BETWEEN DEMATERIALIZATION
AND DOCUMENTATION

CONCEPTUAL ART IN A CURATORIAL PERSPECTIVE

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor aan
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
on gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
op dinsdag 29 november 2016 om 13.45 uur
in de aula van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

door

Nathalie Sophie Johanna Francisca Zonnenberg

geboren te Nijmegen
promotoren: prof.dr. W. Davidts
            prof.dr. K. Kwastek
copromotor:  dr. J. Jobse
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation could not have been realized without the help of others. I am greatly indebted to my promoters Wouter Davidts, Katja Kwastek, and Jonneke Jobse, who gave me many helpful comments and suggestions throughout the course of my research. It was Jonneke who encouraged me to undertake this PhD research in the first place, while Wouter guided me in the development and elaboration of my thesis with many inspiring conversations. Katja was especially of support with constructive criticism in the last phase of completion of the dissertation. I am also indebted to Carel Blotkamp for proposing me the idea to initiate a PhD research, and giving me the confidence to execute such a project. Additionally I would like to thank the members of the reading committee, Eric de Bruyn, Ann-Sophie Lehmann, Mia Lerm Hayes, Terry Smith, and Diederik Oostdijk, for accepting the invitation to assess this dissertation, as well as for their valuable comments and revelations.

I would especially like to thank Jan van Adrichem for being a stable point of reference in the review of my texts from the very start, and providing me with stimulating conversations and feedback. Special thanks go also to my former PhD fellows at the VU University, Iris Burgers, Elise Noyez, and Rose Tzalmona, for being an important pillar during the first years of my research, and joining in many inspiring and humorous conversations about the tasks that we were all up to. I am grateful to have been able to work within the Department of Arts and Culture at the VU University, where I have always felt appreciated and supported by the former chair Koos Bosma (†), as well as by the Art History staff members Richard Bionda, Agnes Groot, Fieke Konijn, Sven Lütticken, Jos ten Berge, Paul van den Akker, and Ingrid Vermeulen.

Furthermore, I owe many thanks to the professional staff of the museums and archives that I have consulted: Stefanie Kreuzer of Museum Morsbroich in Leverkusen; Kathrin Barutzki of the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Gabriele John of the Stadtarchiv Leverkusen; Elisabeth Schleeben of the Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf; Anne Dressen, François Michaud, and Florence Pustienne of the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, and Chiara Costa of the Fondazione Prada, who helped me find access and useful information in their archives. Special thanks I would like to express to Claude Gintz, to share with me his ideas and memory of the curation of the exhibition L’art conceptuel, une perspective, and Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk (†), Ann Goldstein, and Seth Siegelaub (†) for the stimulating conversations about conceptual art’s legacy.
Finally, I am most grateful to my family and friends who bore with me and supported me throughout this important project, and accepted recurring absences in social events and get-togethers. In anticipation to the public defense of my dissertation, special thanks go to my parymphs Sanneke Stigter and Sjoukje van der Meulen for accepting to mentally as well as emotionally support me during the last hour of my PhD endeavor.
For my father, in memoriam

“You should write a book,” he said
CONTENTS

Introduction 9

Chapter 1 A Trajectory of Conceptual Art’s “Object” (Between Dematerialization and Documentation)

1.1. Theories and Definitions of Conceptual Art 25
1.2. The Principle of Dematerialization 33
1.3. Primary and Secondary Information 43
1.4. Art Documentation 54

Chapter 2 Case study: Konzeption–Conception: Documentation of a To-day’s Art Tendency (1969)

2.1 A First Overview of Conceptual Art 65
2.2 The Catalogue (as) Exhibition 69
2.3 Where’s the Exhibition? 77
2.4 The Exhibition as (Free) Publicity 86
2.5 Conclusion 92

Chapter 3 Case study: L’Art conceptuel: une perspective (1989)

3.1 A First Retrospective of Conceptual Art 93
3.2 The Exhibition as Historicizing Venture 97
3.3 Discourse versus Exhibition 107
3.4 (Institutional) Critiques 116
3.5 Conclusion 122

Chapter 4 Case study: When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969/ Venice 2013 (2013)

4.1 Reconsidering the Exhibition of Conceptual Art 125
4.2 (Re-)Curating Art History 129
4.3 The Legacy of the Exhibition 139
4.4 The Problem of Authenticity (Reproducing Aura) 147
4.5 Conclusion 154

Epilogue 157

Bibliography 171

Summary 187
INTRODUCTION

The impossibility of reclaiming the volitivity of perceptual change leaves art historical explanations to pick the bones of dead forms. In this sense, all art dies with time and is impermanent whether it continues to exist as an object or not—Robert Morris¹

In 1969, Dutch artist Jan Dibbets conceived and developed a project, which can be regarded exemplary for the paradoxical condition of many works of conceptual art. Project for Art & Project anticipated the fifteenth exhibition of the Amsterdam “avant-garde gallery” Art & Project, and used the distributive format of the gallery’s invitation, the so-called bulletin, to construct a work that would eventually reveal the network involved in the production, distribution and collection of conceptual art in the late 1960s.²

To a mailing list of about 400 addressees the bulletin was sent with the question to return one side to the gallery, after which each returned bulletin would be marked on a map by a straight line from the home of the addressee to the location of the gallery in Amsterdam. Next to this, the addressees were invited for the opening of the exhibition (of the work) that would take place at the closing day of the project.³ The work had at least two different formats of presentation: while the first consisted of the exhibition of the 196 returned bulletins and their additional markings on four maps in the gallery (Amsterdam, the Benelux, Europe and the world); the second appeared in the 1970 July/August issue of Studio International in printed format—representing the returned bulletins by a list of names.⁴

Among the addressees who returned the bulletin to the gallery were not only Dibbets’s colleague-conceptual artists, but also important critics, curators, dealers, and, most importantly, (a new type of) collectors interested in conceptual art. It may thus come as no surprise that the exhibited work in the gallery was subsequently acquired—by the collectors-couple Herman and Henriëtte van Eelen.⁵ The eventual sale can be

---

² Prior to the exhibitions in the gallery space Art & Project distributed the bulletin in order to announce these exhibitions, but more often than not the bulletin also functioned as an alternative space for the activities of the artists they affiliated with that did not fit the traditional format of exhibition.
³ The closing day of the project was on Tuesday, December 16, 1969 from 8-9 p.m. See Jan Dibbets, Art & Project Bulletin #15 (November 1969).
⁴ For this specific issue of Studio International the New York curator-dealer Seth Siegelaub was invited to “curate” an exhibition in the magazine. On his turn he invited a number of other curators, of which Hans Strelow selected the work by Dibbets.
⁵ The personal relationship with the artists and the specific interaction of each acquisition were more important for the Van Eelens than the (art historical) value of the works. Birgit Pelzer has stressed that for Belgium collectors
considered an essential part of the work, successfully closing the cycle of production, distribution, and collection in which conceptual art operated in the late 1960s. In this respect Dibbets’s Project has become a historical document, effectively illustrating the process of commodification that conceptual art was subjected to since its beginnings—something of which the artist seemed well aware when he conceived the project.  

Ironically, the sale of Dibbets’s Project as an autonomous work of art is at the same time contradicting the principles of conceptual art that were precisely trying to counter the process of commodification. In another respect, the work is also illustrative for the dilemma of exhibiting conceptual art: Although Dibbets has always lightly objected to being ascribed a “conceptual artist,” Project for Art & Project could be defined a textbook example of a conceptual artwork, which in its execution is negating or frustrating a definite format of exhibition.

When I co-curated with Toos van Kooten the exhibition REDONE: Conceptual Art from the Collection at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo in 2008 I was personally confronted with the dilemma of how to (re-)exhibit Dibbets’s Project. The Kröller-Müller Museum acquired the Van Eelen collection in 2006, and this was the first time that Dibbets’s work was to be re-exhibited in a public context. The four different maps with markings were separately framed behind thin Perspex, and the collection of 196 returned bulletins was kept in a simple cardboard box with no further instructions. It was thus of main concern to anticipate the contextual implications this documentary type of work

Herman and Nicole Daled “[b]uying works by living artists offered a way to escape the passive role assigned to art audiences. This insistence on action, on ‘doing’, entered into a dialogue with art production at a time when the latter, crucially, viewed itself as a testing ground for thought.” Birgit Pelzer, “Synchronies: A Journey of Discovery through Herman and Nicole Daled’s Collection and Archives – 1966-1978,” in A Bit of Matter and A Little Bit More: The Collection and Archives of Herman and Nicole Daled 1966-1978, eds. Patrizia Dander and Ulrich Wilmes, exh.cat. (München: Haus der Kunst, 2010), p. 17. Among the addressees who returned the bulletin were John Baldessari, Stanley Brouwn, On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, Ger van Elk, Daniel Buren, Piero Giliardi, Gerry Schum, and Lawrence Weiner; Wim Beeren, René Bloch, Cor Blok, Willi Bongard, Michel Claura, Konrad Fischer, Rudi Fuchs, Bernd Lohaus, Barbara Reise, Seth Siegelaub, Hans Strelow, John Wendler, and White Wide Space; and Martin and Mia Visser, Herman Daled, and Herman van Eelen.  

6 In an interview I conducted with Dibbets in 2010, he explained that he came up with the idea for the work to “test” whether what he thought of the system of art at the time was really true. See Nathalie Zonnenberg, “The Amsterdam Connection: In Conversation with Jan Dibbets and Ger van Elk,” Metropolis M no. 4 (August/Sept. 2010), pp. 52-62 and 112-115. http://www.metropolism.com/magazine/2010-no4/de-amsterdam-connectie. Dibbets’s viewpoint at the time can be regarded rather opportunistic, as he said in 1968: “Sell my work? 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.” See Lucy R. Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” in Ann Goldstein and Ann Rorimer, Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975 (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), p. 28.  

7 This exhibition was the result of a seminar with BA students that I initiated and coordinated at the VU University in Amsterdam, and which studied a large amount of conceptual artworks from the collection of the museum. See http://krollermuller.nl/exposition/archive#2008.  

8 The collection Van Eelen-Weeber contains 35 conceptual artworks from 1965 tot 1973, as well as a few precursors like Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and Barnett Newman. The works have been brought together in a relatively short period of time in close relationship with the artists and their galleries. See http://krollermuller.nl/exposition/archive#2006.
would acquire within a spatial presentation. Whereas the bulletins were organized according to the four geographic categories, we decided to display them in vitrines that were placed directly below the framed maps on the wall, in such a way that a large part of the names on the papers would be exposed—in order to generate an understanding of the relationship between the different parts of the project. The work was hereafter included in the exhibition *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art 1960-1976*, curated by Christophe Cherix at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010, where it occupied a central position.\(^9\) Unfortunately, since the addressees and stamps of the different locations were not visible there, the larger implications of Dibbets’s work were not conveyed to the public. The bulletins were all stocked together and displayed at some distance from the maps, as a result of which the correlation between the maps and bulletins was lost.

It is hard to argue that the documents within the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum representing Dibbets’s *Project* comprise an autonomous artwork; the various elements of the project need to be contextualized within an exhibitionary setting to make sense. In contrast, the publication of Dibbets’s *Project* within the context of the *Studio International* journal offered a more appropriate format to display the several parts of the project as a whole: it used modest referential information to disclose the main purpose of the work. In the journal, the unaddressed bulletin was published on one page, followed by the list of addressees, “by number of bulletin and name of person responding,” and by the four maps, two on a page, simply referenced as “maps of responses” from Amsterdam, Benelux, Europe and the world.\(^10\) No more than the original documents did the assembly of all the information involved in the project constitute an autonomous work of art; it was merely a mode of distributing information to anyone who purchased the journal. Directly conveying the project’s information in a publication, however, the journal effectively disclosed Dibbets’s proposition as no other format could.

The above case elucidates the difficulties in the exhibition of works of conceptual art that are preserved within collections of private and public museums of modern and contemporary art. One of the main objectives of conceptual art was to criticize and subvert the commercial system of (contemporary) art that relegates the artwork to a plain commodity. Many works that were conceived at the time and applied a

---

\(^{9}\) Christophe Cherix, *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art 1960-1976*, exh. cat. (Museum of Modern Art New York, 2010). This noteworthy exhibition was based on a gift of conceptual works from the collection of the Dutch Art & Project gallery and credited the influence of Dutch art institutions in the development of conceptual art.

\(^{10}\) *Book Supplement of Studio International* 17 no. 6 (July/August 1970), p. 42.
“dematerialization of art as object,” were nevertheless sold and thus commodified. This outcome is interpreted in two conflicting ways. Whereas some regard it as “a failure,” others hold it as the “open-ended assignment” of conceptual art as a movement. Since the latter option has intrigued me as a practicing curator, I decided to explore in this research project how historical works of conceptual art are to be taken care of within a contemporary exhibitionary context—starting from the knowledge that the etymological origin of to curate is to take care (*curare*). My aim has been to define what is to be considered the “original artwork,” and, to examine to what extent the sustained exhibition of such work—which is, after all, the task of public collections—conflicts with the intentions of the protagonists of the historical “movement”? Wouldn’t it be better to accept the documentary status of many works of conceptual art, and present these in books and publications, as was initially thought to be the proper place for it? Or, if the exhibition in a spatial configuration is nevertheless compulsory, what other formats of display would be appropriate to effectively disclose these works?

Instead of answering these questions in the format of a manual or instruction book—based on my own practice or experiments within curation—the thesis that I present focuses on the historical reassessment of the conundrum of exhibition within conceptual art, and the role that curators assumed in this regard. The French art historian Jean-Marc Poinso has argued that works of art do not only exist by means of their art historical disclosure, but additionally and especially by their continued exhibition. To study the history of conceptual art’s exhibition, therefore, can provide insight into the complexities and paradoxes of conceptual art’s “ontological condition,” as well as into the artistic and curatorial strategies that are to be taken into consideration in support of the present and future exhibition of conceptual art.

As Sophie Richard demonstrated in her 2010 dissertation-book *Unconcealed*, “Conceptual Art” has developed out of several (individual) artists’ practices simultaneously emerging in the United States and Europe, establishing collaborations and relationships amongst each other and with affiliated curators, dealers and collectors that became an “international” network. Within this network diverse positions and opinions have been decisive for the eventual framing of conceptual art as an art historical category.

---

Consequently, there is not one covering theory of conceptual art but many, most of which are based on either theoretical reflections or formalist art historical affirmations. I do not intend to add another definition of conceptual art to these theories; rather I will use the existing array of literature to contextualize the complexity of the conundrum I intend to examine. Whereas the artists, theorists, and exhibitions of conceptual art that I scrutinize in this thesis will not differ much from those canonized, my analysis of the problems arising within historical examples of exhibitions of conceptual art attempts to provide a different perspective on the legacy of conceptual art.

Although my method of research is primarily art historical, I will approach the dilemma of (re-)exhibiting works of conceptual art from the perspective of a curator. As I am active as an exhibition curator within the field of art institutions and museums I tend to encounter and examine works of art from this position. Accordingly, this dissertation focuses on the properties of an exhibition as a means to communicate artworks to an audience, including the spatial, temporal, but also relational considerations that such an enterprise entails. To this end I will on the one hand reconstruct curatorial methods and strategies that have allowed the conceptual work of art to be exhibited in the first place. On the other hand I will relate both of the latter to the historical and more recent discourses on conceptual art, revealing inconsistencies but also opportunities inherent to the exhibition practice of conceptual art. With this double approach, I aim to present a curatorial perspective that concentrates on the communicative or public rationale of conceptual artworks rather than their theoretical affirmations—although these aspects cannot be entirely separated within conceptual art.

The discipline of curation has become increasingly theoretical in recent years, and produced a discourse of its own that has entered, and might even have come to dominate the discourse of contemporary art in general. Arguably, present-day curatorial discourse is indissolubly connected to conceptual art. The processes of "demystification" that artists (in close collaboration with curators) in the late 1960s generated, established a shift in the conditions of art production that is often referred to as the "linguistic turn."
According to curator and theorist Paul O’Neill, conceptual art's demystification of "the hidden structures of the art world"—i.e. the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the influence of the exhibition space on the production of artworks—anticipated a "curatorial turn" within the practice and discourse of art in the early 1990s. This turning point is not only evidenced by the recent development of the practice of exhibition-making into a more discursive and professional discipline, institutionalized in educational and training programs, but also by the large amount of critical and scholarly literature produced on the methods, theories, and histories of contemporary exhibition-making.

While the study of and writing on exhibitions and curating has come to dominate the general art discourse since the 1990s, it has also forced the academic discipline of art history to broaden its scopes. According to art historian and professor of museum studies Bruce Altshuler the curatorial boom of the late 1980s and 1990s runs parallel to an expanding interest in social and institutional histories within art history, "prompted by the postmodern questioning of grand narratives, by postcolonial studies, and by multiculturalist demands for inclusion of the previously excluded." Altshuler also claimed that this development was in fact a response to the groundbreaking 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Likewise, within the research and literature on conceptual art, exhibitions have played significant roles, such as the 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism* at the Queens Museum in New York, which called attention to a more global perspective on conceptual art.

In turn, the study of such exhibitions, published for example in the Exhibition Histories series of Afterall Books since 2010—including case studies of exhibitions like *When Attitudes Become Form, Op losse schroeven*, Lucy Lippard’s *Numbers Exhibitions*, the Third Havana Biennial, *Magiciens de la terre*, among others—offers important points of reference for my own elaborations.

---


22 The exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* at the Queens Museum in New York in 1999 presented many conceptual practices outside the New York and American-European circle of conceptual art, including those in Japan, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Australia. In Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Russia.
Positioning my research within this specific field of exhibition history and theory, I will not so much focus on artists’ oeuvres or individual works of art—even if not explicitly avoiding this—but turn my attention towards the multi-faceted context of the exhibitionary setting. Exhibitions are marked by artistic or aesthetic, if not even more by institutional or socio-economic strategies. This realization requires that some refinements on the narrative of conceptual art need to be made. While the art historical canonization of conceptual art—concentrating on artists’ discourse and oeuvres—is on its way to completion, even in those regions that were formerly not part of the Western art historical hegemony, it is my opinion that the current (art historical) assignment concerning the study of conceptual art is twofold.23 First, we need to analyze the paradoxical relationship between the discourse and practice of conceptual art, which contributed to the allegedly failed self-imposed assignment. Secondly, we need to question in how far the notion of this “failure” is not only related to the increased commercialization of the art world, but also to a deficient understanding of the conceptual work of art by museums and art institutions, concerning the question how to exhibit these works in a contemporary perspective.

In order to contribute to the above research desiderata I will first, in chapter 1, re-evaluate several theories and definitions of conceptual art from the (historical) literature; more specifically the notions of “dematerialization,” “primary and secondary information,” and “art documentation,” respectively framed by Lucy Lippard (1968), Seth Siegelaub (1972), and Boris Groys (1997). These particular notions can be considered imperative for the ontological condition of the conceptual artwork in regard to its exhibition, and will be used as a theoretical framework to assess three case studies of conceptual art exhibitions from the late 1960s to the present in the subsequent three chapters.

The first part of chapter 1 expands on “The Principle of Dematerialization” through an analysis of the ideological stance of the artists involved in relation to applied formats of exhibition, and the larger system of art’s production, distribution, and collection. Lucy Lippard’s rather broad definition of conceptual art as "work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap,

unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized,’” might seem highly inadequate to use as a theoretical framework to analyze the ontological implications of the conceptual work of art. Yet, Lippard worked as a critic and curator in close collaboration with conceptual artists, and approached this type of art with respect to its material form—even if this was exactly what was being problematized. While she soon agreed with her critics that, “[a] piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or ‘material,’ as a ton of lead,” the notion of dematerialization continued to be addressed in the literature on conceptual art. It can even still be considered relevant to determine to what extent the traditional understanding of a work of art is challenged by conceptual practices, both in its ontological condition, material formation, and in relation to its exhibition.

The second part of chapter 1, entitled “Primary and Secondary Information,” examines the strategies of conceptual artists to present their work outside the realm of the leading art institutions, using in particular the format of the publication. It was the contention of Seth Siegelaub, curator and dealer of the New York conceptual artists Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner, that the specific, idea-based character of conceptual art was utterly fitting to the format of the publication as a new “space” to show art. Furthermore, the publication was a means to surpass the existing market strategies of art at the time, and develop a new system of art distribution that would be based on royalties. Siegelaub’s Artists’ Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement was another attempt to protect the rights of conceptual artists and to guarantee an income for their “immaterial work.” The idea was never effectively realized. In fact, the contract also facilitated the trade of conceptual works via the existing market system, and many indistinct documents of conceptual art ended up in private and public collections around the world, where they are considered and treated as original artworks. From an “art as information” conceptual art thus turned into an “art as documentation.” In this turn conceptual artists’ rejection of the art object as a commodity, paradoxically enough, has been commodified.

26 Siegelaub regarded the nature of conceptual artists as one that doesn’t relate to space. None of the artists he worked with, however, agreed. See RoseLee Goldberg, “Space as Praxis,” Studio International 190 no. 977 (September/October 1975), p. 130.
27 I am referring here to Maurizio Lazzarato’s concept of “immaterial labor” (i.e. labor as service). See Maurizio Lazzarato “Immaterial Labour,” in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), Radical Thought in Italy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) trans. Paul Coillili and Ed Emory, pp. 132-146. Although not a definition used by the practitioners of conceptual art in the 1960s, this term is anticipating recent discussions on, and reevaluations of conceptual art, f.e. by Jan Verwoert, who regards conceptual art not as a new method of work that changed the role of the artist into an office worker, as had been asserted by Benjamin Buchloh, but about the “rejection of work.” Jan Verwoert, lecture on the occasion of the presentation of Camiel van Winkel’s book During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed: Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, December 9, 2012.
The third part of chapter 1, "Art Documentation," further analyzes the commodified work of conceptual art that is often captured in documents and certificates. The definition of art documentation by the Russian-German philosopher Boris Groys accurately describes the current ontological condition of historical works of conceptual art: as “documents referring to art without being art itself.” These documents, however, can be considered the only “originals” of conceptual artworks that museums or private collectors own—originals, however, that require some sort of “reproduction.” The diagrams and texts, instructions for events or projects, and proposed or imagined artworks can solely exist in the form of a plan to be produced at a later date, or, can allow for re-execution; reconstitution or re-adaptation to different spaces and circumstances. In this respect, the issue of originality is challenging the institutional system in which art operates to revise its methodologies. As I will argue, the custody of conceptual artworks in collections goes beyond the traditional museological responsibilities of maintenance, conservation, and presentation. It prompts some sort of “shared authorship.” Since the “receiver” of these works is no longer the well-informed participant involved in the small conceptual art circle of the late 1960s and early 1970s, to convey these works to a contemporary public may only be accomplished by the “delegated receivership of the curator,” as Dutch art critic Camiel van Winkel puts it.

The trajectory or (historical) analysis of conceptual art’s condition discussed in the first chapter along a re-examination of key theories and definitions serves as a theoretical framework to, in the following chapters, assess three exhibitions. These exhibitions serve as case studies for a re-evaluation of the forms that have been assigned to conceptual art works in different exhibitionary settings. When researching the many exhibitions with, and of conceptual art from the early years to the present, at least three different timeframes in which the curatorial perspective on conceptual art has changed considerably can be distinguished: the initial phase when conceptual art was first exhibited in the late 1960s; a second phase in the early 1990s when several exhibitions on the legacy of conceptual art were curated and its historicization started; and finally current practices of remake exhibitions that try to reactivate the legacy of conceptual art. The three selected cases, Konzeption-Conception: Documentation of a Today’s Art Tendency in 1969, L’art conceptuel: une perspective in 1989, and When Attitudes Become Form: Bern

29 See also Poinot 1999, p. 103.
30 See Camiel van Winkel, “Global Concept: Applications and Embodiments,” in Sabine Folie (ed.), 2013, p. 95. Van Winkel argues that the curator receives the work on behalf of the public, reads, interprets, and examines it, and communicates the results back to the public.
1969/ Venice 2013 in 2013 are key exponents of these respective phases. The distinct role of the curator and the applied curatorial methodologies within these respective exhibitions will be a main principle of examination. The intersection of historical research and curatorial discourse is used in order to analyze how curators in the past have applied curatorial methodologies, as to gain insight into the theoretical but also practical ramifications of exhibiting conceptual works.

The selection of these three exhibitions of conceptual art is based upon several criteria, including the significance they have played in the manner in which conceptual art has been critically received, and, consequently, art historically canonized. First of all, I have made my selection of case studies within the region of Western Europe. This was not only a practical choice—as I am based in Europe and the access to these archives was more readily available to me than to those in the United States—but also because conceptual art was received and exhibited by important public museums in Europe in a very early phase, as well as supported by several European collectors that were involved in the ‘movement’ of conceptual art.31 Furthermore, the three case studies show a clear historical development of the exhibition of conceptual art, which provides insight into how institutional and curatorial strategies added to the canonization of conceptual art that at the same time created problems to effectively disclose the works involved.

Concerning the initial phase of conceptual art’s exhibition the spectrum of exhibitions that have contributed to the reception and acknowledgement of conceptual art as an art historical category is manifold. Meanwhile, through emerging curatorial research, some of these have become truly legendary, such as Harald Szeeman’s When Attitudes Become Form (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), Wim Beeren’s Op Losse Schroeven (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1969), and Lucy Lippard’s “Number Shows,” respectively in Seattle (1969), Vancouver (1970), Buenos Aires (1970), and Valencia CA (1973), to name only a few.32 In these years, however, there were almost no exhibitions that explicitly framed conceptual art as a movement or specific type of art and tried to determine its specific character. One of the exhibitions that did, and probably the first exhibition, was Konzeption-Conception: Documentation of a Today’s Art Tendency at the Städtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen in 1969, curated by the German art dealer Konrad Fischer and the director of the museum, art historian Rolf Wedewer.

31 See Richard 2009.
While this exhibition is mentioned in various historical studies on conceptual art, in depth study, let alone a factual description, of the exhibition is lacking. Moreover, since most of these sources refer to the catalogue it was not even certain that a physical exhibition actually did take place. In chapter 2 I present a first reconstruction of the physical exhibition in Leverkusen, and argue that it had brought to the fore the dilemma of exhibiting works of conceptual art already in this early phase, confirming the mediatory role of the curator from the very beginnings of conceptual art. Its key achievement however was to make an exhibition specifically dedicated to conceptual art in order to grant the new type of art a place in the annals of art history. The critical reviews of this exhibition in the German press at the time hinted at the problem inherent to the exhibition of conceptual artworks, as well as the role of the publication as a means to appropriately communicate this type of art. Moreover, the substantial critical debate in the newspapers contributed to the “avant-garde quality” of conceptual art, and anticipated subsequent theories on conceptual art.

More often than not the critical attitude of the conceptual artists themselves has added to a large extent to the illustrious status of early exhibitions, which incorporated what has come to be called “institutional critique.” Hans Haacke’s famous MoMA Poll, included in the exhibition Information (1970) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as well as his censored exhibition Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, or Daniel Buren’s censored contribution to the Sixth Guggenheim International (1971), were provoking the institution. It was only in 1989 that Benjamin Buchloh acknowledged this kind of provocation as an important aspect of conceptual art in his catalogue essay “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969)” for the Paris exhibition L’art conceptuel, une perspective. This exhibition, initiated by the director of the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, Suzanne Pagé, and

---

33 While there was no photographic documentation of this exhibition, I based my reconstruction upon the extensive contemporary reviews in the German newspapers, and historical documents regarding the organization of the exhibition that are available in the archives of the city of Leverkusen. I also made use of floor plans of the exhibition spaces of Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen, which I visited, and historical documents on the Prospect 69 exhibition, which was organized by Fischer around the same time as Konzeption. These documents are available in the archives of the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, as well as the city of Dusseldorf.
34 Shortly after Konzeption Klaus Honnef published his book Concept Art (Cologne: Phaidon Verlag, 1971), which is certainly highly influenced by Konrad Fischer’s activities within the field of conceptual art since he refers to several of Fischer’s exhibitions.
36 Ibid.
curated by art historian Claude Gintz, made a first attempt to re-evaluate historical conceptual practices.

Organized exactly twenty years after *Konzeption*, the Paris exhibition is mentioned in many publications as a key exhibition of conceptual art, but has never been studied to substantiate this claim. As I argue in chapter 3, *L’art conceptuel: une perspective* highly contributed to the historical framing of conceptual art, especially through the comprehensive catalogue that included Buchloh’s seminal text, which was subsequently revised and reprinted in the winter issue of *October* journal in 1990. The overall focus on the role of the catalogue, however, has overshadowed the importance of the actual exhibition in Paris. I will demonstrate that the exhibition process included valuable discussions with several of the participating artist about defining the “original” in their works, and the manner in which their historical works could be represented in a present timeframe within the galleries of a museum. In my analysis, based on assessing the catalogue, correspondences, documents, and photographs concerning the exhibition—conserved in the archives of the Musee de l’art Moderne—as well as an interview I conducted with curator Gintz in 2011, it becomes clear that many of the artists at the time did not have proper solutions for this problem.

What is more, the critical attitude that some of the invited artists assumed (Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke), was frustrated by museological restrictions that had to be taken in consideration by curator Gintz. While he was of opinion that the importance of conceptual art within an art historical perspective was anticipated by the practices of a new generation of artists in the late 1980s that was reconsidering the artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s in their own work, he was not able to address this specific aspect in his exhibition. That conceptual artists’ critique of institutions and the larger system of art prevented the acquisition of their works by important museum collections seems only logical. But that the initial resistance of institutions like the Guggenheim Museum or the Museum of Modern Art in New York to engage with these critical practices had still not changed much in 1989 seems ironical.

---


38 Archives MAMVP (Box 524); Conversation with Claude Gintz by the author, Paris, December 3, 2011.


40 The Museum of Modern Art in New York was often the target of the critique of conceptual artists, which culminated in the early 1970s in the repeated demonstrations and actions of the Art Workers’ Coalition. In 1992 and 1993 the Guggenheim Museum acquired a large amount of (post-)minimal and conceptual artworks from the collection of the Italian count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. In 2010 the MoMA filled a gap in their collection with the acquisition of the collection of the Dutch gallerists Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren of Art & Project.
The variety of curatorial models that has been developed since the 1990s offers a broad potential for a less traditional manner of exhibiting works of art that have no permanent form. The flexible and open-ended exhibition project *Do it*, initiated by the Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1993, is a good case in point. Based on the idea of the musical score, Obrist initially invited twelve artists to send him instructions for works of art that were translated in nine languages and brought together in a publication, which could then be, and have been, (re-)enacted in different venues and settings all over the world.\(^4\) The parallels with conceptual publication-exhibitions in the 1960s are no coincidence; in his curatorial practice Obrist is highly influenced by the experimental practices of Seth Siegelaub, Pontus Hultên, and Harald Szeemann, among others, as can be read in the various interviews that he conducted with these pioneering curators.\(^42\)

In recent years the formula of re-enacting works from the 1960 and 1970s has become a recurring genre within curatorial practice, and has even developed into the reproduction of entire historical exhibitions. The Australian art historian and critic Terry Smith coined this new curatorial genre “recuration,” in which he specifically appraised the importance of including contemporary topics in the reconstructed exhibition.\(^43\) Also Canadian art historian Reesa Greenberg has observed the trend of reconstructing historical exhibitions since the mid-1990s, and even distinguished different typologies within what she has termed the “remembering exhibition.”\(^44\) While there are many exhibitions that have brought to the attention historical projects by conceptual artists, and museums have acquired works and (private) collections of conceptual art, these works are still sparsely properly exhibited within a museological framework.

Some exhibitions, however, have more specifically addressed the problem of originality or authenticity within conceptual art, like *In Between Minimalisms/ Free Sol LeWitt* at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2010, in which Danish artists’ collective Superflex reproduced a wall structure by Sol LeWitt in order to distribute it in edition and make it available to a broader audience.\(^45\) A more serious, or even scholarly exhibition in
this respect is the remake exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/ Venice 2013* at the Fondazione Prada in Venice in 2013, which I will examine in chapter 4. Whereas the original 1969 exhibition by Harald Szeemann is generally considered as an exhibition of conceptual art, the remake in Venice offers a valuable contribution for a continued exhibition of conceptual art today. In its specific approach of “recurrating” the historical event, including many works of conceptual art, within a different spatio-temporal framework the remake offered a multifaceted methodology that for a large part was dedicated to the dilemma of reproducing works of art that aspired dematerialization. The Fondazione Prada is not a public but private museum and accordingly does not necessarily has to adapt to general museum ethics. However, concerning the comprehensive care they have taken for many seminal works of conceptual art from important public collections, its approach can, as I will argue, very well be regarded an exemplary method within museum practice.

As the first two cases analyzed within this thesis are historical, these are studied more traditionally through the use of archival materials and reviews, to in a way archeologically reconstruct the supporting ideas and configuration of the original exhibitions. The *Attitudes* case, however, is a present-day exhibition that in and of itself already included a reconstruction exercise, both in its re-evaluation and re-execution of a historical exhibition. It could therefore be studied in different manners—both in a historical and in a today’s perspective. This resulted in a more art critical method of research and description in the fourth and last chapter, based upon my own critical assessment of the physical exhibition on the one hand, and a re-examination of the historical exhibition in the context of current curatorial discourse on the other. I have first visited and extensively examined the exhibition at the site in Venice, and subsequently evaluated my experience through the study of the catalogue and the reception of both the original as the remake exhibition in art historical literature and various international art magazines and journals.46

Although a study of exhibitions presumes the inclusion of photographic documentation of how these exhibitions were installed *pro tanto*, this thesis is deprived of visual information regarding my case studies. The choice as to not include images of the three exhibitions discussed is not only prompted by practical considerations—photographs of the first two case studies are either absent or inaccessible—but first and foremost by my attempt to concentrate primarily on the methodology of a specific

46 See f.e. Rattemeijer 2010.
exhibition rather than its visual outcome. The fact that exhibitions of conceptual art are barely photographically documented might be attributed to many conceptual artists’ persuasion that ideas or concepts should be chiefly conveyed by textual information and cataloguing rather than by visual documentation. Conversely, both the historical and remake exhibition in the third case study made extensive use of photographic documentation. I however did not want to make too much of a distinction in approach between the cases, and chose to respect conceptual notions on documentation to focus on the methodology of these specific (historical) curatorial practices. It is not my intention to prescribe a method of presentation or exhibition of conceptual works of art, but to encourage innovative and experimental modes of curatorial research and practice within current museum practices—which admittedly are still very much dominated by a modernist understanding of art history. This dissertation wishes to explore to what extent the critical approach of the “art object” within conceptual art practice, conflicting modernist tenets of originality and market value, were incorporated into historical moments of exhibiting conceptual art.

1. A TRAJECTORY OF CONCEPTUAL ART’S “OBJECT” (BETWEEN DEMATERIALIZATION AND DOCUMENTATION)

The collector is someone who enters into a conspiracy with the artist that is beyond the issue of accessibility, an agreement that the sensibility is an important one. This agreement may be really what the owner has that is “original.”—Douglas Huebler

1.1. Theories and Definitions of Conceptual Art

In 1991 and 1992 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum acquired a large amount of (post)minimal and conceptual artworks from the renowned collection of the Italian count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. This acquisition by one of the most established museums of contemporary art, at a time when conceptual art started to be acknowledged as an art historical category, evidences the acceptance of conceptual artworks as collectable “objects.” As common as this affirmation may seem today, at the time of purchase the museum took quite a risk in sparing no expense to obtain goods that were basically not there. Many of the conceptual (but also minimal) artworks that Panza purchased over the years only existed in the form of certificates; documents of authenticity that in judicial terms are of little value. There are records of a few severe cases in which Panza had considerable disagreement with artists whose works he autonomously (re)constructed in accordance with these certificates (Carl Andre and Dan Flavin amongst others). These cases illustrate the complexity of appropriately interpreting such documents—following the artist’s intentions—, as well as the undefined status of the works, which are now in the custody of the Guggenheim Museum.

This said, it is surprising that it took the museum almost twenty years to launch the Panza Collection Initiative (PCI) in 2010, dedicated to the long-term preservation and potential future exhibition of minimalist, post-minimalist, and conceptual art. As the

---

49 Through purchase and gift the Guggenheim Museum New York acquired over a 350 works of minimal, conceptual, post-minimal, and environmental art; an additional 335 works are on extended loan.
50 The Panza acquisition was estimated to have cost around $30 million, an amount that was collected through the sale of three important paintings from the collection: Fugue (1914) by Wassily Kandinsky, Boy in Blue Jacket (1916) by Amadeo Modigliani, and Birthday (1923) by Marc Chagall. See f.i. Grace Glueck, “Guggenheim to Sell 3 Works to Help Buy Others,” The New York Times (March 23, 1990).
51 See Daniel McLean, “Authenticity in Art and Law: A Question of Attribution or Authorization?” in Susan Hapgood and Cornelia Lauf (eds.), In Deed: Certificates of Authenticity in Art (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2011), p. 89. McLean asserts: “While the legal structure would seem to govern and regulate the art market like other aspects of society, the law is generally ambivalent toward intervening within the art system on questions of authenticity. At the root of this ambivalence is the belief that art is based upon subjective (aesthetic) judgment and that opinions concerning authenticity are necessarily prone to error…”
52 For a precise analysis of these cases see Martha Buskirk, “Authorship and Authority,” in The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 19-56.
museum stated in 2010 there is no true consensus on this subject: “Traditional curatorial and conservation practices are often inadequate in dealing with art that is ephemeral, variable, or fabrication-based in nature. Further, these unorthodox approaches to art making raise difficult conceptual, ethical, and legal questions regarding authenticity, ownership, and interpretive rights. The lack of a clear methodology for managing these issues has left the fate of many works of the era uncertain…”53 This holds especially true for conceptual art: Whereas in the case of minimal art there is still a material object to be fabricated, in the case of conceptual art one has to deal with instructions or propositions for pieces that, following Lawrence Weiner’s dictum, “may be fabricated,” but “need not be built” at all.54

Interesting but equally ironical about this notice is that, more than forty years after Lucy Lippard concluded that an art “freed from the tyranny of a commodity status and market orientation” failed, the commodified work of conceptual art that has transferred via the hands of the private collector to the museum collection is (again) stirring up conventional modes of art’s production and exhibition.55 What makes the initiative of the Guggenheim Museum challenging is that it reopens the 1990 dispute on the reestablishment of the “original artwork,” which Rosalind Krauss has described in her renowned essay “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum.”56 As Krauss stressed, “[w]e watch the activity of markets restructuring the aesthetic original, either to change it into an ‘asset,’ … or to normalize a once-radical practice of challenging the very idea of the original through a recourse to the technology of mass production.”57 While many pieces of conceptual art, diagrams and texts, instructions for events or projects, and proposed or imagined artworks, can be (re-)executed by others than the artist and reconstituted or re-adapted to different spaces and circumstances, or solely exist in the form of a plan to be produced at a later date, it remains a both urgent and rousing

---

53 The PCI concentrated on the work of four artists, two living and two deceased: Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Bruce Nauman, and Lawrence Weiner, and stated “[T]ogether these artists are represented in the collection by a total of ninety-four works. Each artist’s practice poses its own demands regarding preservation and display, but the holdings of the four artists’ works also collectively implicate many issues and practices that are broadly at stake for art throughout the period. The four case studies will be carried out through a set of consistent procedures: archival research; oral history interviews with the artists, artist estates, fabricators, former assistants, and other relevant parties; and the installation and physical examination of selected works.” See http://www.guggenheim.org/new- york/collections/conservation/conservation-projects/panza-collection-initiative. [October 6, 2011]
54 Cited from Lawrence Weiner’s famous Declaration of Intent: “The artist may construct the piece. The piece may be fabricated. 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 upon the occasion of receivership.” First published in exh. cat. January 5-31, 1969 (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p.
57 Ibid., p. 430.
question (at least for a curator) how to appropriately deal with these possibilities within an exhibitionary setting.

As the PCI suggests there are various answers to this question—at least as many as there are artists' practices. A close examination of artists' oeuvres and individual works, as the initiative proposes, is therefore a feasible method to start getting a grasp on the subject. However, as Susan Hapgood asserted, "[t]he artist's initial intention would be important to a reconsideration of refabrication, but it would not be the sole factor. . . . due to inherent conflicts of interest, refabrication decisions should not rest in the hands of any single party—museum, gallery, collector, or artist."  

Since the original context of artworks at the time of their first public exhibition, including the participation of the curator, has often determined the artwork in the case of conceptual art, it is crucial to take the curatorial histories and methodologies of conceptual art into account to define the current ontological condition of conceptual works of art. To do so, this chapter will first take a brief look at the general literature on conceptual art and its shifting terminologies, to then focus specifically on three notions of conceptual art which I consider most useful within the curatorial evaluation of conceptual art's dilemma of exhibition. Such re-evaluation of the discourse on conceptual art, from early artists' texts to more theoretical assertions concerning the aesthetic strategies of conceptual art, will serve as a framework to assess the three case studies presented in the following chapters.

Conceptual art has generated its own specific discourses, moreover, it brought about its own aesthetic theories—initiated by the artists involved, and adapted by several likeminded artists, art professionals, and theorists who engaged with them. Artists' writings, such as Joseph Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy" (1969), and Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), and "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969) are generally regarded as most representative for conceptual aesthetics, and often read as manifestos for the movement.  

Kosuth's claim that conceptual artists act as theorists, and operate merely amongst themselves, contributed to the reputation of conceptual art as being inaccessible to the public—a stigma that is still very active today. Whereas artists

such as Kosuth were certainly excluding the larger public, in claiming that “an audience separate from the participants doesn’t exist”; artists like LeWitt, but also Lawrence Weiner and Robert Morris, conversely, acted in a manner to “engage the mind of the viewer.”

Weiner, in his “Declaration of Intent” (1969), more explicitly addressed the role of the “receiver” in the (eventual) realization of the conceptual work, while LeWitt and Morris, departing from minimalist aesthetics and assuming the actual realization of the work, address the work’s interaction with “space, light and the viewer’s field of vision.”

These different positions also become visible in the early scholarly literature on conceptual art. Ursula Meyer’s 1972 publication Conceptual Art mainly followed Kosuth’s stance on conceptualism, noting, amongst others, that the book had become an important new space to show art. The German-born artist and sculpture professor explicitly referred to the notions of “primary and secondary information,” coined by the New York curator-dealer Seth Siegelaub in an interview with Meyer included in her book, which differentiate between the conceptual work and its (format of) presentation. Meyer’s publication was soon followed by Lucy Lippard’s 1973 compilation-book Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object. In this book Lippard, who (together with John Chandler), had published the essay “The Dematerialization of Art” in 1968, further elaborated on the notion of dematerialization to come to a broad definition of conceptual art. Processing the consequences of minimalism, most visible in the stance of conceptualism practiced by artists like LeWitt and Morris, Lippard referred to “a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness),” in her introduction of Six Years.

While, throughout the years, many have pointed out the inaccuracy of the term, the notion of dematerialization nevertheless remained an important point of reference in the subsequent literature on conceptual art, whereas Siegelaub’s complex notions of

---


64 Lippard 1973, p. 5. In Lippard’s extensive and varied compilation of “fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia. . . . in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia,” a reference to Klaus Honnef’s 1971 book Concept Art is missing. Although the German art historian and critic was the first to formulate a theory of conceptual art, his publication has been largely omitted in the early, but also more recent literature on conceptual art—possibly because it was never translated into English. Honnef’s precise analysis of several exhibitions, as well as various artists’ positions, both in Europe and America, can be regarded a prelude to the founding of conceptual art as an art historical category, which did not start before the late 1980s. See Klaus Honnef, Concept Art (Cologne: Phaidon-Verlags-GmbH, 1971).
primary and secondary information were overly neglected. Parallel to the renewed interest in conceptual art within exhibition practice, a vast array of publications that re-evaluate, rewrite, or reconsider the early literature of conceptual art has appeared since the 1990s, starting with Benjamin Buchloh’s seminal essay “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” first published in the catalogue of the Paris exhibition L’art conceptuel. Une perspective in 1989, and subsequently in a somewhat revised form in October journal in 1990.\textsuperscript{65} In his text Buchloh ascribed the conceptual “movement” to the avant-garde tradition of Marcel Duchamp, a claim that was followed by many scholars. In juxtaposing various artists’ positions, Buchloh sketches a socio-political development of conceptual art, which is most strongly expressed in the institutional critique applied by European artists like Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers.

In Alexander Alberro’s and Blake Stimson’s 1999 Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology various early texts on conceptual art from both Europe and the United States are republished, and as such acknowledged the simultaneous development of conceptual art on both sides of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{66} In his own contribution to this anthology, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977,” Alberro discusses different genealogies of conceptualism, which he termed “linguistic” as well as “analytic” and “synthetic.”\textsuperscript{67} Differentiating between the conceptualism of Kosuth and the members of Art & Language group on the one hand, and the conceptual theory of Sol LeWitt and others on the other, Alberro defines a third, more radical and institutional critical model of conceptual art, which he referred to as “synthetic” (Buren, Haacke, but also several Latin-American artists like Eduardo Costa, Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles).\textsuperscript{68} Stimson, in his contribution, addressed the “promise” of conceptual art, which refers in particular to the redefinition of the social function of art.\textsuperscript{69} This notion is comparable to Michael Newman’s “open-ended assignment,” presented in his 1996 text “Conceptuele kunst van de jaren


\textsuperscript{66} Alberro and Stimson 1999.

\textsuperscript{67} The first Alberro ascribed to Kosuth and the members of Art & Language group, the dominant model of conceptualism according to the author, the other two categories he adapted from Kosuth, who followed Immanuel Kant’s distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. See Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977,” in Alberro and Stimson 1999, p. xvi-xxviii.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. xlv.

\textsuperscript{69} Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art,” in Alberro and Stimson 1999, pp. xxxviii-lii.
Newman is also the first to reassess Lippard's notion of dematerialization in regard to the broader context of institutional changes that have taken place at the threshold of the new millennium. In his subsequent publication *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (1999), edited together with Jon Bird, conceptual art is first defined as a "linguistic turn" in modernist aesthetics, and alternately regarded, by various authors, both as an art historical movement and a critique of the object.\(^{71}\) The American art critic and historian Thomas McEvilley more distinctively explained conceptual art's critique of the object, again reassessing Lippard's notion of dematerialization, as a critique of modernism/formalism that paved the way for post-conceptualist, i.e. postmodernist practices. In his book *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (2005) the relevance of Lippard's early observations is redefined in a broader historical perspective.\(^{72}\)

Peter Osborne's 2002 survey *Conceptual Art* more generally re-examined conceptual aesthetics within a global perspective, including both (Latin) American and (Eastern) European, as well as other genealogies of conceptual art.\(^{73}\) The British philosopher and art historian claims that the questions raised by conceptual art are still dominating the current discourse on art. Therefore he considers all contemporary art to be essentially post-conceptual, an argument that was also made by the Dutch art historian and critic Camiel van Winkel in his 2012 dissertation-book *During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed: Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism*.\(^{74}\)

While these latter more theoretical writings on conceptual art fully acknowledge and underline the paradoxes of conceptual art and the impact that this type of art still has on current art practices, the actual implications of conceptual art's strategies for institutional or curatorial practice have hardly been addressed and studied. A sole exception is Jean-Marc Poinsot's book *Quand l’œuvre a lieu: L’art exposé et ses récits autorisés* (1999), in which the consequences of conceptual strategies for the present-day status of these works within museum conservation and disclosure have been surveyed.\(^{75}\)

---

70 Newman 1996. Part of this issue was devoted to Siegelaub’s project “The Context of Art,” with contributions by many conceptual artists that re-evaluated the legacy of conceptual art.
74 Camiel van Winkel, *During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed: Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012).
Poinsot analyzes the difficulties in defining the actual conceptual artwork and emphasizes the value of documentation and certificates to accomplish this. In this respect Boris Groys’s notion of “art documentation,” first coined in the German version of his text “Art in the Age of Biopolitics” in 1997, offers a useful definition to describe the complex status of conceptual artworks after their historical moment. As the Russian-German philosopher states, “[a]rt documentation is by definition not art; it merely refers to art, and in precisely this way it makes it clear that art, in this case, is no longer present and immediately visible, but rather absent and hidden.”

In the interviews that Patricia Norvell conducted in the late 1960s with several conceptual artists like Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, and others, edited and published together with Alexander Alberro only in 2001, the problem of documentation, or the use of documents in order to elicit the public’s participation is emphasized. Alberro’s more recent publication Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity (2003) thoroughly examined early documents and works of conceptual artists from the archives of Seth Siegelaub. In this seminal publication on the practices and strategies of conceptual art in the late 1960s in New York, Alberro is the first to actually reevaluate Siegelaub’s notions of primary and secondary information, which he applies as a coordinating definition for several conceptual models relating to site specificity, linguistics and dematerialization. In the examination of several works and projects that Siegelaub conducted with conceptual artists, Alberro intelligently demonstrates the contradictions of conceptual art as to the distinction between theory and practice.

Arguably, Lippards thesis about the “dematerialization of the art object” marked the starting point for the definition of the conceptual artwork, a process that might initially have been directed against the commodification of art, but that eventually did not affect the supporting political system as intended/ prescribed. Moreover, the critique of the object was best expressed through the frustration of the most visible format of presentation: the museum exhibition. Although not all of the artists that are considered conceptual would or did ascribe the socio-political implications of dematerialization; the nature of, and the manner in which many works of conceptual art relate to the broader

---

77 Ibid., p. 53.
aspects of time and place is paramount to the understanding of their exhibition today. That the idea-based character of conceptual art is best to be exhibited in, or distributed by a publication or catalogue, where primary and secondary information congregate, however, is something to reevaluate. This contention has not prevented the acquisition of many of these documents by private and public collections to be exhibited as such; the present status of these documents could thus be defined according to Groys’s notion of art documentation.  

The determination of “originality” is an extremely complex one in the case of conceptual art; not only in terms of authorship, or authenticity, but moreover in its ontological definition, i.e. the factual condition or “being” of the artwork. Krauss’s definition of the minimalist artwork, referring to its seriality, as “multiples without originals,” also seems applicable to the conceptual work of art. However, since the conceptual work of art is often contained in documentation and certifications, these documents are more often than not identified as the original. Although the documentary status of many conceptual artworks has long been recognized, “[t]o categorize art documentation as ‘simple’ artwork would be to misunderstand it by overlooking its originality, its identifying feature,” as Groys remarked.

In order to get to the core of my thesis, how to re-exhibit historical works of conceptual art, the following parts of this chapter will more specifically (re-)evaluate the notions of “dematerialization,” “primary and secondary information,” and “art documentation,” respectively framed by Lippard (1968), Siegelaub (1972), and Groys (1997). While the first definition was reevaluated and theorized throughout the general historiography of conceptual art; the second only recently received proper theorization in Alberro’s account; the third, however, is a yet unexploited definition that deserves further examination within the discourse of conceptual art, and which I attempt to accomplish in the below elaborations.

82 Ibid.
1.2. The Principle of Dematerialization

When Lucy Lippard and John Chandler wrote in 1968 that “[a] number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art . . . a trend [that] appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object’s becoming wholly obsolete,” expectations of a radical shift in art’s production, reception and distribution were in the air.\(^83\) The type of art addressed, then specified as “an ultra-conceptual art” or “idea art,” was further explored by Lippard in the following years and lead to the compilation-book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, in which she deliberately stated *not* to refer to a new art movement, but “to expose . . . the chaotic network of ideas in the air, in America and abroad, between 1966 and 1971.”\(^84\) She also acknowledged the inaccuracy of the term she coined in her earlier writing, but “for lack of a better term” continues “to refer to a process of dematerialization or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness).”\(^85\)

As the term was continued to be criticized by many, I do not consider it to be a more, or less accurate term, or point of reference for the thesis I want to present, than the term “conceptual art” itself that since its usage has been equally criticized but eventually evolved into the art historical category.\(^86\) As an art historical category “conceptual art” can be, and has been regarded in very specific or more widely encompassed definitions that consists of different models, lineages or trajectories; consequently, to use it as a description of one specific type of art is highly problematic.\(^87\) Although I want to meet the persistent call of professionals involved, like the curator-dealer Seth Siegelaub, to not regard conceptual art in “a standard, conservative, hermeneutically-sealed, textbook-type history,” but instead to consider it within “the broad social issues of [its] time”; to explain conceptual art in a curatorial perspective I’d first need to focus on a specific aesthetic (or

\(^83\) Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” *Art International* vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1968), pp. 31-36, as published in Alberro and Stimson 1999, p. 46.

\(^84\) Lippard, 1973, p. 5.

\(^85\) Ibid.


\(^87\) Following Peter Osborne’s argumentation f.i., “[o]ne should be wary of replacing too narrowly historical and critically sectarian a definition of conceptual art, such as Kosuth’s ‘purely conceptual art’. . . , by the more general notion of ‘conceptualism’—understood to denote a broad change in ‘attitude’ towards the art object as ‘materially constituted and visually privileged.’ For such an inclusive attitudinal definition marks out a terrain that almost all contemporary art inhabits: ‘conceptualism’ is more or less coextensive with ‘contemporary art.’” Osborne 2002, p. 18
formal) aspect of conceptual art, which I distinguish as “the principle of dematerialization.”

I would like to explore whether dematerialization can be explained beyond the obvious explications, such as the reduction of the visual elements of the artwork, or the unwillingness of artists to produce “any more objects” that support the market system of art, and get to the deeper implications of these actions within curatorial practice. Within art historical writing dematerialization is generally described as a specific lineage of conceptual art, criticizing the traditional “objecthood” of the artwork, or more specifically, the art object as a commodity. This lineage cannot be entirely separated from, and even merges with other lineages that question the originality of work, place art at the threshold of information, or meld within the context of public spaces and publicity. What is more, dematerialization explicitly refers to the changing status of the art object, which stands at the basis of the development of conceptual art, and more particularly relates to the problem of exhibiting works that are non-object.

In their 1968 essay Lippard and Chandler place the then trend of dematerialization within a historical evolution of art as described by the Russian-American composer Joseph Schillinger in his book *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts*. Following his schema art (has) evolved into five zones, of which the last, the scientific, post-aesthetic,”[w]ill make possible the manufacture, distribution and consumption of a perfect art product and will be characterized by a fusion of the art forms and materials, and finally, a ‘disintegration of art,’ the ‘abstraction and liberation of the idea.’” This vision on the arts of their time preliminarily included a utopian thinking that was related to the broader socio-political changes in the late 1960s. More specifically, it elaborated on the parallel with the subsequent art historical framing of conceptual art as a further consequence of a development that has been instigated by minimal art.

In the preface of *Six Years*, Lippard states that “‘Eccentric abstraction,’ ‘Anti-Form,’ ‘Process Art,’ ‘Anti-Illusionism,’ or whatever, did come about partly as a reaction against the industrialized geometry and sheer bulk of much minimal art. Yet minimal art was

---

89 Huebler 1969.
90 See f.i. Alberro, in Alberro and Stimson 1999, p. xvii
91 Ibid.
92 Lippard and Chandler in Alberro and Stimson 1999, p. 47.
93 The utopianism that Lippard and Chandler refer to in their essay is explained in Lippard’s foreword to *Six Years* in regard to Richard Buckminster Fuller, who coined the term “ephemeralization,” which refers to technological advancement by means of gradually diminishing the amount of materials and effort to accomplish an increasing use of functions. See f.e. R. Buckminster Fuller, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity* (New York: Overlook Press, 1969).
itself anti-formalist in its nonrelational approach, its insistence on a neutralization of ‘composition’ and other hierarchical distinctions.”94 In her attempt to describe an art in the process of dematerialization Lippard refers to Sol LeWitt’s premise that “the concept or idea was more important than the visual results of the system that generated the object,” which undermined formalism by insisting on a return to content.95 She discerns a variety of work that start from the systematic serial drawings by LeWitt and temporary works by artists such as Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman and Robert Smithson, to “the accent or overlay of an art context, an art framework, or simply an art awareness, that is, the imposition of a foreign pattern or substance on existing situations or information (e.g. Barry, Dibbets, Huebler, Oppenheim, Smithson, Weiner and others).”96

As an exhibition curator Lippard worked with many of these artists and a shared fundamental issue that she recognized in their work was “a concern with the object”; either as a formal discourse on the work of art, as to go beyond the physical relation to the object, or as a principled attitude: “Some artists now think it’s absurd to fill up their studios with objects that won’t be sold, and are trying to get their art communicated as rapidly as it is made.”97 Principally, Lippard thus regarded the rejection of the art object in a twofold manner: as a formal critique of the definition of the artwork, and as a more ideological critique on the system of art’s distribution or trade.

As Thomas McEvilley has argued, “Ephemeral works are in part an attempt to avoid the processes of commodification and fetishism in which artworks favoured by the formalist ideology seemed so deeply implicated.”98 Connected to a larger comment on capitalist society in which art was “bought and sold by the greedy sector that owned everything that was exploiting the world and promoting the Vietnam war,” artists’ political positioning, according to McEvilley, became an equivalent of their artistic attitude.99 The anti-establishment attitude of artists devoted to dematerialization in the

94 Lippard 1973, p. 5.
96 Lippard 1973, p. 5. As Jean Marc Poinsot has commented: "Une partie importante du débat suscité par l’apparition de l’art conceptuel a tourné autour de sa dématérialisation, mais si l’on se reporte à la série d’exemples que Lucy Lippard et John Chandler citent dans leur texte « The Dematerialization of Art » il apparaît que la plupart des œuvres en question sont des objets, des œuvres, des expositions déniés tels un dessin effacé ou remplacé par une inscription au crayon très légère, un objet caché ou encore un signe sur quelque support que se soit qui recouvre ou jouxte ce dont il est le signe. Il n’y a pratiquement pas d’œuvre dans leur liste qui ne repose sur une réalité matérielle bien précise et si l’on examine avec soin l’activité des artistes conceptuels, force est de constater qu’elle ne peut être réduite à la diffusion d’ « informations » ou de concepts dont la seule dissémination se ferait par le processus dématérialisant du langage imprimé." Poinsot 1999, pp. 104-105.
97 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
1960s, as Siegelaub has pointed out, has been largely marginalized in the historicization or canonization of conceptual art; but this attitude did find the artistic strategies behind the dematerialization of the art object that are still relevant today. In contrast to conceptual art’s first historicizers, McEvilley focused on the ideology or intentions behind conceptual art; distinguishing these artistic strategies rather than art historical categories. He stressed that “[t]he complex of strategies forming Conceptual Art was first defined negatively. . . . Its early form was to a degree determined, or controlled, by the form of what it was criticizing.”

When breaking with the tradition of modernist painting and sculpture and/or the formalist art of commodity-making, conceptual artists were producing declarations (about artistry) that became artworks; as “demonstrations of a real seriousness about art in a broader or deeper sense.” McEvilley points out, following his conceptual precursors, that this attitude was anticipated by the prototype of Marcel Duchamp. Early examples of such works include Robert Morris’s *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal* from 1963, a signed and notarized declaration that was sent to the architect and head of MoMA’s architecture department Philip Johnson, who bought the work *Litanies* that Morris exhibited in his first solo show. When Morris had still not received payment after six months he responded with his *Statement*. Also Lawrence Weiner’s famous “Declaration of Intent,” that was first published in Seth Siegelaub’s exhibition catalogue *January 5-31, 1969*, although never meant to function as an artwork, can be regarded the textbook exemplar of this kind.

Other more persuasive declarations include John Latham’s 1966-1969 *Art and Culture*. Latham withdrew Clement Greenberg’s collected essays on modernist painting, *Art & Culture* (1961) from the library of St. Martins School of Art in London and chewed and spat out a third of its pages together with his students, thus illustrating his aversion to Greenberg’s specific modernist notion of the artwork. In the same year John Baldessari

---

100 Lippard recalls a commentary by Jan Dibbets that sketches the positioning of artists in the late 1960s: “Sell my work? 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.” Lippard 1995, p. 28.

101 In his approach McEvilley nonetheless duplicates his precursors in defining the dematerialization of the art object “an unrealizable ideal,” but recognizes “a real meaning to the project.” [p. 95] I am here only drawing from McEvilley’s conception of dematerialization but have adjusted most of the works he refers to due to incomplete data and interpretations.

102 McEvilley 2005, p. 98.

103 Ibid.

104 The declaration reads: “The undersigned, ROBERT MORRIS, being the maker of the metal construction entitled LITANIES, described in the annexed Exhibit A, hereby withdraws from said construction all esthetic quality and content and declares that from the date hereof said construction has no such quality and content.” See further Martha Buskirk, “Introduction,” in Buskirk 2003, pp. 1-16.

105 This work can be regarded within, what Peter Osborne has termed, “the crisis of Greenbergian criticism” at the beginning of the 1960s; essentially a crisis in its medium-based conception of the artwork, its ‘specific’ Modernism,
announced to stop making work by his own hand and signature, which was followed by the burning and subsequent exhibition of the ashes of all his former paintings in 1970. Another seminal work of Baldessari that can be ascribed to the declaration is *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* from 1971, which resulted from an invitation by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design that wanted to exhibit his work. When the Californian artist was not able to travel to Canada to install the exhibition, he sent the school a piece of paper with the aforementioned text, instructing the College to recruit students in order to write the words "all over the walls of the gallery space" as an imposition.106

The negative designation of art, or to use the terminology of Peter Osborne, "the lineages of negation" that paved the way of conceptual art further expanded in the focus on the exhibition space, to be more precise the art institutions or system in which art becomes manifest.107 McEvilley stressed, "As the other side of dematerialization, Conceptual Art has analyzed the context in which the art object had once been contained, focusing on the system of market-related processes that surrounded it like a net."108 Again, Duchamp and his insight that it was the institutional context that defined the work of art comes up as an inspiration, one that was further contextualized by Yves Klein in exhibiting the empty gallery of Iris Clert in 1958.109 According to McEvilley it was Klein who first applied the term dematerialization to art.110 He conceived the exhibition of an empty space—a gesture that he had applied several times—in traditional terms, calling them "invisible paintings and sculptures."111

The idea of emptiness is a recurring theme within the work of Robert Barry. As one of the four artists associated with Siegelaub he can be considered amongst the few "true conceptualists." In a symposium at Bradford College in 1968, moderated by Siegelaub, he stated: "[T]here is something about void and emptiness which I am personally very concerned with. I guess I can’t get it out of my system. Just emptiness.

---

106 Baldessari committed another version of the piece to videotape. Like an errant schoolboy, he dutifully writes, “I will not make any more boring art” over and over again in a notebook for the duration of the tape. See http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/i-will-not-make-any-more-boring-art/ [October 21, 2011]
109 This exhibition by Klein, known under the title *The Void*, has recently gained importance through the exhibition *Vides (Voids)* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris from February 25 – March 23, 2009.
Nothing seems to me the most potent thing in the world." His 88mc Carrier Wave (FM) and 1600kc Carrier Wave AM, included in Siegelaub's January 5-31, 1969 exhibition, consisted of transmitted carrier waves in an enclosed room, which would not be visible in any way and could only be determined by the caption on the wall describing the work. Some places to which we can come, and for a while “be free to think about what we’re going to do.” (Marcuse), a project that Barry initiated in 1970, which is still in progress, anticipates on an active role of the visitor in the (empty) exhibition space, using it as a place to meet and reflect.

This model has been further explored in Art & Language’s Air Conditioning Show, that was conceived in 1966 and first appeared as an article in Arts Magazine in 1967, but was only executed as an “exhibition” in 1972 in the Visual Arts Gallery in New York. Art & Language stated that “[a]ny attempt at picturing (visualizing) the situation is merely evidence that the art-audience is stuck with its visual art-object. A question that might be asked here is, would there be a difference between a ‘non-exhibition’ model and a model that exhibits nothing?” Also they ascribe to the fact that “It is obvious that the public nature of historical experience and its open-endedness (the two main types of reflexive relatedness) is reflected in language. This is to say that the lingual datum is basic to history.”

Another example of an “empty exhibition” that more explicitly revealed the underlying political system of the institution is Michael Asher’s project in the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles in 1974. Asher removed the partition wall of the gallery behind which the office space was located, thus exposing the “financial centre” of the gallery. In the same year the artist had an exhibition at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in which he did not modify anything, neither the space nor its architecture, and intervened in the existing situation only by not turning on the lights. Dematerialization in these works can be explained by the uniqueness of the projects’ moment; their finite duration is a fundamental aspect to Asher. He usually refuses to partake in the physical (re-)exhibition of former works because of the missing historical context, as he stated that his projects “[h]ave no objects, and present just the exhibition space, addresses specific

---

115 Ibid., p. 69.
questions or concerns about that space which are particular to its context.”

Explicitly related to the context in which they are shown, the works cannot be re-exhibited; the survival of these works is merely secured in their documentation.

A subgenre that McEvilley discerns from Klein’s exhibition of the empty gallery, related to immateriality and subtraction, is the empty or hidden piece. Examples of such works McEvilley finds in Bruce Nauman’s Audio-Video Underground Chamber (1972-1974), and in Robert Barry’s Closed Gallery Piece (1969). The latter exists in the distribution of the invitation card of a selected group of galleries containing the text “During the exhibition the gallery will be closed.” According to McEvilley, the invitation card itself should be determined the piece, but since the context in which the sent invitation was functioning gives the piece meaning, the printed piece of paper as an autonomous work in an exhibition will not make sense. In his book Quand l’œuvre a lieu. Art exposé et ses récits autorisés the French art historian Jean-Marc Poinsot further elaborates this problem: “One has to understand here that the exhibition at issue wasn’t possible because the artists and the gallerists had already extended its definition in the bulletin [invitation card], and, because the bulletin as part of the exhibition returned the work tractable to the gallery as a sign captured in a syntagmatic [constituent] relation.”

Thus, since the exhibition of the piece wasn’t tangible in the first place, the subsequent exhibition of the piece wouldn’t be possible.

Barry, but also Ian Wilson, have made several pieces in which the distributive format of the invitation card was used to suggest or occupy a mental space that captures the work. As Poinsot has pointed out, “models of exhibitions that do not exhibit anything’ have played a very specific role within conceptual art; while the flee to language, coupled to the control of the surrounding reality captured in the field of the exhibition, have established a dialectic and aesthetic approach of the contemporary practice of semiotic systems that circulate the most elaborated languages in the most intangible realities apparently without difficulties.” Other than Lippard, who is at the time not further

---

117 Other than McEvilley describes, at Art & Project in Amsterdam this work didn’t exist in a “sign on the door,” but in the sent invitation card that reads: “During the exhibition the gallery will be closed.” See Art & Project Bulletin #37, 1971.
118 Poinsot 1999, p. 112. [Il faut comprendre ici que l’exposition en question n’était possible que parce que les artistes et les responsables de la galerie avaient déjà étendu sa définition à ce bulletin, et, que le bulletin comme partie de l’exposition rendait manipulable l’ouverture de la galerie comme signe pris dans une relation syntagmatique.]
119 Ibid., p. 116. [Par contre, « les modèles d’expositions qui n’exposent rien » ont joué un rôle très spécifique dans l’art conceptuel, car le recours au langage, associé à la maîtrise de la réalité environnante prise dans le champ de l’exposition, a pu établir une approche dialectique et esthétique de la pratique contemporaine des systèmes.
specifying or theorizing dematerialization, Poinosot proposed a broader definition of
dematerialization that is appropriate to most of the new art developed in the late 1960s
and early 1970s. He roughly defines dematerialization as “the end of painting and
sculpture as exclusive materials of the division of the visual within the artistic sign.” He
further explicates dematerialization as “the disappearance of the artifact as a permanent
and exclusive security of the total artwork rather than the reduction of the artwork as an
idea or similar reality. In other words, the artwork could exist in another form than the
object elaborated by the artist, fabricated under his direction or by his choice.”

Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings, described in certificates, are clear examples of a
dematerialized art that have the possibility to be re-executed at various spatial-temporal
situations following his instructions. Although always in close collaboration with the
LeWitt Estate they indeed “allow for infinite generalization, or variety.” Conversely, Ian
Wilson’s discussion pieces solely depend on the physical presence of the artist and,
besides a written text that “a discussion with Ian Wilson has taken place,” lack further
indications for re-execution or representation. As I have come to the point to define
dematerialization as a process that is scrutinizing the artwork’s traditional boundaries
rather than the actual elimination of its tangible form, works like Wilson’s complicate a
simple determination. Whereas they can be regarded most successful in terms of
effectively applying the principles of the conceptual assignment, they simultaneously
make their continued existence in an exhibitionary, or any communicable format to a
large degree unattainable.

Similar to Benjamin Buchloh’s definition of conceptual art “from the aesthetic of
administration to institutional critique,” dematerialization can be defined as a
development that commenced from the critique of the formalist art object or commodity

---

120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 79 and p. 110 "la fin du tableau et de la sculpture comme matière exclusive du découpage du visuel dans
le signe artistique]; [Ce que recouvre la notion de dématérialisation est . . . la disparition de l’artefact comme
garantie permanente et exclusive de l’intégrité de l’œuvre, plus que la réduction de l’œuvre à une idée ou à une
réalité du même ordre. En d’autres termes, l’œuvre pouvait exister sous une forme autre qu’un objet élaboré par
l’artiste, fabriqué sous son contrôle ou choisi par lui.] Translation by me. Poinosot’s definition in fact opens up the
discussion on dematerialization as an aspect that anticipates the ontological status of the conceptual artwork.
122 Lippard 1973, p. 5.
123 Although Ursula Meyer has argued that “Conceptual art emphasizes the elimination of the art-object,” referring
to LeWitt’s wall drawings: “Without the interference of objects Sol LeWitt gives a subtle emphasis to actual space
through the direct application of his schematic drawings to the gallery wall,” or “Mel Bochner’s measurement series
document and evaluate the space of galleries and museums. Daniel Buren’s stripes applied to walls, doors and
billboards create a focused tension with the environment.” But she also mentioned works that did remain in a
tangible form/ object such as Jan Dibbets’ perspective corrections or Hanne Darboven’s number constellations. In
to the critique of the entire system of art that supported this commodity.\textsuperscript{124} But the exposure and critique of the underlying system of rules that defined art in a highly developed capitalist society was an act that inversely also needed the structures of this system to make its point. As Buchloh has stated, “[o]ne major paradox of all conceptual practices… [is] that the critical annihilation of cultural conventions itself immediately acquired the conditions of spectacle culture. . . .”\textsuperscript{125} But this is not the only paradox that conceptual art holds; the fact that a dematerialized art essentially lives on through the market-making of its residue is a paradox in itself.\textsuperscript{126}

As Michael Newman stressed, a dematerialized art still needs some sort of presentation to be an artwork or to function as an artwork, and in order to do so notes, sketches, descriptions and documentary materials have been produced. But although the necessity to demonstrate or communicate the work in one way or another meant that there were "traces that remained (as notes or sketches for the work or as documentation) that consequently could be made marketable"; if these remnants weren't collected, most of these works would no longer exist.\textsuperscript{127} According to Newman, these "documentary works" have alternatively also proved successful in tackling the system of commodity-making: "in the sense that it escapes to the inherent formalism of the tautology and to the pursuit of pureness of the immaterial."\textsuperscript{128}

A key example of such works Newman recognizes in the documented architectural interventions in galleries or museums by Michael Asher, a type of conceptual art that he places within the category of "synthetic conceptualism." Remarkably, Newman considers this category contrasting to "analytic conceptualism," the classical ("Kosuthian") definition of conceptual art, in which he specifically places dematerialized art.\textsuperscript{129} The distinction between the two categories becomes even more confusing when Newman

\textsuperscript{124} Benjamin Buchloh, “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969),” in exh. cat. Paris 1989; Also according to Alexander Alberro this strand of conceptualism became the dominant theoretical model of conceptualism, as an alternative to the initial dominant tautological model by Joseph Kosuth.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 52. What is ironical about this statement is that Buchloh, who is examining conceptual art in a purely art historical, aesthetic framework, seems not to interpret the declarations made by conceptual artists within this very discourse, as \textit{artistic attitudes}, but rather places them in a philosophical or ontological discourse.

\textsuperscript{126} In the late 1960s Lippard stressed: “The artists who are trying to do non-object art are introducing a drastic solution to the problem of artists being bought and sold so easily, along with their art. . . . The people who buy a work of art they can’t hang up or have in their garden are less interested in possession. They are patrons rather than collectors. That’s why all this seems so inapplicable to museums, because museums are basically acquisitive.” In 1995, in retrospect of her text on dematerialization, she refers to her perspective at the time as “utopian.” Lippard 1973, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{128} Ibid. Translation by me.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p. 103. Although this category is used by other historicizers of conceptual art, they do not all ascribe the same features to it. See f.i. Ursula Meyer or Alexander Alberro.
ascribes a second trend to this category, a type of work that “better succeeded in surmounting the gallery-circuit” by using the magazine page as a place of distribution and consumption, such as Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* that was published in *Arts Magazine* in 1966. While this type of conceptual art was, according to Newman, further explored in the advertisement pieces in public spaces executed by Hans Haacke, Victor Burgin and others, it is also precisely the “information-type” of art as it has been stressed by Seth Siegelaub in his early “catalogue exhibitions,” in which Kosuth had a significant role.

While the notion of dematerialization has been deemed by many as “[a] piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or ‘material,’ as a ton of lead,” the critique of the object within the discourse of conceptual art has been too easily surpassed by modernist principles that obstinately prevail within the today’s market-driven system of art. Whereas the distinctions or determination of different lineages of conceptual art has been a demanding art historical effort in the 1990s, this theoreticization or categorization of conceptual art has not brought any deeper insights into the museological or curatorial interpretation of such works. In contrast, the notion of dematerialization is applicable to any work of art that, within the socio-historical context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, frustrated, and intended to frustrate a traditional format of exhibition. The format of publication that conceptual artists often chose to “exhibit” or communicate their work was a consequence coherent to their positioning, and will be further examined within Siegelaub’s notion of “Primary and Secondary Information.”

---

131 See *Lippard 1973*. 
1.3. Primary and Secondary Information

In 1972 Ursula Meyer stressed: “Books have become an increasingly important medium for Conceptual Art, often taking the place of exhibitions. They have more permanence than transient shows in galleries.” According to Meyer’s observations, which heavily lean on the ideas of Siegelaub, the traditional gallery (or exhibition) space, designed to exhibit objects, was no longer suitable to exhibit the new art of “conceptions.” Already in 1969 Siegelaub had described how he perceived the developments in the contemporary art of his time: “[g]radually there developed an ‘art’ which didn’t need to be hung. An art wherein the problem of presentation paralleled one of the problems previously involved in the making and exhibition of a painting: i.e. to make someone else aware that an artist had done anything at all. Because the work was not visual in nature, it did not require the traditional means of exhibition, but a means that would present the intrinsic ideas of the art.”

As an independent curator-dealer Siegelaub had been working from the late 1960s on to provide new conditions of transmitting the new art to the audience whereby the ideas of artists “may be made as widely available as possible without the risk of spurious identities becoming attached to them.” In order to do so, he considered the format of the catalogue/publication an accurate vehicle; as a potential “exhibition space”: “When art does not any longer depend upon its physical presence, when it becomes an abstraction, it is not distorted and altered by its reproduction in books. It becomes ‘PRIMARY’ information, while the reproduction of conventional art in books and catalogues is necessarily (distorted) ‘SECONDARY’ information. When information is PRIMARY, the catalogue can become the exhibition.”

It was Siegelaub’s conviction that people are more likely to engage with art through printed media and conversation than to directly encounter an artwork; in the case of conceptual art, where art concerns conceptions not connected to physical presence, its intrinsic value is not altered by the presentation in a book. The idea that conceptual art could be “communicated” to an audience through the printing and distributing of its primary information only, was never fully accepted by the artists involved, however, it generated a pioneering model for presenting the newly established

---

134 Ibid.
“dematerialized art” to an audience. Siegelaub’s notion of primary and secondary information is not completely unambiguous when applying to the different conceptual projects in and outside of his own practice. I therefore want to examine the connotations of an information-based art and its ambiguous relation to the book/publication, i.e., to re-evaluate the notion of primary and secondary information, and thus stress the status of conceptual art as an art of representation rather than of presentation.

Whereas Newman places the trend of “exhibiting” concepts or conceptual art via the format of magazines or other publications deliberately as opposed to the trend of dematerialization, I’d propose to regard this as an aspect of the same progression—as it was initially conceived. As had been suggested by both Meyer and Siegelaub, it was exactly the dematerialized status of conceptual art that made it pre-eminently an art to be documented and (re-)presented in a book format. Furthermore, the focus on the book or publication as a way to communicate propositions was, according to Meyer, acuminated by the theoretical examinations of the conceptual artists. Providing their own theories, the writing of a “critical interpretation” of the work, “different from the artist’s intention,” was assumed to be unnecessary—essentially because it was “prejudicing information.”

The idea that the artist himself is best equipped to explain his work, and is therefore taking over the position of the theorist/critic, was based upon the assumption that (conceptual) artists were thinkers rather than producers. Meyer stressed that “[a]ttending to the critical function itself is the nature of Conceptual Art. There is no further need for critical interpretation of idea and intention already clearly stated.” Undoubtedly, she was referring to Kosuth’s tautological/linguistic interpretation of conceptual art that “should express definitions about art or the formal consequences of these definitions only.” Siegelaub’s catalogue exhibitions provided a proper format of presentation for Kosuth’s linguistic model of conceptual art. In the catalogue of Siegelaub’s January 5-31, 1969 show Kosuth published a statement on the changed form of presentation of his Thesaurus-works (Art as Idea as Idea) from the mounted photostats to spaces in newspapers and periodicals. He explained:

---

137 In a radio symposium on WBAI-FM with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth and Weiner, moderated by Siegelaub none of the artists agreed (except maybe Kosuth) on Siegelaub’s statement that the fundamental nature of their work is that it does not relate to space. See Lippard 1973, pp.127-133.
140 Ibid., p. ix.
142 Honnef pointed out that Kosuth’s theory cannot be separated from his artistic work; he considered the former much more convincing than the artistic projects that have been entitled “investigations,” and should have an
This way the immateriality of the work is stressed and any possible connections to painting are severed. The new work is not connected with a previous object—it’s accessible to as many people as are interested, it’s non-decorative—having nothing to do with architecture; it can be brought into the home or museum, but wasn’t made with either in mind; it can be dealt with by being torn out of its publication and inserted into a notebook or stapled to the wall—or not torn out at all—but any such decisions is unrelated to the art. My role as an artist ends with the work’s publication.143

Kosuth’s statement is based upon a group of works that he himself categorized as “The Second Investigations” (1968-1969)—in which he proposed a confrontation between art and non-art systems and contexts—but it more generally illustrates the motivation of artists to present their work in the realm of the publication.144

As a prelude to Siegelaub’s catalogue projects, the projects that artists were developing in periodicals and other publications from the early 1960s on experimented with the page as a site to merge idea and presentation.145 As Ann Rorimer asserted, the early magazine pieces by Dan Graham explored “[t]he page to cite itself as a site: that is, the content of the work and its context in a publication coincide in so far as the former serves as a self-referential inventory of the latter.”146 Graham started with these works in 1965, right after the gallery that he had briefly run fell short, which, according to Rorimer, stipulated “[a] reaction against the gallery experience, but also… a response to contradictions [he] discerned in gallery artists.”147 Whereas for Kosuth the use of spaces in magazines and newspapers made it possible to avoid the creation of an autonomous object of commercial worth, it had allowed Graham to circumvent the spaces in which art objects are sold, as Rorimer argued: “By placing works in magazines, he substituted the ideational space of the magazine page for that of the enterable exhibition space.”148

Graham’s piece *Figurative* (1965), published in the March 1968 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar*, was a cash-register receipt arbitrarily placed between advertisements of Tampax and Warner’s Bra. Rorimer stressed that “[a]s a sort of anti-ad it resists being

---

143 See Lippard 1973, pp. 72-73.
144 For more information on these works by Kosuth, see Anne Rorimer, “Siting the Page,” in Michael Newman and Jon Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999), p. 17.
146 Rorimer 1999, p. 15.
147 Ibid., p. 19.
148 Ibid., p. 15.
merchandized as a precious and purchasable or saleable object, and replaces traditionally composed figuration with functioning numerical figures. Representational material and presentational method are thereby fused in that the work is to be seen simultaneously on the page and inside the magazine that contains it.”

Graham’s *Homes for America* was first realized as a slide show included in the exhibition *Projected Art* at the Finch College Museum of Art in New York in 1966. Shortly thereafter the piece was published as a photo-essay in *Arts Magazine*, titled *Homes for America: Early 20th Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of ’66*. It was important to Graham that the photographs are regarded as part of an over-all magazine article lay-out and not as a separate work, “[t]hey are illustrations of the text, or inversely, the text functions in relation to the photographs thereby modifying their meanings. The photographs and the texts are separate parts of a two-dimensional, schematic grid perspective system. The photographs correlate to the lists and columns of serial documentation and both “represent” the serial logic of the housing developments which the article is about.” As Graham had stressed, he did not consider himself to be an artist, consequently he was not interested in how his projects would be received: “I think the fact that *Homes for America* was, in the end, only a magazine article, and made no claims for itself as a work of art is its most important feature.” In 1969 he ended his magazine/publication activities.

Similar to Graham’s “photo-journalism,” Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson conceived “The Domain of the Great Bear,” a fictional art project in the form of an article that was published in *Art Voices* (Fall 1966). As Rorimer stressed, the project was “[e]liminating the once firm division between the defining characteristics of an art work

---

149 Ibid., p. 16 also see: Rorimer, “Reevaluating the Object of Collecting and Display,” *The Art Bulletin* vol. 77 no. 1 (March 1995), p.21

150 *Aspen magazine* can be considered a “multi-media magazine,” which was published six times a year in various formats. Issue no. 5 and 6 (1967), also called the “Minimalist issue,” was edited by the Irish art critic Brian O’Doherty, and included contributions by various artists and writers, such as Roland Barthes, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, Morty Feldman, Naum Gabo, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Susan Sontag, a.o., in a two-piece cardboard box. It can be regarded an early example of a “magazine-exhibition,” which deserves further study.


152 Ibid.
versus those of a magazine article, it deliberately eludes typecasting as one or the other. The subject matter of this work/illustrated article about the American Museum of Natural History and Hayden Planetarium in New York carries the reader from the cosmic heights of planetary movements to the bathos of institutional settings.\textsuperscript{153} Set within the pages of an art magazine this project was an obvious critical gesture directed at the authority of authorship, originality and truth.\textsuperscript{154} Also Stephen Kaltenbach’s series of ad-works in \textit{Artforum}, like Kosuth using the advertising pages of the magazine as an alternative exhibition format, counter expectations regarding the traditional forms and functions of art.\textsuperscript{155} The series consists of concise and suggestive phrases, such as ‘Expose Yourself’, ‘Smoke’ or ‘Tell a Lie,’ instructing, or provoking viewers/readers, and “offering an incursion into the weightiness of critical dogma found in art magazines.”\textsuperscript{156}

Other examples of magazine works that, contrary to Graham’s or Kosuth’s, deal with the page itself as material, are two “immaterial” pieces by Robert Barry published in the magazine 0-9 (July 1969), edited by Vito Acconci and Rosemary Mayer. The two works that are listed in the magazine’s table of contents as “The space between pages 28 & 29” and “The space between pages 74 & 75,” define the page in terms of its (non-)physicality; as a two-dimensional entity that is one of a number of joined repeated elements forming a book or publication.\textsuperscript{157} The “space” that Barry refers to is only imaginary: the first is captured between the end of a project by Bernard Venet on page 28 and the start of an essay by Dan Graham’s on the reverse site (page 29); the second is referring to the space between pages 74 and 75 that is accessible by opening the magazine to these pages. Like other works by Barry from the late 1960s, such as the ‘Inert Gas’ series or the ‘Carrier Wave’ pieces, the work cannot be experienced in the manner of a traditional object, but exists in information only.\textsuperscript{158}

Anticipating these practices Mel Bochner’s project at the New School of Visual Arts, \textit{Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art} (1966), can be considered the first exhibition in which the book was explicitly framed as an exhibitionary format. In the gallery of the School Bochner exhibited four identical black office-style box files with Xerox-copied working drawings and notes of a number of his artists’ friends (LeWitt, Judd, Flavin, Darboven amongst others) on four

\textsuperscript{153} Rorimer 1999, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{154} See also Michelle Grabner, “Mel Bochner at The Art Institute of Chicago,” in \textit{Frieze} no. 105 (March, 2007). \url{http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/mel_bochner/} [15-12-2011].
\textsuperscript{155} Kaltenbach’s ad-works appeared in the advertising section of \textit{Artforum}’s issues starting in November 1968 and ending in December 1969.
\textsuperscript{156} Rorimer 1999, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., pp. 21-22
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
clean white pedestals in the middle of the room.\textsuperscript{159} The extreme mechanization of artistic production and distribution that Bochner had employed in this project must have been appealing to Siegelaub since it was exactly this strategy that characterized his seminal “exhibition” \textit{The Xerox Book} (1968).\textsuperscript{160} \textit{The Xerox Book} could be regarded the most explicit example in which Siegelaub’s notion of primary and secondary information becomes manifest. The 175-page publication in a letter size format consists of a collection of works/ propositions by Andre, Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, LeWitt, Morris, and Weiner, each equally, or democratically, spread over the pages and distributed in an edition of 1000.

It was Siegelaub’s intention to “[s]tandardize the conditions of exhibition with the idea that the resulting differences in each artist’s project or work would be precisely what the artist’s work was about. It was an attempt to consciously standardize, in terms of an exhibition, book or project, the conditions of production underlying the exhibition process.”\textsuperscript{161} Siegelaub had asked nine artists (De Maria and Smithson eventually withdrew) to make a 25-page work on a standard letter size (21,59 x 27,94 cm), in which the new technique of the Xerox photocopier was intended to utilize its reproduction. As Alexander Alberro had argued, Siegelaub’s interest in the photocopy medium came out of the impersonal character of the xerography that depersonalized the production process and negated the skilled hand of the artist; and essentially negated the aesthetic component.\textsuperscript{162} In an interview on the project in 1969 he emphasized: “I chose Xerox as opposed to offset or any other process because it’s such a bland, shitty reproduction, really just for the exchange of information. That’s all a Xerox is about. . . . So Xerox just cuts down on the visual aspect of looking at the information.”\textsuperscript{163}

The deskilling practices that characterized the work of the artists Siegelaub represented correlate with the idea of a plain information transmission, but above all, according to Alberro, “the electrostatic copying machine, with its leveling of all information to the zero degree, emphasized the new art’s status as text, as \textit{secondary}


\textsuperscript{160} Alexander Alberro linked \textit{The Xerox Book} project by Siegelaub to Bochner’s pivotal exhibition. Alberro 2003, p. 133.


\textsuperscript{162} Alberro sees this attitude in line with the visionary writings of Marshall McLuhan and Quintin Fiore, in Alberro 2003, p. 135.

information.”¹⁶⁴ Now it is important to note that the partition of primary and secondary information in relation to the book is regarded quite ambiguous here. Quite the opposite, Siegelaub has defined projects within the field of the catalogue/publication as primary information, as explained by Rorimer in a broader perspective: “[w]orks bound into a publication and/or bonded with the printed page. . . . are not treated as a subsidiary or related illustration to a written text, as in earlier livres d’artistes, but are the very text per se—whether this so-called text be a visual or verbal or a linguistic and/or photographic manifestation on a page.”¹⁶⁵ In this respect works bound in publications replace the formerly subsidiary or secondary information of the artists’ works (bibliography, textual information, illustrations or other documentation) and would accordingly become essentially primary information. However, in the case of conceptual art, the notions of primary and secondary information can be and have been interpreted alternately, since the essence of the works can, in most of the cases, merely be experienced by means of secondary information.

In fact, the notion of primary and secondary information can generate different models when applied to the works of the artists involved. Whereas Kosuth “firmly adhered to a notion that only the primary information mattered (the secondary information is like a truck that carries the work to the gallery)”; Huebler and Weiner “believed in the dominance of the secondary information since the primary was inaccessible and even undesirable.”¹⁶⁶ Parallel to the Xerox Book Siegelaub organized “solo exhibitions” of Huebler and Weiner, respectively in November and December of 1968, to which he referred as “the first exhibition in which the catalogue was the exhibition” and “the first exhibition in which the book is the exhibition.”¹⁶⁷ Huebler’s project was still “exhibited” within a traditional context as “work” in a private apartment, but the new practice introduced here consisted in, as Poinsot has argued, “[t]o operate a disconnection, a disassociation between, on the one hand, the idea of the work—to be understood generally as a proposition that contains reproducible image and language—and, on the other hand, its presentation, principally based on the decision of the principle to privilege in an almost exclusive manner the effect of dematerialization of reproducibility to thereby cancel every interest for reproducible documents.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added by me.
¹⁶⁵ Rorimer 1999, pp. 25-26
¹⁶⁶ Alberro 2003, p. 122.
¹⁶⁸ Poinsot 1999, p. 106. [La pratique inaugurée par Huebler et Siegelaub qui consistait, dans une situation conventionnelle de production et de présentation de l’art, à opérer un décrochage, une dissociation entre d’une
In accordance with Weiner’s “Declaration of Intent” the “exhibition” Statements (1968) consisted of 25 general and specific statements, textual constructions referring to a possible material execution, published in a book format. After Weiner participated in Siegelaub’s exhibition at Windham College in April-May 1968 with a work (a grid of “staples, stakes, twine, turf,” 70’ x 100’ with a 10’ x 20’ notch removed, 6’ off the ground, topologically variable) that was soon to be destroyed by students, he realized that it didn’t need to be executed again; the description of the work would suffice. At this point Weiner allows the description of the work (the secondary information) to become the work itself (the primary information); in his statements the information that describes the work equals the existence of the work, and primary and secondary information become one and the same.169

In the case of The Xerox Book, eventually, the notion of primary and secondary information can be interpreted either way, since each of the artists envisaged their own interpretation in its realization.170 Nevertheless, Siegelaub’s concept of primary and secondary information is applicable to the condition of the conceptual work itself, as Alberro has stressed: “[i]t was now possible to split the artwork in what he [Siegelaub] referred to as ‘primary information’ (‘the essence of the piece,’ its ideational part), and ‘secondary information’ (the material information by which one becomes aware of the piece, the raw matter, the fabricated part, the form of presentation). This idealist conception of meaning as an a priori construct existing before its embodiment in form raised the issue of substitution and exchange in a social and economic sphere.”171 But this interpretation of primary and secondary information as a classical dichotomy of content and form is not sufficient to explain the complexities that are at stake within the exhibition of conceptual art. According to Poinsot the “decoupling of the work and its presentation is a process that has contributed to endorse dematerialization, which was paralleled by the annexation of language and the real environment as concurring or interchangeable fields for the actualization of the work, as well as the utopian idea to

---

169 For Weiner the exhibitionary format of his statements was at first not important, a sheet of paper with the typed text was representative, later he adhered to the spatial (re)presentation of his text-works.
170 Only Huebler, Kosuth and Weiner made use of text as the primary material of their work for the Xerox Book; Andre used the technique of the Xerox machine to produce a work that he usually would not make in such a format; Barry made a piece with dots and LeWitt included schematic drawing executed over the 25 pages. Morris showed photographs of planet earth. Siegelaub stressed that his catalogue-exhibitions came out of the several discussions he had with the artists he worked with. See Obrist 2011, p. 121.
substitute pure discursive activity in favor of some materialization that remains to be susceptible to alienation and fetishization."

In the next exhibition that Siegelaub conceived, *January 5-31, 1969*, the dilemma of these processes of exhibiting conceptual work became clear. The exhibition was installed in an empty office space at the New York McLendon-Building, although the physical presentation of the works was, according to Siegelaub, less important: "[i]n my recollection the show exists entirely as a catalogue. After one and a half week we were not focusing our attention on the space anymore. It merely served as an office." The project was referred to as: "A group exhibition of the work of Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner in which the exhibition was the guide to the catalogue." This implies that for Siegelaub the principles of the exhibition and its documentation in the catalogue had reversed. In this regard, as Poinsot has argued, the invitation of the *January 1969* show is illustrative: "the works have not disappeared [32 works], the objects count for nothing [0 objects] and the catalogue has an edition of 2000."

Poinsot points out the contradictory character of the declarations of the artists in the catalogue, as well as the inconsistency in the making of an exhibition, to show something and at the same time deny the existence of that thing. As he stressed, "[T]he denial of the exhibition, but not the renunciation of that practice, has been launched by the conceptual artists and their relative positions, especially the ones in the United States, in a particular polemic context. At the beginning of the 1960s, it appeared with utmost evidence that artistic activity is oriented towards the production of exhibitions, or events that take place, rather than towards the production of œuvres that may eventually be exhibited."

---

172 Poinsot 1999, p. 105. [D’une manière générale plusieurs processus ont contribué à avaliser cette dématérialisation : la dissociation de l’œuvre et de sa présentation, l’annexion du langage et du réel environnant comme champs concurrents ou interchangeables d’actualisation de l’œuvre, et enfin l’utopie d’une substitution d’une pure activité discursive à quelque matérialisation que ce soit toujours menacée d’aliénation et de fétichisation.]

173 Siegelaub as cited in Honnef 1971, p. 27. Translation by me. Siegelaub nevertheless extensively documented the exhibition in the McLendon-building.


175 Poinsot 1999, p. 106. [L’arithmétique de l’invitation à l’exposition de janvier 1969 parle d’elle-même : les œuvres n’ont pas disparu, les objets ne comptent pour rien et les catalogues sont au nombre de deux mille. Pour lui [Siegelaub] les données sont inversées.]

176 Ibid., p. 104. [Comment est-il possible de faire une exposition, de montrer quelque chose et simultanément d’en dénier l’existence en tant qu’œuvre ?]

177 Ibid. [La dénégation de l’exposition, et non le renoncement à cette pratique, que vont entreprendre les artistes conceptuels et leurs proches prend place, et ceci plus particulièrement aux États-Unis, dans un contexte particulièrement polémique. Depuis le début des années soixante, il apparaît avec de plus d’évidence que l’activité artistique est orientée vers la production des expositions, ou des événements qui en tiennent lieu plus que vers la production d’œuvres susceptibles ultérieurement d’être exposées.]
It was important to Siegelaub to keep out of the dominant strategies that the big museums and galleries applied, as to change the methods of how art was received. Although his projects might not have been as much a democratic endeavor as they were first proclaimed, as he had later stressed, they shared the intention to change the way in which art was presented and marketed by the big museums with the artists he worked with: “[i]sn’t . . . one of the more important functions of museums, to kill things, to finish them off, to give them the authority, and thus distance them 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 toward this kind of activity: historicization. It is a sort of cemetery for art . . . “

Interestingly enough, the museums rapidly adapted the new trend of catalogue-exhibitions that Siegelaub had initiated. A number of important museums and institutions followed the model of the catalogue-exhibition, in which the exhibition’s catalogue was used as an alternative space for projects that could not be exhibited in the traditional exhibition space. Examples are the catalogues of Wim Beeren’s Op losse schroeven (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam), Harald Szeemann’s When Attitudes Become Form (Kunsthalle Bern), the Leverkusener Konzeption – Conception exhibition (Museum Schloss Morsbroich), Kynaston McShine’s Information show (Museum of Modern Art, New York), Wim Beeren’s Sonsbeek buiten de perken (Sonsbeek Park, Arnhem), and Harald Szeemann’s Documenta 5 (Kassel).

The catalogue of Lucy Lippard’s combined exhibitions 557,087 at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion (1969), and 955,000 at the Vancouver Art Gallery (1970) complemented to a large extent Siegelaub’s proposal. It consisted of 96 + 42 unnumbered and unbounded index cards, containing the works of the participating artists, as well as texts by Lippard, artists’ quotes, and general information on the exhibition venues and project—all equally considered within the format of the 4’ x 6’ file card (10,2 x 15,3 cm). The bulletins that were published by the Amsterdam Art & Project gallery applied their own format of exhibition parallel to these practices; art magazines such as Studio International adopted the format, and incidentally published “exhibitions,” like the book

---

178 Ibid.
179 In order to avoid the authority of museum spaces, as well as their heavy administrative structures (as also galleries have) Siegelaub developed a format trying to eliminate the overhead such as rents, light, telephones, secretary, “all the fixed expenses needed to maintain a permanent space.” Obrist 2011, p. 120.
180 Lippard, but also Ursula Meyer, applied the same format in her early anthology on conceptual art; the same focus on documentary material of works that are collected in a publication can be distinguished here. For further information on the “Number Shows” see Cornelia Butler et al, From Conceptualism to Feminism. Lucy Lippard’s Number Shows 1969-74 (London: Afterall Books, 2012).
supplement of the July/ August 1970 issue with Siegelaub as guest editor, in which a number of curators was invited to "curate" a section of the journal.\textsuperscript{181}

As Poinso\textsuperscript{t} suggested catalogues such as the above-mentioned inverse the traditional model of the exhibition catalogue that merely consist of referential information next to the reproductions of autonomous works.\textsuperscript{182} Instead, they provide "space" for every artist, open to either bio-bibliographic information or any photographic or textual information that involved or represented the work. The catalogue provided a stable model for the presentation of a type of art that in a traditional exhibition set-up was very difficult to communicate.\textsuperscript{183} According to Alberro, catalogues "[a]s 'containers of information' that were 'unresponsive to the environment,' offered neutral sites in which to exhibit work."\textsuperscript{184} He emphasized that Siegelaub restated on numerous occasions his concern to make the art he was promoting "known to the multitudes," and was well aware that catalogues could reach a much larger public than the more conventional material supports for art, "since the printed matter circulated in a myriad of different contexts and countries."\textsuperscript{185}

The question is whether this was really the case, while it was not so much the catalogues that were circulating, but rather the artists themselves—traveling to different contexts and countries to install or present their works.\textsuperscript{186} Significant to understand is, however, that the material realization of the idea, as in a classical object based art, is deliberately left open, the secondary information therefore, is not the materialization of the piece, but the presentation of an idea that may not always be an artwork. The role and meaning of documentation as a means to (re)present the conceptual artwork should therefore be further examined.

\textsuperscript{181} Book Supplement of Studio International 17/6 (July/ August 1970) with contribution of David Antin, Germano Celant, Michel Claura, Charles Harrison, Lucy R. Lippard, and Hans Strelow.

\textsuperscript{182} Poinso\textsuperscript{t} 1999, p. 181. [Cette invasion documentaire banalisée a conduit ceux qui, du fait même de la circulation rapide des œuvres et des informations, ne voulaient pas laisser une place indue à une information secondaire dont l’activation exigeait un travail encyclopédique du lecteur, à dénoncer à leur manière l’approximation et l’inintérêt de ces messages télégraphique. (In footnote: Il ne faut pas perdre de vue les difficultés soulevées par l’inflation du nombre de manifestations, le besoin de documentation énorme liée à un type de travail non réductible à une reproduction, les contrainte de place des publications et le désir légitime de leurs responsables à publier malgré tous ce qu’ils pouvaient considérer comme les informations les plus complète.]

\textsuperscript{183} An often-heard comment of the visitors of early exhibitions of conceptual art was “where’s the exhibition?” because the spatial collection of words and papers was not accepted as an exhibition of works at the time.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{184} Alberro 2003, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{186} As Konrad Fischer had stressed, instead of spending extensive budgets for the transport of big works, conceptual works of art could be sent by mail, and the budget could be spend to accommodate the artists themselves, making the presence of the artist an important aspect of the work.
1.4. Art (and) Documentation

Newman claimed that, “the necessity to make the [conceptual] work of art appear in one way or another meant that there were traces that remained (as notes and sketches or as documentation) that could consequently become marketable,” proved contradictory to the concept of dematerialization and the rejection of the saleable object.187 But although conceptual artists’ rejection of the art object as a commodity, and their preoccupations with the gallery-system didn’t necessarily mean that they were against the selling of their work, the formats that they chose made that very difficult to come about.188 This is why Siegelaub’s efforts as an organizer of catalogue/book-exhibitions were essential—surpassing the traditional function of the gallery as the place where art objects are being marketed and sold.

It was his intention to use the format of the book/catalogue as a possibility to distribute the artists’ works to a specific interested public thus constructing a new market system for art that would generate an income for the artists involved—an idea that was never fully realized as it was intended.189 In the same spirit he developed, together with the New York lawyer Robert Projansky, his famous project The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement (1971)—a contract that would give control to the artists over the financial aspects of their productions.190 The “Artist’s Contract,” as it was also named, was distributed in four different languages, and an attempt to reform the dominant art market practices. It was sent to a number of museum curators and other art professionals but never became fully operative, although it did effect to some extent how art professionals dealt with (conceptual) works of art.191

Nevertheless, as conceptual art had separated art’s “essence” from its presentation, and the exhibitionary format was by and large temporary or site specific, documents or other (descriptive) documentation of these works were essential to

---

188 As Alexander Alberro suggested, “galleries survive only by selling products, and if the products cannot be displayed or have no material form, they are much more difficult, even impossible to market. But if some of the artists are antigallery, they are not necessarily antimarket,” Alberro in Alberro and Norvell 2001, p. 11.
189 Siegelaub explained in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist that he thought artists should receive royalties when their works are reproduced, resold, exhibited, etc, just as it is applied to the work of composers, authors and musicians, in Obrist 2011, p. 126.
190 For more information on this contract see Alberro 2003, pp. 163-170.
191 Especially in Europe there was quite some interest in Siegelaub’s contract, it was published in several art magazines (Studio International and Museumjournaal among others) as well as in the catalogue of Documenta 5. As Siegelaub emphasized: “If it wasn’t for the interest in the Contract by the people in Europe, like Harald Szeemann, or Germano Celant who worked on the Italian edition, it would have stayed as just an idea,” See further Maria Eichhorn (ed.), The Artist’s Contract (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), p. 41.
transfer and conserve the work in one way or the other. To use documentation in their work was an aspect that most artists affiliated with conceptual art had accepted to make sure there is evidence of what existed or occurred (as a historical validation), but it was also a problem for the artists since the documentation of the works/events could be confused for the work itself—as Siegelaub explained, “[a] written statement about what was done. . . . Or two photographs. . . . all this is a record of the work of art. . . . It’s not the work of art.”

Ironically enough, it was precisely through the network of a new type of gallery, the so-called “avant-garde gallery,” that developed in Europe at the end of the 1960s that conceptual art has been supported and distributed so largely already at a very early stage. These new galleries, not unlike Siegelaub, worked in a personal and direct interaction with the artists and managed to mediate in making accessible conceptual works. But that the galleries in doing so also had to resolve in some way the dilemma of conceptual art is illustrated by a statement of Siegelaub: “In the case of Kosuth you have a newspaper. Even though it’s not in fact the art, it’s a record of the art—a public record of the art. Huebler has photographs. . . . But Barry is quite a bit different. There’s absolutely nothing. Thus the challenge is how to make something out of nothing.” In this respect, as Barry has put it, “Certainly the galleries have had their influence on the way art looks.”

Indeed, as Alexander Alberro had stressed, it became retrospectively clear that “[t]he artists. . . . who have subsequently achieved the greatest commercial success are the ones who quickly figured out ways to provide the gallery with marketable documentation.” This fact, however, has given certain conceptual artists even more reason to be skeptical about the relation of the work to its documentation—sometimes changing their positions over the years. Alberro states: “[t]he very process that gives the photograph or other initially supplementary document (Siegelaub’s ‘secondary

---

192 As Ursula Meyer had suggested in the early 1970s: “The aspect of documentation has become increasingly important for Conceptual Art. The camera as well as the Xerox machine can be used as dumb recording devices. Conceptual artists—among others On Kawara and Douglas Huebler—have used meaningless, everyday occurrences, maps, snapshots, diagrams as ‘containers’ for their conceptions,” Meyer 1972, pp. xi-xii. Emphasis added by me.
195 Ibid., p. 7.
196 Alberro in Alberro and Norvell 2001, p. 11.
197 Ibid., p. 12.
198 Kosuth f.i. realized in the 1970s that the presentation of his work One and Three Chairs (1965?) had not been done properly at different venues. He then produced a certificate with very specific instructions for the installation of the work (“no other installation permissible”). See Poinso 1999, pp. 42-43.
The value of art makes untenable the belief that art exists in an autonomous space or sphere, thus underscoring how completely art by the late 1960s had become a market-driven commodity. Perhaps this realization more than any other prompted so many of the artists... to remain ambivalent, if not apprehensive, about the relation of their work to its documentation."\(^{199}\)

To determine where the conceptual work of art ends and its documentation starts is, consequently, not an easy task. The apprehension that various conceptual artists have expressed about confusing the boundaries between artworks and documents, between art and information about art, has proved most relevant today.\(^ {200}\) When examining many works of conceptual art in different exhibitions, one has to note that the lion’s share of these works have become what Boris Groys has termed “art documentation.”\(^ {201}\) Art documentation, however, as Groys had stressed, "[i]s by definition not art; it merely refers to art, and in precisely this way it makes clear that art, in this case, is no longer present and immediately visible but rather absent and hidden."\(^ {202}\)

Groys distinguished two different manners in which art documentation refers to art: First, art documentation may refer to art events that were present and visible at a particular time, like performances, temporary installations, or happenings, which are documented, and the documentation is later exhibited as a means to recollect the original event. Another type of art documentation, however, which according to Groys is increasingly being produced and exhibited, does not claim to make present any past art event: “Examples include complex and varied artistic interventions in daily life, lengthy and complicated processes of discussion and analysis, the creation of unusual living circumstances, artistic exploration into the reception of art in various cultures and milieus, and politically motivated artistic actions.”\(^ {203}\) Since these artistic activities take place within the structures and processes of daily life, and are not a product or result of a “creative” activity, they cannot be presented except by means of art documentation. In such cases, “[a]rt documentation is neither the making present of a past event nor the

\(^ {199}\) Alberro in Alberro and Norvell 2001, p. 12.

\(^ {200}\) Ibid.

\(^ {201}\) Patricia Norvell’s early interviews with the core group of conceptualists reveal some of the problems that these artists have with the documentation of their work. Robert Morris, for instance, says: “Documentation is like a residue or sediment... but it’s like one edge of the piece. And it has a sentimental value more than anything else. You can’t locate the works in terms of its record. It’s like a series of snapshots or something.” Morris clearly predicates such comments on his worry that the public may unwittingly mistake the record for the art and in so doing miss the artwork altogether.” Robert Morris interviewed by Patricia Norvell in Alberro and Norvell 2001, p. 9.\(^ {202}\)

\(^ {202}\) Ibid.

promise of a coming artwork, but rather . . . the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in any other way.”

Whereas this first type of art documentation can be determined as the mere recording of an event, the second type is more paradoxical and diffuse in nature and applicable to many works of conceptual art. Correspondingly, Siegelaub’s primary and secondary information could be similarly determined: if the art activity, or art practice cannot be (re-)presented in any other way than by means of documentation, it could be considered primary information; if the practice or activity has taken place within a specific timeframe, and has been recorded as such, it could be considered secondary information. The second type of art documentation, which may consist in photographs, diagrams, written statements, sketches, books, catalogues, or other referential materials, principally allows a reproduction of the “original” event.

As this may generally be relevant to conceptual artworks, different artists have different ideas about how to deal with the referential material adjoining their projects. In the work of various artists documentation can either accompany or visualize the artwork, or end up somewhere in the middle, as in the work of Douglas Huebler. In Huebler’s art it is difficult to separate the documentation from the work; they become a whole. As he distinctively stated: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting. I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place. More specifically, the work concerns itself with things whose inter-relationship is beyond direct perceptual experience. Because the work is beyond direct perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation. This documentation takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings, and descriptive language.”

In regard to the map as a documentary format Huebler stated: “The map is

---

204 Ibid.
205 Poinsot 1999, p. 98. [La photo est littéralement une émanation du référent. [...] Telle photo, en effet, ne se distingue jamais de son référent (de ce qu’elle représente), ou du moins elle ne s’en distingue pas tout de suite ou pour tout le monde (ce que fait n’importe quelle image, encombrée dès l’abord et par statut de la façon dont l’objet est simulé). »Roland Barthes, La Chambre claire (Paris : Cahiers du Cinéma/ Gallimard/ éd. Du Seuil, 1980), p. 126 and p. 16, as cited in Poinsot, p. 98. « Barthes puise un grand plaisir . . . dans cette motivation du signe photographique, dans le fait que l’image présente sous ses yeux se donne pour l’enregistrement de l’avoir-été-là de l’objet ou de l’être représenté. Il renvoie du même coup tout ce qui sert à la représentation dans une rôle secondaire vis-à-vis de ce qui concourt à présenter encore. Les œuvres in situ donnent de même l’impression d’une révélation, d’une mise en prise directe de l’observateur avec la « vérité » du réel qui l’entoure. » (i.e. the works of Sol LeWitt at the grandes nef du musée d’Art contemporaine Bordeaux >> Wall Drawing #2 1968/1990) . . . Ce qui importe, c’est qu’effectivement le savoir-faire de l’artiste . . . . est moins mobilisé pour représenter, figurer, former que pour établir une relation de contiguïté, voire de solidarité entre le réel et ce qui est donné à percevoir, où ce qui est figuré ou formé, l’est sous l’espèce de cette relation de motivation. » [...] Ainsi, nombre d’œuvres « site specific » ont été portées à la vue de leur public au moyen de cette émanation du référent qu’est la photographie.]
only a chart, you know. It isn’t [a] real thing, and yet we begin to assume it is a real thing.”

As Alberro pointed out “the real thing” for Huebler is presumably the ephemeral art event, though an artist as Weiner states that, “an event can never be art.” Nevertheless, Huebler incorporated documentation into the initial process of production of his work, preferring to have an active hand in to determine which of its traces will remain. He proclaimed that, “it’s the documents that carry the idea. And documents have to exist.” Alberro emphasized that for LeWitt documentation not only functions as a record but also, “like a musical score, elaborates further on the work.” In his conceptual wall drawings, however, LeWitt never shows the working drawings nor the instructions or diagrams for their execution; these are explicitly declared not to be the work of art.

In the case of Weiner’s propositions documentary material is never used by the artist himself, as he explained: “[s]haring my work would be done by publishing a book, just the statements per se of the work. It would be just as good as if the work was built.” Weiner considered the documentation to be distracting, “which is why I prefer for the work originally to be seen just in language….I don’t take photographs.” However, records of early text works that have been executed by the artist, such as THE RESIDU OF A FLARE IGNITED UPON A BOUNDARY (1969, for Op losse schroeven) that is usually represented by a photograph of Weiner preparing the flare on the quay of an Amsterdam canal, do exist, and can easily be confused for the work. An artist like Barry is for this reason explicitly rejecting documentation; as he believes that “documentation sort of gets in the way of art….Some of the documentation has to be so involved that it just becomes like a little art object itself.”

Yet, also Barry has produced documentations to “contain” his work that (eventually) became the artwork itself. Most well-known is the documentation of his invisible Inert Gas Series, a series of photographs of locations where he released various gasses to the atmosphere, which have been exhibited at different venues worldwide, and have never been questioned not to be the artworks—could even be defined some sort of “photo-conceptualism.” Even the invitation card of his Closed Gallery Piece (1969), with

---

207 Ibid.
209 Ibid., p. 7-8.
210 Ibid.
212 Weiner in “Art without Space” symposium, as cited in Lippard 1973, p. 128.
213 Lawrence Weiner interviewed by Patricia Norvell in Alberro and Norvell 2001, p. 6. After his initial works Weiner however continued to produce text-based works that incorporate space, as he defined them “sculptures.”
the illustrious text “During the exhibition the gallery will be closed,” has gained the status of artwork. Because of the work's historicization or canonization, by authors like McEvilley, as well as others, the document/invitation card became a desirable object to purchase for collectors.\footnote{See f.i. McEvilley’s explanation of this work in “Anti-Art as Cognition. Themes and Strategies,” in The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism (Kingston, New York: McPherson & Company, 2005), p. 96.} The confusion between work and documentation made several conceptual artists very rigorous in their conceptual practices. The Dutch Stanley Brouw, for example, persistently refuses to have documentary material (i.e. secondary information) to be included in catalogues or other representational formats. Daniel Buren has alternately determined all records of his in situ works “photo souvenirs” that are not supposed to be exhibited as such (although they eventually have been).\footnote{Ibid.}

In order to determine to what extent the documentation of conceptual works is freestanding, and to what extent it is merely an archival record of something that did or did not take place, it is important to consider what Poinsot has termed “les récits autorisés” (authorized records).\footnote{Ibid. “Tirant les lecons des installations fautives, certain certificats produits par Kosuth dans le cours des années soixante-dix ont commencé à comporter des instructions d’installation circonstanciées et imperatives ( “no other installation permittable”).”} In examining the installations of the work One and Three Chairs by Kosuth he points out that the repetitive false exhibition of the work (in Centre Pompidou and MoMA) made the artist decide to produce specific certificates over the course of the 1970s that contain explicit instructions for installation (as in “no other installation permittable”).\footnote{See Maria Eichhorn, “On the Avertissement: Interview with Daniel Buren (1998),” in John C. Welchman (ed.), Institutional Critique and After (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), pp. 85-122.} In several of Kosuth’s notations Poinsot recognized “points where the artist doesn’t support improvisation and usages where he has asserted them before.”\footnote{Buren also established clauses on rights of reproduction, exhibition, attributing provenance etc. in his Avertissement, a juridical contract that he has written together with his half-brother and lawyer Michel Claura in 1968-1969 and used for the sale of his work ever since. See Maria Eichhorn, “On the Avertissement: Interview with Daniel Buren (1998),” in John C. Welchman (ed.), Institutional Critique and After (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), pp. 85-122.} But the difficulties met in the work of Kosuth don’t stand on its own. Poinsot emphasizes that all works can be subject to misinterpretations, even the most conventional, if not preserved in authorized records. They can be found in different types of auctorial documents, such as comments, declarations, notes and illustrations,
catalogues, projects, certificates, instructions, reviews and descriptions for installation and all other information that the artist has recognized at the time a work was conceived. These documents can, according to Poinsot, be regarded as veritable references of the initial intentions of the artist, and provide with legitimate information for the actualization or potential reappearance of his work.

The certificate of authenticity is the most explicit and legally verifiable form of such documents, which has been developed by, and accompanied the works of several artists at the end of the 1960s. In some cases, as for instance in LeWitt’s, the distinction between the work and the documentary or accompanied materials that support the work are contained in the certificate and instructive for executing the work. As LeWitt has stated: “The people who buy the certificate usually also have the supplementary photograph or the diagram, and the certificate can also be used as a program for the realization of the piece as a musical partition. The wall drawings are temporarily and could be redone. It’s relatively simple...” Yet, even in these works misinterpretations have been made, and the certificates have been exhibited as if the artwork.

The principle difficulty within such works, as Poinsot has asserted, “lies in the fact that they integrate a part of the world, a fragment of the real and thus implicate a particular responsibility from the keeper/owner of the piece who is assigned to make concrete decisions in order to realize the work.” Although, generally speaking, the certificate should provide the modalities of realization that are consigned by the artist, essential specifications, practical as well as conceptual, are often lacking.

In the case of LeWitt, to make sure that his certificates are realized in the correct manner the artist developed a method to carry out the wall drawings that has been explicited in several texts by his hand. As he stated, the realization of the work should only be done by “the proper draftsmen,” who can be found in assistants situated all around the world that should be approved by the LeWitt Estate. These specifications have however never been included in the certificate. The signed certificate is, as Poinsot

---

220 Les gens qui achètent le certificat ont aussi habituellement la photographie ou le diagramme qui l’accompagne et le certificat peut aussi être utilisé comme un programme pour réaliser la pièce comme les partitions de musique. Les dessins muraux sont temporaires et peuvent être refaits. C’est relativement simple...Un-edited interview with Sol LeWitt on February 19, 1987 as cited in Poinsot 1999, p. 162.
221 For example in the exhibition *In Between Minimalisms* at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2010. See Zonnenberg 2010/2011.
222 “The artist conceives and plans the wall drawing. It is realized by the draftsmen (the artist can operate as the proper draftsman); the plan (drawn, spoken, or designed) is interpreted by the draftsman. The artist has to authorize different interpretations of his plan. The artist and the draftsman become collaborators in the fabrication of the art.” Sol LeWitt in “Wall Drawings,” *Arts Magazine* vol XLIV no 6 (April 1970), p. 45 and “Doing Wall Drawings,” *Art Now* vol III no 2 (June 1971), n.p. reprinted in *Sol LeWitt*, exh. cat. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978 p. 169, as cited in Poinsot 1999 p. 164.
223 For example in the exhibition *In Between Minimalisms* at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2010. See Zonnenberg 2010/2011.
224 LeWitt 1970.
points out, thus merely functioning as a testimony of an authentic work but it doesn’t guarantee the correct handling of the auctorial responsibility. In this respect the certificate can even further complicate how the specific conceptual work of art should be determined within the shared auctorial responsibility that it involves, and, again, creates further misunderstanding about what the status of these particular documents is.

That many artists, such as LeWitt, but also Dan Flavin, Joseph Kosuth, Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Long and others make note on their certificates that these are not the artwork, and will not, or should not be duplicated, is indicative to the fact that their potential use is subject to various assumptions. The causes of misuse or misinterpretation of the certificates are not difficult to understand, as Poinsot has asserted, while the art market is still attached to objects and not to “deeds” (prestations). As Barry had stressed, the conceptual work of art has also adapted itself to be able to negotiate such “deeds,” but in doing so might have surpassed its initial goal. However, museums and galleries don't pay artists for their interference. Diverse attempts to change the principles of the art market, such as Siegelaub’s and Projanski’s artist’s contract, have not accommodated or certified the right of “demonstration.” The reproductions or documents of artists’ activities that are not provided with some sort of authentification or signature indication, have not gained economical significance, and as such remain invisible in the system of art.

In the rare cases where the certificate leaves little room for interpretations other than the artist’s will, as in the case of Daniel Buren, a lifetime awareness regarding the work ceaselessly binds the collector to the artist. Together with the lawyer, curator and his half-brother Michel Claura Buren has been producing certificates that have been driven to the extent, as that the work cannot exist without it, and they may not be sold at auction without the artist’s benediction. The contract can also not be reproduced without the artist’s permission. Whereas Siegelaub’s and Projanski’s Artist’s Contract was modeled after Buren’s it may come as no surprise that it was never successfully applied for the sale of conceptual artworks.

According to Siegelaub, Buren "[a]lways used some kind of contract concerning the placement and the use of his work, because they are site-specific and he is very careful

---


227 Hapgood and Lauf 2011, p. 81.

228 Siegelaub mentioned that there were no artists involved in the drawing up of the contract, but a precedent for its form was Daniel Buren. In Eichhorn 2009, p. 41.
about his interests when the piece is sold. There have been a number of people, like Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and especially Hans Haacke, who have used The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement. . . . In fact, most artists were not that interested at all, more against it than for it.” 229 It had been very difficult to implement contracts in the art business at the time because, as Siegelaub pointed out, “During the late 1960s and early ‘70s, the art world was in a state of relative poverty and thus the Contract was seen as just another problem in selling work.” 230 Lawrence Alloway has in this respect suggested another critique that the artists might have had, while the contract attaches the artist to an eternal curating of his or her work; an activity to which many artists are not likely to submit. 231

But also on the site of the consumer there were objections: Siegelaub mentioned that he presumed Herman Daled, Anton Herbert, or Panza had signed it, but for many collectors it was only complicating sales: “In the late 1960s when the issue of artists’ rights was becoming more important, some gallery owners were enthusiastic about the idea of a contract and said they would use it, while others were absolutely against it. I remember in particular André Emmerich in New York who said people wouldn’t buy art anymore.” 232 Two reactions on the contract in this respect are quite remarkable; Jean Leering, director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven replied:

> [M]y opinion is twofold: a. The agreement would mean a strengthening of the capitalistic point of view. To my opinion art has nothing to do with money: the aspect of the (art)-work (as object), which has to do with money, is its stamp-value; its rareness. To proof this we have only to look to objects of architecture: after having paid the architect’s fee one does not pay the artistic value any more; any expectation regarding increase of value of a piece of architecture is in vain because of its immobility. b. I do not think you did study, as is said, every facet of this question, because a very important element is missing: the role of the public in the appreciation of art. . . . That is the reason I do not agree with your veto for the artists. By this I think you are making larger the existing gab between art and public. 233

Harald Szeemann replied: “. . . [your] paper is a very good idea and a very useful thing if it is really applied (sic). . . . we can of course distribute it during documenta

229 Ibid.
233 Ibid., pp. 32-35.
next year. The only critique I have about it: The Contract is finally only through its
distribution and through its author a work for the so called avant-garde. This means that
if it’s not used by all the local artists all over the world it doesn’t become what you think it
should be.”\textsuperscript{234}

Especially Leering’s reaction is illuminating the contradictory aspect in the
contract that tried to secure speculating with the work. Also Weiner pointed out this
deficit in regard to the artist’s position, and for this reason had never made use of the
contract. As he stressed, the contract is contradictory, as “it is geared to an artist’s work
being protected only if it gains in value. If it diminishes in value, the owner is under no
obligation to compensate the artist and thus participate into the gamble that the artist
intrinsically faces.”\textsuperscript{235} The other aspect Leering is pointing at, the difficulty to adequately
implement the contract’s consequences in museum practices as to make it accessible to
the public, seems also contradictory in regard to the work of conceptual artists such as
Weiner, who reserved an amount of his statements to function in the “collection public
freehold.” In principle these works could be “owned” by anyone who for instance
purchased the catalogue or book in which they were published, but Weiner distinguishes
also “[p]rivate freehold, which is where the only people that can own the piece are the
people who ask for it when it’s freehold.”\textsuperscript{236}

Regarding private freehold, Weiner has little concern to reassure his collectors, as
Lauf and Hapgood have pointed out, "He takes the barest steps necessary in his
documentary practice by recording ownership of his works through letters that he sent to
an archive (formerly to its lawyer, Jerald Ordover) and to the owner, whom he often
refers to as having ‘accepted responsibility’ for the work of art. Weiner’s practice makes
clear that there is a condition of trust involved, implying that no amount of coddling,
documentation, or binding verbiage will accomplish much.”\textsuperscript{237} It is important to
reconsider the implications of the involved responsibility, or the “proof of receivership”
that Weiner provides. Whereas the private collector can have his personal engagement to
this document, the museum of contemporary art has the task to “disclose” the works in its
collection to the public. Therefore, it is first and foremost relevant to not categorically
define these documents as autonomous artworks, but rather as \textit{signs} that contain

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{235} Weiner in conversation with Cornelia Lauf, as cited in Hapgood and Lauf 2011, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{236} See f.i. Alberro 2003, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., p. 80.
information representing an artwork; they refer to a possible work of art, but are not by definition itself works of art—or at least not in some final, or definite form.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{238} See also Groys 2008.
2. CASE STUDY: KONZEPTION-CONCEPTION: DOCUMENTATION OF A TODAY’S ART TENDENCY AT THE STÄDTISCHES MUSEUM SCHLOSS MORSBROICH LEVERKUSEN (1969)

Museums are an archive of visual art. And when a museum puts on an exhibition of contemporary art it ought to do so in a museum-like way, that is, logically and coherently. Extending a tradition into the future: that’s the way a museum ought to raise the value of tradition, through bringing in new tendencies, and not depreciate it as usually happens today—Konrad Fischer239

2.1. A First Overview of Conceptual Art

Among the flood of conceptual art exhibitions that took place around the world in 1969, Konzeption-Conception: Documentation of a To-day’s Art Tendency may not seem the most prominent.240 Nonetheless, this exhibition, curated by Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer and shown at the Städtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen from October 10 until November 30, 1969, can be considered the first overview show of conceptual art in Europe.241 The municipal museum Schloss Morsbroich, based in a former Baroque castle, was the first post-war museum in Nordrhein-Westfalen dedicated to contemporary art, and held a relatively progressive course during the directorship of Wedewer (1965-1995). When he proposed his exhibition to the culture committee of the city of Leverkusen, conceptual art had already obtained some name in Germany—as Kunsthalle Düsseldorf director Jürgen Harten stated in an interview on Prospect 69 earlier that year.242 It thus seems appropriate that the proposal was unanimously accepted.243

Being an art historian, Wedewer had frequently published on new tendencies in painting,

---

240 The year 1969 proved paramount to conceptual art with Seth Siegelaub’s January and March 1969 exhibitions in New York, Op lasse schroeven at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, When Attitudes Become Form at the Kunsthalle in Bern and Lucy Lippard’s 557,087 at the pavilion of the Seattle Art Museum, among others. Significant projects of conceptual art, however, have preceded these exhibitions, such as Mel Bochner’s Working Drawings show at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1966, Paul Maenz’s 19:45-21:55, September 9th, 1967 at the Dorothea Loehr Galerie in Frankfurt in 1967 and Germano Celant’s Arte Povera + Azioni Povere in Amalfi in 1968. See for a more complete record of events and activities in 1969 Lucy Lippard’s Six Years.
241 The exhibition included works by: Keith Arnatt; John Baldessari; Robert Barry; Iain Baxter; Bernd & Hilla Becher; Mel Bochner; Alighiero Boetti; Marcel Broodthaers; Stanley Brouwn; Daniel Buren; Victor Burgin; Donald Burgy; Eugenia P. Butler; Pier Paolo Calzolari; Paul Cotton; Hanne Darboven; Jan Dibbets; Hamish Fulton; Gilbert & George; Dan Graham; Douglas Huebler; Richard Jackson; Stephen Kaltenbach; On Kawara; Michael Kirby; Joseph Kosuth; David Lamelas; Sol LeWitt; Bruce McLean; Bruce Nauman; Guiseppe Penone; Adrian Piper; Sigmar Polke; Emilio Prini; Markus Raetz; Allen Ruppersberg; Ed Ruscha; Fred Sandback; Richard Sliadden; Robert Smithson; Timm Ulrichs; Bernar Venet; Lawrence Weiner; and Zaj (Walther Marchetti).
242 Harten stated that the phenomenon of conceptual art was known in Germany for about 1.5 year. Broadcasting of “Das Feuilleton,” Deutschlandfunk, Wednesday October 1, 1969 (21:40-22:00). Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf (IV 29367).
243 A note dated 14-7-1969 reads that the exhibition “Konzeptkunst” was approved by the culture committee. Stadtarchiv Leverkusen (410.1302).
and acquired many works of Art Informel, Zero, Op-art and analytic and monochrome painting for the museum’s collection. In his catalogue introduction he placed conceptual art within an art historical continuum, more specifically aligned to Earth or Land Art: “[O]ut of this emerged Conceptual art that, for the first time, represents an art that only consists of planning sketches whose execution and transformation into the final work of art is considered of secondary importance and, therefore, can be dismissed.”

It seems ambiguous that Wedewer co-curated the exhibition with Fischer, who was the main dealer of many of the artists involved: about half of the artists in the show (20 out of 44) was represented by him. Most likely, the latter’s particular expertise on, and contacts within the scene of conceptual art that he had been establishing since 1967 was preferable above the possible objections. Fischer’s intermediary role at the time was outstanding, as Brigitte Kölle proclaimed in her thesis “Die Kunst des Ausstellens. Untersuchungen zum Werk des Künstlers und Kunstvermittlers Konrad Lueg/ Fischer (1939-1996): “[T]he way in which the traditional, limited distribution of tasks between cultural producer and cultural mediator was broken open [is] something for which Konrad Fischer, like almost no other figure in the second half of the 20th century, exemplarily stands.” As mediator and advisor as well as the lender of a great number of conceptual works Fischer had already taken a significant role in Op losse schroeven in Amsterdam and When Attitudes Become Form in Bern and at the Haus Lange in Krefeld; in Leverkusen he extended this role as the (co-)curator of the exhibition.

The enterprise of making an institutional show that historically founded as a new art “movement” the type of art that Fischer was representing must surely have been beneficial to the emerging status of his gallery. It can therefore be questioned to what extent Konzeption fits into a commercial strategy that Fischer was developing at the time. Almost simultaneously with the exhibition in Leverkusen he organized together with

Hans Strelow the art fair / exhibition *Prospect 69* at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, which was more specifically conceived as a promotional event. Remarkably, the commercial *Prospect 69* was rather positively received by the press, whereas *Konzeption* was more disapprovingly received as “a show that showed nothing at all.”²⁴⁸ It is not unlikely that Fischer in his overloaded role as curator-dealer had to make decisions where to put his focus, and the exhibition in Leverkusen was of lower priority than the art fair / exhibition that he was organizing in the prosperous milieu of Düsseldorf.²⁴⁹ But it may also be that the latter exhibition, in its first attempt to categorize the new phenomenon of conceptual art, was more radical, and therefore exemplary than the former.

Although the exhibition has been largely credited in the historiography of conceptual art, a thorough study of *Konzeption* has never been made, possibly due to a lack of visual documentation.²⁵⁰ Lucy Lippard and Klaus Honnef refer to the exhibition in their early anthologies of conceptual art, and Seth Siegelaub considered it a key exhibition of conceptual art—next to his own *March 1969* in New York, Wim Beeren’s *Op losse schroeven* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Harald Szeemann’s *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle in Bern, and Konrad Fischer’s *Prospect 69* at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf.²⁵¹ In Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson’s *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* the exhibition gained recognition by the subsequent reference to its catalogue. The seminal text “Beware” by Daniel Buren, which is included in this anthology, was originally published (in French) in the *Konzeption* catalogue under the title “Mise-en-garde,” preceded by Wedewer’s introduction to the exhibition, originally written as the proposal to the culture committee of Leverkusen.²⁵² Furthermore, the design of the catalogue, radically breaking with the standard for catalogues of exhibitions of visual art—not unlike the publication practices of Siegelaub—has become an important document of conceptual art. It made use of publishing, as Catherine Moseley has pointed

²⁴⁸ Fischer conceived and organized several editions of *Prospect* together with Hans Strelow at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf between 1968 and 1976 as an alternative “art fair” that was meant to counter the Cologne art fair (founded in 1967) that was concentrating on German galleries only. Fischer wanted to open up to a more international and avant-garde type of art fair and asked several galleries from both Europe and the United States to collaborate. This initiative, accurately compiled for the Kunsthalle, has been generally received as an exhibition. Around 1972, however, there was an increasing critique on his positioning and the conflict of business and autonomous artistic interests. This eventually lead to the ending of the *Prospect* shows in 1976.

²⁴⁹ In the same month that *Prospect 69* and *Konzeption* opened Fischer was also represented for the first time at the Cologne art fair. Next to this he organized 14 international exhibitions in his space at the Neubrückstraße, among which a lot of debuts. See Kölle 2005, p. 52.

²⁵⁰ Noteworthy is that in terms of visual documentation, progress reports, correspondence concerning the content of the exhibition, etcetera, *Prospect 69* is much better preserved than *Konzeption*, of which only few records are kept. See also Stadtarchiv Leverkusen and Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf.

²⁵¹ Siegelaub selected these exhibitions for his retrospective project on conceptual art “The context of art/The art of context” (*Kunst & Museumjournal*, vol. 7, no. 1-3, 1996).

out, “to present primary, unmediated information, as far as possible, to let people think about art for themselves.” According to Moseley, this specific format of the catalogue, “in which a form of exhibition takes place,” as well as the fact that Fischer, as a commercial art dealer, was organizing an exhibition on conceptual art within the institutional framework of a public museum has contributed to the significance of the exhibition.

Since proper visual documentation of the exhibition is not available, it might not seem opportune to analyze this exhibition in depth. Nonetheless, the extensive newspaper reviews published at the time and a small amount of documents related to the organization of the show, kept in the archives of the city of Leverkusen, provide sufficient information to sketch a reconstruction of the spatial exhibition. The dilemma of exhibition is explicitly problematized in Konzeption, both in the recognition of the catalogue as the “primary” exhibition space of the works, and the rather paradoxical insistence on the “secondary” exhibition at the site of the museum. It is essential to study and define how the spatial exhibition differed from the catalogue-exhibition in order to determine the initial exhibitionary status of conceptual art. In addition, the role of Fischer as the curator of the exhibition is analyzed with regard to the changing conditions of the work of art, as well as the position of the artist. In their attempt to frame conceptual art as an art historical movement Fischer and Wedewer instigated a fierce debate—not only in the exhibition’s reception, but also by some of the artists involved,—which reveals a critical undertone to the project that imposed the curators to mediate respective artistic positions within the institutional space. I would argue that this positioning in many respects already anticipated the future mediation of the curator within the re-exhibition of conceptual art.

---

254 Ibid., pp. 156-157. Moseley doesn’t further elaborate these observations.
255 In the private archive of Konrad Fischer there’s no further documentation of Konzeption. Communication with the artists may have been done over the phone, or via Fischer’s gallery during the preparations of other exhibitions. A few correspondences in regard to Konzeption are described in Sophie Richard’s Unconcealed, Richard 2009, p. 97. Recently, some documents of correspondence showed up in the bequest of Thérèse Bonney at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive as published in Stefanie Kreuzer (ed.) More Konzeption Conception Now, exh. cat. Museum Morsbroich Leverkusen, 2015.
256 See the harsh reception of the exhibition in the local and national German newspapers, as well as Daniel Buren’s critique as expressed in his catalogue essay.
2.2. The Catalogue (as) Exhibition

In the application to the culture committee of the city of Leverkusen to support his exhibition—only slightly but in its last paragraph significantly differing from the catalogue’s introduction—Wedewer formulated in clear phrasings the radical transformation of the visual arts that he presumed conceptual art. This transformation was not so much conceived in the formal or thematic appearance of art, but, as he wrote, “in its fundamental nature.”

Going beyond the temporary exhibition, conceptual art’s most important characteristic, according to Wedewer, was its openness: the possibility that this type of art holds to generate innumerable shapes or appearances within time and space—depending on its different “receivers.” In this regard he refers to “utopian architecture,” ascribing conceptual art a socio-political characteristic that could potentially change the perspective on our surroundings or life in general:

This art exists merely as a draft and withdraws from a total realization or execution of its initial idea as of secondary importance. Consequently, this means that this art’s tendency is no longer the presentation of something… but becomes as it were exemplary of its open form… [T]he individual draft is only a proposition that instigates an associative “to act through.” The result is that the creational moment of these partly far-reaching de-visualizing drafts lies in a methodological showing of possibilities, that retrospectively relate to subjective positions, which, however, thereafter could also relate to issues of a different kind, like “utopian architecture.”

That the catalogue was assumed to better present the essence of this type of art than a traditional exhibition, or even to “outreach it as a document and communication format,” fits within the spirit of the moment. Siegelaub had already proclaimed the publication or catalogue an alternative “space” that would more appropriately “exhibit” an information-based art—revising the format of the artists’ books that were in

---

257 Wedewer, proposal to the culture committee of the city of Leverkusen, 20-06-1969, Stadtarchiv Leverkusen (410.1302).
258 Ibid. “[e]s sich erstmals um eine Kunst handelt, die nur im Entwurf noch besteht und auf jegliche Verwirklichung oder Ausführung ihrer jeweiligen Ideen als nur von sekundärer Bedeutung verzichtet.” Translation by me. This socio-political explanation by Wedewer, similar to Lippard and Chandler’s coining of the term “dematerialization,” can also be read as a legitimization of the project towards the municipal funders since this paragraph is not included in the catalogue but replaced by another.
circulation since the early 1960s. The curators of Konzeption had most certainly made use of these earlier experiments. Their exhibition catalogue was conceived following the same principle as Siegelaub’s Xerox Book (1968); each of the 44 participating artists was provided with five pages in the catalogue, in which their work could be presented or “exhibited.” Whereas in the Xerox Book the works of the artists (Andre, Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, LeWitt, Morris, and Weiner, each covering 25 pages) were exhibited in alphabetical order, the contributions to the Leverkusen catalogue were randomly spread over the pages. The principle of “primary information” was largely adapted, leaving all finalizing implications/ interpretations to the reader/ receiver /“consumer” of the book, but other than in Siegelaub’s publication the primary information was accompanied by secondary information in the form of artists’ biographies that were published at the end of the catalogue.

Furthermore, the Xerox Book had no physical presentation next to the publication; Konzeption presented the primary information of the participating artists in both the catalogue and in a spatial configuration in the museum. In a memo that was probably sent to all the collaborating artists, a reference is made to “the materials” to be exhibited; the plans, concepts, photos, etcetera, that the invited artists were to be providing, were confirmed to be installed at the site by the museum personnel. In the same memo is added that every artist would have about five pages (20 x 22 cm) for the book, which suggests that the provided “materials” would be adapted for both the exhibition and catalogue. This is affirmed by an indication in the financial report of the exhibition, which notes that the publication, the “catalogue-book,” should be similar to the “space-catalogue.” Remarkably, the definition “(space-)catalogue” is used here to refer to the spatial display of the collection of primary information, which is similarly used for the catalogue. The traditional curatorial assignment of compiling works for an exhibition is herewith eliminated; instead the focus is merely on the transmission of “information.” That in this respect more importance is given to the catalogue(-book) than the exhibition is also illustrated by the estimated costs for the project: the budget for the catalogue

260 See f.e. Germano Celant, Book as Artwork (London: Nigel Greenwood Inc Ltd, 1972), in which a compilation of artists’ book titles from Claes Oldenburg, Dieter Roth, John Cage, Piero Manzoni, Ed Ruscha, Yoko Ono, Alan Kaprow, Mel Bochner, Art & Language, Robert Filliou, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Stanley Brouwn, Bruce Nauman, Lawrence Weiner and many others is listed. Siegelaub was familiar with these practices since he was in contact with Dan Graham already in 1966. See Alberro 2001.

261 “The material for be exhibited: plans, concepts, photos a.s.o. could be copied in large sizes and could be framed in the museum. For the eventually execution of ideas we have here some specialists (sic).” Memo “Concerning exhibition CONCEPT ART” (Stadtdarchiv Leverkusen, Box 410.1302), n.d.

262 A last phrase in the memo reads that in case of any more questions they have to write to the museum, which none of the artists did, or no record of this correspondence was kept.

263 “Ausstellung ‘Konzeptkunst,’” financial report (Stadtdarchiv Leverkusen, Box 410.1302), 10-6-1969.
exceeded the combined budget for the physical show. In general, the costs for the project were limited and the production of the exhibition and catalogue relatively simple: all the necessary information for the realization was principally covered with the transport of a medium sized box containing all the artists’ projects. This method of work resembled the format used by Lucy Lippard in her number shows, that she herself referred to as "suitcase exhibitions."

There are some interesting analogies between Konzeption and Lippard’s 557,087 show that took place in Seattle from September 5 until October 5, 1969. Lippard also sent a standard letter/questionnaire to the artists she wanted to collaborate with, a bit more specific than the memo by Fischer and Wedewer, in which she asked for their plans for both catalogue and exhibition. These plans were printed on index-cards, one for each artist in the show, and were to be used as the exhibition’s catalogue. Not bound together in a book, but just assembled as a set of cards in an envelope, the idea was that the person who bought them could arrange the catalogue according to their own taste, “democratically” avoiding a prescribed hierarchy of one artist above the other. Furthermore, Lippard’s own textual contribution to the catalogue doesn’t read as an explanation for neither works nor catalogue-exhibition but stands on its own, similar to the artists’ contributions. In the Konzeption catalogue the different artists’ contributions, generally plans that could be subsequently executed, are also randomly, and not alphabetically, included. Contrary to the “democratic design” that Siegelaub and Lippard were propagating, however, is Wedewer’s introduction to the catalogue that explained the works in their relative context; an art historical labeling. It is followed by LeWitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art” that are translated here in German. Also the short

---

264 Ibid. The costs for the execution of the catalogue (14,000 DM) exceed the estimated costs for the execution of the exhibition, consisting of the transport of a box sized 1,20 x 1,50 x 0,50 with works coming from and going back to New York (3000 DM); reproductions of photographs and drawings (1000 DM); the rent of slide projectors etc (4000 DM) and insurance (500 DM (sic!)).


266 Fischer, who was responsible for the production of the catalogue of Konzeption, should have been familiar with the format of this show by Lippard, some of the artists involved were also in his gallery (Andre, Dibbets, Buren, Kawara, Weiner) and it could very well be that he had adopted the format in some way, although he claimed to be the first to have used installation sketches and plans for his invitation cards. Jappe, 1971. Sophie Richard in her book Unconcealed mentions that Fischer sent a letter to Lippard and Siegelaub to ask for their advice on how to put together a document-oriented exhibition. There’s no record of their response. Richard 2009, p. 97.


268 In an interview with Jo Melvin, Siegelaub, who was responsible for the production of the Seattle catalogue, is explaining that this was the most important motive for the random selection system of the catalogue for both him and Lippard, in Butler 2012, pp. 257-259.
biographies of the artists that are alphabetically listed in the back of the catalogue are contrasting the idea of primary communication.\textsuperscript{269}

Nevertheless, within the artists’ contributions in the catalogue no distinction is made between the discursive component of (some of) the texts and the visual of the sketches/plans. Especially Daniel Buren’s contribution to the catalogue is significant in this respect. Instead of handing in a plan/ concept of a work (either in sketch or text), like the other artists did, Buren contributed with his critical essay \textit{Mise-en-garde} that is randomly placed, although a bit at the end of the catalogue, between the other contributions. According to Georg Jappe Buren provided an in-situ work for the exhibition, one of his \textit{affichages sauvages}, which was not executed in Leverkusen but placed on billboards at the Grabbeplatz in Düsseldorf in front of the Kunsthalle where \textit{Prospect 69} took place.\textsuperscript{270} In \textit{Konzeption} an annotation on the wall pointed the visitors towards this fact. Although Buren documents his works \textit{in situ}, he wants to emphasize on the different type of information that these photos hold (secondary), not to confuse them with the work of art represented, and therefore defines them as “\textit{photo-souvenirs}.” That Buren didn’t use his five pages in the catalogue for the documentation of his work underlines the importance of the momentary experience for him, even in its publication, and the applied opportunity to make a point about the framing of conceptual art within the specific context of this exhibition.

Buren wrote his text for \textit{Konzeption} prior to the exhibition and thus didn’t see the other works selected. After the exhibition’s opening, he however decided to rewrite certain aspects of the text that was subsequently translated into English and published in \textit{Studio International}.\textsuperscript{271} As he stressed, “My skepticism in certain respects was proved justified.”\textsuperscript{272} Most of the considerations that he expressed already in his first text were left unchanged, only a few parts are emphasized with additional fragments. In the reprinted text Buren is criticizing the exhibition and different contributions to the exhibition as not consistent with the initial motives for a conceptual art—a denominator that he himself did not feel allied to. He distinguished four (previously three) different meanings/usages of the term conceptual art: 1.) concept = project; 2.) concept = mannerism (concept = verbiage); and 3.) concept = idea = art, of which Buren criticized, and drew “considerations which will serve as a warning…. We can affirm that at least nine-tenth of

\textsuperscript{269} Within Siegelaub’s logic these additional informations to the artists’ contributions can be regarded secondary information.
\textsuperscript{271} Daniel Buren, “Beware!,” \textit{Studio International} vol. 179, no. 920 (March, 1970), pp. 100-104. The additional/revised fragments are italicized and put in between brackets in the text.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., p. 100.
the works gathered together for [the exhibition at Leverkusen] (or its counterparts) [relied on one of the four points] raised above or even, for some people, [partook subtly of all four at once.] They rely on the traditional and ‘evergreen’ in art or, if you like, rely on idealism or utopianism, the original defects which art has not yet succeeded in eradicating.”

Within the specific context in which it was conceived Buren’s essay provided an interesting insight into the selection process of Konzeption, i.e., what has been considered “conceptual art” at the time within a European perspective; examining the contributions in the catalogue Buren’s classification seems applicable in many respects. That the majority of “works” in the catalogue can be placed within the category “concept= project”; proposals to be realized at some point, may be the result of the open question posed to the invited artists to send in their “plans, concepts and photos” as a starting point for the show—although it remains ambiguous whether the plans and concepts that are assembled in the catalogue were equally (re)presented in the physical exhibition. That, as Buren suggests, many of the artists “in their striving after reality become anecdotal [art=mannerism]” and take the pose of a “gardener, scientist, sociologist, philosopher, storyteller, chemist, sportsman,” may not be the most severe defect of the artist’s changing attitude—although Bernard Venet’s weather calculations or Donald Burgy’s body measurements and birth photographs may be a bit confusing in this sense. But the addition to this category that Buren described in the English version of his text, conceptual art that has become “verbiage art”; an excessive and meaningless use of words, is a more explicit critique. In their “attempt to explain to us what a conceptual art would be, could be, or should be,” thus Buren, “[they are] making a conceptual work.”

Indeed artists like Weiner or Kosuth are not explicitly drawing a distinction between their discursive and artistic work, as f.e. LeWitt is doing, interchanging the categories of primary and secondary information as defined by Siegelaub. Further elaborating on this type of conceptual art Buren defines “the most dangerous category . . . concept=idea=art,” in which he recognized a tendency “to take any sort of an ‘idea’, to make art of it and call it ‘concept’ . . . To exhibit a ‘concept’, or to use the word concept to signify art, comes to the same thing as putting the concept itself on a level with the object. This would be to suggest that we must think in terms of a ‘concept-object’—which would

---

273 Ibid.
274 See letter regarding the organization of the exhibition (Stadarchiv Leverkusen, Box 410.1302); Georg Jappe in his review of the show states that many of the works in the show differ from the ones in the catalogue. Jappe 1969.
275 Buren 1970, p. 100.
276 Ibid.
277 Around the time of the Leverkusen exhibition Kosuth published his famous text “Art after Philosophy” in Studio International vol. 179, no. 915 (October, 1969), pp. 134-37, in which he is explicitly emphasizing the fact that the writing on art can be regarded a practice of art.
be an aberration.”

With his summary Buren emphasized that at the time of this exhibition the “category” of conceptual art was already roughly delineated, as well as highly problematized.

After his “warning” Buren is positioning and reflecting on his own work—although the use of the pluralis maiestatis suggests that he is representing a generation of artists. Avoiding the trap of thinking a concept, which he defines an "ideal-object,” to be essentially different than an object, Buren presents a method or framework, which is at the same time questioning its own existence. In doing so, the site in which it is presented becomes a key element. The critic Michel Claura, Buren’s half-brother, is further emphasizing the distinguished position that Buren prescribed himself in a comment published after the Studio International article:

When the first version of the text upon which we are here commenting was published at Leverkusen, it was included in an exhibition entitled ‘Conception’. This exhibition/catalogue relates to a requirement of art in its conceptual form. Buren’s text is a ‘clinical study’ of this proposition. In the context of the exhibition/catalogue the critical aspect of the text was emphasized. In other respects, having already faulted the perfect ordering of the book through the ‘surprising’ content of the text, Buren, in presenting his own proposition, turns the tables on the exhibition, providing ‘something to see’. In this way the conceptual contiguity is broken.

Whether Buren succeeded to overcome the pitfalls described in his catalogue contribution, via this specific catalogue contribution, as Claura suggests, is questionable. The essay was not translated into German or English, like most of the contributions in the catalogue, and the number of readers, or receivers, either of German or other European origin, that would have been able to understand the essence of the text was surely limited. Buren’s contribution nonetheless complicated an unambiguous understanding of the new type of art, as can be concluded from a critic’s comment: “Buren and Sol Lewitt formulate tracts and sentences about ‘Conceptual Art,’ whereas Lewitt restrictively indicates: ‘These sentences comment on art, but are not art.’ In the unnumbered catalogue however, they stand indistinguishably next to the art, sketches, fragments of ideas, photographs.” Through his “intervention” Buren points at the insufficiency in the distinction between

---

278 ibid.
primary and secondary information, not only by his colleague-artists but also by the curators of the exhibition, and is urging the debate on conceptualism.

Buren’s idea of the problematic nature of photo documentation in regard to “conceptual” art was, however, in some respect similar to Fischer’s. In her review of Fischer’s exhibitions Barbara Hess pointed out Fischer’s attitude towards documentation of exhibitions or works presented in exhibitions in comparison to Buren’s idea of the “photo-souvenir.” In an interview with Georg Jappe for Studio International in 1970 Fischer abstained from illustrating his statements with documentation of the exhibitions and projects that he organized (as well as his portrait) because he held these for “random installation photos, things of the past.” Instead, he provided the reproductions of the invitation cards of his gallery, on which the “primary information” of his exhibitions, installation drawings, sketches, descriptions, et cetera were printed. With this point of view Fischer strictly distinguished between the concept and the spatial (temporal) execution of the work—something he nevertheless valued highly.

This principle that Fischer adopted in the invitation cards of his gallery openings was incorporated in the catalogue of Konzeption, and in a way it could be read as an announcement, or advertisement of the works in the show that didn’t necessarily provide the same information. In favor of Buren’s critique on the danger of concepts becoming objects without further consequences, Fischer may not have regarded the exhibition secondary to the catalogue that contains the “original” plans and ideas, as was suggested in the reviews of the exhibition: “As it is presented in Leverkusen, the exhibition is only the highly unnecessary addition to the much more adequate information in the extensive catalogue; besides that the exhibition doesn’t communicate any additional vision.” Or, as another commenter put it even more bluntly: “It is better not to go to Leverkusen, but instead to order the catalogue: it is much more interesting and also more ‘visual.’”

Although the observations that the catalogue was more illustrative than the exhibition may seem correct, the curators still mounted a physical show and they must

---

283 Jappe 1971.
284 Brigitte Kölle claimed that Fischer was very much concerned with the mounting of the exhibition, something that she ascribes him doing in the various shows that he collaborated in. Kölle 2005, pp. 51-52. Fischer stressed that the exhibition is for him the most important test—contrary to the position that artists take through their writings. In this respect he is explicitly criticizing (the texts of) Kosuth, “when he puffs himself up in Studio International, that’s the sort of thing I can’t take.” Jappe 1971, p. 70.
have had a reason for it.\textsuperscript{287} Fischer and Wedewer were more than generally informed about the implications of the type of art they were promoting and it is legitimate to regard the exhibition as a fully complementary part of the enterprise. This can be concluded from the fact that the blue prints of the catalogue were also exhibited in the exhibition, as to illustrate that the “concepts” or “plans” were prior to the exhibition.\textsuperscript{288} Like in Lippard’s Seattle and subsequent “number shows” these documents, which were sent by mail, could provide all the necessary information to mount the physical show. It is therefore inadequate to evaluate the importance of Konzeption merely through the catalogue as exhibition, and essential to analyze how the physical exhibition was installed in correspondence with the catalogue. In the following section of this chapter a reconstruction, as well as an analysis of the exhibition is made in regard to the published newspaper reviews.

\textsuperscript{287} See f.e. Helga Meister: “But even these minimal written or printed little somethings are too much. While concept art is theoretical, not practical. The catalogue, which is more illustrative than the exhibition….” Helga Meister, “Das Ende vom Lied,” \textit{Westdeutsche Zeitung} (November 20, 1969).

\textsuperscript{288} As can be read in one of the reviews: “[t]he galley proofs of the catalogue are mounted on a wall next to the staircase.” Thomas Nehls, “Vor allem wurde viel gelächelt. Zum Ausstellungseröffnung gab’s einen Film,” \textit{Leverkusener Anzeiger} no. 250 (October 28, 1969).
2.3. Where’s the Exhibition?

That conceptual art, according to Wedewer’s notion, would discharge the final execution of the planning sketch to the final work of art—while this last step was considered less important—may be a bit over-simplified. The fact that the conceptual artists conceived a type of art that was not intended to be realized into a final product but consisted in a mental process that could be affected by different “receivers” in different ways, however, frustrated the traditional presentation of art. For the physical presentation of Konzeption within the museum spaces at the Schloss Morsbroich Wedewer and Fischer had to find ways to do justice to the type of work selected, and consequently experiment with formats of exhibition that were yet unknown. In doing so the exhibition encountered quite some misunderstanding, as is cunningly described in a local newspaper: “The question was without irony; the somewhat helplessly wandering man was eager to let himself into the adventure of the youngest art: If they could please tell him where’s the exhibition. That he was in the midst of the exhibition he hadn’t noticed.”

Regarding the standard conditions or formats of visual art exhibitions at the time, Konzeption was rejected by the press, not only “because there wasn’t a single object to be shown,” but moreover because it “renounced the fundamental of an exhibition, that is, to exhibit.” In spite of the skeptical tone that reverberated, the reception of Konzeption provided a critical understanding of conceptual art, which, possibly as a result of this skepticism, did acknowledge conceptual art’s problem of exhibition already at this point. That Wedewer in his interpretation of conceptual art was specifically pointing at its significance as a theoretical art had in this respect complicated the proper validation of the exhibition. One of the more interesting observations at the time stressed that “[T]his first ‘Conception’-exhibition has concurrently also illustrated the borders of this tendency. That too is an important result. . . . In his preface to the catalogue [Wedewer] characterized conceptual art as a theoretical art, with which he has seized the dilemma: concepts are not exposable.”

Daniel Buren’s critical contribution to the catalogue had additionally prompted the critics of the exhibition to regard conceptual art as a problematic category per se.

---

289 Morschel 1969.
292 Stachelhaus 1969. Translation by me.
Georg Jappe, in a more sophisticated review on the exhibition, saw his criticism on the exhibition reflected in Buren’s text. He emphasized the confusion of terminology that is taking place in the exhibition-catalogue, and remarks that “under the slogan ‘Live in your head’ . . . a lot has been thrown in the same box.”293 Referring to Szeemann’s exhibition that in its full title already represented the intellectual aspect of the new type of art, Jappe particularly esteeemed the theoretical potential brought together in Konzeption. Although he considered the art itself to remain underdeveloped, he claimed that the first signs of a new role of art had become apparent, and a new theory had developed: “A concept is not something that one shows, it is not a sketch, but a proposition. In other words: a concept is something that one has and demonstrates through examples. The examples are no objectified commodities but the exemplary of a method. The method is not to innovate the laws of art (like form, color, surface), so not to find a new style, but a new understanding of art, a new self-understanding outside the realm of form—aesthetic responsiveness—a, sale and use.”294

Jappe is the only critic getting to a deeper understanding of the conceptual project, regarding the new artistic “method” a progression to the context of art rather than the autonomous artwork. He nevertheless evaluated the outcome of the theory in a traditional art historical manner or aesthetics, stressing that many of the works merely exemplify a new method of artistic practice instead of actually putting it into practice, and questioning whether the artists will succeed in this. According to Michael Newman it was exactly the “failure” of conceptual art that, in hindsight, made it possible to write its history, which emphasized that within the institutional framework of the museum the broader mission of conceptual art was difficult to realize in any case.295

Had Harald Szeemann in the preparations for When Attitudes Become Form already proclaimed that the gestures of the new type of art he had encountered couldn’t be exhibited; Konzeption nevertheless further scrutinized the boundaries of the exhibitionary format.296 The reference to the exhibition as a “space-catalogue” that was supposed to be comparable to the “catalogue-book” already emphasized the textual

293 Jappe 1969. Jappe, of course, is here referring to Szeemann’s exhibition Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form that took place at the Kunsthalle Bern earlier that year. Translation by me.
294 Ibid.
295 See Michael Newman, “Conceptuele kunst van de jaren zestig tot negentig: Een onaf project?,” Kunst & Museumjournaal vol. 7, no. 1-3, 1996, p. 102. “[H]et succes van het werk kan worden afgemeten aan de mate waarin het zich verzet tegen opname in een historicistisch continuüm, aangezien het de doelstelling van de beste van deze kunst was om een dergelijk continuüm te beëindigen of op te blazen; we zouden dus kunnen stellen dat het alleen te danken is aan die gedeeltelijke mislukking van de ‘beweging’ dat de geschiedenis ervan geschreven kan worden.”
arrangement of the exhibition, and indeed Konzeption was described to be “sober, office-like-, un-meuseum-like.” On the walls of the museum spaces (as well as on tables and floor) indexes, plans and photographs were fixed, “as analysis as well as stories, as questionnaire and diary note, as snapshots and as draft,” or, as a more cynical comment puts it, “loads of English-written letters and ‘nonsense-photos.’” The general characterization of the exhibition seems effectively summarized in the following description: “The total negation of the object, the withdrawal in the head of the artist, the totally subjective, even narcissistic behavior and the expressive romantic gesture of the conceptualists, all this is in Schloss Morsbroich in the form of small notes, letters, instructions, graphic representations and photographs signaled from the walls.”

In comparison to the reception of the exhibitions Op losse schroeven and When Attitudes Become Form, which also received severe criticism, the reception of Konzeption developed a different historical reputation. The criticism on these earlier exhibitions was against an art that was regarded “nothing but upgraded rubbish,” but at least the art that was shown was still object-based, and could be defined as “anti-art.” Konzeption clearly had a different set-up; that there weren’t any regular objects in the exhibition was confusing, and created the impression at the time that there was “nothing to see.” Illuminating in this regard is also that almost none of the reviews of the exhibition were accompanied with photographic material. Interestingly enough, the curators also didn’t make an effort to document the exhibition—in contrast to the huge amount of photographs that Szeemann had generated—, and likely, in regard to Fischer’s attitude, the catalogue was considered the “container” of the primary information, more appropriately representing the artists’ projects than any photographic registration of the spatial configuration would do.

---

297 Meister 1969. Translation by me.
298 Nehls 1969.
299 Stachelhaus 1969.
300 Lambert Tegenbosch, “Op losse schroeven,” de Volkskrant (March 14, 1969). For a closer examination of the reception of these exhibitions see: Steven ten Thije, “‘Op losse schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’: Public Reception in the Netherlands and Switzerland,” in Rattemeyer 2010, pp. 212-219. Because of the different types of art that were brought together in these exhibitions, I wouldn’t define them as conceptual art exhibitions, as is generally done.
302 The poor pictorial representation centers around the work of Keith Arnatt (probably the most pictorial) and two pictures that show a glimpse of the exhibition; a photograph of Marcel Broodthaers reading the catalogue in front of the work of Bochner, and another one (in Der Spiegel) in which a couple of visitors wander around the exhibition (one also seems to be looking in the catalogue or at least reading instead of looking at the works) with in the foreground a work by an unidentifiable artist (work not represented in the catalogue).
303 The remake of the exhibition When Attitudes Become Form at the Prada Foundation in Venice in 2013 included hundreds of photographs of the original exhibition, the exhibition process and the artists involved in the catalogue.
That the curators would have dealt with all the contributions correspondingly; principally not distinguishing between the type of conceptual work, and directly implementing the contributions as such in the exhibition, like they did in the catalogue, would be in line with LeWitt’s dictum “Ideas alone can be works of art.”

According to some of the critics this became the leitmotiv for the exhibition, possibly as a result of the rather dogmatic application of LeWitt’s ”Sentences” as an overture for the artists’ contributions in the catalogue. That the critics generally interpreted conceptual art as the one part of the classical dichotomy of idea and form that is now proclaimed “end product” stressed once more the inadequacy of Siegelaub’s notions of primary and secondary information.

Critic Anna Klapheck acknowledged this confusion, she commented: “There have always been concepts, sketches, and utopian architecture [she is referring to Leonardo da Vinci], though these have generally aimed at eventually being put into practice. For the conceptual artists of today design is the final form, the end product. Designs can be reproduced, photos copied. In this regard the catalogue produced as a guide to the exhibition is close to the exhibition itself.”

LeWitt himself, however, would never have defined the concept the end product, or even considered to exhibit it as such (whereas other artists thought the presentation of the idea to suffice). According to his dictum, “Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist’s mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly,” the proposal would have been executed without further discussion. This is exactly what LeWitt’s contribution to the exhibition included: his proposal or concept that was printed in the catalogue, “Project for Leverkusen”: four squares of 1 m x 1 m with a specific number of lines that were to be drawn on the wall, was realized according to this description.

The consequent realization of the concept-proposition was also applicable to Mel Bochner’s measurement pieces, which were executed in the Leverkusen exhibition spaces as can be concluded from an obscure installation view of the exhibition, which is represented in a single photograph in a local newspaper. But other contributions, such

---

305 In the catalogue’s contents is mentioned “Einführung: Sol LeWitt” [Introduction: Sol LeWitt].
307 Although there are no photographs of this piece at the Leverkusen show it is included in the catalogue of the exhibition L’Art conceptuel show in Paris where it was re-executed. Claude Gintz et al, L’Art conceptuel, une perspective, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1989), p. 209. In this catalogue a reference is made to Sol LeWitt: Wall Drawings 1968-1984, eds. Rudi Fuchs et al, exh. cat. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam/ Eindhoven/ Hartford: Stedelijk Museum/ Van Abbemuseum/ Wadsworth Atheneum, 1984), p. 33, in which the work is also mentioned, although not in exactly the same phrasing and without date.
308 Leverkusener Rundschau (October 24, 1969).
as Adrian Piper's *Relocated Planes, Indoor Series/Outdoor Series*, Victor Burgin's “Leverkusen proposal,” or Bruce Nauman’s concept for a performance piece in two parts (one for the exhibition and one for the catalogue) seem to have had no other manifestation than the proposition in the catalogue. There is, however, a significant difference between contributions by artists like Marcel Broodthaers and Alighiero Boetti, who insisted on the exact publication/exhibition of their letters/proposals, and f.e. Nauman’s proposed performance, of which “the five pages of the book will be publicity photographs of the dancer hired to do my piece with his name affixed.” These precise instructions were obviously ignored since in the catalogue his proposal is printed without the photographic reference—only accompanied by the German translation. Whether Nauman’s proposal for the exhibition, a dancer that was supposed to perform several exercises within a 30-minute timeframe in a room that would be cleared out by museum guards, was actually executed is not clear—it has in any case not been described in one of the reviews.

As Jappe had already pointed out, several of the contributions in the catalogue did not correspond with those in the exhibition. Although it seems only natural that in the eventual installation of the exhibition at some points interpretations of the contributions had to be implemented, this demonstrates that double standards were applied in the spatial exhibition. However, the spatial surroundings were still important to effectively show the work, as is illustrated by Fred Sandback’s *Eight-part Sculpture for Der Grosse Saal*. The room in which it was presented, the south room of the museum (the Spiegelsaal = mirror room), was described “squeamishly empty”, and a typescript on the wall read that the variable proportions of 8 gases (nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, krypton, helium, neon, xenon and argon) were present here: “The following eight proposals exist simultaneously in the same general space. Their content varies, and one or all of them may cease to exist for a time, depending on deviations from normal atmospheric conditions.” Obviously, the reading of this information printed in the catalogue could not provide the experience of the work while reading the same information on the captions within the architecture of the mirror room in Schloss Morsbroich.

Sandback’s piece may have been an exception within the exhibition. More close to artist-projects like Yves Klein’s *The Void* (1958) or Art & Language’s *Air Conditioning Show* (1972), *Eight-part Sculpture for Der Grosse Saal* can be regarded a prelude to the “empty” or “non-” exhibition, in which “dematerialization” was established through the

---

transition of language to architecture. Although the occupancy of space wasn’t explicitly an aspect that the curators of Konzeption intended to implement, it is nevertheless an important aspect of conceptual art. Several works in Konzeption that were described to have “nothing to do with the theme of the exhibition,” because they were not literally transmitting information (that was understood by some critics to be the intention of the curators), were in fact anticipating the theory so precisely described by Wedewer in a spatial configuration, like the series of photographs of industrial architecture by Bernd and Hilla Becher. In that sense the exhibition was giving way to different “lineages” of conceptual art that have only been defined in a historical development of the movement.

It is noteworthy that Konzeption in its historical framing had ignored influences stemming from minimal art. Apart from LeWitt’s seminal text and his contribution to the exhibition, a wall drawing that was included in the catalogue as an instruction, (post-)minimal practices were lacking in the exhibition. Works from artists like Carl Andre and Robert Morris, frequently associated with early conceptual art and included in earlier conceptual projects and shows (f.e. by Siegelaub), were not included. Instead, many of the works in Konzeption were close to Land Art, thus representing the stage that precedes a strict conceptualism following Wedewer’s interpretation: “Because most of the Land Art objects are based in distant places photographs and descriptions must take the place of the object itself.”

The new usage of photography as a registration or documentation of events and constellations that took place outside the exhibition space was correspondingly overly represented. The series of photographs of Keith Arnatt registering the artist in all phases

---

311 For further reading on these exhibitions see John Armleder, Matthieu Copeland et al (eds.), exh. cat. Voids: A Retrospective (Zurich/ Paris: JRP/Ringier/ Centre Pompidou, 2009). Michael Newman claimed that the materialized present and assumed autonomous art object is avoided by the conceptualists through social systems in real time and real space, with the risk that the materialization is shifted from the object to the conditions. Newman 1996.
312 From the modest photographic documentation, as well as the descriptions in the papers, it is clear that the curators had no intention to work on the theme of emptiness.
313 See f.e. Wolfgang Künze, “Die neueste Kunst gibt’s nur als Entwurf,” Leverkusener Rundschau (October 24, 1969). “The museum this time, with the help of the German gallery Konrad Fischer, only specifically wants to inform. But about what really?” Translation by me.
315 Following the descriptions, there were a few pieces in the exhibition, defined “curiosa,” that were still object-based and could refer to minimal art, though it seems that these works were selected at a later moment since they were not included in the catalogue: “On the floor is a white rectangle with a spirit level placed on it and on another spot there is a triangle with a compass affixed to it. In one corner there are black angles whose area decreases towards the top.” Anna Klapheck, “Leverkusen Exhibition of Conceptual Art. Is it a swindle or not a swindle?” The German Tribune (December 9, 1969, originally published in German in Hannoversche Allgemeine, November 14, 1969).
316 Ibid.
of being buried in the sand can be considered most revealing in this sense, since it had been used as a recurring (although sparse) illustration to the reviews. Other works that can be placed within the category of Land Art are Robert Smithson’s Sites Photographed for Ruhr-district Non-Sites, Bruce McLean’s Five Part Landscape Painting, and Hamish Fulton’s landscape photographs. Donald Burley’s walk in Massachusetts, where he had found a stone that was analyzed on its optical, geological and mathematical characteristics, of which the results were captured in a spreadsheet, analysis and photographs, is already taking a step beyond Land Art and introducing conceptualist motives.\(^ {317}\) Jan Baxter’s You Are Now in the Middle of an N.E. THING CO. Landscape (1968-1969), in which a text board is “erected on a site which meets the V.S.I. (Visual Sensitivity Information) qualifications of an N.E. THING CO. Landscape,” can be regarded a decisive link towards conceptual art that “[d]oes away with the concrete point of departure, and . . . does not aim at an available, but possible object. It describes processes and events and is therefore close to the happening.”\(^ {318}\)

Retrospectively, according to Rosalind Krauss’s definition of “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” land art’s relation to (post)minimal art has been outlined, but at the time this relationship was not yet clearly described.\(^ {319}\) The German art historian Klaus Honnef is considering conceptual art, similar to his American contemporaries Lucy Lippard and Ursula Meyer, an outcome of minimal art in his influential anthology of conceptual art from 1971.\(^ {320}\) Fischer, in fact, regarded conceptual art “a by-product of minimal art,” and was also greatly in favor of the American artists.\(^ {321}\) Wedewer’s framing of conceptual art as a consequence of land art could have been prompted by Gerry Schum’s Fernsehgalerie, which broadcasted works from conceptual and land art artists under the title “Land Art” in May 1969.\(^ {322}\) But more importantly, in his embrace of land art Wedewer could place conceptual art within a European tradition of avant-garde art that, in comparison to the American, was less concerned with the denunciation of the object/commodification.

\(^ {317}\) Meister 1969.
\(^ {320}\) Klaus Honnef, Concept Art (Cologne: Phaidon Verlag, 1971). This book has been very influential in the reception of conceptual art both in Germany and the Netherlands. Remarkably, according to Lynda Morris, Honnef has credited Fischer for his collaboration on the “book.” See: Morris, “Unconcealment,” in Richard 2009. p. 20. Clearly, however, Honnef is referring to the catalogue of Documenta 5, in which he had written the introductory text to the section he had organized together with Fischer. His book Concept Art had already been published the year before and was probably the reason that Zeemann had invited Honnef to collaborate on Documenta 5.
\(^ {322}\) On 28 March 1969 at 21:00 Schum’s Fernsehgalerie, with works by Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibberts, Barry Flanagan, Mike Heizer, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson, was “opened” on the Sender Freies Berlin (Studio C, Kaiserdamm 77, Berlin) with an inaugural speech by Jean Leering.
The European embedding of conceptual art could have been an important
motivation for this first survey in Germany. Art practices developing in the United States
had been growing stronger since the late 1950s, and it was only few years ago that the
most prestigious exhibition in the world, the Venice Biennale, had proclaimed an
American to be the most emerging artist of the exhibition by awarding Robert
Rauschenberg the Grand Prize of Painting in 1964. The turmoil that this award had
generated in a way affirmed that the leading position of European culture and art
worldwide was declining. Especially in Germany the anxiety against the American
recuperation was strong. When Fischer was preparing Prospect 69 in Düsseldorf with a
large selection of American galleries he was asked: "Would an exhibition like "Prospect"
not strongly invigorate the dominance of the American art—which we could certainly
articulate. And would this not be to the disadvantage of the German art dealers, and the
German artists that are represented by them?" In his disapproving response Fischer
emphasized on the aspect that he wanted to inform about a young generation of avant-
garde artists of which the prices were relatively low:

Obviously, that can also be very beneficial, when the collectors will see that there
are maybe more interesting things to have at other places—or something. But that
can only be of use for the German art dealers as to involve themselves with better
quality. It is indeed illusive that Europeans should travel to the United States and
buy there, since the flight would automatically cost twice as much, because travel,
transport, insurance et cetera are included. Otherwise that would be the task of the art
dealer; to buy in the United States, not just one piece, but a whole stock, or a
few exhibitions, to be delivered in just one flight.

If Fischer was engaged to bring American and European influences and artists
together, Wedewer insisted on the European pre-history of the new art first ascribed to
the U.S. interestingly, Jappe, in his critical review of the exhibition, also contributed to

325 Das kann natürlich auch sehr vorteilhaft sein, wenn plötzlich die Sammler sehen, dass woanders doch vielleicht noch interessantere Sachen zu haben sind oder so. Aber das würde ja nur dem deutschen Kunsthändler nützen, sich mit bessere Qualität einzudecken. Dass Europäer nach Amerika gehen und da einkaufen, ist ja doch recht illusorisch, da der Reise sich ja automatisch verdoppeln würde, da darin Fahrten, Transporte, Versicherungen usw. sind, was ja sonst Aufgabe des Kunsthändlers ist, in Amerika einzukaufen, nicht nur eins, einen ganzen Schock (stock?) oder einige Ausstellungen mit einer Fahrt besorgen usw. Ibid. Translation by me.
326 Richard mentions that the collaboration between Fischer and Wedewer didn’t go well, and that at the end of the show Fischer decided not to work again with the museum director. Although she refers to the letters sent by artists.
the differentiation of the European and American artists.\textsuperscript{327} When he described the works in the exhibition, despite the intentions of the artists, as "pre-artistic snooping and stammering," he adds that "[E]specially the American artists seem in their newborn personal meditation to have trouble to distinguish between subjective and private."\textsuperscript{328} Nonetheless, in its physical installation Fischer and Wedewer’s European overview of conceptual art shows quite a few similarities with Lippard’s exhibition \textit{557,087}, and could even be considered its European counterpart. It is therefore useful to analyze to what extent the exhibition in Leverkusen has drawn from American influences, and if so, whether Fischer’s method of work has been defining for the execution of \textit{Konzeption}.

\textsuperscript{327} Possibly, Jappe and Wedewer had been in contact about the theoretical framework of the exhibition while Wedewer in his introduction mentions to follow a “formula” by Jappe.

\textsuperscript{328} Jappe 1969. Translation by me.
2.4. The Exhibition as (Free) Publicity

The ironical comment from a press review that “[M]useum directors can look forward to see themselves enabled to mount an exhibition without paying for the costs of transport, insurance and security,” in fact positively corresponded with the new practices in exhibition-making. Operating the idea of dematerialization, Lippard in her suitcase exhibitions was particularly concerned with “doing more with less”—and applied a socio-economical principle within the production processes of public exhibitions. This was prompted by the different, more intellectual, position that the artists had taken, which stipulated the detachment of the production process and the role of the public to be more participatory or democratized. In comparison Siegelaub’s efforts were more specifically focused on the broad distribution of the work of his artists to the “multitudes,” encouraging a new system of compensation, not so much in the financial appreciation of the end product, but in the intellectual work that the artist had done.

Theoretically, these ideological aspects were also recognized in the show in Leverkusen, but within the traditional context of the museum they could hardly be realized. Museum director Wedewer was certainly not drawing the conclusions from his intellectual framing of the new art, and Fischer, although personally affiliated to many of the artists, was less politically engaged than his American colleagues. Nonetheless, it was probably Fischer who could be held responsible for the final installation of the show in Leverkusen, while his commitment to the artists and the installation of their work has been frequently described. Also, he declared himself in favor of making museum shows: “Perhaps I’m not an ordinary art dealer. I’m not interested in this whole gallery business. I want to convey information, to show an artist’s work; I couldn’t care less where I do it. I have never put a notice in a paper. I’d rather do museum exhibitions which are linked with my name.”

Fischer had never deliberately presented himself as a curator, and neither had he consciously developed a curatorial method, but he had very specific ideas about how to

---


330 Various letters were sent by the artists to the museum in Leverkusen, long after the exhibition had closed, requesting to receive catalogues or the fees for the participation in the show. The director seemed to have no knowledge of fees. Stadtarchiv Leverkusen.

331 See f.e. Lynda Morris who described that Fischer was the only one present during the installation of When Attitudes Become Form in the ICA in London. Sezemann was not able to come and also Charles Harrison, who was the co-curator of the London show was not there. Richard 2009.

position his artists within the art scene of the time. The nonchalant attitude that he demonstrated in the above statement suggests that his success as an art dealer is a fortuitous consequence rather than a predetermined strategy, but this precise behavior should not be underestimated. With his sophisticated method of work Fischer had actually been as effective in the promotion of his artists as Siegelaub was considered to have been. Since he started to represent the work of artists like Carl Andre, Jan Dibbets, Richard Long and Bruce Nauman in 1967 he developed a precise strategy that would secure these artists’ positions within the professional art circuit.

Fischer came across the work of the minimal artists while still working as an artist himself, and was intrigued by the clear, objective or even ascetic characteristics that were so contrary to the pop-like work he and his Düsseldorf colleagues Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter were making in the early/mid 1960s. His basic idea was to bring international artists to Düsseldorf—essentially those who were not yet known in Germany, or more generally in Europe: “I... came upon what was brand-new and currently on view in America and had connections to Europe as well. That was at first an external criterion, but I was convinced of the quality of what I saw there. I was lucky that nobody had done this before.”

Being very keen to select and work with artists who were not yet represented by other galleries (“that wouldn’t have brought us any further”) Fischer made clever use of the limited means he had at the time, and invited artists, instead of transporting their artworks, to produce these at the site of his gallery. This method was more close to the process-based, in situ work of the minimal and conceptual artists and cheaper than transporting and insuring the works. It was also important for Fischer to meet the artists in person before working with them; to have a good understanding between them—to

---

333 Kaspar König, in a conversation with Brigitte Kölle, says about Fischer “He always conveyed the impression that he had nothing to do. As if everything was running on its own. He always did so with great efficiency and intelligence, while acting as if it had appeared from nowhere.” Kölle 2007, p. 91.
335 Fischer had started his gallery focusing on (post) minimal art in 1967, soon after Paul Maenz’s exhibition-event “Dies alles herzchen wird einmal dir gehören” [Some day sweetheart all this will be yours] in which he participated as an artist under his mother’s maiden name Lueg. This exhibition-event, held at the Dorothea Loehr gallery in Frankfurt in both the interior and exterior spaces of the former stables, included ephemeral works by Jan Dibbets, Barry Flanagan, Bernard Höke, John Johnson, Richard Long, and Charlotte Posenenske. The temporality of the project was underlined by including the opening hours in the title: 19:45-21:55, September 9, 1967.
337 Kaspar König stated that: “[if] an artist had already exhibited elsewhere, Konrad was no longer interested. He wanted to be the first one and to have direct contact with the artists.” in Richard 2009, p. 62. This quote, supposedly taken from an interview by Kölle conducted with König, is surprisingly lacking in the interview referred to. The gallery space at the Neubrückstrasse, where Fischer started, was actually an archway between two houses that was closed up with doors on both sides. The space was only 11 by 3 meters, and according to several artists a challenge to use as a starting point for their work. See f.e. Bruce Nauman interview, Kölle 2007, p. 18.
talk with them and drink beer in Düsseldorf—was a more decisive factor in the partnership than the quality of the work, as he once stated:

If I haven’t met the artist and I don’t like him, I do not exhibit him. Occasionally, I do exhibitions with artists to see whether I like their work over a longer period of time. Only after a month do I know whether their work appeals to me, and sometimes the relationship peters out. Sometimes, the reason that some artists only exhibit once is that we didn’t get along too well. It doesn’t always have to do with their art. If you don’t get along well, you don’t have to keep on trying.338

Once Fischer decided to affiliate with the artists of his choice, he however strongly committed to them. The close relationship with his artists is illustrated by the fact that all of them, when in Düsseldorf, stayed in Fischer’s private apartment. Besides saving money on expensive hotels he thus had the chance to get to know them on a personal level.339 In his very particular manner to associate with them, generally as an artist amongst artists, he was constantly on the lookout for possibilities that would provide them with the highest visibility. In an interview in 1989 he recalls his motivations: “It is very important for me to look after my artists, especially so that they can exhibit in other galleries. Of course not in Cologne, that’s too near, I wouldn’t like that, but in Milan, London, Munich. And then it’s important that they get into museums!”340

In order to get his artists abroad Fischer established a network of likeminded galleries, both in Europe and the United States, such as Heiner Friedrich in Munich, Gian Enzo Sperone in Turin, and Dwan Gallery in New York, with which he shared the expenses for the tours, and in some cases also the commission on sales.341 In developing this network of galleries devoted to conceptualism, the launch of Prospect 68, held from 20-29 September 1968 at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, had contributed significantly. As a reaction to the Cologne Kunstmarkt, which opened in 1967, and in which he was not invited to participate, Fischer organized together with the art critic Hans Strelow an alternative art fair / exhibition, more subtly announced as an “international preview of art from the

---

341 Köle f.e. writes that Fischer made his first three-week trip to New York from 27 March to 19 April 1968. The at the time expensive costs for the flight were shared with gallerist Heiner Friedrich, who could also benefit from Fischer’s research and studio visits to the artists represented by him. Köle 2005, p. 49.
avant-garde galleries.”342 A jury or committee, including important art professionals like Enno Develing, Pontus Hultén and Martin Visser, selected sixteen, mainly European galleries to participate.343 Remarkably, Fischer himself was not selected, possibly because he was also the organizer of the event. The event was however a great success: with 15,000 visitors, among which important figures in the conceptual art scene like Johannes Cladders en Harald Szeemann, the opportunity for the new galleries to extent their commercial interest must have been substantial.

Next year’s Prospect 69, taking place from September 30 to October 12 1969, could be regarded even more successful because of the participation of many “international” galleries—about half of the sixteen participating galleries was American.344 Like the year before the selection of the galleries was made by a jury/committee of important art professionals with the difference that this time the artists were selected prior to the galleries.345 Because of this focus the art fair was more exclusively positioned as an exhibition.346 At the opening of Prospect 69 Harald Szeemann, seated in the selection committee, held a inimitable speech in which he gave a critical reflection on the milieu of contemporary art, which he described as “the triangle studio – gallery – collection + museum.”347 He emphasized on the role of the museum to credit the

342 The “exhibition catalogue” of Prospect 68, more like a publicity hand-out, had the subtitle: “Katalog-Zeitung zur internationalen Vorschau auf die Kunst in den Galerien der Avantgarde.” Archiv Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

343 The participating galleries were: Apollinaire (Milan), Axiom (London), Bischofberger (Zürich), Iris Clerc (Paris), Dwan (New York), Mathias Fels & Cie (Paris), Robert Fraser (London), Kasmin Limited (London), Yvon Lambert (Paris), Del Naviglio (Milan and Venice), Ileana Sonnabend (Paris), Sperone (Turin), Rieke Swart (Amsterdam), M.E. Thelen (Essen), Wide White Space (Antwerp), and René Ziegler (Zürich). Other members of the selection committee were museum director Paul Wember, art critics Alan Bowness and Kurt Meyer, and private collector Hubert Peeters.

344 Participating galleries were: ACE (Los Angeles), Art & Project (Amsterdam), l’Attico (Rome), Eugenia Butler (Los Angeles), Bykert (New York), Dwan (New York), Fischbach (New York), Toni Gerber (Bern), Yvon Lambert (Paris and Milan), Mickery (Loenersloot), Seiquer (Madrid), Ileana Sonnabend (Paris), Sperone (Turin), Wide White Space (Antwerp), Howard Wise (New York), Seth Siegelaub (New York).

345 The jury included José Luis de Castillejo, Martin Visser, Michel Claura, Enno Develing, Jasia Reichardt, Paul Wember, Harald Szeemann. The participating artists were: Robert Barry, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lynda Benglis, Joseph Beuys, Alighiero Boetti, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Cooper, Darboven, Dibbets, Griffa, Gronen, Michael Heizer, Hidalgo, Huebler, Kosuth, Kounellis, Lamelas, LeWitt, Long, Mattiacci, Marchetti, Marden, Ohlson, Oppenheim, Penone, Prentice, Prini, Raetz, Ross, Rutzenbeck, Ryman, Schnyder, Smithson, Toroni, Weiner, and Wheeler.

346 Deputy director Jürgen Harten noted in a radio interview that the selection committee made a selection of artist names first and after this the corresponding galleries were approached to participate. This procedure was followed to avoid that the galleries would have too much exposure/authority and the exhibition could also be experienced as a real exhibition. Deutschlandfunk 1969.

347 Harald Szeemann, opening speech Prospect 69, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf (IV 29367). Szeemann was invited by Jürgen Harten to host a “more serious” opening event instead of the free jazz and beat opening of the previous edition “to avoid massive overcrowding”. He was asked for a critical comment to “the situation of contemporary art in museums and galleries”.

Harten in a letter to Szeemann, September 5, 1969, Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf (IV 29367).
actions of conceptualist artists: “It is foremost important that they are realized, that they take place in a museum, either financed by taxpayers or private persons. This will give them the character of publicness and at the same time the irrationality of artistic events.” According to Szeemann the museums could bring artists something that the galleries could not, which he defined as “consecration.”

If not already, Fischer would certainly have understood at this moment the importance of the show he was organizing in Leverkusen, and the question is how he proceeded with this information. From March 25 to April 9, 1969 Fischer made a trip to New York where he met several gallerists, artists and other contacts cooperative in the furthering of Prospect 69, as well as his gallery practice. Presumably, this trip would also have been of use for Konzeption, but there are no records that confirm this. What is more, although Fischer met Siegelaub in New York, he only wrote to him and Lippard on July 11, 1969 to ask for advice how to set up a “documentary-oriented exhibition.” It thus seems that at the time of his New York visit he was not yet involved in or engaged with the Leverkusen exhibition. It could be that Fischer, like in earlier projects, was first consulted for his expertise and only later extended this role, but the lack of reference to Konzeption in his personal records nevertheless suggests that this exhibition had not his priority at the time.

After his collective endeavor with Wedewer in Leverkusen, Fischer had in any case managed to establish a position as (co-)curator and was increasingly involved in museum projects and exhibitions on conceptual art (in Germany). The highlight was, no doubt, his participation in Documenta 5 in 1972 where he organized together with Klaus Honnef a section of the exhibition devoted to conceptual art titled Idee + Idee/Licht. Fischer’s expertise on conceptual art was, again, the reason he was asked to collaborate, as Honnef recalls: “[M]y feeling was that I could still learn a few things and I opted to work with Fischer.” Apparently, at the time there were no objections for the ambiguous position that Fischer had manoeuvred himself into, but by then he had about consummated his strategy: According to Honnef Documenta 5 has been fundamental for the individual careers of the conceptual artists that started shortly after.

348 Ibid. Szeemann speaks more specifically about a “Kunsthaus.” Translation by me.
349 Ibid.
350 Richard 2009, p. 97. There’s no record of Siegelaub’s and Lippard’s response.
351 Harald Szeemann wanted to include a conceptual art section in his Documenta 5 (1972) but wasn’t particularly interested in this type of art and invited Honnef to do it, who asked Fischer to collaborate since he considered him to be the expert on conceptual art. Honnef himself says that Szeemann had invited him to do the section with Fischer.
353 Ibid., p. 448.
In his analysis of the strategies that Siegelaub implemented when developing new formats for the exhibition of conceptual art, Alexander Alberro already suggested that it was exactly the distribution of information that eventually "sold" the work.\(^{354}\) Also Fischer was well aware of this principle when he stated: "[T]he capital, as far as the artist and I are concerned, is the publicity. What’s important for me is not how to sell things but how to get information across to those who are interested, so that in due course the artists I represent get somewhere, and people say, ‘Fischer got the right man.’"\(^{355}\) Fischer’s comment on “the capital is the publicity” corresponds with Alberro’s notion that within the emergent art marketplace of the 1960s it became irrelevant to distinguish between positive or negative criticism because they both add to the same result: “[T]he passage directs attention to the shift during this decade from serious intellectual critique and analysis to the crucial importance of publicity.”\(^{356}\)

Thus, the general opinion of misunderstanding, or the critical press review about his conceptual art show, was of little importance to Fischer. The publicity generated by the negative reception of Konzeption would nevertheless contribute to its subsequent success.\(^{357}\) Moreover, supplement to the production of publicity, Fischer understood that, for the broad distribution of his artists, it was important to get them into the official canons of art.\(^{358}\) With the mounting of a large historical show in an important museum for contemporary art he had brought the type of art he was representing under the attention of an international network of avant-garde art professionals and collectors, and favorably placed himself in the midst of the discourse.\(^{359}\)


\(^{356}\) Alberro 2003, Alberro adds that within this atmosphere a new type of dealer emerged, one who had to appeal to collectors but maintain a distance from them at the same time.

\(^{357}\) Szeemann had already pointed out in his diary of the preparations for When Attitudes Become Form “at least the exhibition will provide with lots of material for discussion (in the papers).” Szeemann in exh. cat. Op losse Schroeven (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1969), n. p.

\(^{358}\) This notion might have been stipulated by the German economist Willi Bongard, who first published his “Kunstkompass,” a ranking system for artists, in 1971 in the German magazine Art Aktuell. In his “objective” calculations of a “top 100” Bongard was specifically focused on the network surrounding the artists (exhibitions in important international galleries and museums, as well as publications and reviews in important art magazines and journals), and the system of art in general. It might also be that Bongard for his ranking system had drawn from Fischer’s practice as a curator/dealer.

\(^{359}\) This might actually been a much more important drive for him than commercial transactions, which were nevertheless a lucrative outcome of his efforts. Sophie Richard’s study on the European network of conceptual art shows the role Fischer has had in the distribution of conceptual art throughout Europe and the financial benefits that he earned, having about a quarter of the market of public institutions. See Richard 2009.
2.5. Conclusion

On the one hand the choice of the curators of Konzeption to present the new so-called “conceptual” type of art principally in a catalogue-book was similar to the exhibition format of conceptual art that Siegelaub initiated the year before. On the other hand Fischer’s and Wedewer’s format differed in a few crucial aspects with Siegelaub’s; not so much in its physical (re)presentation—after The Xerox Book Siegelaub made several spatial exhibitions that he defined “a guide to the catalogue”—but moreover in its traditional, art historical aspect of categorization. In contrast to Siegelaub’s explicit rejection of the museum, focusing on places outside this dominating institution, Fischer and Wedewer were explicitly framing the new art tendency within the context of the museum. As a result, following Rosalind Krauss’s definition of historicization, that “[t]he new is made comfortable by being made familiar, since it is seen as having gradually evolved from the forms of the past,” conceptual practices had been diminished from its newness and mitigated its differences to fit into an art historical category.

In bringing together artists that shared the same principles, Konzeption can be interpreted a first attempt to art historically explain conceptual art, actually defining it as a “movement”—paradoxically conflicting with the motivations that urged the conceptualist venture in the first place. But it was also exactly this strategy, which Fischer had meticulously carried out, that had distributed conceptual art amongst a large audience and several important museum collections. That this principle was more important at the time than the curatorial dilemma of exhibiting conceptual art seems to be a fact, but Fischer was nevertheless committed to a proper installation of the works. Although he did not specifically describe or document his methodology of work, it is known that he valued the spatial aspect of art, and that he was committed with the artists to install the physical show. That the direct exchange with the artists is crucial to the installment of conceptual art within a spatial exhibition is a case in point, although at the same time this may seem to contrast the primarily information-based character of conceptual art.

---

361 Krauss 1979, p. 277.

Historical objectification ought to be sped up while there is still a collective experience and memory which can assist in the clarity of an analysis while, simultaneously, opening up a space to ask fundamental questions regarding history-making.—Michael Asher363

3.1. A First Retrospective on Conceptual Art

In the same year in which the renowned exhibition Les magiciens de la terre was shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a retrospective exhibition on conceptual art opened at the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris (ARC) on November 22, 1989.364 In a cultural climate that centered on the topic of post-colonialism, and twenty years after conceptual art had reached its peak, the exhibition L’art conceptuel, une perspective seemed out of place.365 As the French critic Ghislain Mollet-Viéville commented: “A retrospective on a movement that flourished in the late ’60s and early ’70s might seem a bit premature, if not downright presumptuous, and some are sure to object that it is too early to grasp the import of such recent history.”366 It was however not without a reason that ARC had mounted a large retrospective at this specific moment: most of conceptual art’s protagonists were still alive at the time the exhibition was conceived, and the organizers were of opinion that the complex movement of conceptual art would shed light on issues that contemporary artists continued to explore.367 Director Suzanne Pagé had invited art historian and critic Claude Gintz to elaborate a project “concerning as the

364 The exhibition ran in Paris until February 18, 1990, and was subsequently shown at Caja de Pensiones Madrid (March – April 1990), the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg (May – July 1990), and the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (August 5 – October 21, 1990).
367 Mollet-Viéville 1989, p. 100.
coalescence, at a particular moment, of a trend (initiated by Duchamp) toward the conceptualization of the visual arts.” 368 Gintz, in turn, had chosen for Benjamin Buchloh to be his “partner in crime” in the conception of the project, which had potentially stirred up the discussions; Buchloh’s seminal essay “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” first published in the catalogue of the Paris exhibition, generated considerable controversy among the protagonists of conceptual art.369

Michael Newman has argued that the history of conceptual art was built up in the period between L’art conceptuel, une perspective in 1989-90, and another important exhibition on conceptual art, Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975, curated by Anne Rorimer and Ann Goldstein at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1995-96.370 Moreover, I would argue, Gintz's exhibition in Paris has largely instigated the historicization of conceptual art, particularly through the discourse that was produced in the catalogue, and prolonged in October journal by Buchloh, Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub. In this respect the catalogue has become more significant than the exhibition, which is consistent with the set-up of the project. Gintz mainly concentrated on the theorization of the project and the selection of the artists and works, which is reflected in the catalogue, whereas ARC curator Juliette Laffon arranged the organization and installation in the museum spaces.371 Although the focus on the catalogue fits the conceptual format of presentation, it is significant to explicate to what extent the curation of L’art conceptuel differs from the exhibition practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Newman stressed the fundamental paradox that is faced when approaching works of conceptual art in a contemporary perspective: “The success of conceptual art can be measured according the amount of resistance against its adoption in the historical continuum, given the fact that the intention of the greatest of these works was to end or demolish this continuum, and it is thus partly thanks to the failure of the ‘movement’ that

371 Conversation with Gintz, Paris, December 3, 2011. In a letter that had been sent to the artists selected for the show, Pagé wrote: “[the exhibition] will show the works of about thirty artists which have been selected by Claude Gintz; the realisation will be implemented by Juliette LAFFON curator at the Museum.” Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9)
its history can be written.”

Referring to the typical remains of the conceptual endeavor that are captured in authentic typewritten documents, Newman’s statement is emphasizing the curatorial approach of L’art conceptuel. Conceived as a historical undertaking the exhibition focused on the discourse of conceptual art rather than the problems this provoked for the making of an exhibition, and ignored the dilemma of how to exhibit conceptual artworks that have become art documentation. The fact that the exhibition was executed as a classical, rather modernist museum presentation brings about an interesting dialectic in L’art conceptuel: while historicizing the period of conceptual art by means of a selection of “autonomous” artworks, the ephemeral projects that lay at the root of this period were in a way transformed into commodified objects. This aspect of the exhibition has been noted in the sparse review of the exhibition but did not lead to further conclusions regarding the condition of conceptual artworks. In contrast to the initial publishing practices of conceptual artists, concerned with the exhibition of “primary information” in a catalogue format, the exhibition and catalogue of L’art conceptuel were compiled traditionally art historical, without the direct participation of the artists. A selection of representative work was made by the curator, after which the “original” works were loaned from different private and museum collections, and in a few cases directly from the artists. It was however in the organization and installation of the exhibition that the direct interaction with the artists elucidated the complexities of an endeavor as to exhibit “primary” works of conceptual art within a spatial-temporal (re)configuration. This can be determined through the correspondence with the artists about the execution of their works in the exhibition, for example the project that was proposed by Michael Asher. The efforts that are made by both Asher and museum staff to find a proper format to fit Asher’s critique on a conceptual art retrospective into the exhibition are more significant than the final result, and illustrate that the institutional framework was the preferred place for conceptual discourse.

---

373 As Newman stated: “The historical distance of conceptual art to the present becomes visible in a manner that could not have been foreseen at the time; by the peculiar sight of the frames, instructions and documents made on old-fashioned typewriters, on which the typed errors were corrected with typex or simply disregarded.” Ibid. Translation by me.
374 The exhibition, after its first presentation in Paris, had only been sparsely reviewed. By the time the exhibition was opened in Montreal it had met much more response in the papers. Especially Thomas Wulffen in Kunstforum International, and John Bentley Mays in the Globe and Mail addressed the “object-status” of many works in the exhibition. Siegelaub criticized the inert presentation of L’art conceptuel, remarkably more than ten years after the exhibition took place. In Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Interview with Seth Siegelaub,” 24th International Biennale of Graphic Arts (Ljubljana: International Centre of Graphic Arts, 2001), p. 220.
375 I base these assumptions on the extensive examination of the exhibition’s archive in the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris and my conversation with Gintz.
As the first prominent and extensive retrospective on conceptual art after its historical momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, *L’art conceptuel* was explicitly confronted with the problem of re-exhibiting conceptual works of art. In this respect this exhibition presents several indicating curatorial decisions relating to the problematic I have presented in the first chapter, which requests the precise analysis of how this project has dealt with the specific paradox of historicizing conceptual art.

In the re-evaluation of, respectively, catalogue and exhibition I will explain that the discussions surrounding *L’art conceptuel* focused on the historical and theoretical aspects of conceptual art whereas the curatorial aspects have been largely neglected. Notwithstanding the affirmation of a “discursive turn” in both artistic and curatorial practice, this turning point is also, or primarily defined by the questions that conceptual artists posed to the format or framework of the exhibition, i.e. institution. The traditional art historical, object-based approach, however, still prevailed in the historical definition of conceptual art, while the discursive aspects that are captured in the residue “materials” of its projects remained unrecognized. That the exhibition problematized the historical validation of conceptual artworks is illustrated in the discussions surrounding the installation of *L’art conceptuel*. It is in these discussions that the crux of my thesis becomes most visible, as well as the necessity to include these exhibition histories into the broader field of art history in order to persist in expanding the field of curatorial studies.

---

376 Residue materials can, apart from actual work, contain anything from artist’s instructions, notes, (published) texts, correspondence about works in exhibitions, interviews, and photographic/ documentary material of previous installation of works.
3.2. The Exhibition as Historicizing Venture

Although L'art conceptuel has been received as a perspective on conceptual art from the specific viewpoint of curator Gintz, defining the place of conceptual art a continuing object of discussion, there were a few principles that had been determined a priori. The intention of director Pagé focused around questioning the contemporary implications of re-activating an artistic practice based on 'ideas,' which had been criticizing or even rejecting traditional museum structures. As she stated in the preface of the catalogue: "What might be indicated by showing works which, through 'dematerialization,' have been constructed explicitly to escape the grasp of institutions and the conditions of 'objects'?" Pagé also emphasized the fact that it was Europe that first recognized conceptual art, and that it is now once again in Europe that a re-evaluation of conceptual art, of which its principal protagonists are American, was initiated. These grandiloquent proclamations underline that it was of great importance for the museum to position itself within the international discourse of conceptual art and to claim a first historicization of the "movement."  

That this historicization was primarily done by means of the catalogue seemed to be prescribed by Pagé as well: "Given the importance of language in the works, the catalogue is particularly important in the case of conceptual art. Juliette Laffon and Angeline Scherf worked closely with Claude Gintz to analyze the works as rigorously as possible. They were very aware that they were contributing to the history of the movement. The goal was to present different viewpoints, and to confront them with the artists’ explanations of their work." Hence, the framework for the conceptualization and production of the exhibition, as well as Gintz’s role in it, were clearly delineated. Gintz nevertheless stressed that he had not felt limited by the director's guidelines; his engagement had been an open question and he was given a free hand in his approach and the selection of artists and works. It was his conviction to show that conceptualism influenced many artists, a positioning that Pagé appreciated: "That’s why we did not limit the exhibit to the movements most famous exponents."  

---

378 This is confirmed through an interview with Pierre Landry in which Laffon declared: "In the past few years, there have been major retrospective exhibitions devoted to some of the artists present in this exhibition. . . . There was also the exhibition Art Conceptuel I organized by CAPC in Bordeaux in 1988, but the intention there was different than ours. . . . As far as I know, there have been no other attempts in Europe or the U.S." Pierre Landry, "L’Art conceptuel, une perspective. An Interview with Claude Gintz and Juliette Laffon," Le journal du Musee d’art contemporain de Montreal vol. 1, no. 2 (July/ August, 1990), n.p.
379 Mollot-Viéville 1989, p. 103.
380 Ibid., pp. 101-102.
In accordance with Pagé, Gintz stressed that the catalogue was particularly important to him. Conventionally, the format of a catalogue-book fits a historicizing endeavor better than a museum show; in the case of conceptual art the focus on the catalogue was even more obvious because of the fact that these artists used the format of the catalogue as a site of exhibition. The transmission of “primary information,” paramount to the conceptual period, was however not adapted as a format for the catalogue of L’art conceptuel. Rather, the format was based on a classical exhibition catalogue, in which all the selected works in the exhibition were included, alphabetically listed by artist’s name, and accompanied by short descriptions, ample photographic documentation and individual exhibition histories. What is more, the thorough art historical essays that were included, next to the ones by Gintz and Buchloh texts by Charles Harrison, Gabriele Guercio, Seth Siegelaub and Robert C. Morgan, emphasize that the historical framing of conceptual art surpassed the intention to make a public exhibition.

In his catalogue text Gintz takes the categorization of conceptual art as the outline for his exhibition: “The very title of this exhibition—‘Conceptual Art: A Perspective’—raises the question of those limits within which such an exhibition should be contained. By which criteria may we determine what actually comprises Conceptual Art?” 381 In his theorization on this question Gintz discussed the positions of a number of artists that he considered “proto-conceptual,” like Dan Graham and Robert Morris, but even earlier European progenitors like Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein. He also discussed several exhibitions, which he considered to be conceptual, such as Siegelaub’s January 31, 1969 and Summer Show (July, August, September 1969), Szeemann’s When Attitudes Become Form, Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer’s Konzeption-Conception, and, with regard to the French context in which L’art conceptuel was conceived, the Paris 18 IV 70 exhibition by Michel Claura—held at a temporary space on Rue Mouffetard in Paris, and accompanied by a trilingual publication (in English, French, and German). 382 Gintz does not further elaborate the conceptual characteristics of these exhibitions; rather, through a selection of artists who participated in these exhibitions, he problematized the strict demarcation of conceptual art.

In his intention to provide a broader perspective on conceptual art Gintz emphasized the influence of European artists, such as Stanley Brouwn’s early conceptualist practices in the city of Amsterdam, as well as the interventions of Daniel Buren—although he eventually considered the latter outside the realm of purely conceptualist art. The work of Hans Haacke, according to Gintz, echoes the discourse generated by Buren, but unlike Buren his visual language is more related to that of “pure” conceptualist artists. Since Gintz in his essay generally focused on the positions/strategies of specific artists, the wide-ranging “network of conceptual art” is not further explored. The role that European galleries, such as Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, Gian Enzo Sperone in Turin, and Art & Project in Amsterdam had on the exhibition, distribution, and subsequent reception of conceptual art in Europe, as well as the influence of earlier exhibitions and events in Europe with conceptual artists, such as Paul Maenz’s 19:45-21:55, September 9th, 1967, Frankfurt, Germany at the Dorothea Loehr Gallery in Frankfurt (the title represents the exact information of the event), are not mentioned. Apparently, the relations between artists, galleries and curators and the importance of their correlated interests was not yet a point of reference in 1989.

In his selection of conceptual works for the exhibition Gintz had invited several artists that fall outside the categorization of conceptual art as defined in his catalogue text. On request, in a conversation that I held with him, he declared that he invited these artists to complement the European picture: “I wouldn’t have asked Bernard Venet, or Opalka if I had to decide purely by myself. They were invited because they were European artists and considered active in conceptual practices.” Whereas in his catalogue essay Gintz was clearly delimitating conceptual art, in the compilation of his exhibition he was inclined to classify more in terms of a general conceptualism represented by different groups of artists: “I don’t think you can lean long to a strict sense of conceptual art when you are speaking of visual art. It is more the moment in the artistic discourse than anything else.”

This historical momentum is extensively analyzed in Buchloh’s essay “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique,” that can be considered the first

---

383 In my conversation with Gintz, he eventually considered only very little artists to be “pure conceptualists,” besides Stanley Brouwn, Ian Wilson, and Michael Asher. Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
384 The exhibition is better known under its subtitle, Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören [Some Day Sweetheart All This Will Be Yours]. The participating artists were Jan Dibbets, Konrad (Fischer) Lueg, Charlotte Posenenske, Peter Roehr, Barry Flanagan, Bernhard Höke, John Johnson, and Richard Long. See: Sophie Richard, Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77, Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections, ed. Lynda Morris (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), pp. 53-68.
385 Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
386 Ibid.
effort to art-historically frame conceptual art. Like Gintz, Buchloh regards conceptual art as a reductionist structuralism that transpositions the object into an empty (linguistic) signifier, a process that had been prefigured by Duchamp.\(^3^8^7\) Buchloh sketched a lineage from Duchamp towards conceptual art, emphasizing the work of Cage, Rauschenberg, LeWitt, Morris, and others. Remarkably, in his canonization of the conceptual movement Buchloh completely ignored the European context—though as a former editor of *Interfunktionen* he should have been well-informed about European initiatives in the realm of conceptual art. Instead, he focused on the revision and theoretization of the until then written and accepted history of conceptual art, stating: "[T]o historicize *Concept Art* (to use the term as it was coined by Henry Flint in 1961) at this moment requires more than merely a reconstruction of the movement's self-declared primary actors, or a scholarly obedience to their proclaimed purity of intentions and operations."\(^3^8^8\) In a footnote added to this statement, Buchloh scarcely concealed that he aimed at the rash adoption of the writings by Joseph Kosuth, as cited in Gudrun Inboden’s text "Joseph Kosuth: Artist and Critic of Modernism."\(^3^8^9\) Moreover, one could argue that Kosuth’s writings have served as a core theory in the early anthologies on conceptual art, for example Ursula Meyer’s book *Conceptual Art* from 1972.

In the determination of Duchamp as a progenitor of conceptual art—something Kosuth in his writings had also claimed—Gintz drew a relation between the artist’s *La Boîte-en-valise* (1936) and the documentary exhibitions by Siegelaub: "If Duchamp seems to mimaetically point to two characteristic features of contemporary 'high' culture... he also insists, in this age of mechanical reproduction, on the potentially unlimited accessibility of the art work. This concern will turn up later at the center of the Conceptual problematic, to which the 'documentary' exhibitions of Seth Siegelaub well testified."\(^3^9^0\) In an interview with Ghislain Mollet-Vieville, who stated that it was Duchamp who first equated art with mental choice, Gintz further elaborated on this:

> When Duchamp put a ready-made in a museum, he turned art into a question of choosing what to call art. Later, interest shifted from the objects that artists chose toward the institutional space in which they were displayed. The conceptualists went a step farther, and eliminated the object from art... The exhibit is a retrospective. We wanted to show how the conceptualization of art that began

\(^3^8^7\) Buchloh, in exh. cat Paris 1989, p. 41.
\(^3^8^8\) Ibid., p. 42.
\(^3^9^0\) Gintz, exh. cat Paris 1989, p. 21. Duchamp’s *Boîte en Valise* can be considered a sort of “portable museum,” a suitcase with miniature replicas and reproductions of his work.
after World War II culminated in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. That was a period of crisis in art and society. Opposed ideologies were at war and it was impossible to predict the outcome.\footnote{Mollet-Viéville 1989, p. 101. Mollet-Viéville had also been one of the lenders of the exhibition.}

Although Gintz is emphasizing the exhibitionary format of conceptual art that has been so important for the democraticization of art in general, he does not further analyze this format. The so-called “suitcase exhibitions” that Lucy Lippard organized in the late 1960s, for example, are not described here but could be considered more close to Duchamp’s \textit{Boîte en Valise} in terms of distributing information through the format of the catalogue-exhibition.\footnote{According to Lippard, she began developing the ideas for these shows in the winter of 1968 while staying in Latin America. When she got back in New York and met Siegelaub she learned that they had similar ideas. The “Number Exhibitions,” \textit{f.e.} 557,087 and its follow-up 955,000, in respectively the Seattle Art Museum in 1969 and the Vancouver Art Gallery in January and February 1970, according to Lippard “could be transported from country to country by artists, bypassing the institutions and allowing more international networking and face-to-face interaction between artists.” See Lucy R. Lippard, “Curating by Numbers,” \textit{Tate Papers no. 12}, 2009 (Landmark Exhibitions Issue), \url{http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7268} [May 23, 2012].} Neither did Gintz use this specific model as an orientation for his own exhibition and catalogue. On the contrary, as he stressed that he “[m]ade no pretence of trying to reconstruct the conceptual art catalogues produced at the time. They took place, they exist and are now part of history. The role of a retrospective exhibition is to begin to historicize. . . . To start, and carry out, the process. There is consequently a kind of alchemy or transformation that occurs and that would be pointless to try to resist.”\footnote{Landry 1990, n.p.} Clearly, the act of historicizing was not regarded in a broader socio-political context, as instigated by conceptual art in the 1960s, in which the exhibition as such was subject to revision.

It was exactly this narrow art-historical perspective on conceptual art that was highly criticized by Siegelaub—who was obviously strongly involved in the Paris endeavor.\footnote{Gintz had been in contact with Siegelaub about the exhibition, and the latter lent several works from his collection to the ARC.} In his intermediary activities for the artists he was representing, Siegelaub had always been trying to avoid too strict art historical categorizations, and he was especially irritated by what he called the “Duchamp-fixation” in Buchloh’s text. In a letter to Juliette Laffon on December 12, 1989 he wrote:

\begin{quote}
[S]ince I have had the time to read the catalogue, and particularly the text of Buchloh, which is a very poor and incomplete “reading” of the period, especially in its Duchamp fixation and its omission of important actors and events of the period. If the exhibition travels and a catalogue is published in other languages, I would like to reply to the general ideas of his text as a postscript to my interview. I am...
\end{quote}
now preparing this. What has been the reaction to the exhibition? Please, advice of plans, so I can get the text to you before a catalogue is prepared.

On December 26 Laffon sent Siegelaub a positive reply about both the reactions of the public ("numerous and very interested"). and his idea to publish a post-scriptum to his interview in a new edition of the catalogue. In this "Addendum," which was published in the back of the second edition of the catalogue, Siegelaub criticized Buchloh in his "standard, conservative, hermeneutically sealed, textbook-type history of his idea of 'who-influenced-who'; 'who-did-what-first,' etc." More specifically, Siegelaub emphasized the refutation to regard conceptual art within a broader socio-political context in which Europe—as he thought to be proved by this exhibition—was leading: "[Buchloh's] 'conceptual art' history is reductive for still another reason: for him, 'conceptual art is basically a history of what he thinks happened in Manhattan between 23rd Street and Canal Street, just like artists living in Paris or Berlin in the early part of the century."

Siegelaub considered the fixation on Duchamp's legacy emblematic for this approach:

Buchloh's history has been reduced almost exclusively to artists and ideas which can be situated—whether pro or con—within the Duchamp perspective, thus very carefully avoiding any other ideas, such as those of Andre, Weiner, Buren, and Barry, who have little, if anything to do with Duchamp, and often open directly onto social, moral and political issues, both art-related and more general. The obvious exclusion of Carl Andre from the beginnings of this history is especially revealing; it is nothing less than the exclusion of the 'political.'

Ironically enough, Andre didn't consider himself to be a conceptual artist at all; quite the opposite, he strongly distanced himself from any possible references to conceptual art and therefore declined to participate in the show. Furthermore,

---

395 Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9). While the review of the exhibition by the (international) art press left a lot to be desired, the sale of the catalogue was going so well that a second edition was soon printed.
396 Siegelaub's proposal is however not discussed with Buchloh before January 29, 1990, when Laffon informs him about Siegelaub's request. Archives MAMVP (Box 524/1).
398 Ibid.
399 Ibid., p. 258.
400 Andre replied to Pagé in respond to her invitation to participate in the show: “Dear Suzanne: How wonderful it was to see you at my show at Daniel Templon! My exhibition with you is one of my best times as an artist. Thank you for the courtesy of writing to me about Claude Gintz and his conceptual art project. Please understand that when I ask not to be part of the exhibition I do it out of friendship and solidarity with you. My poetry and sculpture have nothing to do with ideas or conceptual art. My work is very clear: no one wins if it is confused with something else. Much love @ carl andre.” Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
Siegelaub saw Buchloh’s critique of Kosuth in the same light as his “Duchamp fixation,” “as a disguised dispute over the ‘correct’ interpretation, use and misuse of Duchamp.”

Contrary to Siegelaub’s objections, Kosuth interpreted Buchloh’s text as a provocation to further dive into precisely this right-or-wrong dispute. In his critique Kosuth seemed particularly keen on defending his own position and obtaining an active role in his own history-making. He made a project out of negotiating with the organizers; the amount and length of letters that he sent to the museum do not compare to the issue at hand. In a letter from June 2, 1989 to Laffon he wrote:

[I] was in shock to learn that the two people least sympathetic to my work [Buchloh and Harrison] were invited to write in the catalogue. I appreciate your assurances that an attempt will be made to re-balance the catalogue. Enclosed you will find my text from Artforum (March, 1988), which attempts to clarify, philosophically, the difference between my work and the work of others I have been associated with. This text is titled: “No Exit.”

This text by Kosuth, a rather idiosyncratic revision of conceptual thought through fragments of his earlier writings, was eventually not republished in the exhibition’s catalogue. Various documents in the museum’s archives relating to the production of the catalogue show that it was the intention to republish Kosuth’s text “Art after Philosophy.” In a correspondence with Charles Harrison on August 7, 1989 Laffon asked for a less specific analysis of “Art as idea (as idea)” in his catalogue contribution since Kosuth’s seminal text would be included. This was however not approved by Kosuth, because he later realized that “this is because Buchloh wants it in since he attacks it.” In a very offensive letter, dated January 11, 1990, to both Pagé and Laffon he further expressed his disappointment with the permission to not be able to read Buchloh’s text until three days before the installation, and the organizers’ abolished promise to include “No Exit” in the catalogue after which he had agreed to participate in the show.

There is no record of this, but the museum did include an essay by Gabriele Guercio, at the request of Kosuth, “to balance the texts by Harrison and Buchloh.” Ironically, Guercio’s text, even more than Buchloh’s, confirmed the cliché of conceptual art being a New York initiative of four artists—and one in particular. But if this gesture wasn’t enough for Kosuth; he insisted to have the statement that he wrote as a comment

---

402 Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
404 Letter of January 11, 1990, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
405 Ibid., The museum had agreed to include in the catalogue a text by Gabriele Guercio, who was recommended by Kosuth, to balance the specific approach of Buchloh and Gintz.
on Buchloh’s text included in the catalogue, as was promised to him, and threatened to “not permit my work to be exhibited and I will go to court to block the catalogue’s sale if these conditions, in writing and signed, are not met.”

After a further extensive correspondence his statement was finally published in the second edition of the catalogue, strangely enough after Harrison’s and not Buchloh’s critical text, and he got the chance to counter the “attack,” that he felt done to him.

In his response to Buchloh, however, Kosuth mainly focused on two footnotes in his essay, in which Buchloh questions specific claims made by the artist regarding the influence of certain artists in his work, or the dates of certain works. Kosuth tried to demonstrate Buchloh’s lack of credibility by criticizing the latter’s confusion of the correct name of the Lannis Gallery/Museum of Normal Art that he founded in New York in 1967, after which he tried to tackle Buchloh in his presumed confusion about the dates of his First Investigations, which he claimed to have made during his show Fifteen People Present Their Favorite Book at the Museum of Normal Art in 1967. Buchloh found no records of the supposedly early dates as claimed by Kosuth—and these records were also not provided by the artist,—a fact that was certainly not complemented by Kosuth’s frail reference to his position within the School of Visual Arts: “the director of the school, Silas Rhodes, put me on the faculty at the age of 22.”

The discussions between Buchloh, Siegelaub, and Kosuth continued in October 57 (Summer, 1991), at the request of Kosuth, following Buchloh’s republished, and slightly rewritten text in October 55 (Winter, 1990). In his response Kosuth added another comment on one of the footnotes in Buchloh’s text to his critique, in which he concentrated on Buchloh’s assumed misinterpretation of his First Investigations as paintings.

Siegelaub’s contribution to the discussion is his republished and unaltered

406 Ibid.
408 In footnote no. 6 in his text, Buchloh makes reference to Kosuth’s text ‘Art after Philosophy (Part II),’ in which he stated that he was “certainly much more influenced by Ad Reinhardt, Duchamp via Johns and Morris, and by Donald Judd, than I ever was specifically by LeWitt.” Buchloh argues: “The list would seem complete, if it were not for the absence of Mel Bochner’s and On Kawara’s name, and its explicit negation of the importance of Sol LeWitt. According to Bochner, who had become an instructor at the School of Visual Arts in 1965, Joseph Kosuth worked with him as a student in 1965 and 1966. Dan Graham mentioned that during that time Kosuth was also a frequent visitor to the studios of On Kawara and Sol LeWitt. Kosuth’s explicit negation 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) that was one of the crucial points of departure for the formulation of Kosuth’s Proto-Investigation. In footnote no. 18 Buchloh states: “By contrast these claims were explicitly contested by all the artists I interviewed who knew Kosuth at that time, none of them remembering seeing any of the Proto-Investigations before February 1967, in the exhibition Non-Anthropomorphic Art by Four Young Artists, organized by Joseph Kosuth at the Lannis Gallery. The artists with whom I conducted interviews were Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner.”
410 In footnote no. 28, Buchloh states: “Paradoxically even Kosuth’s work from the mid-1960s—while emphaz-
catalogue text. In turn, Buchloh replied once more to both Kosuth and Siegelaub and had a final say about the reception of this dispute on the catalogue and exhibition in Paris. Buchloh expressed to be less surprised by Siegelaub’s critique, although the latter’s choice to specifically defend Kosuth doesn’t go with his more social-political commitment with conceptual practices since he is “[o]f all participants in the Siegelaub group certainly the least convincing candidate for the political causes of Conceptual Art, then and now.”

Buchloh admitted and rectified the small mistakes in his text but refused to believe that it were these footnotes that triggered Kosuth’s violated response, one that not only addressed to author ad hominem, but also to the museum in the warning to withdraw his work if they would not meet his demands. He comments on Kosuth’s argumentation: “It seems that in the mind of artists like Kosuth, artistic practice is a matter of image control and product protection, of territorial strategies, networked or, if necessary, extorted in the various institutional and commercial venues that facilitate the work’s continued circulation and guarantee its mythical status.” Although Buchloh stated that his essay “[d]oes not in fact contain any accusations or polemics directed especially at Joseph Kosuth or his work,” in his reaction he took the opportunity to do just that, and continued with the suggestion that “[Kosuth] could not resist the temptation to display once again his status as a master by deploying the institutional power of the museum to stage a public retaliation similar to the famous Guggenheim affair when he co-initiated the censoring of Daniel Buren’s work from the Guggenheim International Exhibition in 1971.”

It is in a way incomprehensible why Kosuth objected so much against Buchloh’s interpretation of conceptual art as a lineage starting with Duchamp, since the artist himself in his text “Art after Philosophy” also sketched this lineage of conceptual art, a lineage that was followed by historians such as Ursula Meyer—and was in fact adopted once more in the Paris exhibition. Why did Kosuth not counter Harrison’s text of Art & Language and elaborate on his role in this group? His objections against Harrison were even more serious than against Buchloh, as can be read in his letter to Laffon:

Art & Language as it is historically understood, ended in about 1975 at the time of the Fox. . . . After we all left the two of them [Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden]

---

413 Ibid., p. 159.
414 Ibid., p. 159.
rather dishonestly continued to use the name, although it had, by then, almost nothing to do with Art & Language earlier contribution. Mr. Harrison remained with them as a kind of public relations agent. Abusing his background as an “objective” art historian he has been re-writing the history of Art & Language ever since. Ala Stalin, they have erased my name from the history of the group.\footnote{Kosuth in his letter of June 2, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).}

Although Kosuth’s latter accusation may be true, his correspondence and public reaction to Buchloh testified of an obsession with ascribing his own artistic practice a prologue to the movement, as well as a complete incapacity to place the process of writing history into a broader perspective. Since this discussion has dominated the subsequent discourse surrounding \textit{L’art conceptuel}, other aspects of the Paris exhibition have been largely ignored. As the preface of the catalogue started with a reference to Lippard and dematerialization, which is based upon a tradition stemming from minimal art and highly influenced by LeWitt’s theorization of conceptual art, this perspective on conceptual art, and thus the dialectic between object and non-object, was not further elaborated in the Paris exhibition.\footnote{This remained a subject for the next large retrospective exhibition on conceptual art organized at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1995 and 1996, \textit{Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975}, which was more specifically involved in the intrinsic problematic of exhibiting conceptual art. As James Meyer has adequately observed, it was focusing on the discourse that surrounded the dematerialization of the object—the basic principle of conceptual art. See James Meyer, “Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975,” \textit{Artforum} (February 1996), p. 78.} Therefore the objective of the retrospective \textit{L’art conceptuel} remained somewhat contained in its theorizing/ historicizing effort without taking the actual works on exhibition into consideration.
3.3. Discourse vs Exhibition

Following the vibrant discussions that surrounded the process of realization of the catalogue, the compilation and installation of the exhibition were not a smooth operation either. With regard to the fact that the artists associated with conceptual art never wanted to be positioned as a movement, and all had individual ideas about their position, there was considerate debate about their inclusion, or exclusion, in the show. Carl Andre, for instance, as mentioned before, charmingly declined to take part in a retrospective exhibition on conceptual art.\footnote{See footnote 33 for Andre’s note in which he declined his participation in the show.} According to Laffon, all artists were immediately contacted when the decision to do the exhibition was made, and they were provided with lists of selected works, and asked to give their comments.\footnote{Laffon in interview with Mollet-Viéville 1989, p. 102.} As a matter of fact the artists, but also the galleries and critics linked to the conceptual movement, were only contacted when they were in the possession of the selected works, and only when their direct involvement was necessary to loan these works or locate others.\footnote{Adrian Piper f.e. sent a letter to the museum on February 10, 1990, stating: “Dear Claude Gintz, I understand I have been included in your exhibition, L’Art Conceptuel, Une Perspective, as well as in the catalogue. I would appreciate if you could send me a copy of the catalogue at the following address:...” Archives MAMVP (Box 524/1).} In this regard the organization and installation of the retrospective conceptual art exhibition were not any different than that of a traditional museum exhibition. It was the artists’ response—similar to their initial radical positioning in the late 1960s—that made it a controversial one.\footnote{In the interview with Mollet-Viéville, Laffon stressed: “Our discussions with them rekindled quite a few controversies, many of which are as relevant today as they were twenty years ago!” p. 102.}

The crucial question that the organizers of the show faced was how a museum can actually “present mental processes as works of art and to make the audience understand that the artwork is essentially a question of how they experience it?” as Mollet-Viéville had posed.\footnote{Ibid., p. 101.} The fact that most of the selected works were traced through their documentation in early anthologies as the ones by Lippard and Meyer and were nonexistent or “dematerialized” at the start of the project challenged the endeavor to assemble a physical exhibition.\footnote{The confusion of documentation and work had been a very important discussion for many artists at the start of conceptual practices. See Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (eds.), Recording Conceptual Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).} Pagé did recognize the problem to “present ‘dematerialized’ artworks that are foreign to the traditional forms and contents of representation. How do you get people to realize that they can do more than read the
works?”¹⁴ In her elaboration of this question, however, she addressed the dilemma of exhibiting conceptual art, something that was there already since its beginnings: “We did our best to present the works the way they were presented originally. . . . Despite our efforts, visitors will go on reading the works, but that was also the case twenty years ago.”¹⁴⁵ The efforts that were made to install a physical presentation in the upper ground floor (level 2) of the Musée d’art moderne—an “experimental floor” where the contemporary art program “Animation, Recherche, Confrontation” (ARC) was and still is situated—were considerate.¹⁴⁶ A large amount of communication about the loan of many works dominate the museum’s archives of the show, which represents the intention to not only historicize conceptual art but also to stimulate its appreciation by a broader audience.¹⁴⁷

Pagé must have had a clear idea of how such an exhibition should be envisioned; in her introduction to the show in the catalogue she, most remarkably, points out the aesthetical appreciation of conceptual art: “Undoubtedly, from a current perspective, in all of these works we might find, due to a shifting in the terms of what we are prepared to receive mentally and perceptually, a certain form of aesthetic seduction, an undeniable visual and formal dimension.”¹⁴⁸ Given the fact that many conceptual artists were very ambivalent about the presentation of their work, Pagé’s last point suggests a re-evaluation of this positioning, and at the same time anticipates the subsequent appreciation of conceptual art as art documentation.¹⁴⁹ It is remarkable that none of the artists, who had expressed themselves so skeptical with regard to the documentation of their work in the late 1960s, commented on this specific matter. As Patricia Norvell in her early interviews with the conceptual artists, as well as with Siegelaub, in the late 1960s already discovered; the historical presentation of their works from the 1960s and 1970s was something the artists themselves had difficulty dealing with.¹⁵⁰

---

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ ARC had been founded in 1966; it was a rather independent “area” within the Musée d’art moderne where new methods of presentation (mainly educational) were experimented in order to reach new audiences. Suzanne Pagé had been directing the program of ARC from 1973 until 1988, the year before L’art conceptuel opened, and, given her specific ideas about a retrospective exhibition on conceptual art, might have intended to curate this show herself. For further information about the role and position of the ARC within the Musée d’art moderne see: http://www.mam.paris.fr/en/node/607 (June 8, 2012).
¹⁴⁷ See also Pierre Landry, “L’art conceptuel, une perspective : An Interview with Claude Gintz and Juliette Laffon,” Le Journal du Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal vol. 1 no. 2 (July, August 1990), n. p. Laffon stressed : “We also tried to see that a wide audience would find the exhibition accessible, through the notes written for each work, and would grasp the process involved in producing the works.”
¹⁴⁹ As Jean-Marc Poinot has commented on the ambivalent positioning of many of the core conceptualists: “How is it possible to make an exhibition, to show something, and simultaneously deny its existence as a work of art.” Poinot 1999, p. 104.
Gintz considered the idea of conceptual art in this respect untenable: “I don’t think you can lean long to a strict sense of conceptualism when you are speaking of visual arts; it is more the moment in the artistic discourse than anything else.” In regard to this artistic discourse he emphasized the strategy of Art & Language: “[i]t was their idea to build up a theory, and that was enough. Each of them in accordance with the theory started building works, visual works. So conceptual art was just a step or a phase in their own working process. That is the danger of labeling. When you name something it goes outside and then it is restricted to something.” In contrast to Pagé, Gintz could hardly have been thinking of a physical presentation when he stressed that the “conceptual artists were not interested in visual effects. Indeed, they were adamantly opposed to them. Art & Language attempted to transform the passive viewer, whose traditional role was to admire things like talent and taste, into a reader. They insisted that their only public was the people who participated in their discussions, debates, and so forth.” This specific approach of conceptualism, also emphasized by Kosuth in his text “Art after Philosophy,” however, was not shared by all of the artists who affiliated with conceptual art. Many of them had different ideas about the presentation of their work in regard to primary or secondary information and held a broad public responsible for the “completion” of their works.

Gintz stated that it was difficult to clearly implement his ideas of conceptualism within the context of the exhibition: “My definition of conceptual art is difficult to represent. . . . the site was always a compromise.” The fact that he considered the catalogue more important than the exhibition, and had positioned himself as a theorist of conceptual art rather than the curator of its exhibition seems to be a way to dissociate from the final result of the exhibition—a rather dogmatic translation of discourse into a physical exhibition. His initial ideas about what the exhibition at ARC should be about were more straightforward. In an early correspondence with Daniel Buren he wrote: “I am preparing for the next spring at ARC a retrospective exhibition around conceptual art. The idea is not to present any static things, but on the contrary to try set up the upheaval that it gave rise to, in the form of a recontextualization of the work of art. This is why I have thought to enclose in the exhibition works by Hans Haacke, Michael Asher and, of

431 Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
432 Interesting is also that, according to Gintz, the design for the presentation of the work had been done by Kosuth, Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
434 See f.e. Lawrence Weiner.
435 Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
436 In my conversation with Gintz in 2011, he had stressed: “I did not approach the artists at first, I was free to choose whoever I wanted.”
course, Daniel Buren.” In the following correspondence with other artists, however, there is no record of the further elaboration of this plan.

It could be for this reason that Gintz was particularly engaged with Michael Asher's contribution, as can be read from a letter he sent to Pagé to try to convince her to keep Asher’s project in the show, something that was apparently uncertain. Asher had initially proposed to re-distribute posters that were made for the publicity of exhibitions with conceptual artists between 1962 and 1972, specifically addressing an audience of 75+ (the then current mean age of the supposed public at the time of conceptualism). With this proposal he wanted to question the idea of a retrospective exhibition on conceptual art, a project that he considered contradictory to the dictum of conceptual art:

Yet, both the quest for reproduction and the quest for nostalgia seem totally inimical to conceptual art practice whose program included a constant request for radical change and an analysis of how that might be effectively carried out. Simultaneously, the strategies which this practice employed, consistently attempted to subvert its very own institutionalization. The question that lingers at this moment is: will this retrospective be experienced and even used as a tool to problematize aesthetic practice just as the practice it represents managed to do?

Because of the difficulties met when trying to acquire the posters from different institutions—there were barely any posters left and if so the institutions were not ready to give them away—the museum sent a letter to Asher with the suggestion to abandon the project and come up with another proposal. As can be read in the continued correspondence with Gintz and Laffon the artist is struggling to find an accurate project for the exhibition. In an undated letter to Gintz he wrote:

437 Gintz in a letter to Buren on April 28, 1988. On March 16, 1988 he had already sent a letter to Hans Haacke to meet in New York and discuss about the exhibition. Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9). “[J]e prépare pour le printemps prochain à l'ARC une exposition rétrospective autour de l'art conceptuel. L'idée est de ne pas présenter cela comme quelque chose de statique, mais au contraire d'essayer de montrer le renversement auquel il donna lieu sous la forme d'une recontextualisation de l'œuvre d'art. C'est pourquoi, j'ai pense faire figurer dans l'exposition des travaux de Hans Haacke, Michael Asher et, bien entendu, Daniel Buren.”

438 On September 29, 1988, Gintz wrote to Pagé: “Chère Suzanne, J’ai appris par Juliette Laffon que vous aviez des doutes quant à la faisabilité du projet de Michael Asher. Soit. Mais n’aurait-on pu s’en assurer en sondant quelques-unes des institutions concernées? La participation de Michael Asher me parait indispensable a l” économie” du projet et ce serait a mon sens très dommage qu’il n’en fasse pas partie. Je le rencontreral probablement le 15 octobre à l’ occasion d’une exposition de groupe à Marseille avec Daniel Buren et John Knight. Comment faire pour ne pas lui opposer une pure et simple fin de non-recevoir? Bien a toi, Claude Gintz,” Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).

439 In the interview with Pierre Landry Gintz specifically points out Asher’s contribution to the exhibition: “[w]e should not overlook the participation by Michael Asher. He 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.” Landry 1990, n. p.

440 Michael Asher in an undated letter to Claude Gintz, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/8).

441 Letter from Laffon to Asher on March 15, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
I think it’s possible to construct a work that would address similar issues as my works before 1972... have consider the material and theoretical context to a retrospective; but I cannot figure out what that work would be without recapitulating ideas which to me seem to be a bit redundant. I think I should have it as such; please don’t depend on my participation or plan my participation and I will keep working on this project and will write you if I have a work which seem suitable. Further, I will understand it if I cannot participate due to timing or funding.441

Asher nevertheless came up with a different plan and proposed to place announcements for the exhibition in several magazines for seniors and retirees:

Many times a retrospective of a prior art movement can serve as a means of recapturing the past, such as if members of the elder part of our art community and its institutions realize a historical need to introduce the movements constituent issues to a younger generation in order to somehow insure the reproduction of these issues. Furthermore, a retrospective can represent a sense of nostalgia or a long mixed rendering of the past, as often used to substitute what we feel is missing as well as confirming what we have chosen to believe.442

Eventually the announcements were not published in senior magazines but in a selection of art historical journals, including Apollo, Art History, Daidalos, The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism, La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France, Romagna Arte e Storia, and Simiolus, with which Asher intended to notify separate groups of historians that a new historical perspective is being mapped on to conceptual art practices.443 It is not clear why Asher had made this change, but in one of his letters he wrote to be happy with the result of the project.

Although in his correspondence and catalogue text Asher clearly sketched what he wanted to address in the exhibition, the final result of his laborious project doesn’t seem to represent his intention. The dry representation of the various journal advertisements within the exhibition didn’t manage to resolve the dilemma that Asher had already foreseen in the public exhibition of his project: “I realize I run the risk of people thinking that perhaps this work is a joke. I might want to write a small thing so this doesn’t happen.”444 In a short text that is also published in the catalogue Asher emphasized on the

441 Undated letter from Michael Asher to Claude Gintz, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/8).
442 Michael Asher in an undated letter to Claude Gintz, Archives MAMVP (Box 524//8).
444 It will probably point to the democracy of the conceptual art practice and the contradiction of who got short circulated (?) in this democracy. It will also point to how the senior citizen represents a sector of society who must rearrange their thoughts about their community at a time when it is most difficult and what has to be confronted in
role that the museum/institution assumes in the historical analysis of conceptual art: “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.” In regard to the effort that preceded this conclusive statement Asher seemed to have subjected the curators of the exhibition to a process of creating awareness. Asher’s contribution to the exhibition reveals as no other the complexity that a curator faces when trying to make a retrospective on conceptual art, as Gintz had stressed: “It is a very complex dialectic in a sense between the object and non-object and how it was coped with by different artists. I think that is really the basis of conceptualism: it is something unresolved.”

Instead of making this key characteristic of conceptual art visible in the exhibition, progressive projects like Asher’s were represented in the exhibition in a rather static manner. The conversion of “information” into a spatial presentation, however, was an important aspect in the work of several of the artists in the show. In the case of the wall drawings by Sol LeWitt the spatial execution of the concept was relatively easy. LeWitt contained the essence of his works in certificates that are used for the further installation of the works. Concerning the inclusion of one of his wall drawings, Wall Drawing no. 28 (1969), loaned from a private collection in Cologne, the museum received a revealing letter by the collector: “[I] am pleased to lend out the piece to your proposed exhibition. But there is no need to send you a loan form; the work, as you know, will be realized without the need of an original drawing. If you need a copy of the certificate please let me know.”

Although the realization of the piece does not require the participation of LeWitt himself, it is clear that the organizers had contacted the artist to ask for directions as to how to install the work. In a postcard from Spoleto (Italy) LeWitt asked when the show would be opened, and instructed the museum that two assistants would be needed to come to Paris “to do the work”; to execute the wall drawings. The museum subsequently solicited two “draftsmen” in the Netherlands, Ton van der Laaken and Wim Starkenburg, who realized several of LeWitt’s drawings in the exhibition.

---

445 Letter from Hans Böhnning to Suzanne Pagé on May 17, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9). The work is referred to as “One four adjacent squares.” This description of the work, generally not used as the title by LeWitt himself, should actually be “On four adjacent squares.” It seems that confusion occurred with Kosuth’s titling of his “One and Three” series.

446 By the time L’Art conceptuel was organized, Van der Laaken en Starkenburg had realized many wall drawings by LeWitt in the Netherlands, f.e. at Martin Visser’s residence in Bergeijk. In their correspondence they refer only to...
Not many conceptual artists have so meticulously recorded the execution of their work as LeWitt. For most of the artists L’art conceptuel was a first opportunity to think about the retrospective aspect of their work. This is illustrated in the correspondence of the museum with the two remaining members of Art & Language, Mel Ramsden and Michael Baldwin, about the presentation of their Index 001 ("Documenta Index," 1972). The museum intended to present the work as eight filing cabinets stacked on top of each other, an installation that was based on a photograph of the work in a magazine.\(^\text{450}\) The artists, however, rejected this installation of the work, and scarcely held to the initial display of the work, as can be read from a letter sent to the museum: “Instead, it should be shown as in the photograph and Xerox copy I have enclosed: two cabinets each on four grey painted plinths with an extensive wall mounted index. Otherwise it is not the work. It takes up space. At Documenta 5 it occupied a whole room.”\(^\text{451}\) The eventual installation of the work however did not provide the wall-mounted index since it was installed in the central room of the ARC enclosed by large windows. Furthermore, the information in the drawers was not accessible to the visitors due to security policies.\(^\text{452}\)

Mel Bochner, who received a personal letter from the director regarding the loan of several of his works, also requested particular installation conditions for two of his seminal conceptual works, Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art (1966), and Measurement Room (1969). The first work consisted of four identical ring binder books with works/ sketches on paper by fellow artists, which Bochner exhibited at the (influential) exhibition at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1966. Bochner stressed that each of these binders should be mounted (screwed down) to a white, wooden sculpture base of 12 to 25 to 36 inches. For the second work he required “a clean, empty white room. No other art works can be seen inside the room. The room should be at least 6 x 6 meters and must have windows.”\(^\text{453}\)

Because of the limited space and Bochner’s request to install the work himself, for which he charged the museum a fee of $ 2,500 (“installation as well as preparation tasks”), the

---

\(^{450}\) A copy of the photograph from a magazine was kept in the archives of MAMVP; it is however not clear which magazine it is taken from.

\(^{451}\) Letter to Juliette Laffon by Mel Ramsden and Michael Baldwin on June 3, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/13).

\(^{452}\) Ironically, since the work was not to be touched/ used, it was in fact transformed into an empty showcase. See John Bentley Mays, “Conceptualism: The Legacy and the Lessons,” The Globe and Mail (August 25, 1990).

\(^{453}\) Letter from Bochner to Pagé, April 17, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
museum abandoned the plan to include this work in the exhibition.

Douglas Huebler proposed to include in the exhibition a "re-execution of a historical work from 1969," *Duration Piece no. 6*. It would consist of a corner with sawdust on the floor that should be photographed at the opening during one to two hours over specific intervals, as a kind of "demonstration." The original work was executed in Siegelaub's *January 5-31* exhibition in New York, and the documentation of the piece was in his possession. Since the historical document of the original piece, lent by Siegelaub, was included in the exhibition (as illustrated in the catalogue) it seems that the work had not been re-executed as Huebler requested. In an elaborate correspondence with the curators of the exhibition Huebler tried to explain that the "originality" of his works is not of great importance. According to the artist many of the works selected for the exhibition, could be represented by copies: "The pieces you are interested in would be 'copies.' My copies (authentic as replications) 42° Parallel and Location Piece #11 are owned by Malcolm (or Alan) Power, London, and they won't loan pieces. But, all will be available, one way or another."454

Since the beginning of his conceptual practices Huebler most often exhibited his work in the form of "artist's copies," and proposed to do the same with a few works requested for the exhibition, *Location Piece 11, Variable Piece 1* and the "Drawing"(?). The suggestion to use copies is however not accepted by the museum since the eventual exhibition (as illustrated in the catalogue) included only "original" works. In a subsequent letter Huebler therefore proposed the curators to include two other "original" works that were still in his possession, *Duration Piece 11* and *Site Sculpture Project, Cape Cod Star Shape Exchange*. He regarded the latter an appropriate alternative to 42nd Parallel, that he presumed couldn't be loaned in its original version.455

By the time Huebler had agreed about the works to be included in the exhibition, and wanted to send the loan forms back to the museum he started to doubt about the presentation of these works in a large group show. In a comment placed between parentheses in his last letter he wrote: "[h]owever the original piece is not especially large and might not be visually impressive next to Joseph Kosuth's neon things so I would be happy to show it, along with the other five works. Twenty years ago I deliberately made small scale pieces because the idea was important, not the visual aspect but in a group exhibition the scale of other pieces could dwarf my work. I want to be informed if other exhibits in the show are installed as large scale wall works because that was not the

---

454 Huebler in a reply to Gintz on May 27, 1988 (?), Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
455 In the end the organizers succeeded in the loan of this specific work since it is included in the catalogue as a loan from the collection of Alan Power.
original thrust of the conceptual enterprise.”

The above cases illustrate that there were several individual considerations of the participating artists about the proper installation of “original” works of conceptual art within a new historical continuum. The museum obviously struggled to meet the requests of the artists, but was not able to deal with the specific demands that come with the re-exhibition of works of conceptual art. Eventually, this inability to meet the demands of re-execution of conceptual artworks in a new exhibitionary setting lead to the withdrawal of several “impermanent” works that, in their re-execution, could have more accurately demonstrated the conceptual endeavor. Conversely, the eventual selection of works in the exhibition included many “original,” more documentary works that were displayed in frames on the walls. That the traditional set-up of museums is conflicting with the new art was already pointed out by conceptual art practices in the late 1960s, but that by the time of 1989 these procedures had hardly changed is emphasized by the curatorial approach and eventual production of L’art conceptuel.

---

456 Letter from Douglas Huebler to Juliette Laffon, December 2, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).
3.4. (Institutional) Critiques

In contrast to the discussions that surrounded both the production of the catalogue, and the installation of the exhibition, the professional reception of *L’art conceptuel: une perspective* is virtually negligible. Dominating in the debate was the group of people that had been affiliated to conceptual art from the very beginning, and, even though the intentions of the curators were otherwise, the exhibition seems not to have succeeded to break out of this inner circle. The sparse review by the press could be explained, as Gintz suggested, by the success of the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la terre* earlier that year, and as a sign of the time.457 Certainly the exhibition, as Pascaline Cuvelier ironically pointed out in *Liberation*, was not understood in its autonomous appearance: “[A]ll those fascinating works do not allow to be approached without any keys for re-understanding.”458 But that the proper understanding of conceptual art was complicated by the format of exhibition, which merely represented the conceptual movement as a series of works brought together without considering the translation of “information” into a spatial exhibition, had been a point of reference in the reception.

German art critic Thomas Wulffen emphasized these curatorial aspects in his short review in *Kunstforum International*, published when the exhibition in Paris had almost ended. According to Wulffen, the exhibition didn’t succeed in its initial intentions; both the suggestion to provide a “perspective” rather than a “retrospective” on conceptual art, and the question what conceptual art means for the contemporary artistic production were left unanswered.459 Gintz explained his approach a broad understanding of conceptualism that went beyond the American pioneers and included also European practices, but how this approach differed from the historical representation of conceptual art that already existed at the time does not become clear.460 Furthermore, Wulffen asserts, the *contemporary* perspective on conceptual art was missing; not only in its relation to contemporary artistic production, but also in relation to a contemporary exhibition of historical conceptual work. Especially within conceptual art the simple assembly of works does not give any insight into the methods of conceptual art, which Wulffen categorized in three progressive origins of the concept: as artistic discourse, as withdrawal from the material-object paradigm, and as a reflection on the market system.

---

457 Conversation with Gintz, 2011. The exhibition *Les magiciens de la terre* was extensively reviewed in the professional art press throughout the whole year in 1989, which obviously left little room for other interests.  
458 Pascaline Cuvelier, “Une certain idée de l’art,” in *Liberation* (Friday December 8, 1989), p. 45. [Tous travaux passionnants qui ne se laissent pas approcher sans une grille de re-lecture.] Translation by me.  
460 Conceptual art had been regarded in this perspective already in the exhibition *Konzeption* in Leverkusen.
of art.\textsuperscript{461} In this respect the curators of the exhibition missed the opportunity to approach the format of a retrospective exhibition in an innovative manner, which is provoked by the residue material of conceptual practices, as well as the commitment of the artists. As Wulffen stressed:

It is possible to question every paradigmatic change that was asserted by conceptual art, but shouldn't this question itself become the subject of exhibition? How does a retrospective exhibition relate to its material? Which conditions give rise to the necessity to re-present a specific art historical phase? How do objects in an exhibition “speak”? Which status do they capture within a sequence of objects? Who shifts the answering of these questions solely to the catalogue, is making it too easy for oneself.\textsuperscript{462}

Wulffen’s accurate critique did not have much effect on the sequence of the exhibition at the other venues. By the time the exhibition had travelled to Montréal his comments were either not yet received by the French speaking organizers of the show, or not understood, since the same issues are coming up here.\textsuperscript{463} In an interview with Gintz and Laffon in \textit{Le journal du Musee d’art contemporain de Montreal} Pierre Landry, the responsible curator of the museum of contemporary art in Montréal, discussed the installation of the exhibition in regard to its curatorial strategy—although in a slightly different understanding.\textsuperscript{464} Landry specifically addressed “the aspect of the hanging,” following a certain chronology, in relation to the exhibition’s plan. In their explanation of how the installation of the exhibition came about, it becomes clear that the curators were mainly concerned about how to “hang” specific groups of works in terms of historical reading:

\[W\]e … first tried to show a number of works that could be described as ‘pre-conceptual’ … We then see some thematic orientations or trends emerge, as there is a transition from the visual to the linguistic—from a system of representation

\textsuperscript{461} Wulffen 1990, p. 298. [Wenn man spezifische Inhalte innerhalb der konzeptuellen Kunst benennen will, so stehen drei Themen in Vordergrund: Konzeptualisierung als künstlerisches Arbeiten in Begriffen, Minimalisierung als Abkehr vom material-objekthaften Paradigma, Metaierung als Reflexion auf das Betriebssystem Kunst.] Translation by me.

\textsuperscript{462} Ibid., p. 299. [Es ist möglich, jene paradigmatische Veränderung, die von der konzeptuellen Kunst behauptet wurde, in Zweifel zu ziehen, aber sollte dieser Zweifel nicht selber zur Darstellung kommen? Wie verhält sich eine retrospektive Ausstellung zu ihrem Material? Welche Bedingungen erzeugen die Notwendigkeit, eine bestimmte kunsthistorische Phase wieder darstellen zu müssen? Wie ‚sprechen’ Objekte in einer Ausstellung? Welchen Status nehmen sie in der Abfolge der Objekte ein? Wer die Beantwortung dieser Fragen allein auf den Katalog verschiebt, macht es sich zu einfach.] Translation by me.

\textsuperscript{463} Contrary to the exhibition in Paris, the Montreal version of \textit{L’Art conceptuel} had been largely reviewed in the (local) papers.

\textsuperscript{464} Pierre Landry, “L’art conceptuel, une perspective : An Interview with Claude Gintz and Juliette Laffon,” \textit{Le Journal du Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal} vol. 1 no. 2 (July/ August, 1990), n. p.
using visual signs to a system of linguistic signs—along with that other characteristics of conceptual art, namely the notions of time and space, of temporalization of space and spatialization of time. Next, within conceptual art itself, among its leading figures, we can detect certain contrasts, certain dialectical connections between artists we could identify as heirs to the New York School. . . . and those who introduced a thematic orientation that is no longer the purity of art but, on the contrary, a connection between art as an autonomous cultural activity and the works in which this art functions and fits.”

Gintz thorough, art-historical approach resulted into a formative catalogue/publication, in which the definite categorization of conceptual art is problematized, and the different works that were selected to illustrate this perspective are contextualized in detail. However, in a spatial configuration of conceptual artworks this problematization and contextualization cannot be explained in the same manner—something that was recognized by Gintz himself when he stressed that his perspective on conceptual art was difficult to represent. Whereas the historical approach determined the format of the catalogue, Gintz emphasized that for the exhibition it was important “[t]o respect the physical presentation of this form of art, as it might have been shown during that time. We therefore tried, as much as possible, not to change it into something that would be seen differently by 1990 eyes.” Curiously, the fact that the lacking historical context would inevitably change the understanding of the exhibited works was completely ignored.

This changed status of the conceptual artwork was observed in a rather tenacious review in the Canadian Globe and Mail with the startling headline: “Montreal retrospective seems designed to confer high-art status on objects and texts made during the movement’s opening phase.” The author of the article, John Bentley Mays, compares the contemporary art market in its dependency on art historical validation to the dog market that requires pedigrees as assurance that the product will hold its value over time: “[M]useums and haut-bourgeois private collectors alike have shown their willingness to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for individual works by, say, Bruce Nauman or Neo-conceptualist Jenny Holzer—hence the urgency behind exhibitions of this [kind].” The suggestion that the exhibition would be sponsored by the art market is somewhat

465 Gintz is in the last phrase of this citation specifically referring to the work of Dan Graham, Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke. Ibid.
466 Conversation with Gintz, 2011.
469 Ibid.
exaggerated, but the effect of a retrospective exhibition on conceptual art by an important museum on the value of the works exhibited is evident, as has been analyzed in the previous chapter. That this validation in turn also had a great effect on the set-up of diverse works in the exhibition is illustrated in the following observation:

Among the most intriguing works featured here is an elaborate installation originally constructed by Art & Language for the 1972 Documenta. . . . Involving complex charts and many scraps of information sorted in filing cabinets, the piece is something of a vast game, to be played rather than merely viewed. . . . But as soon as I opened the first file-drawer, a guard swooped down on orders from above to advise me that the drawers were to stay firmly fermé. Thus did the game become a traditional art-object, to be cherished by the institution like any Henry Moore sculpture, and thus was the would-be player turned back into a traditional viewer—all in the twinkling of an eye.470

The specific approach of historicity within the execution of L’art conceptuel in fact could have been a stimulating factor in the process of commodification regarding the conceptual artworks in the exhibition. Because of the restrictions that valuable works loaned from (private) collections demand in a public exhibition, the final presentation of these challenging and discursive works was rather static. Artists like Huebler and Asher were consciously trying to implement the spirit of the conceptual endeavor into the exhibition, but they were confronted with institutional procedures meant to “protect” the artists’ work. Most of the artists however seemed to have accepted this fact, and disregarded to seriously discuss or criticize the actual installation of the works in the spaces of ARC. No doubt that at the time that conceptual practices were for the first time historicized by an important museum, and (in the Duchampian tradition) thus validated as proper artworks, it was not opportune to criticize museum politics.

In 2001 however, in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Siegelaub retrospectively turned out particularly critical about the museological set-up of the show:

[t]he ‘authority’ of museum spaces makes everything so ‘museum-like.’ This was the case, for example, of the exhibition L’art conceptuel, une perspective [1989] organized by Claude Gintz at the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, the first institutional look at the period. No fault of his, but it really looked dead. 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 them from people by taking them

470 Ibid.
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 a sort of cemetery for art.471

Although Siegelaub’s bold critique meets the ideas and projects of conceptual art that he had instigated in the late 1960s, it is remarkable that he waited more than ten years to express his thoughts about the exhibition—something that would have come well along with his critique on Buchloh’s text. Gintz assumed it only natural that Siegelaub was very critical to the exhibition; “[h]e was more concerned about the context of how art functioned. . . In a sense you should admit or accept the idea that it is true that the founding person and advent of conceptual art as such were Seth Siegelaub and his January show, even if historically speaking it also comes from fluxus and Henry Flint.”472 In this respect Gintz also points out the inconsistency in the initial conceptual practices: “I don’t think that Siegelaub when he tried to make the artist contract the follow up was really between artists and galleries; it was not something concretely existing; it was conflicting the show from the beginning. There was a difference between what Siegelaub represented and what European artists, Broodthaers or Buren, were representing.”473

But the real critique that Siegelaub expressed related to the functioning of the museum, a contextual aspect that many conceptual artists addressed. Although the will of ARC to meet the artists in their specific wishes for the presentation of their work was certainly there, the challenge as to engage with a discourse that conflicted institutional methodology, and the exhibition as such was just too much to handle for the museum curators.474 The focus on “a very discreet hanging device,” as Laffon stressed, instead of on “the problematization of the exhibition itself,” as Wulffen had suggested, indicates how the intentions that had initiated the project of L’art conceptuel were not applied to their ultimate consequence, or gradually neglected in the installation of the final exhibition. This can largely be explained by the art-historical validation of the “originality” of the work of art.475 Since the notion of originality is highly problematized by conceptual art, as

472 Interview with Gintz, 2011.
473 Ibid.
474 This is also illustrated in the interview with Mollet-Vieville, who emphasized: “Did you consult the artists? How did they react to your choices? Although many of them are now working in different directions, I imagine they all wanted to make sure you did not underestimate their role in the movement!” Mollet-Vieville 1989, p. 102.
475 See f.e. Rosalind Krauss, “The originality of the avant-garde,” in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths (Mass: MIT Press, 1985): “But the formula that specifies a print as a photographic original made close to the “aesthetic moment” is obviously a formula dictated by the art historical notion of period style and applied to the practice of connaisseurship. A period style is a special form of coherence that cannot be fraudulently breached. The authenticity folded into the concept of style is a product of the way style is conceived as having been generated: that is, collectively and unconsciously.” p. 157.
was illustrated through the specific case of Huebler’s participation in the Paris exhibition, the curators have overcome, or simply ignored this problem by sticking to the “original,” i.e. authentic resumes of the works. Although this method of work sometimes meant that the curators had to compromise—for security reasons the most accurate presentation (f.e. to tack a piece of paper directly onto the wall) was impossible—it was still prevailed by them to a “design side’ which would have been a betrayal.”

476 The problem of originality is much more significant within conceptual art than that is suggested here. Since I will revisit this theme in detail in the next chapter I allow myself to leave the subject to this too short of notion.
3.5. Conclusion

Apart from Michael Asher’s project that was especially made for the exhibition—as well as some works that were re-executed such as the wall drawings by LeWitt—most of the works in the exhibition can be regarded documentary works, or what Groys has termed “art documentation”: representations of projects that had functioned within a different timeframe and context.478 Interestingly enough, this fact, which had been crucial at the start of conceptual practices, was not a serious point of critique for the artists involved in the show—the discussion that evolved after the opening of the show focused on the theorization of conceptual art rather than its exhibition. That the catalogue was regarded the proper place for the reflection of this discourse, and the exhibition of secondary importance seems to be logical, and even following the conceptual legacy. But the format of the catalogue, as well as that of the exhibition, were deliberately different from the formats used in the early 1960s, which, in a way, had made them look “dead,” as Siegelaub had stressed.

The act of exhibiting conceptual art can be regarded principally conflicting with the conceptual project, but this problem was not specifically addressed in the exhibition.479 If there is one thing that L’art conceptuel: une perspective illustrates, it is that the continued exhibition of conceptual artworks is not a straightforward undertaking. Although the discussions preceding the exhibition were vibrant, the result of this debate was not made visible in the exhibition. The unbalanced junction between the catalogue and the exhibition, following different formats that had a different perspective on historicity, may be the result of the division of tasks; curator Gintz had besides the selection of works little control on the final installation of the exhibition—this was in the responsibility of museum curator Laffon. It is significant to stress that the curatorial responsibility is in this sense underestimated, or the praxis of exhibition-making is taken for granted; hence the opportunity to address historical and theoretical issues of conceptual practices by means of the exhibition failed to attend.

In the 1960s and 1970s the direct collaboration between artists and curators/dealers instigated discursive practices in the arts, which also complicated (traditional) institutional methods and the exhibition of works in a spatial configuration. However, when works of conceptual art are no longer negotiable because they have been consigned in a collection, it becomes more difficult to re-activate their initial, open-ended status—

479 As Poinsot had stressed: “L’exposition, c’est donc a priori la possibilité de la présentation.” Poinsot 1999, p. 123.
they have become the commodities that conceptual artists were trying so hard to avoid. That museums have to guarantee their loaners that the works from their collections are handled with care and protected from possible molestation, make it difficult to communicate the “participatory” aspect of many of these works, hence the example of Art & Language’s Documenta Index. The adversity of conceptual art is that the “original works” are “dead” in terms of exhibition; the documentary remains of these works often need to be translated, interpreted, revived for exhibition, which in a way endangers their authenticity in a strict art-historical perspective. This is the true challenge of the conceptual legacy that remains still open to innovative or experimental forms of exhibition. If anything, this case study shows that it indeed wasn’t about objects in an exhibition, not even for the artists; it was about the discussion. The question, however, remains: how to exhibit a discussion?

The exhibition space has moved a long way from being a “temple to art,” and beyond being “a place for art activity.” It is one site in a string that aims to become a “creative commons.” In such circumstances, what happens to the curator’s responsibility to art’s history, and to the processes of social memory in her or his culture?—Terry Smith

4.1. Reconsidering the Exhibition of Conceptual Art

Parallel to the opening of the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, entitled The Encyclopedic Palace, which was reflecting psychological subversions in art-making, the Fondazione Prada in Venice restaged an exhibition that has been paramount to the conceptualization of artistic thought. Harald Szeemann’s 1969 exhibition Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information, studied and described in-depth over the past two decades, hardly appears to need additional consideration, and yet it was precisely this legendary exhibition that was systematically reconstructed in the eighteenth-century Venetian palace Ca’ Corner della Regina—exhibition venue of the Fondazione Prada. When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969/ Venice 2013 was, according to the Foundation’s president Miuccia Prada who initiated the project, an effort to “verify the possibility of re-establishing the relationship . . . between the works and the public.”

The Bern exhibition, that contributed to a

481 Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form was, already before Bruce Altshuler coined it as one of the canonical exhibitions of the contemporary in his book Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002 (London: Phaidon Press, 2013), considered seminal, and was extensively described in Die Kunst der Ausstellung (Insel Verlag, 1991) and Christian Rattemeyer, Exhibiting the New Art, ‘Op Losse Schroeven’ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ 1969 (London: Afterall Books, 2010), a.o. The original as well as the restaged exhibition included works by Carl Andre, Giovanni Anselmo, Richard Artschwager, Thomas Bang, Jared Bark, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Mel Bochner, Alighiero Boetti, Marinus Boezem, Bill Bollinger, (Daniel Buren), Michael Buthe, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Paul Cotton (Adam II), Hanne Darboven, Walter de Maria, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Rafael Ferrer, Barry Flanagan, (Phillip Glass), Ted Glass, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Douglas Huebler, Paolo Icaro, Alain Jacquet, Neil Jenney, Stephen Kaltenbach, Jo Ann Kaplan, Edward Kienholz (and Jean Tinguely), Yves Klein, Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis, Gary B. Kuehn, Sol LeWitt, Bernd Lohaus, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, Bruce McLean, David Medalla, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, (Hidetoshi Nagasawa), Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Dennis Oppenheim, Panamarenko, Pino Pascali, Paul Pechter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Markus Raetz, Allen Ruppersberg, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Robert Ryman, Frederick Lane Sandbach, Alan Saret, Sarkis, Jean-Frédérique Schnyder, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, (Michael Snow), Keith Sonnier, Richard Tuttle, Frank Lincoln Viner, (Aldo Walker), Franz Erhard Walther, William G. Wegman, Lawrence Weiner, William T. Wiley, and Gilberto Zorio. The names in between parentheses were participating but left unmentioned in the original exhibition, which was rectified in the (catalogue of the) restaged exhibition.
turning-point in art history, was not seen by many and the reconstruction of such an important momentum could in this respect be regarded another possibility to convey the 1969 experience.

Whether the project eventually succeeded in this precise objective can be questioned, but the reconstruction of the historical exhibition, accomplished by the shared efforts of curator Germano Celant, architect Rem Koolhaas, and artist Thomas Demand, certainly challenged existing ideas about art historical research, transmission of knowledge, and curation.483 The “remembering exhibition,” as Reesa Greenberg framed it, has become a recurring genre within curatorial practice today, and to reconstruct a historical exhibition as a “site of memory,” a place where memory can be (re)activated, in that respect, is not a novelty.484 The Venice exhibition fits Greenberg’s typology of ‘the replica,’ most explicitly in its “leap-in-time approach”; reconstructing as identical as possible, although at a different site, the original mise-en-scène of the Kunsthalle Bern.485 While the replication of entire exhibitions did not come about before the early 1990s, replicas of “environments” within museums can be regarded a preparatory practice, as Celant has pointed out. The “reconstruction proposals,” which he developed for the Venice Biennale in 1976, such as ensembles by El Lissitzky, Piet Mondriaan and Lucio Fontana, can therefore be considered anticipating the specific curatorial approach of the Attitudes remake.486

The choice to remake an exhibition that is iconic in its representation of a new art that was created in-process at the exhibition site, and consequently had a certain nonchalance in its installation, is precarious, or even ambiguous, in many respects. Not all of the “original” works from the Bern exhibition have been kept; many of these works


485 Greenberg distinguishes three different types of the remembering exhibition, next to “the replica” these are “the riff” and “the reprise,” which respectively and in brief denote the reconstruction of a historical significant exhibition in the original form either at the original site or in alternated form at a different site, the rethinking of an exhibition in a new exhibitionary form, and the web representation of an exhibition. Greenberg, 2009; Prada, exh. cat. Venice, p. 377.

were demolished after installation, or absent for other reasons. These “deficiencies” were overcome in the Venice remake with the production of replicas, or, if not possible, the photographic representation of the original work. In its meticulous replication of the entire historical setting of the Kunsthalle Bern, as a 1:1 scale model implemented into the architecture of the Ca’ Corner della Regina, the replica exhibition can be considered a unique showcase within its genre. The precise physical reconstruction of the *Attitudes* show was realized through the study of more than one thousand photographs of the original exhibition in Bern, as well as the extensive analysis of documents and correspondence of the Harald Szeemann Archives at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, emphasizing the influence of documentation. In this respect the exhibition is more than a replica, and could also fit Greenberg’s typology of the "riff": recognizing the importance of the exhibition or exhibition phenomenon and rethinking it in exhibition format.

Whereas much effort was put into revitalizing the historical setting, it was in the constant friction between the implemented model of the Bern Kunsthalle and the spaces of Ca’ Corner della Regina, as well as the historical context that was generated through the presentation of documents from the archives, tablets with photographs, selected television interviews, and the extensive catalogue, that the project reached its full potential. As Celant stressed, it has been one of the project’s intentions to reclaim the analysis and comprehension of the history of modern and contemporary art through the study of the relationships that works of art have established within the context of other works and architecture rather than their autonomous status. Although this objective does not directly pay attention to the broader socio-political commitment that the artists in the original show proclaimed; it is a means to provide deeper insight into the artistic and curatorial strategies that were applied to engage with the transformations within the larger society at the time.

---

487 In the cases that the works did become part of important art collections, the original nonchalant installation of these pieces today was certainly challenging in terms of security and insurance.
488 There is no other exhibition so extensively documented as this one by Szeemann, which no doubt contributed to its reputation. The conscientious research that preceded the endeavor in Venice is outstanding, and, worth mentioning, could probably not have been realized by a public art institution depending on external funding. Furthermore, due to incomplete documentation, the works that were originally exhibited in the Schulwarte, an adjoining building of the Kunsthalle, were not exhibited within a recreated setting of the interior of the Schulwarte but on the third floor of the palazzo.
489 Greenberg, 2009.
491 Although an important new approach in the assembling of an exhibition, the relational aspect between the works and the surrounding architecture was not the most radical quality of Szeemann’s project; the break with the “triangle in which art operates—studio, gallery, and museum” and the engagement of many of the artists with the counter-culture of the 1960s were cathartic. As Szeemann declared in his introduction of the catalogue: “It was inevitable that hippie philosophy, the rockers and the use of drugs should eventually affect the position of a
In a strict sense the original *When Attitudes Become Form* was not a conceptual art exhibition, as I have argued in my second chapter, yet, it is generally regarded within the context of conceptual art, as many of the works in the 1969 exhibition were proclaimed within the trend of dematerialization. The reconfiguration of these works in a replica exhibition is therefore indicative to a number of questions related to the curatorial representation of conceptual art. It is for this specific reason that I have chosen to analyze precisely this exhibition as the last case study of this thesis, and not one of the many conceptual art retrospectives that were compiled over the past few years, as *f.e. In & Out of Amsterdam. Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976* at the MoMA in New York in 2009, *With a Probability of Being Seen, Dorothee and Konrad Fischer: Archives of an Attitude* at the MACBA in Barcelona in 2010, and *A Bit of Matter and a Little Bit More: The Collection and Archives of Herman and Nicole Daled 1966-1978* at Haus der Kunst in München in 2010.492

Other than the exhibition in Venice these exhibitions were particularly focused on (private) collections of conceptual art, in which the singularity of the autonomous works rather than the relational component of works in an exhibition dominated. This underlines the acceptance of the “object” of conceptual art, documentary remains of works that cannot simply be identified as (final) works, instead of reconsidering the “open-ended” status of conceptual art that is problematized in its spatial-temporal exhibition.493 The “recuration” of an exhibition that is a textbook example of the temporality of the new art, in its full spatial and temporal dimensions, offers the possibility to productively rethink its aspects of historicity, site specificity and presentation.494 These aspects are key for the understanding of the present-day exhibition of historical works of conceptual art, and will be further analyzed in this chapter.
4.2. (Re-) Curating Art History

Compared to the five months in which the original exhibition was conceived and organized, the remake of *When Attitudes Become Form* was a highly structured assignment that had been elaborated two years in advance. Since *Attitudes* was an “anti-exhibition,” which emphasized the attitude and the mentality of the artist, the included works did not have, or were deliberately rejecting commodity value, consequently leading to the destruction or loss of many of them. As a curator working parallel to Szeemann at the time that *When Attitudes Become Form* was conceived, as well as being involved in the original project, Celant was well aware of the pitfalls of an endeavor as to re-assemble an exhibition with works that declined to be conventional artworks. He describes the momentum of the late 1960s as “[A] cathartic process, aimed at a rebirth. . . . beginning to sweep away inequalities and exalt differences. . . . the obvious sign of this equalization was the abolition of plinths. . . . All that counted was the trace, material or immaterial, left by the person in the setting.” Nonetheless Celant, under the auspices of Prada, met the challenge to reenact these material and immaterial traces.

With the help of the artists who participated in the 1969 event, or, if no longer alive, their estates, all the still existing works were traced, and (most of) the collectors convinced to allow the original mode of installation. To bring together the original works was one thing, but to be authorized to show them in exactly the nonchalant way as they used to be, another. Quite a number of the works, conflicting the commodity status of artworks at the time, were acquired by important museum collections, among which the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and Castello di Rivoli in Turin, now representing eminent market values that are to be secured. Furthermore, the most challenging part of the

---

495 The idea for the project came about in 2010, when Celant and his team had a discussion about remakes of works of art, such as editions and multiples, culminating in the exhibition *The Small Utopia* that took place at the Fondazione Prada in 2012. See Celant in exh. cat. Venice 2013, p. 393.
496 For instance the works by Saret, Alighiero Boetti, Neil Jenney, Richard Artschwager, Robert Morris, Mario Merz, Sarkis and Sol LeWitt were lost or destroyed. See exh. cat Venice, p. 413.
497 As the initiator and representative of Arte Povera in the late 1960s Celant was associated to Szeemann. In a constant dialogue with Szeemann about their shared interests in the art of those days he had been involved in setting up the show in Bern, and was asked to conduct the opening speech.
499 It took quite some persuasive power to convince the collectors, and, in terms of security, the organizers had to submit to current regulations for the protection of artworks, including a limited amount of visitors at the time, under guidance of a security guard. E-mail conversation with Chiara Costa, associate researcher of the Fondazione Prada, May 13, 2014.
remake of the Bern exhibition was how to exhibit the works that were not or no longer available. The register of curatorial inventions that was applied in this respect was impressive, and encouraged a broad perspective on the exhibition of art from the 1960s. In joining forces with Rem Koolhaas and Thomas Demandt, as well as a team of researchers, Celant covered curatorial questions and decisions within the architectural, artistic, and art historical domains.

As a model for the remake venture, Celant referred to his own experience in reconstructing projects of “environmental situations” and complete ensembles, which he applied in the exhibition Ambiente/Arte: dal futurismo alla body art [Environmental Art: From Futurism to Body Art], that was part of the Venice Biennale in 1976.500 According to Celant the reconstruction is an important contribution to the history of knowledge, as he sketched a pre-history of the remake exhibition, starting with the reconstruction of environmental situations of artists such as Vladimir Tatlin, El Lissitzky, Alexandr Rodchenko and Kurt Schwitters done by museums.501 The earliest “exhibition proposals” in this regard, are ascribed to Jean Leering, former director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, who commissioned the reconstruction of El Lissitzky’s Proun Room, as well as a stage set by Mondriaan as early as 1964, Theo van Doesburg’s Flower Room and two scale models of the Café Aubette in 1968, and Moholy-Nagy Licht-Raum Modulator in 1970.502

To position the Attitudes remake within the domain of these reconstructions of environmental works adds a historical component to the recent trend of remembering/replica exhibitions as Greenberg has observed since the early 1990s, and puts the emphasis on the artistic value of the project and the exhibition as a total work of art. Although the Venice exhibition meets the criteria of a replica—in its precise re-assemblement of the original exhibition’s contents, in its archival documentation

---

501 In conversation with Thomas Demand Celant asserts: “Personally, I think that reconstructions—or remakes, reenactments and so on—are an important contribution to the history of knowledge. By this I mean the knowledge of a ‘whole’ that our society has dismantled, exactly as the wholeness of environments has been destroyed. That is why I think it is important to remake something that existed in the past, not only as an object or room, but as a whole. It has no kitsch intent: the idea is to reintroduce it historically, in our accelerated, image-based contemporaneity.” Ibid., p. 415.
502 Leering was highly concerned with the absorption of the arts into the larger social context or society, of which the reconstruction of important “contextual works” can be considered exemplary. The Van Abbemuseum’s current director, Charles Esche, succeeding Leering’s approach has since executed several new reconstructions of works by El Lissitzky, Rodchenko, a.o. as well as reconstructed several historically important exhibitions. Esche considers “the urge to reproduce the canon of exhibitions,” together with the newly developed disciple of exhibition histories “a motor for understanding the social interface of art, and even its future political potential today through analyzing what public presentations achieved and how they functioned in their own time and place.” See Charles Esche, ‘A Different Setting Changes Everything,’ exh. Venice, p. 471. See also René Pingen, Dat museum is een mijnheer. De geschiedenis van het Van Abbemuseum 1936-2003 (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2005).
supplement, and even in its homage to the original—the focus is on the relational aspect of works in an exhibition that exceeds the prevalent modernist tradition to exhibit autonomous artworks in museums of contemporary art.503 Celant declares that the relational component of art is now finally receiving serious attention: “Today we understand that re-creating a situation and a relationship between objects of art is a way of communicating a history that, while it has shaped the developments of the last fifty years, has been lost at the level of experience.”504

The emphasis on experience suggests that the project was merely re-activating or celebrating the historical momentum—which it also did—but it rather offered the possibility to experience the historical exhibition in a contemporary perspective—which is captured in its rehabilitated spatio-temporal installation. Celant in this respect points out “the exhibition setting,” a definition by Terry Smith, “in which meaning can be found not only in the isolated artifact, but also in the dialogue and connection sought and constructed, in the process of mounting and displaying it along with other works of art in a specific space.”505

The most reliable information about how the works were installed in the environs of the Kunsthalle Bern was obviously represented in the more than thousand photographs of the original exhibition.506 The remake of the historical show was therefore largely based on the study and interpretation of these documents—a task in which the participation of Thomas Demand has been significant, and which the artist approached from his own artistic understanding: “We have to operate on a 1:1 scale, which means the surrounding is less speculative, and that is something I always try to make a feature in my own work. . . . To find a balance between abstraction and distraction, it seems key to find the right depth of detail.”507 Remarkably, the type of detail the artist refers to is quite literary, emphasizing the importance of doorframes, floorboards, the white of the wall etcetera, according to Demand, “not because the physical Kunsthalle played such a big role

503 See Greenberg 2009.
505 In the catalogue of the exhibition Celant explains: “Analysis and comprehension of the history of modern and contemporary art has generally passed through the single and compact artifact that can range from the object—picture or sculpture—to the environment, but very rarely through study of the relationships that the works of art have established with the context formed by other works of art or their interactions with architecture. It is time to reclaim this fundamental relational component of the story, which Terry Smith has defined as “the exhibition setting,” in which meaning can be found not only in the isolated artifact, but also in the dialogue and connection sought and constructed, in the process of mounting and displaying it along with other works of art in a specific space.” Ibid., p. 394. See also: Terry Smith, “What is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?,” in Thinking Contemporary Curating (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), p. 30.
506 The catalogue checklist was not entirely correct or even incomplete since a lot of the works that were initially selected by Szeemann were replaced for others at the moment of installation—while the catalogue must have been in the process of printing. E-mail conversation with Chiara Costa, 2014.
507 Demand in conversation with Celant, exh. cat Venice 2013, p. 399.
in the exhibition, but just to have a space within which the artworks can be experienced as a reaction to their surroundings.”

The architectural surroundings of the Kunsthalle have in fact been defining for the exhibitionary form that the works in Attitudes took, since most of them had been made directly at the site. As Christian Rattemeyer has pointed out, the most interesting and compelling aspect of the new art for Szeemann was the tension between dematerialized gestures and their material residues—which held the works in a state between finished and unfinished. He intentionally avoided the expressions “object” and “experiment,” as to make clear that “the newest art” exhibited did not fit any traditional art historical category. Consequently, according to Rattemeyer, the central issue of When Attitudes Become Form was “how to exhibit a gesture,” which “takes literally the idea that exhibiting attitudes must mean deemphasizing the object—locating the radicality of new artistic practices in the ‘dematerialization of the art object.’”

In a corresponding way the central problem that Szeemann was confronted with, how to exhibit a gesture, remains as big a challenge in the assignment of the remake exhibition. To recreate the essence of the original exhibition—its indefinite, in-progress character relating to several socio-political changes at the time—is more complicated than the simple re-assemblage of the material remains of the “dematerialized works” from the original exhibition. The recuration of such an exhibition comes with a responsibility that goes beyond the traditional tasks of the curator. Jean-Marc Poinsot considers this a responsibility that the curator shares with others, like the conservator, the collector, the art critic, and even the viewer, who “have to bring together disparate elements of a work in order to produce effects and meanings, and to contribute to the sustainment of the work outside the attendance and period of activity of the artist.”

---

508 Ibid.
509 “Without ‘becoming form’ such immaterial gestures remain unpresentable in an exhibition, and Szeemann acknowledged that by including several artists and their works only via what he called ‘information’ in the catalogue. Without ‘attitudes,’ the ‘forms’ would be just conventional sculptural objects. Szeemann made sure to create definitive images—iconic moments—that would allow the exhibition to be read as an object—a formed, formal object—while still being ostensibly about gestures of dematerialization, process, concept, and information. Attitude and form created the exhibition’s historical success.” Christian Rattemeyer, “How to Exhibit a Gesture: The Innovations of When Attitudes Become Form,” in Hoffmann, 2012, n. p.
512 Ce que les énoncés performatifs, les récits autorisés et les énoncés théoriques ainsi que la prise en charge de la présentation investissent, ce sont des fonctions qui maintiennent la structure de l’œuvre quand celle-ci n’a pas de structure matérielle permanente. Loin d’être repoussé l’observateur, l’organisateur d’exposition, le conservateur, le collectionneur ou le critique se voient investis de nouvelles responsabilités. Ils doivent mettre ces éléments disparates en œuvre pour produire les effets et le sens et contribuer à la pérennisation de l’œuvre au-delà de la présence et au-delà de la période d’activité de l’artiste. Poinsot, p. 130.
this respect, the reenactment of works “without a permanent material structure” can be considered a participatory practice.\textsuperscript{513}

While many of the artists were still alive at the time of the installation of the show in Venice, Celant and his team have applied several indicating strategies of “recurrating” in direct dialogue with them. Some of the artists in Szeeman’s exhibition already anticipated the future remake of their work in the late 1960s: LeWitt’s wall drawings, which can be re-executed in different spatial situations by means of the certificates preserved with descriptions and diagrams, are the most evident of such works, and, because of the artist’s clear instructions, need no further justification. Other artists actively engaged in the reenactment of their work, like in the case of Ger van Elk’s \textit{Replacement Piece} (1969), Keith Sonnier’s \textit{Mustee} (1968), Weiner’s \textit{A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing of Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall} (1968), or Gilberto Zorio \textit{Let’s drag a little…} (1969).\textsuperscript{514} Reconstructions of conceptualist works from artists who were no longer alive, however, like Richard Artschwager’s \textit{Blp} (1968) Joseph Beuys’s \textit{Fettecke} (1969) or Alain Jacquet’s \textit{Electric wires} (1968), have been approached following the same methodology, and were re-executed with the help of the artists’ estates in Celant’s remake. Another category of reconstruction distinguished in the Venice exhibition is the “exhibition copy,” reproduced works for exhibition only, like Mario Merz’s \textit{Appoggiati} (1969-2013), Robert Morris’s \textit{Felt} (1967-2011) and Bruce Nauman’s \textit{Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals} (1966-2007)—the latter already a copy in the 1969 exhibition.\textsuperscript{515}

Although the re-execution, reenactment or reconstruction of many indefinite works was yet fairly straightforward, the most prominent, or most radical recreation in the \textit{Attitudes} remake was undoubtedly the architectural intervention of the Kunsthalle Bern in the building of the Ca’ Corner della Regina. As Celant explained: “Overlapping the Bern spaces with the eighteenth-century Ca’ Corner della Regina spaces involves both an architectural and temporal tear. A dramatic and spectacular graft where two sets

\textsuperscript{513} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{515} Bruce Nauman already made exhibition copies of his works in the 1960s used for (travelling) exhibitions. Morris has been re-executing his works from the 1960s and 1970s more recently, in a museum as well as a (commercial) gallery context. He re-curated his 1971 exhibition \textit{Bodyspacements} in 2009 in the Tate Modern but more recently re-executed earlier works in the Unlimited exhibition at Art Basel 2012 for the Berlin gallery Spruth Magers. Remarkably describing himself a “choreographer and dancer” in the Bern catalogue Morris stated the following: “...object-type work is not based—as has been supposed—on a particular, limiting, geometric morphology or a particular, desirable set of materials. Lumps are potentially as viable as cubes, rags as acceptable as stainless steel rods.” Robert Morris, exh. cat. Bern, 1969, n. p.
intertwine in a third spatial and temporal case."516 The intention to graft the exhibition in its totality—inserting on a full-size scale the modern rooms of the Bern Kunsthalle, with its white walls, distinct floors, and all the artworks included in their relative positions—into the ancient frescoed and decorated rooms of the Venetian palace was an unusual, as well as ambitious project. As Koolhaas emphasized in a conversation with Celant, it was not clear from the start that they would eventually succeed to reconstruct the historical exhibition in its totality: "[I]Initially we were resigned to the fact that only fragments, or physically reduced spaces that would create a weird relationship with the existing building would work. But when we printed Bern’s plans on transparent film we discovered that the whole building actually fit exactly inside the architecture of Ca’ Corner della Regina."517

To experience the Attitudes exhibition in its totality, or, correspondingly, to understand the original exhibition’s routing within the reconstructed spaces of the Kunsthalle Bern, in fact, was far from self-evident. When visiting the exhibition in Venice, one would enter at the Ca’ Corner della Regina going up the stairs to the second mezzanine floor, first encountering Jannis Kounellis’s Untitled (juta sacks with different contents like coal, peas, rice, and lentils) in the stairways. Subsequently, a rather small room with works by Dibbets (Museum-socle with Angles of 90˚, 1969), and Sarkis (Bac en attente (avec eclairage dans l’eau + neon), exh. copy 2013, and Rouleau en attente (avec neon blanc), 1968) could be entered, whereas reconstructed works by Zorio (Giunchi con arco voltaico, 1969), and Neil Jenney (The Sigmund Biederman Piece, 1968) were placed in the adjacent room.518 In Bern all of these works would have been situated in the same room, but the existing walls of the palace prevented the exact re-assembly of the whole scenery. Moreover, the works in these rooms were originally located at the lower floor of the Kunsthalle Bern and would not have been the firsts to encounter.519 The entry to the original show was via the big entrance hall of the Kunsthalle Bern in which Richard Serra’s Splash Piece (1969) and Belts ((1966-67) were installed to the facing wall—quite a different sequence of events.

517 Ibid., p. 414.
518 In the original show this work was also in the stairways, as other works that were missing here (except Weiner’s square and Jacquet’s wires). Zorio’s work was, like the original, set under voltage several times a day but unlike in the original show it could not be approached but was behind a rope.
519 Jenney’s piece was somewhat altered and bigger than the original. Unfortunately, the more exiting The Curtis Mayfield piece (1968) a shrine covered with aluminium foil and colorful neon signs, was not reenacted. Jenney included a short statement in the Bern catalogue, “My sculpture is theatrical. The activity among the physical presences of the items and events they realize, provided they exist together, is theatrical. This goes beyond the visual image. Ideally my sculpture exists unseen,” suggesting the temporarily existence of the pieces.
The reconstruction of the entrance room of the exhibition in Bern was situated on the first Nobile floor further up the stairs, first engaging a small hallway with a black-and-white tiled floor and photographs on the facing wall. Since the staircase of the palazzo was taking almost half of the original entrance room the precise re-enactment of the exhibition setting was disturbed. Due to enhanced health and safety regulations, Serra’s Splash Piece (1968-69), an in situ work that the artist made with (highly poisonous) hot lead “splashed” against the floor and plinth, could not be reenacted. The same concerned Hidetoshi Nagasawa’s Ghiaccio Secco, a small cube made of dry ice, which is now covered by prohibited materials legislation. Serra’s work Belts (1966-67), in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York (Panza Collection), which hung above Splash Piece, was too fragile to travel and could not be installed. The absence of these works was recaptured in the demarcation of the location at the exhibition site, as if a crime scene, accompanied by black-and-white photographs of the original setting—a peculiar intervention, which nevertheless effectively emphasized their actuality within the historical timeframe.

Regarding the still existing works in this room, a series of minimalist works by Serra, Close Pin Prop, Shovel Plate Prop and Sign Board Prop (all 1969, in the collection of the Guggenheim) were exhibited in a more or less original setting, loosely leaning towards the wall and close to one another directly placed on the replicated black-and-white tiled floor that cut through the architecture of the Ca’ Corner della Regina. Surprisingly, this specific installation took away the neutrality of these formal works, but it was unfortunate that, because of the staircase, they had to be relocated in between two doors of the palazzo and guarded by a thick juta rope, which left the 1960s desecration of the autonomous object-status of the artwork in a contradictory juxtaposition. Because of these hindrances and adjustments the re-assemblage of the entrance hall of the Kunsthalle did not to give a full perspective of the original installation—despite the meticulous replication of architectural details, like the tiled floor, the grey wooden paneling and plinths, its typical doors, windows and radiators, which provided an almost...

---

520 Serra executed this piece earlier in the exhibition Nine at Leo Castelli’s warehouse in December 1968, and in Wim Beeren’s exhibition Op losse schroeven, directly against the façade of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where it was vandalized by opponents of the event soon after installation. Some artists didn’t agree to re-execute their work within the historical context of Attitudes, like Jean-Frédéric Schnyder who decided not to reenact his work Schreibrett because he considered it an early work in his development as an artist no longer interesting in a today’s perspective. In these rare cases similar works were selected. E-mail conversation with Chiara Costa, 2014.

521 Photographic documentation of Michael Heizer’s Dissipate II (1968), and Ground Incision (Loop Drawing) (1968) were also missing in the reconstruction of the Kunsthalle’s entrance room. In fact, none of Michael Heizer’s work was included in the remake exhibition in Venice; Celant explains in the catalogue that his Land Art interventions could not be reenacted in Venice because of “Heizer’s aspiration to actually break down museum boundaries,” but why the documentary works, considered documents and not originals at the time, were not exhibited remains unclear. See exh. cat. Venice 2013, p. 406.
cinematic “décor.” Rather, it showed the extent to which the “survived works” from this specific room of the Bern exhibition were suffering their “confiscation.”

In comparison, the reconstruction of the central room of the Kunsthalle, with distinctive works by Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Gary Kuehn, Reiner Ruthenbeck, and Keith Sonnier, can be considered more successful. All of the works—either in original, exhibition copy, or reenacted—were reassembled on the exact robust herringbone floor and large white walls of the “original's” space, divided by only a few columns of the palazzo underneath. With the biggest and most entire of works brought together, the reconstructed central room of the Kunsthalle was the most convincing in the experience of a historical ambiance, and one where one could actually taste some of the excitement that the original show must have generated. The (historical) artworks that were jumbled up the room, every wall covered, and spread across the floor, where one had to step carefully in between and across them, directly engaged interaction with the visitors. To experience the accumulation of the entire exhibition in this central room was striking, and revealed the precise spatial choreography that Szeemann applied to his exhibition.

Within this careful re-assemblage and reconstruction of works and setting it was somehow surprising that visitors were not more explicitly guided to first enter the upper floor of the Ca’ Corner della Regina, in order to walk through the exhibition as Szeemann had intended. The works, concepts, processes, situations, and information that he wanted to present in the Attitudes exhibition were in their process-based configuration developed in immediate dialogue with the site and routing of the Kunsthalle Bern—an aspect that is also particularly stressed with this project. Koolhaas described the reconstructive venture as “an archeological project to be entangled by the viewer,” which puts emphasis on the ‘receivership’ of the project. It seems the architect is referring to the active or participatory role of the viewer, or the ‘receiver’ according to Lawrence Weiner’s terminology, which was leading in the 1960s understanding of conceptual art. But the

---

522 The distinctive works referred to in this room included Pipe Piece (1968), Screen Piece (1968), and Rope Piece (1969-2011) by Bill Bollinger; Augment (1968), Sans III (1969-2013), and Vinculum II (1969) by Eva Hesse; Untitled (Wedge Piece) (1968) by Gary B. Kuehn; Aschenhaufen III, and Möbel I (both 1968) by Reiner Ruthenbeck; and Mustee (1968-2013), Untitled (Neon and Cloth) (1968), Flocked Wall (1969), and Neon Wrapping Neon and Incandescent Bulbs (1969) by Keith Sonnier.

523 Franz Meyer, director of the Kunsthalle Bern before Szeemann, stated that, “The ‘Attitudes’ exhibition, unlike the contextual group shows before, overwhelmed me. It was an event with a palpable inner necessity, an uncertainty maybe that was felt beneath the skin, but one that was also immensely pleasurable and inspiring” as cited in Rattemeyer 2010, p. 36.

524 It is interesting that the amount of available work is so high in this central or main gallery of the exhibition, which emphasizes the importance of the works from the youngest generation of (mainly) US artists brought together here. For a precise description of the spatial choreography of Szeemann’s exhibition see Rattemeyer 2010, pp. 37-39.


526 See f.e. Jean-Marc Poinrot in conversation with Lawrence Weiner, Beaux-Arts Magazine no. 65, Paris 1988, p.35. “[t]he existence of the work also depends on the decisions of recipients. In this assertion Weiner indicated clearly
small art audience of artists, art dealers and art collectors that affiliated to the new art practices in the 1960s and 1970s can hardly be compared to the increasing number of contemporary art lovers that regularly visit contemporary art manifestations around the world—the Venice Biennale alike to which’s (professional) audience the Prada Foundation was clearly referencing.527

The responsibility for the reenactment of these ‘new art practices’ today is therefore primarily restricted to the “delegated receivership” of the curator, to borrow a definition by Camiel van Winkel, “who receives the work on our behalf, reads, interprets, and assesses it, and communicates the results to us, the audience.”528 In this respect the information provided in the adjoining hand-out and catalogue was essential; comparing the enclosed floor plans and (photographic) views of the original exhibition in the Kunsthalle Bern with those of the remake exhibition in the Ca’ Corner della Regina stimulated to recall the artworks in their original context, and simultaneously added an objectifying historical layer to this experience. In an interview with the “team of the Fondazione Prada, journalists and friends,” published in the catalogue, Celant stressed the importance of addressing different layers of historicity, elaborating not only the spatial, physical and artistic, but also discursive representation of the original exhibition:

Instead of adapting the works nostalgically to fit into Ca’ Corner della Regina, the curatorial, artistic and architectural choice was to plug the whole of ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ into the container. ... The intention was not to go back and adapt history to our space, but to bring back the past exactly as it was. And so, without breaking down the exhibition and diluting it in streams of objects, the novelty lay in putting together the before and the after, the yesterday and the today of the exhibition, obliging them to coexist in a time, context and place that are not the ones in which it was held.529

While the disruption of the implemented model of the Bern Kunsthalle by the architecture of the eighteenth-century palazzo constantly frustrated a simple reviving or remembering of the past, it can be questioned whether the remake of When Attitudes Become Form was meant to function as a genuine replica—i.e. reproduction of the original

---

528 Camiel van Winkel, “Global Concept: Applications and Embodiments,” in Folie 2013, p. 95.
exhibition. Moreover, the provoked frustration encouraged to rethink the values of art from the 1960s in a contemporary perspective, and revealed several problems related to the historical relevance of exhibitions and the so-called “authenticity” of artworks.\textsuperscript{530}

\textsuperscript{530} Aileen Burns and Johan Lundh in their “Review When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969 – Venice 2013,” Kaleidoscope Web Specials, stated that “Like the show, the publication is geared towards art professionals, for whom no detail is insignificant. ‘When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013’ has taken the phenomenon of the curator as pilgrim to a whole new level.” \url{http://kaleidoscope-press.com/web-specials/reviewwhen-attitudes-become-forms-bern-1969venice-2013words-by-aileen-burns-johan-lundh/}
4.3. The Legacy of the Exhibition

An exhibition that is so legendary and canonized as a turning point in art history is intriguing in the sense that one wants to (re-)experience the importance of the original event. For Prada, this even explicitly stipulated the remake venture in Venice, stating in her foreword to the catalogue that she wanted “to verify the possibility of re-establishing the relationship… between the works and the public; moreover to recreate the emotion and passion which one perceives in the original photos from 1969.”\(^{531}\) To move in between the works exactly as they were originally installed, however, did not generate the same encounter as the one represented in the historical photographs. In fact, to come upon the remake exhibition in search for a lost time could be rather disappointing, as the review of Franco Fanelli testified: “[T]he Gelant-Demand-Koolhaas trio, in reproducing a myth, have only managed to produce a faithful but lifeless copy. And in this devitalisation of a great and justly famous exhibition, works that were born out of creative energy come across as taxidermied fetishes, juju-less idols, as snuffed out as the torches by Gilberto Zorio in one of the most gloomy rooms of the claustrophobic sequence.”\(^{532}\)

The problem of re-exhibiting works of art that are remnants of the counter-positioning of the art system as well as the exhibition format itself, is particularly articulated within this observation. Although seemingly obvious, it is important to stress that the legacy of the exhibition, which is created by several, not necessarily correlated events, is not the same as the spatial (re)configuration of the exhibition, or the exhibition as a materiality. Moreover, the documentation of the original exhibition in Bern, as Rattemeyer has pointed out, at the time already projected an image of Szeemann’s project that could not be communicated through the actual exhibition. Knowing that the flexible and indefinite character of the artworks was difficult to grasp at the moment of display, Szeemann cautiously emphasized the site specific, in-process character of the project in photographs, as well as film/video registrations as a means to consolidate his idea of \textit{Attitudes}.\(^{533}\) In this manner he created a representation of the exhibition that effectively generated an overall interest, as well as its reception in the professional art world.

This aspect was also pointed out in the accompanying documentary presentation at the ground floor of the Fondazione Prada. The more than thousand photographs of the original show in Bern were on view on a number of iPads spread around on big tables

\(^{532}\) Fanelli in \textit{The Art Newspaper} 248 (July/ August 2013), p. 25.
\(^{533}\) For instance the famous photograph in which Weiner is holding a chisel in front of his work \textit{A 36’ x 36’ Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall} (1968), which was (clearly) staged since the work was already finished at the moment the picture was shot. See Rattemeyer in Hoffmann 2012, n.p.
with comfortable chairs in a reserved room. A program of television interviews with Szeemann and the artists, essentially showing the activity at the site of the Kunsthalle Bern, were projected in another room, and documents from the Szeemann Archives shown in the hallways contextualized the replica show in the upper floors. In vitrines paraphernalia regarding the set-up of the original show were displayed, including a worn out list with telephone numbers of the participating artists that Szeemann carried with him, transportation budgets for the works, Szeemann’s sketches for the poster of the exhibition, and, most peculiar, a handwritten letter by Szeemann’s mother, in which she begged her son to stop making shows that infuriate the press, and make her afraid of repercussions. The off-putting review by the Swiss press and a number of ridiculing cartoons were displayed aside and illustrated the turmoil that surrounded the original show, which confirmed the image of the exhibition as an anti-establishment venture.534 Functioning as a “parallel exhibition,” this documentary presentation elaborated the importance of archives for the writing of (art) history, but simultaneously showed how much the historical reception of the exhibition is contrasting the actual experience of the exhibition in a spatial configuration.535

Szeemann had been extremely aware of the “politics of publicity,” as Charles Esche has stressed, he was a “charming impresario with an eye for the press and media,” by which means he successfully launched the careers of the artists involved into the market and museum world.536 The recent development of curatorial studies, according to Esche, has created an urge for the canonization of exhibitions, in which Szeemann’s When Attitudes Become Form has subsequently gained "the aura of an exemplary curatorial strategy."537 Esche has certainly played his part in the canonization of Attitudes; as one of the editorial directors of Afterall Books’ "Exhibition Histories" series he commissioned for its inaugural publication the extensive case study on both the exhibitions When Attitudes

534 See also Lange 2013.
535 Curator Glenn Phillips of the Getty Research Institute stated in the New York Observer that “The material from ‘Attitudes’ was in 300 different locations within an archive that stretches a kilometer long. You can’t just go to the ‘Attitudes’ box.’ Mr. Phillips, who calls the Szeemann archive ‘probably the greatest 20th-century art archive in the world,’ happens to be a veteran of what he calls “exhibition remakes,” mostly ones involving performance art. The Prada Foundation show’s “detective work,” as Mr. Phillips put it, took the Getty—Mr. Phillips, along with a research assistant, five cataloguers, three conservators and four photographers—a year to complete.” See Sarah Douglas, “Bad Attitudes: Harald Szeemann’s Landmark Exhibition Was a Scandal in Its Day,” New York Observer, 1-6-2013.
536 http://observer.com/2013/06/bad-attitudes-harald-szeemanns-landmark-exhibition-was-a-scandal-in-its-day/
538 Ibid. The methodologies used in the construction of an exhibition canon have however been criticized to the same degree as art history has been criticized for its imperialistic Western-centered approach, i.e. by Okwui Enwezor. See my report on Former West Conference, Utrecht, November 6, 2009.
539 http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchCongresses/1stFormerWestCongress/Text/ReportDay2
According to Esche, the concentration on this exhibition is not without a reason, since it had an avant-garde quality that foreshadowed the most significant developments in the art that followed, while simultaneously being representative of the moment: “It was speculative yet it took a clear position, proclaiming this new art to be the art of the future as well as a discovery of the present.”

This reflection of the exhibition has been confirmed time and again in several other studies, most recently in Bruce Altshuler’s anthology Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002 (2013). Also, re-interpretations in exhibition format have both celebrated, as adapted its legendary status (to create their own), such as Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-1975 at Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2000, and When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco in 2012. The first, curated by Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, re-examined the artistic legacy of the 1960s and 1970s in British art, to clarify the points of origin of this “formative generation”; the second, curated by Jens Hoffmann, was presented as “a sequel” to, and a re-evaluation of Szeemann’s exhibition. Hoffmann focused on the potential influence of the historical exhibition in artistic practices today, presenting artists working in relation to the history of conceptual art, or responding directly to the 1969 event. A large part of this exhibition was devoted to the representation of the original show including floor plans, photographs and a large-scale model of the Kunsthalle Bern with miniature replicas of the artworks.

Important to point out is that both the exhibitions in London and San Francisco also appropriated the distinguished design of the Attitudes catalogue, following the model of an office binder that contained introductory texts on the exhibition, alphabetical files of all the participating artists with bio-bibliographical information, as well as documentation and several “works” that could not be included in the exhibition. This catalogue format was an indissoluble component in Szeemann’s show; it stressed the information-based quality of many of the works, and served, as was accustomed at the time, as an alternative space in which projects that were too immaterial or conceptual to fit into the physical space in which projects that were too immaterial or conceptual to fit into the physical

---

exhibition could nevertheless be "exhibited." It is remarkable that Celant in his remake did not specifically address this aspect of Attitudes, especially since he himself had been so concerned with the format of the book as an alternative exhibition space in the early 1970s. Instead, the catalogue of the Venice exhibition, an extensive 600-page publication, focused on the remake endeavor as such, in which the historical documentation of the Bern exhibition, together with the floor plans, marked the overture to the detailed description of the reconstruction through interviews with Celant and his team. Additionally, contributions by renowned art historians and curators such as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Charles Esche, Boris Groys, Jens Hoffmann, Chus Martínez, Terry Smith, and Mary-Ann Staniszewski, among others, emphasized either the significance of the historical exhibition, or the implications of its “re-materialization” in a today’s perspective.

In his catalogue interview Celant anticipated the future reception of the Attitudes remake, arguing, “if the exhibition is going to have an effect on criticism it will be through a reinterpretation of the methodologies used in exhibitions and museums in the past and present.” According to Celant, the current market values assigned to art make it almost impossible to show art in the unhindered manner when it was first produced and shown, an aspect that is certainly stressed with the reconstruction venture. Esche, in his catalogue essay, considered the exhibition’s relevance to be particularly found in its essential opposition to modernist tenets as originality and uniqueness; “tenets that have been fundamental to maintaining the value of artworks in the art market.” He calls for the potential significance of the repeated exhibition in Venice:

541 These were the contributions by Jared Bark, Ted Glass, Douglas Huebler, Jo Ann Kaplan, Bernd Lohaus, Bruce McLean, David Medalla, Paul Pechter, Michelangelo Pistoletto and William Wegman.
543 See also: Henry Andersen, “Exhibition // When Attitudes Become Form: From Bern 1969 to Venice 2013,” Berlin Art Link, October 8, 2013. http://www.berlinartlink.com/2013/10/08/exhibition-when-attitudes-become-form-from-bern-1969-to-venice-2013/ . “The catalogue which accompanies the exhibition takes great care to let us know that every piece has been installed with the utmost cooperation with the artists involved (or with their estates), but is it important that we are seeing Alain Jacquet’s wires rather than someone else’s? Not really. In the right frame of mind, certainly, Jacquet’s wires are beautiful – but no more than any others. Rather, the piece’s great achievement is one of directing the viewer’s focus, in placing parenthesis around an everyday banality and in doing so making it beautiful.”
544 Celant further adds: “It will be possible to deduce their positive and negative sides. Certainly it raises questions about the current limitations and defenses required by the market values assigned to art, which makes necessary the systems of isolation that transform perceptions of the works, to the point where museums and collections are being turned into bunkers and strong rooms! It suffices to note the freedom with which the public in 1969, however uninformed. . . . strolled around works located just a few centimeters from one another.” Celant in “Why and How,” exh. cat. Venice 2013, p. 412. Although the critique on the current market system of art seems fairly hypocrite in regard to the costly Venetian event that would not have been possible without a big sponsor like Prada (as the original event would not have been possible without the sponsorship of Phillip Morris), this aspect of the exhibition is certainly relevant and will be further discussed in the last sub-chapter.
If it shapes not only a desire to memorialize a strand of Modernism that is more compatible with the present but also to challenge the construction of Modernism in museums and collections, then it will be of real importance. If it further disrupts the contemporary art world by showing its inadequacy as a successor to the ambitions of ‘When Attitudes Become Form,’ then this 2013 version will go down in art history and some art historians yet to be born might be restaging this Venice version somewhere else in the world in 44 years time.546

Employing this kind of discourse, the remake venture in Venice naturally adds to the already legendary status of Attitudes. In addition, Esche’s perspective on the exhibition’s potential makes clear that the project is specifically addressing a professional art audience, as critic Holland Cotter has vigilantly noted: “The majority of the audience queuing to get in during the biennial’s preview days were curators and art historians. In a young field such as curating, it is little wonder that we are all entranced by this dual offer: to walk through an exhibition curated by a canonized figure and to visit a remarkable and innovative curatorial endeavor orchestrated for and in the present.”547 Nevertheless, the highly staged-managed replica exhibition also instigated an irritable response by some of its (art historical) reviewers, criticizing “[t]he lack of willingness to engage with the selective, antiseptic, undeniably fetishistic return to this particular exhibition.”548

The most forthright, but also premature critique was expressed by the German art historian and critic Helmut Draxler, prior to the exhibition in a conversation with Hal Foster, who asked his opinion on the mode of representation addressed in reenactments of past performances, or in remembering exhibitions, referring to the one in Venice. Draxler criticized the specific approach of the Attitudes remake, questioning the historical correctness of the project: “In general, I would say of course this is a total fake, that you can’t represent history like that if you try to reinstall the Harald Szeemann show When Attitudes Become Form in Venice now. It’s a totally different event doing it now; and artistic ways of dealing with the past are interesting only when they try to precisely address the difference between then and now in one way or another. In doing so they may become critical.”549

546 Ibid., pp. 475-476.
549 Draxler in Folie 2013, p. 251.
Art historian Catherine Spencer asserted that even though the accompanying pamphlet stated that the intervention in the Ca’ Corner della Regina is not connected with a fetishistic and nostalgic dimension, “nostalgia’s seductive spectre is both irrepresible . . . and the most interesting element in the whole enterprise.”550 While Spencer rightly questions how nostalgia affects the writing of history, and whether this is necessarily a negative thing, she herself makes the mistake to uncritically adapt the historical picture of the exhibition, which in comparison with its remake “makes for an experience that feels like a lot of missed opportunities.”551 In both Draxler’s and Spencer’s observations, there is a principle distance to the historical event, a historical “correctness,” which prevents a direct interaction with the curatorial proposition in which the historical setting is re-enacted. The presumption that the 1969 exhibition was a chaotic enterprise, in which “artists made small but significant essays on the museum fabric” (a hole in a floor here, a shaky wiring project there), and the rejection of the 2013 version as “stage-managed, even Disneyfied,” is indeed based on a nostalgic sentiment for the past.552 That the original exhibition might have been as staged-managed as its remake is something that the exact replication of the exhibition’s mise-en-scène presents: history-writing can in fact be a mythifying practice.

In its curatorial re-evaluation the Attitudes remake emphasized how a legend comes into being, which added to a critical perspective of the exhibition and the process of historicization in general. German art historian Klaus Honnef, author of the book Concept Art (1972), who saw Szemann’s exhibition in 1969 in Haus Lange in Krefeld, accurately described the nostalgic feeling linked to the historical show and the inevitable disappointment that followed after seeing the remake in Venice. His critical observation reads: “Since John Fords astounding ‘Liberty Valance’-film, it is known that ‘truth’ in the age of media has no chance against legend. And thus went the winding road of the reconstruction into a nostalgic trip through the labyrinth of one’s own memory and at the end into disappointment. With a weak sentiment that struck the storyteller in Marcel Proust when after a long absence recognizing his beloved grandmother only as an old woman.”553

550 Spencer 2013.
551 Ibid.
Honnef’s remarkable assessment of the remake venture is that it would have been better had Demand made a scale model of the exhibition in Bern and photographed it, since, "It is photographic and cinematic images that, other than Walter Benjamin’s idea of specific events and persons, really bestow the mythic aura.” Demand, however, did make photographs of the exhibition setting within the Ca’ Corner della Regina, included in the exhibition’s catalogue, which actually have the opposite effect. Compared to the vibrant photographs of the original exhibition in the beginning of the catalogue these unambiguous photographs of the life-size scale model squeezed within the Venetian palace emphasize the artificiality of the project. It becomes evident, even more than in the actual experience of the exhibition, that the specific curatorial approach of this project dismisses the replica as an attempt to a simple reviving of the past. As Esche claimed in his catalogue essay, the remake exhibition cannot even be regarded a genuine reproduction of the original; whereas its curator is no longer alive, and the artists’ projects are now static objects, the replica in Venice becomes “a phenomenon totally independent of the original exhibition.”

Consciously or not, the Venice remake is playing with expectations and at the same time not fulfilling these expectations, instead creating an historical distance, which, through the format of the exhibition, gives insight into the critical aspects of historicity. As Cotter has pointed out, the curatorial strategy that Celant and his team applied in a way demythified the status of the original exhibition:

The hyper-presence of two competing spaces and many temporalities pushes back against the immediacy of the 60’s display techniques. The curatorial strategy is not subtle and does not pretend to transport viewers back into a great Szeemann exhibition. Instead, Celant expertly layers references, which gives the audience an intangible sense of a past exhibition, relying on the ability of the audience to experience the show as it is, and as it was simultaneously. At the same time, the Prada’s nesting of architecture inside architecture is itself a disruption, and a clever one. It turns replication into a form of rethinking about art’s past and present, and about how myths are made.

According to Cotter, the show’s reputation as improvisatory and chaotic is “ill founded”; indeed Szeemann made a careful planning of the exhibition’s setting, in which certain rooms were devoted to more established artists, who could be considered

554 Fotografische (und filmische) Bilder sind es, die entgegen Walter Benjamins Ansicht bestimmten Ereignissen und Personen erst die mythische Aura verleihen.” Ibid. Translation by me.
556 Cotter 2013.
progenitors of the younger artists, like Joseph Beuys and Edward Kienholz; while other rooms were assigned to new art tendencies, like the Italian Arte Povera (i.e. Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Mario Merz and Gilberto Zorio), and post-minimal and conceptual art (i.e. Carl Andre, Mel Bochner, Hanne Darboven, LeWitt and Franz Erhard Walther). As noted before, the exhibition culminated in the largest room of the Kunsthalle that was devoted to the “emerging” American artists, among them Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Keith Sonnier, and Walter De Maria. By using the stairways as an additional exhibition space, with documentary (De Maria, Flanagan, Smithson), as well as site related works (Weiner, Jacquet), Szeemann created a Gesamtkunstwerk in the environs of the Kunsthalle, in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts (the individual artworks).

The result of the remake effort in Venice goes beyond a simple reconstruction of the exhibition, while the whole exercise of making an exhibition is taken into consideration, as Celant explained: “[I] think it is important to remake something that existed in the past, not only as an object or room, but as a whole. It has no kitsch intent: the idea is to reintroduce it historically, in our accelerated, image-based contemporaneity. .” The consequences for [the interpretation of] the works of art within this constellation are commanding, as Pierre-Yves Desaive asserted: “Celant forces us to wonder whether it makes sense to display these historical pieces in this way, putting the emphasis on the freedom of the curator. His gesture seems iconoclastic at first glance, but produces the exact opposite effect; even under these conditions, the works maintain their integrity.” The Venice exhibition explicitly addressed, although not explicitly mentioned, the problem to deal with “original” works from the 1960s and 1970s in an exhibitionary perspective, and the role that the curator can play in this. In this respect, integrity, or authenticity, is a significant point of discussion, which is also recurring in the reception of the remake exhibition. But how should the authentic (re-) curation of the historical exhibition and its works be determined?

557 Ibid. That the exhibition was politically radical, as is usually assumed, is another aspect that Cotter regards contradicted in the remake: “Little of the work was topical. The artists were almost exclusively white and Euro-American. Only three—Hesse, Jo Ann Kaplan and Hanne Darboven—were women. In addition, far from being a countercultural bootstrap affair, the show floated on a cloud of money.”


4.4. The Problem of Authenticity (Reproducing Aura)

The strategies used by many artists of the 1960s in order to de-mythify the object of art can be considered, as Boris Groys has pointed out, an art-atheism in which artworks no longer possess autonomous status but are to be understood as "[m]ere documents, illustrations, or signifiers of art."\footnote{561 Boris Groys, “On the Curatorship,” in Art Power (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 49.} The artistic projects, performances, and actions that have taken place during the 1960s and 1970s have been documented, and are often represented in exhibition spaces and museums by means of this documentation. Such documentation, according to Groys, merely refers to art without itself being art—in fact only confirms the absence of the artwork. He however posits that in bringing together different documents or illustrations and additional objects in an installation (or exhibition), the entire installation gains back autonomous status;\footnote{562 Ibid., p. 50.} Groys in this respect refers to Marcel Broodthaers’s *Musee d’Art Moderne, Departement des Aigles* (1973), in which the separate objects are not, and are deliberately labeled "not a work of art,” while the whole installation is.

This principle, according to Groys, can also be applied to the contemporary independent curator, who makes exhibitions comparable to artistic installations; the artworks take in the role of documentation of a curatorial project and do not aim to glorify the image’s autonomous value, like in Hans Ulrich Obrist’s, Molly Nesbit’s, and Rirkrit Tiravanija’s *Utopia Station* at the Venice Biennale in 2003.\footnote{563 For a critical evaluation of *Utopia Station* see also: Liam Gillick, “For a... Functional Utopia? A Review of a Position,” in Paul O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007), pp. 123-136.} Szeemann’s *Attitudes* show, as one of the first curatorial projects to date, can be regarded within this same perspective. The role of the curator was employed by Szeemann as that of an “independent worker,” as Florence Derieux in her study of Szeemann’s methodology has stated, as the “[c]reator and author of the exhibition—he preferred to call himself an ‘exhibition-maker,’” who positioned himself as a “free creative agent.”\footnote{564 Florence Derieux, “Introduction,” in Derieux et al (eds.), *Harald Szeemann. Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2007), p. 8.} Consequently, the exhibition, in the words of Daniel Buren, no longer involved the display of artworks, but, “[t]he exhibition as the exhibition as a work of art,” in which “[t]he works presented are carefully chosen touches of color in the tableau that composes each section (room) as a whole.”\footnote{565 Buren 1972.} Nevertheless Buren’s ironic comment, Szeemann’s exhibition provided a context for the “invisible attitudes” of the artists in the late 1960s by which means—one could pose—they were seen and understood by a (broader) audience. Consequently, the
exhibition in its entirety created an autonomous status that its separate parts, the artworks, could not.

In his catalogue essay "Art Topology: The Reproduction of Aura," Groys claims that the artists of Attitudes did not create 'new,' i.e. original or autonomous objects or artworks—like the avant-garde artists before them were accustomed to do—but "new contexts"; new "utopian, or at least heterotopian 'here and nows.'" As an example of such works, one could think of Jan Dibbets's Museum-socle with Angles of 90° (1969), in which the artist excavated the corners of the Kunsthalle Bern, as well as those of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the exhibition Op losse schroeven, by which means he literary revealed the foundations of the institution, and, in a broader perspective, connected the two exhibitions. Also Michael Heizer's works Depression (1969), a wrecking ball that demolished the asphalt and was left in front of the Kunsthalle, and Cement Through (1969), a nine meter long trench filled with cement in the lawn behind the Kunsthalle, are works that outside the specific context of the Bern exhibition have no particular meaning.

As regards Benjamin, what guarantees these works their status of originality is their inscription in the "here and now"; the aura is determined by their topological context, or historical site rather than their material characteristics. The participating artists in Attitudes, according to Groys, produced "not the things themselves but precisely their auras. And the exhibition also produced its own aura—by creating the 'here and now' for their work." Thus, the site-specificity of the works related to the context of the Kunsthalle Bern as well as the other works in the show generated an aural experience; one that would be unavoidably destroyed at the moment that the original show was dismantled. Groys, however, claims that the reproduction of an exhibition like Attitudes also allows the "reproduction of aura." He considers this statement affirmed by the fact that the exhibition after Bern was similarly reproduced in Krefeld and London before entering its next episode in Venice. In the inimitable conclusion of his catalogue text he states: "The attitude must be utopian or at least heterotopian to be able to keep its aura through reproduction. The naturally emerged aura, as it was described by Benjamin, gets

---

567 For this reason Heizer, as one of the few artists that participated in the original Attitudes show, declined to participate in its remake venture in Venice.
569 Ibid.
lost through the reproductive process, but an artificially produced aura allows itself to be reproduced again.”

Groys emphasizes that “the archive of art documentation” allows a more or less exact reproduction of an exhibition, especially an exhibition like *Attitudes* that is itself a form of documentation. Analyzing the methodologies used by the Fondazione Prada to reproduce the *Attitudes* exhibition as close to its original as possible, however, illustrates how much the system of art is preventing an “authentic” manner of exhibition of works from the 1960s and 1970s. Although Groys’s proposition in theory could be operated, and has been operated in Venice, it is, due to “the current limitations and defenses required by the market values assigned to art,” that the ‘documents’ from Szeemann’s exhibition were hard to reassemble in their original exhibition setting. As Esche has argued, to maintain the value of artworks in the art market, modernist tenets as originality and uniqueness have been fundamental. According to Celant, “[this] makes necessary the systems of isolation that transform perceptions of the works, to the point where museums and collections are being turned into bunkers and strong rooms.” Furthermore, Groys’s perspective on ‘art documentation,’ as well as ‘reproduction’ in regard to the *Attitudes* show is ambiguous and not further elaborated in his catalogue text.

The fact that the original exhibition after Bern was also on show at Haus Lange in Krefeld, as well as at the ICA in London, both in a different setting because of the distinctive architecture, does not prove that the reproduction of the exhibition’s aura is possible, but precisely marks the difference between the repeated historical exhibition and the Venice remake. Whereas Szeemann was still the official curator of the exhibitions in Krefeld and London, in Venice it was Celant who chose to implement the entire Bern exhibition within the interiors of an eighteenth-century palace. The “reproduction” of the *Attitudes* show in Venice has been based on the historical documentation of the original show in Bern, photographs and archival information, as well as the re-assemblage of the “original” works, but did not contain Szeemann’s (original) curatorial methodology. Instead, the applied methodology offers an alternative to traditional art historical research by developing new information and knowledge through the process of re-

---

571 Ibid.
575 I deliberately write “official” in regard to Szeemann’s curatorship of the two sequel *Attitudes* shows, since the exhibition in London has been organized by Charles Harrison, and Lynda Morris has repeatedly asserted that it was Konrad Fischer who, behind the scenes, was responsible for the installation of the show in the ICA. See Morris in Richard 2009.
enacting, as Terry Smith has argued. Smith named the tendency “[t]o revisit past exhibitions by restaging them or by designing a fresh one that reworks aspects of a previous exhibition,” other than Greenberg’s remembering exhibition, a practice of “recuration.”

The significance of curatorial practice as discursive, and the creative role of the curator, is stressed by Smith: “For curators who think in and through exhibitions (as distinct from confining discursivity to speech or text, and from thinking primarily in art historical, art critical or theoretical terms),” the recuration of past exhibitions is a natural/logical consequence. In this respect the Venice remake can be regarded a curatorial exercise, in which solutions for the problems that site-specific or conceptually based works in their re-exhibition require had to be found through different methods of reproduction, as Frieze editor Christy Lange has pointed out:

The result is a mixture of recreation, reconstruction and reenactment, and of absence and presence. It’s possible to look at the show as a meta-show: a conceptual exercise or a curatorial readymade. . . . There are no straightforward solutions to the problems this presents: finding the right shade of grey paint for the baseboards, or attaining the proper shade of yellow to recreate Joseph Beuys’s Fettecke (Fat Corner, 1969). But the show doesn’t attempt to find perfect solutions; rather, it seems to embrace the imperfection of this venture. For that reason, among others, to me this recreation doesn’t feel fetishistic or like a romanticization of the past.

In the adjoining hand-out of the exhibition, Celant, more unequivocally than in his catalogue text, elaborated on the creative aspect of the remake venture. He considered the approach of the project comparable to a “ready-made” in order to become reflective: “[T]aking the whole of ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ and inserting it as an ‘archeological’ citation into the exhibition spaces of Ca’ Corner della Regina, according to a design by Rem Koolhaas and with a visual contribution from Thomas Demand, has created the same effect as the encounter between a bicycle wheel and a stool in Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel (1913).” The specific curatorial strategy, incorporating the

---

577 Ibid. Smith has seen this tendency appear “within biennials (Gwangju 2008, Whitney 2012), contemporary art spaces (Eastside Projects 2008) and in museums as temporary exhibitions or room installations, and in the overall programming of certain museums (most thoroughly at the Van Abbemuseum under the directorship of Charles Esche).”
archeological composition of two separate realities, shows a similarity in approach with a project that Koolhaas developed in 1986 for the Milan Triennale, La Casa Palestra. The “whole” that Celant refers to replicates Koolhaas’s former discourse in this project, which was the result of his critique of the 1984 reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion (1929). Koolhaas addressed the problem of authenticity regarding the architectural reconstruction of Mies’s pavilion, which he considered “a clone, not fundamentally differing from Disney,” which had destroyed its aura.580

Instead Koolhaas wanted, “in the name of higher authenticity,” to research “the true history of the pavilion after the closing of the 1929 World’s Fair and [to collect] whatever archeological remnants it had left across Europe on its return journey.”581 The oral, textual and photographic tradition around the “lifeless, puritanical modern building” was considered an important aspect of its reconstruction in this respect: “Like a Pompeian villa, these fragments were reassembled as far as possible to suggest the former whole.”582 In his own “reconstruction” of Mies’s pavilion within the Triennale building Koolhaas provided a discursive spectacle that elaborated the symbolic history, or perhaps “aura,” of the pavilion—preserved in its photographic and narrative representation. Similar to Honnef, the architect seems to persist in the “inversion” of Benjamin’s notion of originality, in which the photographic (and cinematic) documentation does not copy or represent the original, and thereby eliminates the original’s aura, but instead contributes to the creation of aura.583

Whereas the pavilion was not designed to host an exhibition but was merely an exhibit itself—apart from the purpose-designed furniture and a sculpture by Georg Kolbe

580 Koolhaas and Mau 1995, p. 49. “In 1985, we were invited to participate in the Milan Triennale; the Palazzo della triennale, subdivided neatly into rooms, had all the deadliness/charm of the treasure chamber of a belated pyramid. . . . OMA’s room, projected in the curved exedra of the fascist Triennale building, was deformed—another misfit. By then, phobic about the duty to reveal, we decided to embody our resistance in an exhibit about exhibition. At the time, a clone of Mies’s pavilion was being built in Barcelona. How fundamentally did it differ from Disney? In the name of higher authenticity, we researched the true history of the pavilion after the closing of the 1929 World’s Fair and collected whatever archeological remnants it had left across Europe on its return journey. Like a Pompeian villa, these fragments were reassembled as far as possible to suggest the former whole, but with one inevitable inaccuracy: since our ‘site’ was curved, the pavilion had to be ‘bent.’” Interesting is that Koolhaas in a short story named “The House that Made Mies” suggests that the idea for a 1:1 scale model is inspired on a 1:1 scale model that Mies made for Helene Kröller-Müller for her museum/ house at the Hoge Veluwe (not Wassenaar as is suggested) to experience the project in its total. The museum by Mies was never built, Koolhaas heard the story from Philip Johnson who said it was a fake, but the 1:1 scale model of the house was really built (maybe not in canvas as suggested there are records in the archives of the KMM); Sam Farnsworth discusses the “aura quality” of the pavilion that, contrary to Benjamin’s definition of aura that is lost in the reproduction of an original, was generated through the photographic representation of the pavilion in a series of black and white retouched pictures, see ‘The Barcelona Pavilion: Barometer of Culture,’ http://www.repetti.org/pdf/h1ui8989_Mies_BP1.pdf, p. 6. [August 11, 2014] 581 Koolhaas 1995.
it was empty—Koolhaas used its vacant opportunity to re-exhibit the building as a site where both its historical and current potential was explored. He referred to the project as “an exhibit about exhibition,” recreating the Barcelona Pavilion in an exhibition setting.\textsuperscript{584} In its critical reassessment of Mies’s reconstructed pavilion Koolhaas’s project could be considered an early example of Greenberg’s typology of the riff. Although the \textit{Attitudes} remake in its meticulous replication of the original exhibition’s \textit{mise-en-scène} was less of a “rejuvenation” than Koolhaas’s \textit{Casa Palestra}, the intention to convey the symbolic history of the original exhibition rather than to produce a genuine reconstruction is crucial.

In his plea of the reproduction of aura, Groys argued that there were in fact no original artworks produced in the Bern exhibition but rather contexts, auratic experiences that were topical and temporal, which raises the question how we should regard the “works” from various collections that Celant and his team have reassembled. According to Groys, these works are rather “documents” or “signifiers of art,” but it is important to further explicate their precise documentary status. In his essay “Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation,” Groys distinguishes between types of art documentation.\textsuperscript{585} There is a significant difference between art documentation that refers to past art events—present and visible at a particular time—as a way of recollecting, and art documentation that merely represents artistic interventions, processes, explorations or politically motivated activities, within the context of daily life, which would otherwise remain invisible. In such cases “[a]rt documentation is neither the making present of a past event nor the promise of a coming artwork, but rather . . . the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in any other way.”\textsuperscript{586}

Szeemann’s exhibition certainly created a context for such works, like Robert Smithson’s \textit{Bern Earth – Mirror Displacement} (1969), which can be ascribed to the first category, and Douglas Huebler’s \textit{Duration Piece #9: Berkeley, California – Hull, Massachusetts, January – November 1969} (1969), or Richard Long’s \textit{A Walking Tour in the Berner Oberland} (1969), ascribed to the second, but not all of the works in the Bern exhibition can be considered art documentation. Other than Lippard’s “suitcase exhibitions” or Fischer’s and Wedewer’s \textit{Konzeption}, \textit{Attitudes} was strictly regarded not a conceptual exhibition—i.e. the plan of the exhibition was not based on the assemblage of artists’ proposals or documents. Moreover, even in these exhibitions the “documents” that the artists provided needed some sort of adjustment to be exhibited in a spatio-temporal

\textsuperscript{584} Koolhaas 1995.  
\textsuperscript{585} Groys 2008, p. 54.  
\textsuperscript{586} \textit{Ibid.}
situation. Groys’s perspective on the curated exhibition as a sort of artistic installation in which the artworks function as “documentation of a curatorial project,” in this respect is a more appropriate tool to define the status of works from the 1960s and 1970s, in order to determine how to deal with such works in a today’s exhibitionary context.

The modernist tenets of museums of modern and contemporary art to store and preserve works according to the autonomous aspects of their visible form or materials rather than their relative implications, has proved particularly ineffective for conceptual art—yet precisely what the conceptual artists were trying to undermine. This however does not mean that conceptual artworks have no material relevance, as Groys has stressed: “[C]onceptual artists shifted the emphasis of artmaking away from static, individual objects toward the presentation of new relationships in space and time. These relationships could be purely spatial, but also logical and political. They could be relationships among things, texts, and photo-documents, but could also involve performances, happenings, films, and videos—all of which were shown inside the same installation space.”

Following Groys’s argumentation, re-activating these relationships within the context of its (original) exhibition could also re-activate some sort of aura, which is something the Venice exhibition adapted to.

In bringing together all of the works or “documents” from Szeemann’s *Attitudes*, the individual artworks from this exhibition were more authentically exhibited than in their “autonomous” presentation within the context of random (museum) collections for which they were once acquired. Despite the artificial, or, according to many art historians, “Disneyfied” configuration of the project, this approach did provide a deeper understanding of the authentic significance of these works than any art-historical writing or traditional modernist exhibition can. Smith has argued that “[i]n recent decades, most art museums have shifted their primary focus away from their historical purpose as scholarly repositories of collections, a selection of which was displayed to a limited range of publics for their edification, uplift, and occasionally glorification...” and “have become sites of attraction within the cultural economy of a city, region or nation.”

Within these new museological practices the remake of *When Attitudes Become Form* explored, in close collaboration with important public collections all over the world, the potential that the restaging, representing and reenacting of artworks, performances, happenings and total events can involve for new analysis and development of knowledge within the field of art’s history and exhibition.

---

587 Groys 2011.
4.5. Conclusion

Within the category of the replica exhibition, the exact reconstruction of the entire *mise-en-scène* of a historical exhibition is unprecedented. Although the “repeat-remembering exhibition,” as Greenberg termed it, is based on the re-assemblement of all the original contents of the earlier exhibition in the same, unchanged space exactly like before, it so far didn’t include the reconstruction of the original space within another space. Parts of exhibitions have been re-installed at other venues, like the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991, or Frederick Kiesler’s 1942 display for Peggy Guggenheim’s *Art of This Century* in the same museum in 1997, but in neither of these reconstructions the setting was full scale or entirely faithful to the disposition of the original exhibition’s spaces.\(^{589}\) As a replica or genuine reconstruction of the 1969 *Attitudes* exhibition, however, Celant’s remake in Venice is also not fully appropriate. If anything, the remake-exercise showed the impossibility to revive the historical moment in the sense of the aauratic experience of the original exhibition. Rather, it should be regarded a proposition to disclose the past in another manner than the writing of history.

What is precisely interesting about the *Attitudes* remake is not that through the reproduction of this exhibition the “artificially created aura” of the original show is reproduced, but that the authentic meaning of the artworks is recreated through several discursive interventions in the context of the replica exhibition. The highly staged-managed set-up of the remake project stipulated an engagement with the historical works that would not be possible in any traditional museum setting. The specificity of artworks and how to relate to them (in the past) is an important aspect that is lost in art history. It is in the recreation of these no longer existing works, nonchalant installation at the site, process-based that have no permanent material structure, that the functions that keep the structure of the work, the so-called “ontological status” of the work, become visible. In

---

\(^{589}\) Greenberg 2009. The exhibition *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] was originally held at the Haus der Kunst in München in 1937; Kiesler’s design for the display of Peggy Guggenheim’s *Art of this Century* in New York was on show in 1942; the exhibition replica’s were shown in Stephanie Barran’s 1991 replica exhibition *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, and her 1997 *Exiles and Emigres: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, both at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). In these cases it was the innovative model of display, which stipulated their reenactment in terms of exhibition design. More recent examples can be found in the project *Time Machines Reloaded* at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2011 and 2012. This program included a variety of presentations based on special museum models from the past, like an ‘ethnographic’ installation in two galleries about the genesis of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) (1929-1936) by The Museum of American Art from Berlin, and Lina Bo Bardi’s 1968 design of “glass plinths” for the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) in which paintings and information could be displayed on either sides. In the case of *Attitudes* the display of works was not predesigned for an existing collection of works, but took its final form at the time of installation at the site, anticipating the spatial characteristics of the Kunsthalle Bern.
this respect the public understanding of the works cannot come nearer. Reconstructing “dematerialized works” may in terms of art historical “authenticity” or “originality” not be fully appropriate, but it does come closer to an original expression of the work than documents or (art) documentation do.

The “recreational experience” of the remake show comes uncomfortably close to the one Disney World is providing, and seems to conflict the (art historical) desire for authenticity—as Rosalind Krauss had already demonstrated in her 1998 examination of the contemporary late-capitalist, industrialized museum.590 But as authenticity itself was something that the artists in the Attitudes show were explicitly trying to confront or dispute, the interpretation of the original show and the works in it should be reevaluated. The historical context of the exhibition is represented in its documentation, and even many works or artistic projects in it are merely represented in (art) documentation. These works, which are only to be known through their historical reference, have in the recreated context of the Attitudes exhibition in Venice gained back relevance, or “autonomy,” which would otherwise be lost.591 The inversion of the notion of aura is in this respect useful that it provides a key principle of the valorization of documentation and archives in which a sense of aura is captured. Although this type of “reproduced aura” cannot be effectively reactivated again, the reproduction, recreation, reenactment or reconstruction of past events, performances, projects, and specific artworks can reevaluate the legendary status that is represented in their documentation and generate new types of exhibition of conceptual art.

591 See also Chuz Martinez, “The Politics of Attitudes,” exh. cat. Venice 2013, p. 516: “The aspirations of writing on art have far more to do with the theory of knowledge than with traditional metaphysics. The notion of ‘quality’ has been displaced by another category: relevance. What really ought to have a bearing on writing is the specter of interaction between the mental conceptions with which art works, the attempts to represent these, and the cognitive systems that make structuring and communication between source and receiver possible.”
EPILOGUE

In practices in which people give other people directions, like in theater, there are always instructions—either on paper or spoken by the director who says “move from left to right.” There is always some sort of interpretation; there is no original—Tino Seghal.592

From 2009 to 2011 the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, under the auspices of director Charles Esche, conducted the long-term program Play Van Abbe. Through a number of reconstructive projects and exhibitions the Van Abbemuseum aimed to question the role of the art museum in the 21st century. One of the exhibitions in the program, more explicitly meant to “re-imagine the museum,” was In Between Minimalisms/ Free Sol LeWitt in 2010, curated by Christiane Berndes and Daniel McLean in collaboration with the Danish artists’ collective Superflex. In Between Minimalisms was based on a selection of minimalist and conceptual artworks, and challenged the authority of the museum in regard to the public disclosure of these works from its collection. This was especially accomplished by Superflex’s own contribution to the exhibition, the project Free Sol LeWitt, a full-functioning metal workshop in one of the museum rooms in which the work Untitled (Wall Structure, 1972) by Sol LeWitt was re-fabricated. Following a 1973 statement by LeWitt, which reads that “[i]deas once expressed become the common property of all,” Superflex not only reproduced, but also distributed LeWitt’s work outside the museum, assigned by lot, as a possible answer as to how to make works from a museum collection accessible to broader audiences.593

Although as an appropriation Superflex’s project was invigorating and entertaining, it was too playful in regard to authorship legislations to function as an exemplary museological methodology for the exhibition of historical conceptual works and projects.594 LeWitt’s wall structures, in contrast to his wall drawings, were never meant to be reproduced. It hence should be questioned how a project like Superflex’s can possibly contribute to an understanding of works from the collection that have no permanent form/structure. Moreover, the exhibition also created confusion about the

592 Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Schaars goed. In gesprek met Tino Seghal,” Metropolis M no. 1, 2004; http://metropolism.com/features/schaars-goed/ [December 2, 2015]. Translation by me. [In praktijken waarin mensen andere mensen aanwijzingen geven, zoals in het theater, zijn er altijd instructies, of het nou geschreven instructies zijn of een regisseur die zegt “ga van links naar rechts”. Er is altijd interpretatie, er is geen origineel.]
status of such works: LeWitt’s certificate of Wall Drawing #256 (1975), a type of project that is purposefully directed at re-execution, was framed and presented as an artwork proper within the same exhibition—something of which LeWitt himself would never have approved.

In a seminar related to Superflex’s project, Esche elaborated the project’s potential to stimulate a different approach to the cultural heritage that museums keep and protect; to increase their value in a broader context.\(^{595}\) He, however, also underlined that the manner in which Superflex anticipated the minimal and conceptual artworks from the collection could never be done by a curator.\(^{596}\) In a subsequent symposium at the Van Abbemuseum Esche valued the project by Superflex as a “recontextualization of the collection”; the museum’s collection holds artworks that have become icons, which are hard to understand today.\(^{597}\) How exactly an artists’ project like Superflex’s can actually contribute to the broader cultural understanding of, say, the work by LeWitt, however, remained unanswered.

The project by Superflex is not an isolated case: In recent years a younger generation of artists has revisited the work by artists from the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to evaluate the legacy of artistic practices of those years. According to Terry Smith, the resulting works and projects should also be considered a type of recuration.\(^{598}\) Such artists, Smith argues, are often invited by institutions to “anticipate retrospect.”\(^{599}\) As curators like Esche, but also New York Jewish Museum director Jens Hoffmann, are interested in the reevaluation or “rejuvenation” of important historical exhibitions related to the institutional narrative, they often rely on artists’ projects to do so. Another example is the exhibition 10 at Wattis at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco in 2009, produced by Mexican artist Mario García Torres. At the invitation of Hoffmann, the then director of the institute, García Torres recreated the exhibition 9 at Leo Castelli that Robert Morris organized around his theory of “anti form” at Castelli’s warehouse at West 108th Street in New York in 1968.\(^{600}\) The artist re-fabricated all the works of the original exhibition including a work by Puerto Rican artist Rafael Ferrer, who was not invited by Morris, making use of historical documentation as well as his own

---

596 Ibid.
598 Smith 2012, p. 201. Smith ascribes this practice to a young generation of artists, like Tacita Dean and Liam Gillick.
599 Ibid.
imagination. According to Smith, interesting examples of recuration within artists’ practice disclose “[t]he layering of memory, the counterpoints of time, as they have been, and are manifest in exhibitions.” The “double play” that is applied as to evoke some ambiance of an original exhibition as well as to implement a contemporary presence is a leading principle within the practice of recuration: Smith more generally ascribes the practice of recuration to the tendency of important curatorial models of the past—especially those of the 1960s and 1970s—in relation to the institution. Recuration thus becomes a method to evaluate and innovate the art institution. The examples of recuration that anticipate the expansion of the traditional boundaries of the museum (in regard to collecting, maintaining, and exhibiting, f.e.) by means of re-evaluation of past exhibitions (specifically those of the 1960s and 1970s) that can be distinguished within museum practice, however, are rare still.

While projects like the ones by Superflex and García Torres contribute to the making present of history that is no longer tangible and thus accessible to a today’s audience, they alternatively do not invoke historical correctness. They rather present information that is appropriated according to artistic rather than art historical standards. This might explain why Smith, but Esche as well, assert that the mandate to “anticipate retrospect” is considered limited when it is given to a museum curator instead of to an artist. Traditionally the curator’s role is supposed to safeguard, analyze and present

---

601 Some information on the project can be found in an interview of Wattis director at the time, Jens Hoffman with Garcia Torres: [http://archive.wattis.org/exhibitions/exhibition-formerly-known-passengers-211-mario-garcia-torres](http://archive.wattis.org/exhibitions/exhibition-formerly-known-passengers-211-mario-garcia-torres). There is also a publication that anticipated the event at the Wattis Institute. See Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *Mario Garcia Torres / 9 at Leo Castelli* (San Juan: Instituto de cultura Puertorriquena, 2009); [https://hundredyearsof.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/9atleocastelliinterior.pdf](https://hundredyearsof.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/9atleocastelliinterior.pdf)

602 Conversation with Mario Garcia Torres, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, December 11, 2015.

603 Smith 2012, p. 199.

604 In this respect, the practice of recuration can be considered a form of “new institutionalism,” a term coined by the Norwegian curator Jonas Ekeberg, which refers to “[a] series of curatorial, art educational as well as administrative practices that from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s endeavored to reorganize the structures of mostly medium-sized, publicly funded contemporary art institutions, and to define alternative forms of institutional activity. . . . At least on a discursive level, there occurred a shift away from the institutional framing of an art object as practiced since the 1920s with elements such as the white cube, top-down organization and insider audiences.” Lucie Kolb and Daniel Fluckiger, “New Institutionalism Revisited,” *OnCurating* no. 21 (December, 2013). [http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-21-reader/new-institutionalism-revisited.html#.VmNvvSjH221](http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-21-reader/new-institutionalism-revisited.html#.VmNvvSjH221) (December 5, 2015). See also Jonas Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism Verkssted #1* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003).

cultural heritage, and also to enrich this heritage by acquiring contemporary works. A museum curator, Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak have stressed, “engages, initiates—and, at times, squanders—credit: both the curator’s professional credit, and the institution’s moral credit, in addition to the financial credit of the state.” These museological ethics, however, are becoming difficult to maintain in an era in which museums are pressed to generate their own income and anticipate growing audiences. As Rosalind Krauss has pointed out, the contemporary museum no longer ascribes to a “particular version of the history of art,” but to “a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically spatial.”

Preferably, these two objectives should be combined in a museum that is “taking care” of contemporary works of art, or artworks since the 1960s. What makes the remake exhibition of When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969/ Venice 2013 at the Fondazione Prada in 2013 in Venice precisely so interesting in this respect, is the responsibility that the curatorial team applied to the public conveyance of the works in regard to the context of the historical event. While the legacy of exhibitions from the 1960s and 1970s may be similarly appealing to artists and curators—and curators certainly draw from their experiences and close collaborations with artists—the extent to which art historical research can be used artistically should be handled with great care by the curator. Together with Rem Koolhaas and Thomas Demand, Germano Celant managed to secure the precise and art historically correct conveyance of conceptual works of art within an exhibitionary setting. Furthermore, it was in the close collaboration with several external researchers, archival institutions, artists’ estates, and where possible the artists themselves that the Venice remake progressed into its eventual form.

The exhibition can be considered a truthful example of what Reesa Greenberg termed a remembering exhibition, while it simultaneously furthered this format within the practice of recuration. Other than Greenberg’s definition of the remembering exhibition, Smith’s definition of recuration refers to a practice of reconstructive exhibitions, as to “[r]ecover forgotten histories or adjust distorted memory but also to rethink current practice and to do so by restaging past exhibitions or developing a fresh

---

607 Ibid.
609 Greenberg 2010.
one that reworks aspects of past exhibitions or events."610 As he had stressed, the goal of recuration "[d]oes not seem to be antiquarian repetition but rather to make a contemporary exhibition, one recommended as relevant to current concerns. While of course there would be an inclination to evoke the ambience of the original exhibition, there is also the necessity of shooting it through with contemporary presence."611 Although, remarkably, Smith does not refer to Greenberg's historical typologies of the remembering exhibition, he is specifically critical to types of exhibition remakes that are in line with a typology that Greenberg termed the "replica."612 Marcel Broodthaers's Section Cinema (1972) at 12 Burgplatz, Düsseldorf, genuinely reconstructed at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 2010, is an example of this typology that Smith discards as mere "antiquarian." Broodthaers's décors were in their original execution certainly not devoid of antiquarianism, but due to the lack of contemporary engagement this type of recreated installation does not deserve the label recuration according to Smith.613

The curatorial methodology applied in the Attitudes remake, however, as argued in chapter 4, is greatly conceding to Greenberg's typology of the replica. Celant asserted that his approach was directly influenced by museum reconstructions of ensembles and environments by artists like Mondriaan, Van Doesburg and El Lissitzky, that were first commissioned at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven by director Jean Leering in the mid-1960s.614 Many of the participating artists in the original Attitudes exhibition have themselves reproduced or reenacted earlier works—either to commercially exploit them or not—, which only emphasizes the reluctance of this generation of artists to adhere to the unique artwork. Bruce Nauman already included an exhibition copy of his work Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals (1966) in the Attitudes exhibition in 1969. Robert Morris gradually reproduced more of his "anti-form" works from the 1960s and 1970s since Tate Modern invited him in 2009 to reconstruct his 1971 exhibition Bodyspacemotionthings in the Turbine Hall of the museum.615 Whereas these

610 Smith 2012, p. 194.
611 Ibid., p. 198. Emphasis by me.
612 Greenberg 2010.
613 Smith suggests that this would be due to commercial intentions as to sell the "original" exhibit in a form as close as possible to its initial object status. Ibid. Conversely, Boris Groys considered the reconstruction of Broodthaers’s décors a good example of “reproducing aura.” Groys 2008, p. 94.
614 Celant, exh. cat. Venice 2013. Esche is in his reconstructive programming also directly referring to Leering, who was an architect, and approached the reconstruction of artworks/installations from this architectural point of view.
615 In many aspects Morris regards, at least in the 1960s, the exhibition as a work of art, the temporality and site of the exhibition where of main importance to him. See Annette Michelson, “Three Notes on an Exhibition as a Work,” Artforum vol. VIII no. 10 (June, 1970), pp. 62-64. Another example is the reconstruction of Scatter Piece (1969) at the Art Basel in 2012. Greenberg placed Morris’s remake in the Tate Modern under the replica.
specific cases may not be considered forms of recuration itself the conservatory reconstruction that is applied here can indeed be an aspect of recuration.

The Venice exhibition illustrates that to recurate an important exhibition from the 1960s with regard to “contemporary presence” does not necessarily exclude antiquarianism. Whereas the Attitudes remake highly leaned on the “antiquarian” reconstruction of the Kunsthalle Bern with all the original artworks in their relative positions included, it double-played the principle of nostalgia by simultaneously revealing the “stage-set” of the exhibition and adding historical references by means of documentation and a parallel documentary exhibition. The critical remarks on this “Disneyfied” approach that disregarded historical notions of authenticity or originality, as art historians Helmut Draxler and Catherine Spencer articulated, were certainly misplaced in this respect. They nevertheless stress an important aspect that is neglected within recurated exhibitions and projects by artists.616 Although the shift in art and exhibition practices towards a more “relational aesthetics” and the rejection of the autonomous work of art since the late 1960s has influenced the prevailing traditionally modernist hegemony within art history, it is still the job of an art historian/curator to protect the genuineness or validity of artworks within their historical continuum.617

The specific approach of recuration applied in the Venice exhibition in fact provided many interesting perspectives on both the historical conundrum of the “dematerialization of the art object,” as well as how to justifiably exhibit such artworks in the present. It successfully made use of the exhibition format as a research tool on two levels. The exhibition was used as a critical vehicle to study the historical event at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969 in terms of the curatorial methodology of Harald Szeemann on the one hand, and the reinstallation of the artworks of which many have become canonical today on the other. In accordance with my account that historically the exhibition of conceptual art has been opportunist in many aspects, the precise re-configuration of all the works included in the 1969 Attitudes exhibition within their “original” setting of the Kunsthalle Bern—although now located in an implemented life-size model within the 18th century Venetian palace Ca’ Corner della Regina—revealed the divergence of radical methods of curation within current museological frameworks.

Furthermore, the variety of formats of display applied in the exhibition in Venice presented different historical narratives of the original works, while simultaneously providing a rewarding spatial experience.

This particular example of the “replica” exhibition entails a certain method of art historical research that turns the (making of an) exhibition itself into a form of research. As Simon Sheikh has stressed; “[t]he curatorial has to do with research, in terms of art history and the (brief) history of the concept and practice of curating. However, perhaps, and more intriguingly, the curatorial could now be posited as a form of research, not just into exhibition-making but a specific mode of research that may or may not take on the spatial or temporal form of an exhibition.” Other than art historical studies on the 1969 Attitudes exhibition, the remake in Venice actively engaged with the historical works, and created a context that made it possible to learn about these works in a more empirical mode. Celant’s approach emphasized that the continued exhibition of conceptual art induces a form of research, an insight that might have a radical impact on future current museological practices as well as on the study of the curatorial history of their works from the 1960s and 1970s.

As Boris Groys has stressed, “the archive of art documentation” allows a more or less exact reproduction of an exhibition, especially an exhibition like Attitudes that is itself a form of documentation. Groys’s suggestion could also be applied to an exhibition like Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer’s 1969 Konzeption-Conception: Documentation of a Today’s Art Tendency at the Städtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen, which essentially or even solely consisted of documentation—as the subtitle also underlined. Ironically, during the final course of the writing of this dissertation the present-day Museum Morsbroich recurated the 1969 exhibition in Leverkusen in 2015 under the title More Konzeption Conception Now. The format of this exhibition could be more explicitly termed a “reprise,” since it presented the work of a younger generation of artists relating to the legacy of this exhibition rather than reconstructed the original exhibition.

A more genuine reconstruction of the 1969 exhibition based upon the documentation in the catalogue as well as from the exhibition’s archives might have provided other insights. As demonstrated in chapter 2 the participating artists in Konzeption, consequent to the dictum of conceptual art, had little concern for the physical

---

installation of their works. Primary was “the idea,” contained in the artists’ proposals that were sent to Leverkusen by mail to be included as such in the “catalogue-book.”

According to the archival information that I have examined, the artists’ proposals were supposed to function in the same way in the spatial exhibition within the rooms of the museum, to which they referred as the “space-catalogue.”

The approach of Konzeption, I would argue, constitutes the principle curatorial methodology of a conceptual art exhibition—it makes use of artists’ propositions (concepts) that are to be simply transferred to any chosen venue, and executed by anyone in addition to the artist, at any site besides the exhibition space. Moreover, this type of approach essentially involves some sort of recuration from the very beginning, as the catalogue is considered to be the “blueprint” for the spatial exhibition that is to be installed by “museum experts,” i.e. the technical staff and/or curator. Within the exhibition’s archive there is little evidence that the execution of the works within the spatial exhibition in Leverkusen was discussed with the artists. Additionally, following the exhibition’s reviews, one can conclude that several of the exhibited works differed from the propositions printed in the catalogue. This substantiates my opinion that the artists’ proposals were open to interpretation from the very start, hence, were adjusted at the site by the curator(s).

In his 1969 Studio International interview with Charles Harrison, Seth Siegelaub had stated that in the case of conceptual art it was important that the curator/dealer came up with a solution to show that the artist “had done anything at all.” In Konzeption Fischer in other words “made visible” what the artists themselves had no interest in literally showing themselves or, for that matter, precisely wanted to problematize by not doing it. Although the term “recuration” was not yet used in the late 1960s, I am of opinion that it applies appropriately to Fischer’s method in Konzeption: he recurated in physical form an exhibition, which he had already curated in the catalogue. This enterprise was aimed at better transmitting the contents of his exhibition project to a larger audience—or at least to the small audience interested in conceptual art, which could guarantee the art he promoted an place within the annals of art history.

---

621 “Ausstellung ‘Konzeptkunst,’” financial report (Stadtarchiv Leverkusen, Box 410.1302), 10-6-1969.
622 This principle was used before by Lucy Lippard in her “number shows.” As noted by Sophie Richard, Fischer had consulted Lippard and also Siegelaub how to set up an exhibition with conceptual artworks. Richard 2009.
624 See f.e. Georg Jappe, Studio International. Shortly after Konzeption Klaus Honnef published his book Concept Art (Cologne: Phaidon Verlag, 1971), which is certainly highly influenced by Konrad Fischer’s activities within the field of conceptual art since he refers to several of Fischer’s exhibitions.
Fischer's adopted role of curator-dealer, intermediating between the distribution of works and the production of knowledge through exhibitions, contributed to a great extent to the reception of conceptual art. More importantly however, this intermediary role of the curator is simply inherent to the exhibition of conceptual art. For that reason it should not be negated in future exhibitionary iterations. To put it more bluntly, the lack of this intermediation laid at the basis of the perceived “failure” of *L’Art conceptuel: une perspective*. It caused that the exhibition, as Douglas Huebler had experienced, was “far removed from the original thrust of the conceptual enterprise.”

The exhibition adhered to the museological apparatus of the day that was gradually more appropriating to standards of the market and the division of tasks. The duties for making the exhibition were not shared but delegated: Susanne Pagé, director of the museum, commissioned/invited art historian Claude Gintz to conceive a plan for the exhibition, based upon a selection of significant conceptual works, and the art historical legitimating of these works through the compilation of a catalogue. Subsequently, the (curatorial) staff of the museum executed the spatial exhibition.

A proper disclosure of the historical works was hindered by the discrepancy between the art historical framing of conceptual art and the physical installation of conceptual artworks in the exhibition. The ensuing problems were not, or could not be properly resolved at the time. The examination of the paradigmatic shifts that conceptual art instigated, Thomas Wulffen argued in one of the very few reviews on the exhibition, should not be limited to the catalogue alone, but elaborated in the material reality of the exhibition as well.

While many of the conceptual artists were still alive at the time, the opportunity to discuss with them the curatorial implications of the “conceptual movement,” unfortunately, was left aside. The discussions did not focus on how to exhibit the idea-based art of the 1960s within a different historical timeframe, but on the historical correctness of certain events, positions, and (self-acclaimed) ascriptions—, which was mainly conducted in the thorough scholarly catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. As a result the intention to historically convey the original conceptual works

\[625\] Douglas Huebler in a letter to Juliette Laffon, December 2, 1989, Archives MAMVP (Box 524/9).

\[626\] As Krauss asserted: “[t]he curator no longer operates as combined researcher, writer, director, and producer of an exhibition but will be increasingly specialized into filling only one of these functions.” Krauss 1998, p. 439

\[627\] It was only after Benjamin Buchloh’s seminal essay published first in the catalogue of *L’art conceptuel* and subsequently in *October* journal that an increasing amount of studies and reevaluations of the 1960s discourse on conceptual art was published.

was well served by the catalogue—making use of extensive secondary information—but the spatial exhibition did not similarly succeed in this.629.

Other than the exhibition in Leverkusen, where artists sent in original proposals that would be directly translated to a spatial exhibition, the exhibition in Paris largely dealt with historical works, contained in certificates and “art documentation,” which did not always directly convey the “original” idea of these works in another exhibitionary setting. The written correspondence with several of the participating artists, as well as with representing galleries and collectors, indicates that the museum personnel is thinking and operating in a traditionally modernist method of exhibition-making. The non-permanent condition of conceptual artworks is not fully understood by Gintz’s supporting curatorial staff. The process and discussions are marked by a continuous confusion about “originals” and “reproductions”. Despite that several participating artists attempted to implement new versions of “original” concepts, the museum refused to include “copies” and stuck with the original art documentation. Since many of these documents did not facilitate interaction per se they became rather trivial. Art & Language’s Documenta Index (1972), which originally invited exhibition visitors to operate, remained inaccessible to the visitors of the exhibition because of secured case files.

Curator Gintz was aware of the paradox of curating a retrospective exhibition on the “conceptual art movement.” To get at the heart of conceptual practices he invited Hans Haacke, Michael Asher and Daniel Buren. These artists’ participation exemplified the disruption of traditions and methods in art production that conceptual art gave rise to.630 Unfortunately he did not succeed in executing this plan in the eventual exhibition —apart from the contribution by Asher. Specifically focused on promoting the historicizing endeavor as such it was the only work in the exhibition that functioned in a truly conceptual mode—existing outside the exhibition’s framework it was represented in both exhibition and catalogue only by its primary information. While struggling to find a proper format to address the retrospective as a tool to problematize aesthetic practice—as conceptual art projects used to do—the artist eventually published an announcement of the exhibition in a number of art historical journals. Without secondary information on the laborious completion of the proposal, however, Asher’s subtle institutional critique remained hard to understand for the visitors of the exhibition.

---

629 The documentation of the exhibition within the archives of the museum, never published and not available for publication, also affirms the impression of a rather static exhibition.

630 It was for this reason that Gintz titled his exhibition a perspective and not a retrospective.
In 1989 the Paris exhibition did not yet profit from the emerging variety of new curatorial models that were going to be developed soon after. Since the beginning of the 1990s young curators such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Maria Lind, and Hans Ulrich Obrist focused on the legacy of artistic practices from the late 1960s and early 1970s—a turn that was partly informed by the fact that they had encountered that legacy in the work of the new generation of artists they collaborated with. While these new developments in curatorial strategies contributed to a great extent to the arrival of conceptual art within the field of art historical study, they nevertheless failed to truly explore the implications of conceptual practices within an exhibitionary format.

In the past two decades since *L’art conceptuel: une perspective* a sequel of exhibitions on conceptual art has been organized in various places around the world. The complexities of the “works, concepts, processes, situations, and information” that were produced in the 1960s and 1970s, however, are repeatedly unaddressed within museum exhibitions of conceptual art today. The exhibition *With a Probability of Being Seen, Dorothee and Konrad Fischer: Archives of an Attitude*, shown in 2010-2011 at the MACBA in Barcelona and Museum Kurhaus in Kleve, focused on the private collection of Konrad Fischer. While this exhibition emphasized the role of the gallerist and the importance or uniqueness of many of his acquisitions, it did not necessarily deliver a truly productive disclosure of these works in a present-day timeframe. For example Stanley Brouwn’s *100 mm (card index file cabinet)* from 1977, a file cabinet with 1 meter of index cards each printed with the text “1mm,” could not be opened, thus the already infinitesimal information that constituted the piece was lost.

Modernist tenets of the unique and precious art object remain prevalent within museum practices, and even support market tactics. The market value of reproducible documents of conceptual art prevent the development of innovative methods in (museum) curation, and a historical and more public understanding of these works in their spatio-temporal context. The copyright legislations that museums need to adjust to, Esche indicates, are problematic as this hinders the development the cultural memory, or context of artworks: “If cultural memory is equivalent to copyright than we have a

---

631 Bourriaud has termed these practices “relational aesthetics,” addressing the relational aspect of the works of these artists often functioning beyond the museum or institutional frame, which he considered inspired by the generation of artists from the 1960s. See Bourriaud 1998.

632 Issues of stretching the canon of conceptual art were f.e. addressed in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* at the Queens Museum of Art in New York in 1999. Expanding conceptual practices in contemporary art have been addressed in several exhibitions at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, like *Concept Has Never Meant Horse* in 2006, and a series of exhibitions that resulted in *A Book about Collecting and Exhibiting Conceptual Art after Conceptual Art*, ed. Sabine Folie et. al., (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013).

problem." But copyright as to protect the authorship of artists’ works in collections remains an issue to address, and there are also other positions to take. In an interview that I conducted with the then director of the Stedelijk Museum Ann Goldstein, she asserted that the possible refabrication of conceptual works of art is something which obliges an extensive exchange and collaboration with artists, artists’ estates and other parties that should guarantee authorship protection. Goldstein has personally collaborated with many conceptual artists in both her position as the director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and as a senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Much more than Esche she is first and foremost dedicated to the artist, and is of opinion that both art historian and curator have the responsibility to respectfully deal with the original intentions of the artist and his/her method of work.

While conceptual works of art principally defy the notion of the “original,” the exhibition of such works historically has been rather unconfined; curators and dealers attempted to make visible what they thought to be interesting or important about this new type of art—also as a strategy to sell these works. When these works were to be re-exhibited in a different historical timeframe, though, the museological restrictions according to how to take care of artworks within collections are confronted with the open-ended status of these artworks, which were not simply to dismiss. Unlike other art disciplines visual art traditionally depends strongly on the originality or authenticity of artworks, and although within the case of conceptual art these doctrines are frustrated, the “original idea” still needs to be communicated. Formats of reconstruction, re-enactment, or reproduction are a feasible method to convey these works to a broader audience, but they need to be critically evaluated as well.

Many interesting examples can be found in the work of a younger generation of artists who revisit the work and legacy of the conceptualists, like Garcia Torres, Superflex or Tino Seghal. These artists are motivating curatorial staffs of museums to become better aware that within the continued exhibition or presentation of conceptualist works a great deal of interpretation is involved. Other successful cases of recuration have passed on the completion of this thesis, such as Seth Siegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016. In this commemorative exhibition, curated by museum curator Leontine Coelewij and researcher Sara Martinetti.

636 Ibid.
a large part was devoted to Siegelaub’s conceptual exhibitions, making use of reconstructed spaces and re-enactments of original exhibition settings. This specific approach supports my thesis that innovative methods of recuration that address the dilemma of exhibition within conceptual art are indeed possible within museums of modern and contemporary art.

Conceptual works can be executed by others than the artist her- or himself, and in their initial stage have been executed by collaborating professionals, i.e. curators, dealers, or collectors. It is no coincidence that within the development of conceptual practices in the late 1960s and early 1970s the role of the curator became more active; the type of art as it were required this. This intermediary role of the curator becomes increasingly important within a sustained exhibition of these works—especially when the artist is no longer there—and should be more seriously applied, or, in fact, art historically verified. Following the above and getting back to my main question it must be concluded that to properly exhibit historical works of conceptual art within a today’s perspective predominantly requires some sort of recuration. It is up to future curators as how to elaborate various formats of recuration within the continued exhibition of conceptual art; this dissertation has provided the field of complexities and problems that need to be taken into consideration in such exercises.

637 The exhibition ran from December 12, 2015 to April 17, 2016, and was developed in memoriam to the in 2013-deceased Siegelaub, in collaboration with his widow and former curator of the Stedelijk Museum Marja Bloem. Martinetti is working on a PhD thesis on the various activities of Siegelaub at the Institut national d’histoire de l’art in Paris.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hoffmann, J., (ed.), *Mario García Torres / 9 at Leo Castelli* (San Juan: Instituto de cultura Puertorriqueña, 2009).


Lippard, L. R., *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 focuses on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, antiform, systems, earth, or process art* (New York: Praeger, 1973).


Winkel, C. van, "Dertig jaar buiten de perken. Gesprek over Sonsbeek 71 met Cor Blok, Judith Cahen en Lambert Tegenbosch," De Witte Raaf no. 91 (May/June, 2001).
http://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/2289

Winkel, C. van, During the Exhibition the Gallery Will Be Closed: Contemporary Art and the Paradoxes of Conceptualism (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012).


Other Sources

Archives MAMVP (Box 524/1-13).


Conversations (e-mail) with Chiara Costa (Fondazione Prada), December, 2014.

Conversation with Mario Garcia Torres, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, December 11, 2015.

Former West Conference, Utrecht, November 6, 2009:
http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchConferences/1stFormerWestCongress/Text/Report
Day2


Stadtarchiv Leverkusen (Box 410.1302).

Stadtarchiv Düsseldorf (Box IV 29367).

SUMMARY

Within art history conceptual art has gained importance in its radical break with modernist traditions of art’s production, distribution and reception. At the end of the 1960s conceptual artists focused on criticizing the autonomous and aestheticized status of the artwork, as well as the broader implications of the general art system that lacked socio-political engagement. This resulted in an artistic practice that appealed to the “dematerialization of the art object.” Although this positioning of the conceptual artists essentially challenged both traditional institutions and art market, it was soon to become included in the same system they were trying to dispute. Due to the use of contracts, certificates and other documents that contained the information of artworks that were physically not accessible, conceptual art, ironically enough, could be commodified and sold and eventually ended up in many public art collections. Whereas many of the first collectors of conceptual art were private persons who entered into an agreement with the artists that was mainly to support their work, the public disclosure of these works was not important and the documents were to be regarded the artworks themselves—which created problems for their continued exhibition.

In this thesis the dilemma of exhibition within conceptual art practices is analyzed and set against its theoretical discourse, as well as its historical ascription, in order to gain insight into the strategies and methodologies that conceptual artists applied to show their work. Anticipating Michael Newman’s suggestion that the remained documents of conceptual art contain some sort of “open-ended assignment” of conceptual art as a movement, the main question that is inquired here is how historical works of conceptual art should be handled within a contemporary exhibitionary context: What should be considered the “original artwork,” and, to what extent is the continued exhibition of such work, which is, after all, the task of public collections, conflicting the intentions of the art historical “movement”? Wouldn’t it be better to accept the documentary status of many works of conceptual art, and present these in books and publications, as was initially be thought to be the proper place for it? Or, if the exhibition in a spatial configuration is nevertheless compulsory, what other formats of display would be appropriate to effectively convey these works?

While the historical exhibition of conceptual art appears to be an opportunist endeavor in many aspects, the analysis of this history provides an understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of conceptual art’s “ontological condition,” as well as of the artistic and curatorial strategies that guaranteed the survival of conceptual art as a movement. Exhibitions do not only represent artistic or aesthetic, but also and even more
in institutional or socio-economic strategies, and it is in regard to this that a curatorial perspective reveals the communicative, or even “promotional” politics of conceptual art rather than its theoretical affirmations—although these aspects cannot entirely be separated within conceptual art. In three case studies of museum exhibitions of conceptual art the historical development of conceptual art within an exhibitionary context is outlined, which both explains and unravels its state of preservation within the collections of public museums of contemporary art. Within this development a principle of “recuration,” has currently entered the field, which offers “re-evaluative” perspectives and methodologies of exhibition-making that are more appropriate for a continued exhibition of conceptual artworks. It will be argued that the approach of recuration can encourage innovative and experimental methodologies of exhibition with respect to conceptual art’s critical attitude towards the “art object”—although conflicting modernist tenets of originality and market value—within contemporary museum practices.