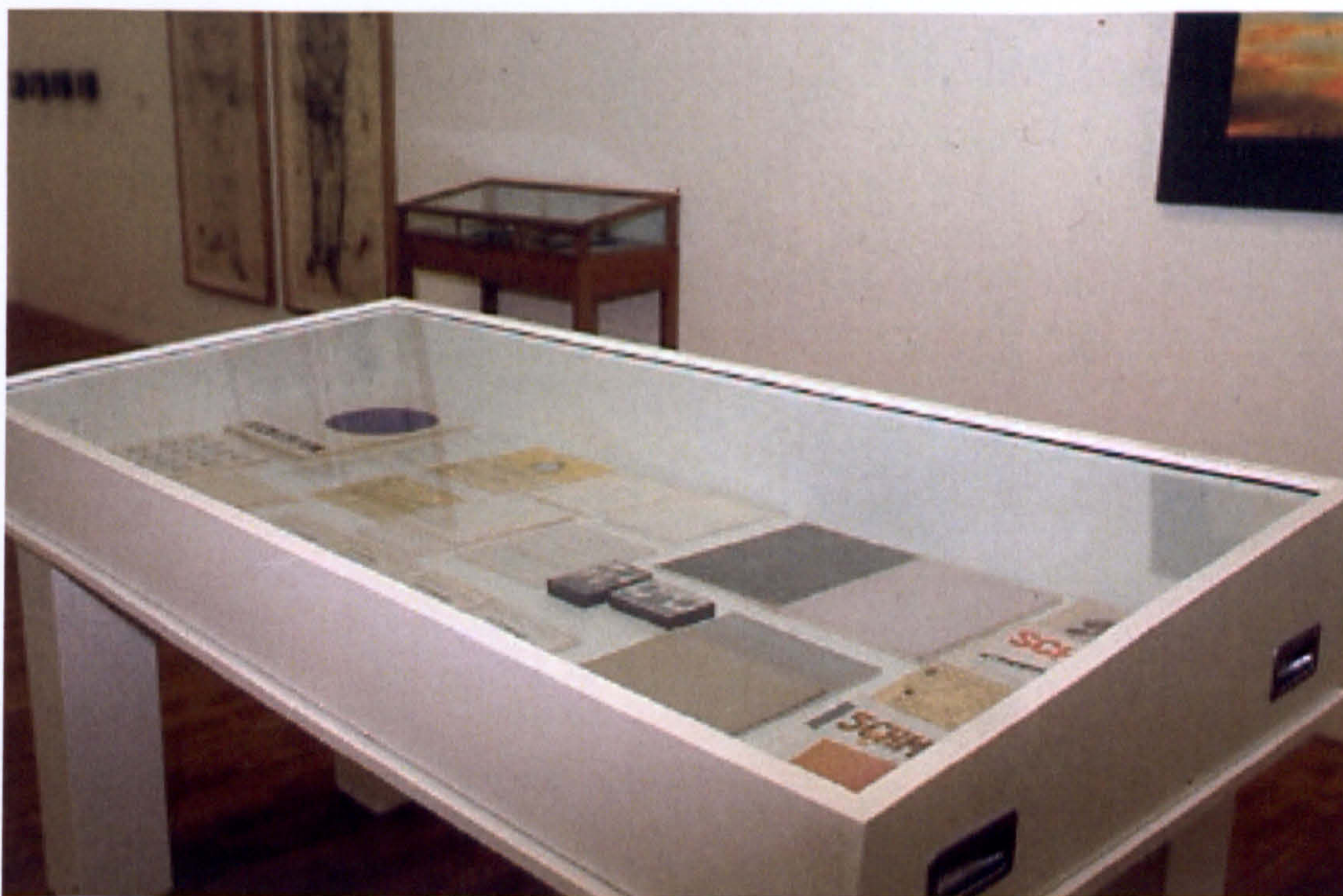


75. Working floorplans for *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, showing the prominent positions accorded to works by John Latham, Bob Law and Roelof Louw at the entrance to the galleries.



76. Working floorplans for *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, showing first upstairs gallery and location of vitrine containing artists' magazines.





77. Vitrine containing various periodicals, *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000).  
Photo: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

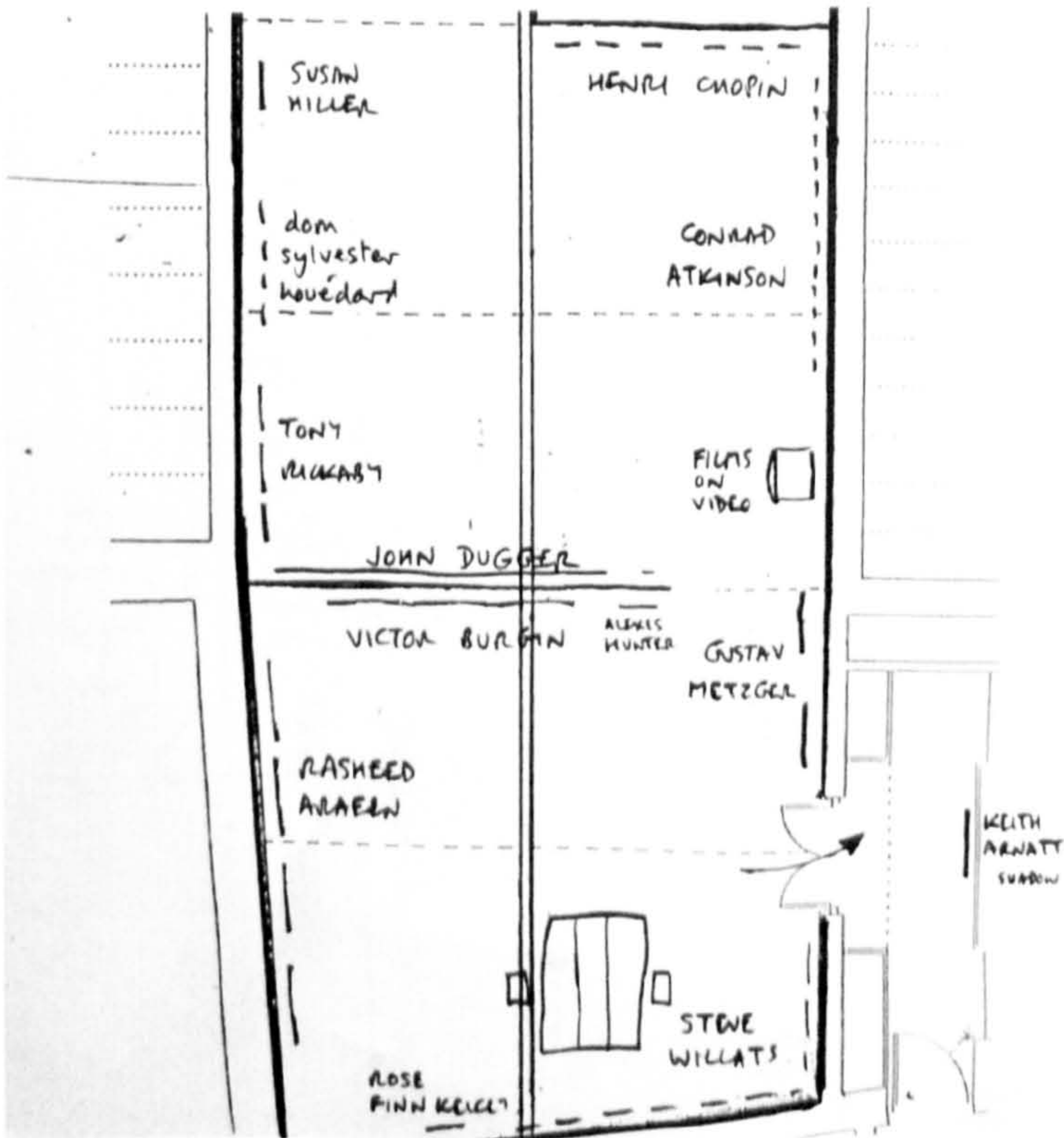


78. Art & Language installing *Index 01* for *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000).  
From left to right: Michael Baldwin, Mel Ramsden, Charles Harrison. Image source: *Modern Painters* 13, no. 2 (summer 2000), p. 24.





79. John Dugger, *Banner for Chile (Chile Vencera)*, 1974, strip banner, embroidered and appliqued (665 x 450 cm). Collection and photo: John Dugger.



80. Working floorplans for *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, showing final rooms in the upstairs galleries and the location of John Dugger's *Banner for Chile*.



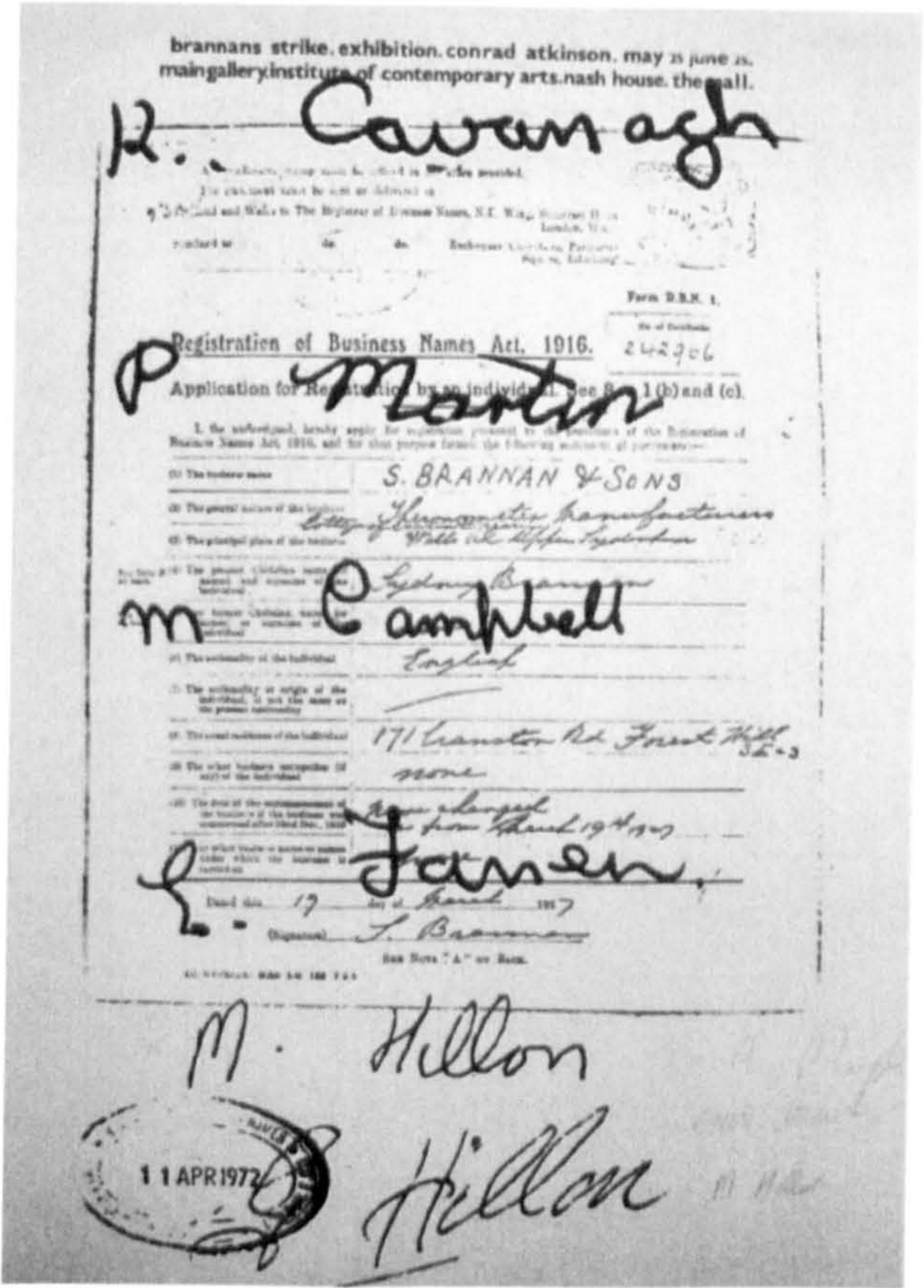


81. John Dugger, *Banner for Chile (Chile Vencera)*, 1974, strip banner, embroidered and appliqued (665 x 450 cm). Installation view: *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000). Collection: John Dugger. Photo: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

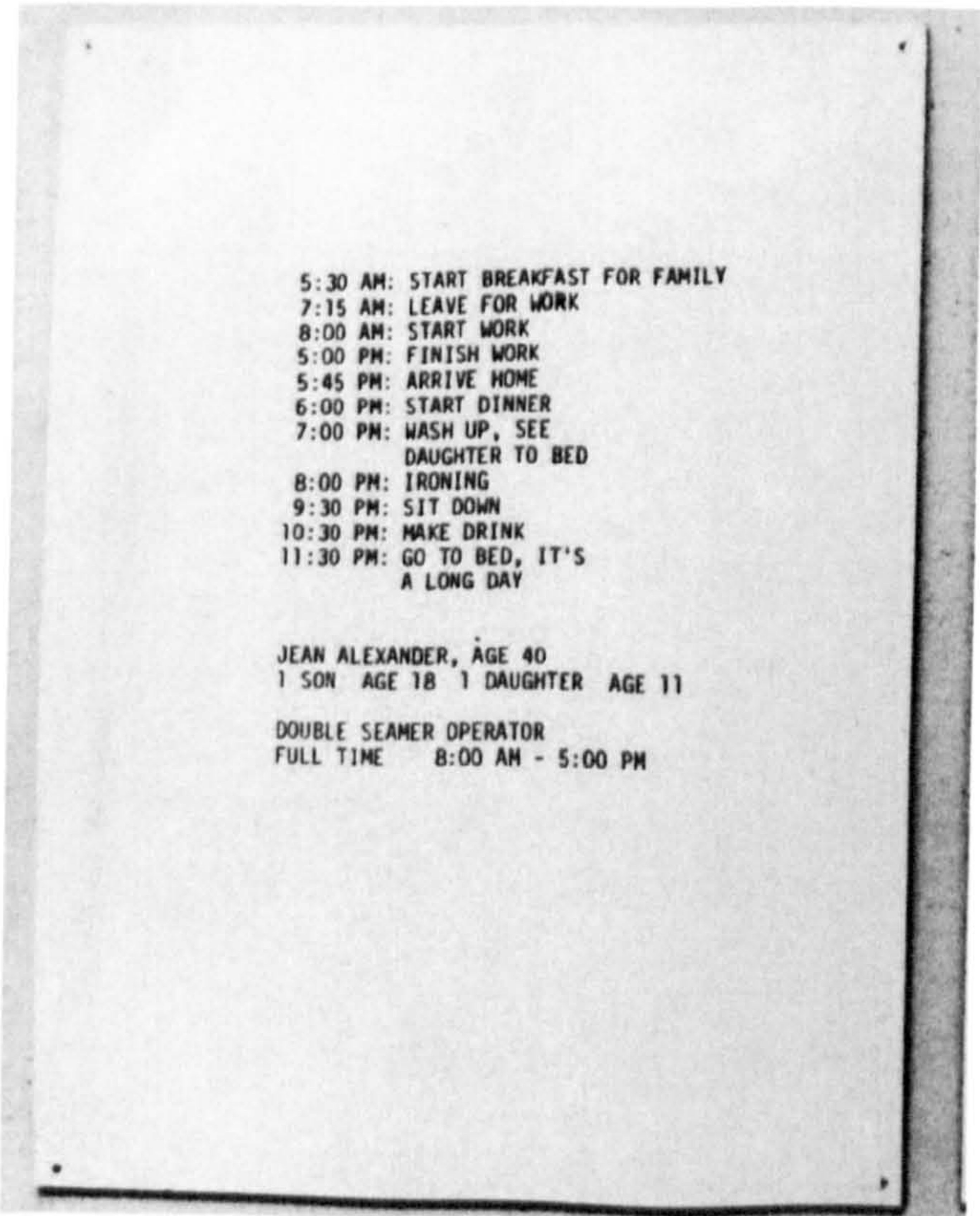


82. Roelof Louw, *Pyramid: Soul City*, 1967, oranges (dimensions variable). Installation view: *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2000). Photo: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.





83. Conrad Atkinson, *Strike at Brannan's*, 1972, silkscreen edition of 15 (56 x 20 cm). Photo: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



84. Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly and Kay Fido Hunt, *Women and Work* (detail), 1975, photographs, documents, sound recordings (dimensions variable). Collection: the artists. Photo: Ray Barrie.





85. Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly and Kay Fido Hunt, *Women and Work*, 1975, photographs, documents, sound recordings (dimensions variable). Installation view: South London Gallery, 1975. Collection: the artists. Photo: Ray Barrie.

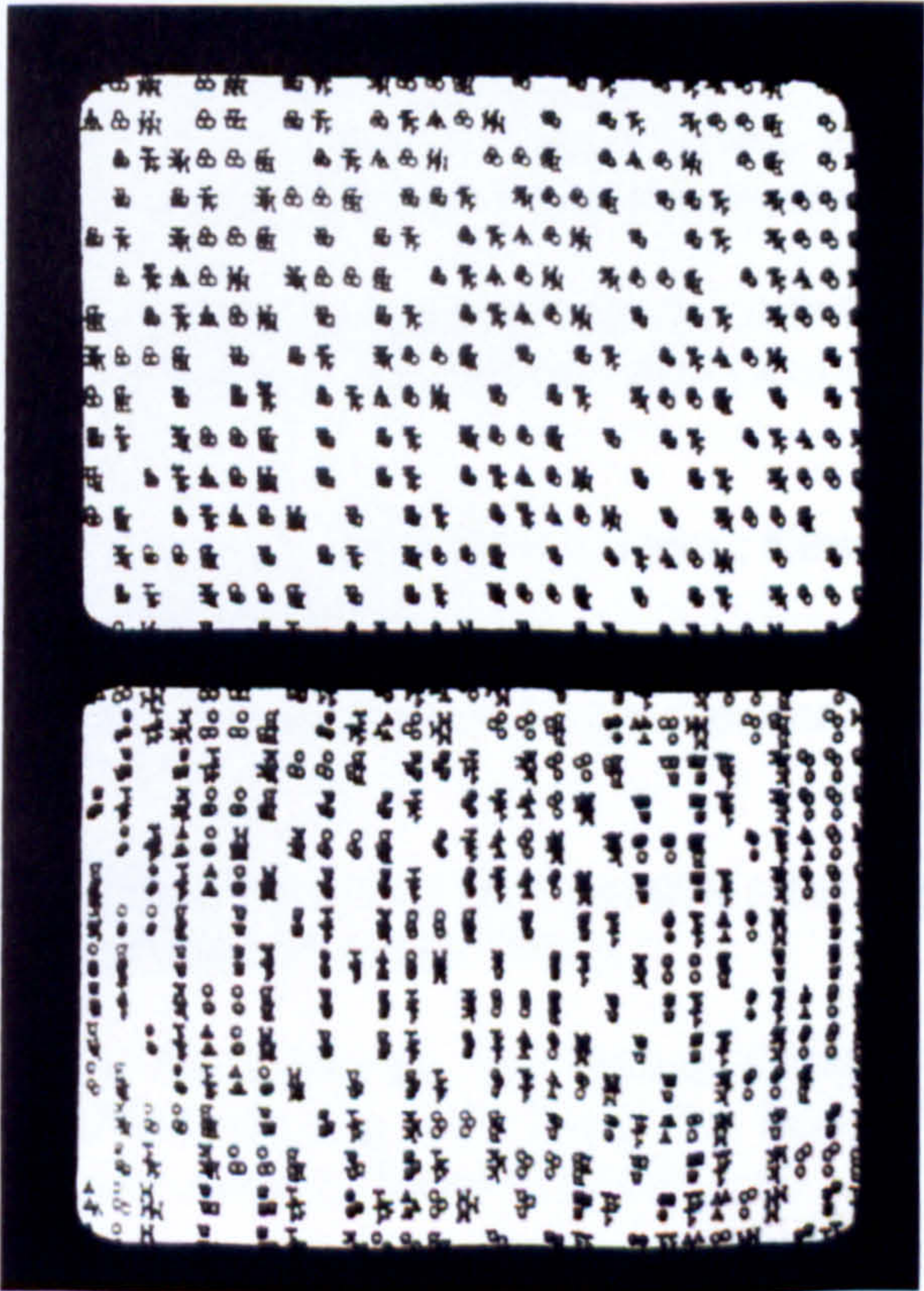


86. De Geuzen, *Democracy: Do Not Clean*, 2000, doormat: rubber and synthetic fibres (100 x 180 cm). Installation view: *Democracy!*, Royal College of Art, London, 2000. Photo: De Geuzen.





87. Publicity material produced by the Whitechapel Art Gallery for the exhibition *Live in Your Head*, showing detail of Michael Craig-Martin's *An Oak Tree*, 1973, glass shelf and brackets, glass containing water, printed text (dimensions variable).



88. Bob Cobbing, page from *This Book is a Movie*, 1971, reproduced as enlarged photocopy, *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965 – 1975* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery). Photo: Estate of Bob Cobbing.



## Bibliography

### Exhibition Catalogues

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