



TIME

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“...still alive”.

Thoughts on experiencing Presence in Non-Objective Art

My talk will be about time in contemporary art. But I will not deal with time as an artistic theme or address the issue of the portrayal of time. Neither will I talk about the time of the production of art or how an artist experiences time. My topic is formulated in a stricter sense and focuses on the experience of time in the perception of non-objective art. I will only speak from the perspective of the person who views art and his or her experience of time in the aesthetics of viewing. I will speak about presence and contemporaneity.

It is in keeping with a good academic tradition to first define the concepts you wish to speak about. I will not be doing this for compelling reasons. Time is the main concept of my talk, and this is precisely where the difficulties already begin. For at least 2,500 years now, the nature of time has been a theme of philosophic contemplation. But the results achieved in finding widely accepted definitions during this long period of research and probing have been sobering: To sum it all up, the answer is “Time is not definable.”¹ This is how succinctly the philosopher Michael Theunissen expresses it in his book *Negative Theologie der Zeit [Negative Theology of Time]*. The reason we do not dispose over any definition of time is not due to a lack of philosophical thought. Not even the natural sciences find themselves in a position to define time. They simply presume it to be a fundamental concept, which is the same thing they do with space. Philosophy can at least teach us why time may not be defined. As soon as we begin to think about time, the time we need to think about it comes into play. Time is not an object we can grasp, but rather the medium of our experience, in which everything we experience, do, and think takes place. As Michael Theunissen puts it: “(...) the experience of time is caught up by the time of the experience, which is to say: the time the experience, always a process, takes. Because in this respect time acts behind our backs, we are never wholly able to make an object of it, never quite able to place it before us. It remains indefinable for this reason.”²

Time is thus something we do not grasp objectively, but only experience. We know time not by concepts, but from practical life. In today’s post-industrial, media and service society, this largely happens in our stating, as it goes, we “have no time”, that we lack time. All too often we experience time in the form of its lacking: we feel time

constraints and are put under pressure by business appointments and deadlines. One of the most surprising consequences is the so-called leisure stress. No wonder that books advising us on “time management” are very popular. The anthropological background for our lack of time is well known to us and yet for the most part we go to great lengths to suppress it: It has to do with the knowledge of our own limited lifespan. Humans are mortal beings. We do not have enough time for the simple reason that some day we will die. The fact of death imbues our sense of time with the necessary existential seriousness. Michael Theunissen says that we are inescapably subjected to the rule of time and suffer from this fact. To be liberated from time—and this for Theunissen means happiness—may only be perceived in what he terms as “tarrying awhile or lingering”: Linger is not going with the flow of time, tearing yourself away from it. The most important paradigm for it is aesthetic contemplation.³ If aesthetic contemplation indeed comprises a moment of existential happiness, then this should be reason enough to ask what the experience of time is all about that we encounter in our aesthetic contemplation of non-objective contemporary art.

This is why I will first speak of the element of time in art and the difference between the effects of meaning and the effects of presence. Secondly, I will remind everyone that those first generations of the non-objective avant-garde, let’s say from Mondrian to Ad Reinhardt, mostly tried to evade time by attributing timelessly valid meanings to their works—unsuccessfully, in my opinion. Thirdly, I will talk about the experience of time in painting following after Minimalism, which had sought to liberate itself from all metaphysical meanings. Fourthly, I will attempt to interpret a work of concept art, namely several telegrams by On Kawara, though not under the usual premises of the effects of meaning, but rather the effects of presence. I do this in the hope of ultimately gaining something towards the understanding of the importance of non-objective art today.

1. From the very second a work of fine art is completed, it conveys something of the time of its origin. Strictly speaking then, each encounter with a work of art is already a view of the past. This fact seems trivial. But it is precisely this phenomenon that makes an academic discipline such as art history possible and meaningful in the first place. The iconology of Erwin Panofsky is still one of the

leading methods that defines art history. It is concerned precisely with determining the “intrinsic meaning or content” of a work of art by perceiving it as a document of its time and conditions, and placing it within a history of cultural symptoms.⁴

By understanding works of art largely as the symptoms of notions typical for an artist, an art landscape, an epoch, a class consciousness, a view of the world, etc. we are achieving a vast amount for regaining a historical context that had been losing its contours in the past. Art works of the past open themselves up to us through the historical reconstruction and interpretation of their levels of sense and meaning (and if you think about it, each work of art we encounter is art of the past). But on the other hand, this methodic approach continually passes over the moment, which stands, or should stand, at the center of all our dealings with a work of art: the aesthetic experience of its physical presence now.

The interpretation of art—and not only professional interpretation, but precisely also the intuitive understanding by the interested art lover—focuses for the most part entirely on the level of meaning of a work of art. Already in the first semester of art history we learn that we should only examine works of art by their historical context and that we should not trust our own senses. Artists, for the most part, have a diametrically opposite understanding. Many of them react skeptically or very badly to attempts at interpretation because they fear that wanting to understand will damage the direct sensual perception of the works. Anyone dealing with painters who work with monochrome colors, for example, knows their dilemma of being constantly faced with questions as to what their works mean. Or people tell them they cannot understand their paintings. That the demand is not for understanding, but for viewing, that the concern is for the sensual presence of the work, for an aesthetic experience of the work of art in its material presence, is something we are unable to understand if we are primarily concerned with establishing a meaning. Therefore, what is continuously expected or even demanded, are explanations of the artist’s intention, which is to say: more or less elaborate theories. We live in a culture of meaning. Meaning is conveyed by all types of media. What this amounts to may be witnessed in any large exhibition where visitors, instead of allowing the presence of the works of say, a Francis Bacon or a Caravaggio to exert their visual effects on them, instead hold their audio-guides close to their ears in order to get the significance of the works as quickly as possible.

To reiterate here: In following the literature scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, we may differentiate between the effects of meaning and the effects of the presence of a work of art. Effects of meaning are all effects that make interpretation and understanding necessary. Effects of presence are effects that originate solely from the material presence of the work of art. They address the senses alone. Works of art always inevitably produce both types of effects. They may not be played off against each other.

2. My hypothesis is therefore that non-objective art is in an excellent position for producing effects of presence, and thus make possible an aesthetic experience of an intensive presence. The reason for this is that by dispensing with a portrayal of the outside world in its changeability and randomness, it (non-objective art) is in a position

to make a theme of the material facts of the work itself, such as color, form, material, light, etc. With Gumbrecht, the concept of presence is initially understood as being mainly spatial: “What is present to us [...] is in front of us, in reach of and tangible for our bodies”⁵ But the corporeal presence may only be felt in a special experience of time: at this very moment, in the present, highlighted in the flow of time. Non-objective art can be a contemporary art in the most literal sense of the word, because it focuses on the present with its material, non-depictive appearance. We might designate this as the utopia of non-objective art: to stop the flow of interpretations and processes of understanding and—if only for a few moments—make possible the experience of a pure and intense present.

At this point I must remind you briefly that the historical avant-gardes of non-objective art mostly strove to evade time by fixing the meaning of their work, i.e. defining it through the use of general concepts. Within the European as well as the American avant-garde art there are numerous concepts of timelessness. This means: Art was based on universals, invariant structures of nature or of the human intellect or mathematical laws. In other words: they were supposed to be unchanging on principle and thus, timelessly valid. I will cite only three extremely different examples here: Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt.

For Mondrian, art was to be the visible expression of the universal in its unchangeableness, i.e. timelessness: “This unchangeable thing we attempt to create as purely as possible. (...) the portrayal of the unchangeable relationship: the relationship of two straight lines standing at a right angle to each other.”⁶ “If the universal is the most essential, it must be the primal reason of all life and all art”, he wrote in *De Stijl* in 1917, continuing: “The more definite (conscious) this being at one with the universal is felt, the more the subjective, the individual, is abrogated.”⁷

In his articles, Barnett Newman repeatedly referred to presence and to his interest in the experience of time. “The concern with space bores me. I insist on my experience of sensations in time—not the sense of time but the physical sensation of time.”⁸ But instead of relying solely on the presence of effects in his colors and forms, he repeatedly loaded them down with metaphysical meaning in his articles, especially with the concept of “the sublime”, which he describes with concepts such as “world mystery” or “metaphysical secrets”⁹

Ad Reinhardt is a special case because particularly with respect to his most recent pictures, he denies any sort of attribution of meaning to works of art. Reinhardt, too, speaks of universality and transcendence, of “style-less universal painting”. His “black paintings” are only mere repetitions of the same ideal: “a pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting, (...) ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art.”¹⁰ The absolute negativity of the picture recalls the negative theology of the mystics, God’s existence without any attributes. In this respect, Reinhardt relies on the effect of sense of his pictures in as far as he refuses them any positive attribution of sense—but in doing so he does not escape attributing sense, because this negation is precisely what constitutes their significance.

All of this and further attempts to bring the interpretation of pictures to an end by attributing timeless meanings is doomed to fail. The reason for this was clearly stated almost 200 years ago by the philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher: “Those desiring to exclude what is individual completely overlook that fact that what they establish as objective knowledge always relies precisely on the particular understanding of their special language.”¹¹ Mondrian’s universal, Newman’s sublime, and Reinhardt’s negativity comprise these particular concepts and notions, which we do not automatically grasp from our own horizon of understanding. They must be accessed through interpretation. The studies on what Mondrian anyway meant with his concept of the universal, whether he was influenced by his Protestantism, his occupation with theosophy, etc., fill entire bookshelves. Similar applies to Newman’s notion of the sublime and Reinhardt’s negativity.

3. Minimal art was the heroic attempt to end once and for all the notion of a work of art as a sign for metaphysical meaning and allow it to revel in its pure self-identity. The fact that this claim may not be met without contradiction is not a topic I shall enter into here. I will not speak now of Minimal Art, but I would like to point out that works of art, which have passed through the experience of Minimalism afford a good departure point for making presence possible. For example, this applies to the Radical Painting of someone like Günter Umberg. Unlike Ad Reinhardt’s *Black Paintings* bordering on the immaterial, Umberg’s black pictures are entirely material objects, i.e. painted color, multi-layered pigments on a picture carrier. An object in space, which the viewer confronts, searching for a viewpoint. An alterative Other, a counterpart not at our disposal. Not at our disposal because it is vulnerable, since the pigment surface cannot withstand even the slightest touch. This is how an almost personal relationship to the picture comes about: “Paintings as objects, as bodies in the world, are extensions of the human condition.”¹² Pictures as bodies desiring touch and refusing it at the same time, bodies without a message, without meaning—an ideal situation for experiencing presence: “My relationship to color is determined by its physical presence.”¹³ Actually I mention Günter Umberg merely for the reason that he is the only artist I know of who has ever referred to the pain of saying farewell in connection with viewing a picture, the “sense of pain upon departure” from the picture.¹⁴ This pain at departing says a lot about the time structure of presence. For we may not keep up presence for any length of time. The picture, when it approaches us, when it “presents itself” has the quality of a phenomenon that opens itself for timeless moments, but then withdraws again in terms of its presence. The pain of departure means that we must leave the direct physical presence of the picture at some point and experience that even the strongest memory of it can never replace the direct contemplation. According to Aristotle, the time of presence in aesthetic experience is “separate”, something Gumbrecht refers to as “fragmented”. It is the experience of the moment—but of a moment, which in a way remains timeless.

The measure of time, namely, plays no role in the experience of presence. It is even an age-old topos of the aesthetics of presence that a moment of eternity may flash in an intensively-experienced moment. And yet, we must still allot a picture the time it needs to reveal itself and open up. In museums, objects with a viewing

period averaging more than 20 seconds are considered to have a great “holding power”. If you look at the two pictures by Thomas Pihl outside in the exhibition for 20 seconds, you will have scarcely seen them yet. It takes a much longer time of contemplation until the pictures approach us, until they reveal themselves as pictures, until they reach us. But if you allow it to happen, they present entirely astonishing viewing experiences. Upon longer contemplation, namely, it emerges that these pictures are not at all as uniform and monochrome as they first appear to be. Rather they consist of numerous stacked layers of poured acrylic paint shining through. After taking a certain time for the eye to get used to them, the layers that lie deeper below very slowly emerge, the color becoming more complex and ambiguous. If you stand close enough to the paintings, their surfaces begin to blur into an incomprehensible color phenomenon, one in which our gaze loses any kind of hold. It is an astonishing experience when suddenly the eye perceives a tiny irregularity, a spot of color or an air bubble. Instantaneously the picture reveals again its tangible material surface, which now suddenly proves to be much richer in detail than had been initially detected.

4. I would now like to try to take a look at a work by On Kawara under the premises of the experience of presence. This is not the way we customarily look at his work. Kawara is normally reckoned among the concept artists and this is considered to be an art directed towards the effects of sense par excellence. According to Joseph Kosuth, art works anyway do not do anything else but produce meaning. Nevertheless, I believe it is legitimate to view On Kawara’s 19 telegrams shown here in the exhibition as material objects. For whatever their underlying concept or idea is, it may anyway only be experienced by the viewer through its material implementation. We are dealing here with 19 telegrams from the series *I AM STILL ALIVE*, which Kawara had written to Klaus Honnef in the 1970s. My thanks go to Klaus Honnef at this point for loaning them to us for this exhibition. The message of these telegrams does not exhaust itself in the semantics of their text, which simply reads: “I am still alive. On Kawara.” But the semantics are dependent on what is referred to in media theory as the “materiality of communication.”¹⁵ Regardless of whether a sentence has been written by hand on paper, or if it has been printed, chiseled in stone, or lights up written in neon, it definitely makes a difference for the meaning of the text. In the case of *I AM STILL ALIVE* we are dealing with telegrams. The telegram is a medium of urgency. You send telegrams if you have to say something important quickly and urgently. And you do this tersely and precisely, because they are expensive, their price being based upon the number of words. Thus, a telegram is in a hurry to get to its recipient. It also means that it outdates very quickly. Kawara’s telegrams are overly saturated with time that has passed. Not only the postmark and the address of the recipient, which is no longer valid, attest to the time, which has passed since then. Also the yellowed paper that was never meant anyway to be kept for any length of time. Likewise the typewriter print—today we use computer print-outs. The postal institution, the German Federal Postal Service, is something of the past since having been privatized in 1994. And anyway the telegram is an outdated medium in an age of e-mail and cell phone. In many countries as a result

there is no longer any possibility to send a telegram. As material objects Kawara’s telegrams are saturated with signs of time past. But they still bear a message in the first person singular present tense: “I am still alive”. As the material trace of past moments they store these. The telegrams bear in addition the name of the artist, though of course, not as a handwritten signature, only the name.¹⁶ Thus, they are bound to the person of On Kawara and yet separable from him because it always remains uncertain whether the name is the actual author of the sentence or whether the sentence is mere quotation or indirect speech. These telegrams will not stop saying that I am still alive. They will not even stop doing this when On Kawara is indeed no longer alive. Carl Andre once defined Minimalism as “attempting the greatest efficiency with the least means.”¹⁷ In this respect Kawara’s telegrams are extremely minimalist. In the poverty of their aesthetic appearance and the simple repetition of their terse message, life and death, past and future collide into moments, which perforate the sluggish surface of the flow of time like pin-pricks. In experiencing presence, the boundaries between subject and object become blurred—what the telegrams say becomes identical for a moment with what the viewer experiences.

5. Here in this exhibition we are showing works by renowned, mature artists alongside works by younger artists, who besides Thomas Pihl, include Nelleke Beltjens, Yuko Sakurai, András Gál, Rene Rietmeyer and Miriam Prantl. What is the reason anyway that artists are still creating pictures and sculptures with a simple language of stylistic means, works which do not portray anything, do not represent anything, do not narrate, symbolize nothing, and bear no message? Moreover these are works about which we have long stopped believing they reveal to us the universal nature of the world or metaphysical reality. What is the reason that so many people still find it so important to deal with such non-objective works nearly 100 years after the beginning of abstract art, and 40 years after Minimalism? Based on what I have already said, I would like to attempt to provide a short answer here.

As Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht notes, we live in a culture of meaning, not in a culture of presence. We constantly produce effects of meaning and multiply them with the mass media. This applies not only to the humanities but also to a large degree to our wholly normal everyday lives. There is no event, no claim by any politician, and certainly none by a soccer coach or pop star, which is not interpreted and laid out, commented, and discussed in a hundred ways. We pile sense upon sense, even if this may not be differentiated from non-sense. And in this, our experience of presence is getting drastically lost. Of course in this symposium we also wish to discuss and produce effects of sense. This is necessary and important. But, precisely as art historians or art critics, we must continuously bear in mind that art works may never completely be explained by theory or meaning. The sensual, material makeup of the work in its presence is not the cinders, slag, and ashes, the undigested remains of theory. It rather serves to make aesthetic experience possible at all, the experience of an intensified moment, the thing others refer to as the “happiness of lingering” (Theunissen) or the “joy of presence” (Jean-Luc Nancy). In my opinion this is the reason why we need such pictures. Put in



the words of the Frankfurt aesthetics professor Martin Seel: “In the perception of the incomprehensible peculiarity of something which is a sensually given, we gain a view of our lives in the present that is otherwise not at our disposal. The attention to what is appearing is thus at the same time attention we pay to ourselves.”¹⁸ To an even greater extent this applies to the appearance of a work of art: It makes the experience of an intensified feeling of self possible, a fleeting moment of breaking free of the reign of time, allowing us to experience the intensive moments that we are still alive...

1 Michael Theunissen, *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 37.
2 Ibid., p. 43 f.
3 Ibid., pp. 285-298.
4 Erwin Panofsky, *Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art*, in: E. P., *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*, New York 1955, pp. 26-54, quote p. 30.
5 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning cannot convey*, Stanford 2004, p. 17.
6 Piet Mondrian, *Dialog über die neue Gestaltung*, quoted in Hans L.C. Jaffé, *Mondrian und De Stijl*, Cologne 1967, p. 117.
7 Piet Mondrian, *Das Bestimmte und das Unbestimmte*, in: *ibid.*, p. 106, footnote 8.
8 Barnett Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, New York 1990, p. 174 f.
9 Ibid., p. 140.
10 *Art as Art. The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*. Edited by Barbara Rose, New York 1976, p. 83.
11 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (1811), quoted here after: Manfred Frank, *Die Unhintergebarkeit von Individualität*, Frankfurt am Main 1986, p. 118.
12 Quoted after: Hannelore Kersting (ed.), *Günter Umberg*, Cologne 1989, p. 47.
13 Ibid., p. 20.
14 Ibid., p. 23.
15 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (ed.), *Materialität der Kommunikation*, 2nd edition, Frankfurt am Main 1995.
16 In my opinion, this aspect is not taken enough into account in the otherwise instructive discourse by Takashi Hiraide. *Die Revolution des Augenblicks. On Kawara als Sprache*, in: *On Kawara. Erscheinen - Verschwinden*, edited by Udo Kittelmann, Cologne 1997, pp. 31-46, (on I am still alive: p. 40 f.).
17 *Artists in their Own Words, Interviews with Paul Cummings*, New York 1979, p. 191.
18 Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, p. 9.

RENE RIETMEYER

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 15 June 2007



Rene Rietmeyer (1957, Netherlands) creates Boxes with which he expresses himself and his awareness of time in relation to his surroundings.*

Depicting self-experienced and non self-experienced time

We humans perceive time only as a result of memory. If we had no conscious memory, we would not be aware of time at all, we would only see the Now. The result of having memory and the creation of our way of measuring time causes our perception of time to appear as a line. Mathematicians, physicists, philosophers and others have made statements about space being finite and time being infinite, but to me it seems as if Time and Space themselves, as well as Existence, are all infinite.

I am an artist, not a philosopher, and unfortunately my lifetime is simply too short to focus on both directions equally good. So I decided to concentrate on expressing my thoughts, myself, in objects and not in writing. Therefore I will not explain here my philosophical thoughts about time, but rather explain how time is expressed in my works. I express not only the time I have experienced, but also time I have not witnessed myself. My installations do not just represent me, they are part of me. My works are often classified as minimal- or non-representational art, but they are not. Although I admit that for communicational reasons I have used the word non-representational myself, I am of the opinion that each work of art represents something, even more than just itself.

My works have become the way they are because of many influences from the past. Knowledge and experiences have formed my intellect, and my work is also influenced by my personal and emotional condition at the moment of their actual execution. Some artists claim that their work is purely intellectual, and others claim they are purely emotional artists. Both influences, emotional and intellectual, are indeed present in my work and me. The separation between the emotional and intellectual is another discussion, but these tendencies exert both a great influence on me and my work. They are strongly related to the time and space I exist in.

Expressing the present and the past

The closest my objects come to something called 'expressing the present' is when I execute the actual manual handling of the physi-

cally present construction of the object. At the actual moment of execution, my emotional constitution adjusts the decisions I had made earlier on. Variations in color, the amount of and the way in which I apply material on the carrier, are for example influenced by my emotional condition during the object's execution. These emotional influences are mainly momentary. Of great influence are, for example, my surroundings and my personal constitution, whether I am hungry or if I just had sex and am tired but satisfied. Many of the decisions about how my objects turn out are made long before the actual execution. The decision about how a series of Boxes will look like is a conscious choice of my means of expression. Certain colors, materials, textures, shapes and compositions express for me certain thoughts and emotions. By connecting them to the subject, I am able to express my intellectual and emotional relationship to the subject. Knowledge about material, color, size, surface-structure, composition and space. Knowledge about the thoughts of other artists I communicate with, but also the knowledge about thoughts and works of artists who are already dead. Knowledge about us, mankind, about the world and the space and time we live in. The thoughts standing at the origin of the intellectual decision about how to construct my work come from somewhere. That origin is to be found in the time that has passed.

Roman Opalka, who sits here next to me, is older than me. He lived before I ever started my life and before Roman, there were other humans. As a human, I am capable of creating an awareness about 'Time which has passed', but in order to create that awareness, I need knowledge and there just isn't enough lifetime to collect all the knowledge I would wish to collect.

How little do I know about the time before the earth existed, about the origin of the earth and the beginning of life. I know a little more about the era when dinosaurs inhabited the world and for me it is not hard to imagine that once dinosaurs probably walked where I am now standing at this very moment. At that time humans did not exist. We, Homo sapiens, came much later, perhaps about 200.000 years ago, and it looks like it took us roughly another 150.000 years before we developed the first cultural aspects. This would mean that, Homo sapiens existed probably 150,000 years without cultural things. From this period we have not found evidence of anything,





having to do with music or art. All those cultural acts must have only started an approximately mere 50,000 years ago.

It was communication which mainly helped us to develop. Writing seems to be the most crucial of all human skills. The, up to now, oldest discovered writing only dates from 5,500 years ago. Communication seems to be the key to so many things. But although we humans have become capable of managing very complex communications, in order to reach as many humans possible it remains wise to use a language, words and sentence constructions, which have a fair chance of being understood.

We communicate not only through spoken language and writing, music and gestures, but also through our paintings and objects. Humans express their thoughts in the paintings and objects they make. These thoughts and the knowledge expressed create an awareness about us as human beings, and the way in which we are able to communicate. But without written statements by the artist, or without having spoken to the artist in person, we will never know what the creator really meant with the works he or she created, and even then, transporting thoughts and emotions honestly and sincerely, remains difficult.

During the last few thousand years many paintings and objects have been created, but it seems to be just the last 150 years where artists have been looking for other goals for their creations than just making religion-related works or representing visually experienced or imaginary scenery. Around 100 years ago, an abstract language in art appeared with people like Kandinsky, Malevich, or later with Mondrian and Barnett Newman. It was Frank Stella who created more or less by coincidence a framework, which made his painting look like an object. The nature of what painting was indeed changed. Painting no longer had to merely depict an image or simulate a window. A painting now became an object in itself, a physical entity in a

room. Surrounding all the creations, abstract thoughts had developed. Donald Judd for example, tried to depersonalize his objects. Although he failed in this attempt, his thoughts and all the knowledge I gained from such people who lived before my personal, consciously experienced time, have helped me in creating my own thoughts about all the formal elements I use to make my works.

Time and my work

I was born in 1957 in the Netherlands. Many events have taken place since then, but it took several years for my brain to reach the level of development where I was able to realize that those events actually happened. It took time and effort to consciously become more aware of myself and my surroundings. That awareness of consciously experiencing my own existence will hopefully continue to grow.

To live my life within art, contemporary art, was an intellectual decision I made in 1993 while living in Greece. Listening, reading, observing, discussing, as a human being, I have learned and continue to learn from others. It is a combination of adopting knowledge and adding my own thoughts to it.

In 1996, I lived for a while in Vallauris, in the South of France. With the little money I earned from selling my work, I went to Paris, to the Centre Pompidou, to look at Roman Opalka's work. At that time three works by Roman Opalka were being shown there. I sat in front of his works, while Polish numbers came out of the speakers. He tried to explain Time to me and I tried to understand. Ten years later, in 2006, again in France, I stood with Roman in his Octagon, discussing Time and now, on 15 June 2007, we are both speaking here in Amsterdam, aware that soon I might witness that Roman will not be able to continue painting infinity, because some day he will die.

Robert Rauschenberg told me that when he was younger, he believed that there was not enough world for him to discover and now, conscious of the fact that he would soon die, he said; "I am running out of time." It is this awareness, of how short my own expected Life-Time actually will be, that made me decide to create the best possible balance between a professional life that is as challenging as possible, experiencing as much as possible in this world, and enjoying a sexual life that is as interesting as possible. Time itself does not stop. We just cease to exist.

Time in my work is expressed in the choice of color, in the choice of shape, size, surface, composition and even in the choice of the materials. These choices are always made in relation to the subject I have chosen for that particular series. These choices are made emotionally as well as intellectually. In order to express the emotions I wish to express, and in order to communicate with the spectator, I have to have at least some knowledge of abstract language. Take color, for example: the thoughts about color came from people such as Goethe, Itten and even Wittgenstein. Their knowledge helped make it possible to use color for communication more consciously. So when I choose a color, the choice is always a combination of my momentary emotional condition and of the knowledge I gained about human thoughts made in the past. But not only color, also other elements such as shape, texture and material can be used to communicate and it is all these things I can make use of. This is not only because of the knowledge about how these elements have been



used in the past, but also because of the knowledge about how most humans respond to these elements. With my consciously taken choices, I express myself and my awareness about human history and the history before humans, my awareness about Time.

In 2001, I lived for some months in an area of Germany called Saarland, which is a coalmining region close to the French border. I always claimed that you could see the coalmines in the genes of the people living there. It was such a dark feeling. For the Boxes I made there, I wasn't able to choose any material other than heavy steel, but as a person very much alive and living in that surrounding, unwilling to be sucked into that society, I gave it a powerful presence. On one side I painted red oil paint, human life.

Here in the next hall, I am also showing Boxes with the title "USA, New Orleans, May 2002". While driving by car from Miami to Los Angeles, I stopped off in New Orleans, experiencing the city, and I remember being disappointed. So later, back in my studio, I chose black and then I chose a shape like a coffin. Now, years of time have passed and meanwhile, disaster has struck New Orleans. The knowledge of what happened in the time after I created my objects has changed the meaning of them. While creating an object, only thoughts and knowledge of the past can go into it, but after the object has been made, through the passage of time, the meaning of an object changes. As time passes, new thoughts are created, we add our newly acquired knowledge to the objects we observe.

Just a month ago I created an installation of Boxes called "Life". For these Boxes I choose the color red because it is human and has a strong presence. I chose the size, compact; and I chose the material, ceramic, because ceramic lasts a long time, longer than wood. Within all their formal elements, with all their subjectivity, these ceramic Boxes represent all my thoughts, me as a total entity. These Boxes, "Life", are proof of my existence. They capture my

awareness of the time I could not witness myself as well as my personally experienced Life-Time. And, after I myself have died, each "Life" Box will continue to exist and communicate.

Questions from the audience

Valerie Laxton: How satisfied are you with your paintings?

Rene Rietmeyer: My work is always the maximum result of what I am capable of at that specific moment in time and space. Sometimes I'm very tired and I just cannot create anything better, or sometimes my arm hurts so much that I am unable to work like I would want to, or maybe I had to work in a very small studio and could not create larger works. Whatever the circumstances and the limitations are, I always try to attain the maximum result. Therefore I always have reason to be satisfied with the outcome.

VL: So you never feel that you have to commit suicide because...

RR: No, and that is a nice feeling. I look at my work and I can see the situation, the time and the location where they were made. I remember that I went to Japan and as usual I was totally broke. The paint became very thin, the canvas had a very cheap quality and the wood and I got thinner as well. That was my first 'Japan Time'. Later, in Germany, I had some money and could order 107 steel Boxes to be made and put thick oil paint on them, but I also remember having worked for weeks in a cold garage in the Netherlands, where it was just 3° Celsius (38°F). I had to put my oil paint on a little heater so that I at least could get the paint out of the tube. And then there were times when I worked in August, in my Miami studio and I was trying to not let too much of my sweat drip into the oil paint because it mixes so badly. My objects become what they become. Always. Each Box I make is a honest result of me, my existence at that moment in time and space, an object from that specific time in my life.

KLAUS HONNEF

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 15 June 2007



Klaus Honnef (1939 in Tilsit) is an art critic and curator. In 1970 he wrote the very first book on Concept Art. Lives in Bonn, Germany.*

Time—A Challenge for the Visual Arts

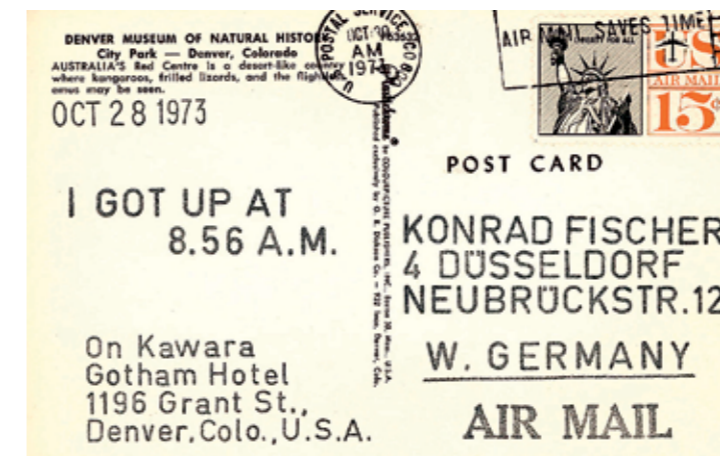
The much-feared Viennese theater critic and writer Alfred Polgar once noted that when he looked at his watch after two hours of a piece about as eventful as a journey across the Argentine plains, he was shocked to realize only five minutes had passed. Albeit, the biting remark casts significant light upon a phenomenon more difficult to grasp than a swarm of bees, and all those who dare to tackle it might just end up with comparable results. By differentiating between at least two different levels of time, the one passing objectively, and the one subjectively-felt, the witty author made clear first of all that there is no such thing as absolute time, and secondly, this insight notwithstanding, he opened a Pandora's box of all the endeavors for tailoring time to fit the human imagination by using plausible systems. Even the simple question of what we may understand by objective time culminates in a dilemma people have been trying to tackle with the most varying models until now, without ever being able to achieve anything approaching objectivity, defined as the "objective" meaning of the concept. Any answer is, namely, always based on premises that, according to the philosopher Karl R. Popper, may not be verified in the final analysis, i.e. checked for their ultimate claim to truth. At most they may be falsified, and must therefore be discarded as untenable.

In this respect what is considered to be an objective passage of time, following in the globally-connected world a mathematical, linear scale gained from astronomic observations, is in no way more objective than the opinion according to which time passes in a constant cycle of the eternal return of what is always the same, or at least similar. The model of a linear and measurable progression of time is fed from a host of observations. In his deductions concerning the phenomenon of time, however, empirical facts get mixed in with a number of a priori premises, such as the unprovable assumption that mathematical principles guarantee objective findings, among other things. The whole matter becomes even more complicated by the fact that even empiricism is only one of a number of possible

approaches to reality, or more precisely, to what is located outside the subjective environment of every person, i.e. his external world. Long before the clock began to rule sovereign in the European Middle Ages, symbolizing the linear progression of time, the Chinese had their own instrument of measurement. They relinquished it, however, because it was not in keeping with their notions of time. In the linear and cyclical models of time, both notions of time are mirrored, which as a rule, characterize complex cultures, whereby the cyclical is much older than the linear model, and more common, too.

The feeling that time is a phenomenon that progresses in a certain direction is probably one of the consequences of the arduous process, where at the end mankind learned to walk in an upright position and then became aware of his or her own mortality. In western cultures of Antiquity, death affirmed the path of life, so to speak. This notion lives on in the monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, yet in contrast to the polytheists, they hold in store more comfort beyond death than Hades, that desolate shadow realm of high Greek culture. In medieval European thought, the eschatological perspective was heightened even more. Death all but supplied the beat for the progression of time. This is manifest in the many poignant sculptures of the body of Christ dying on the Cross, which on the other hand promise the redemption of man through the death of the Son of God and his physical resurrection after death. In other words: a life in absolute timelessness. The short phase of life proffered the tempting possibility of gaining chances for a joyous existence in a timeless paradise, if man only behaved in a certain way, a paradise mankind had once been driven out of for its sins. From the standpoint of the secular Modern movement, the chronological imperative has been expressed ultimately as a radical belief in progress in this world, thanks to which things inescapably and constantly develop for the better. Consequently, in their wake death has taken on features of something random, so that its occurrence seems more and more like an act of sabotage in a logically planned world. Simply suppressing it is the inadequate, though understandable, answer.

Although mankind began very early on to document the varying relationships to the fleeting phenomenon of time, also in pictures, this only happened rather indirectly. Pictures, in as much as



they do not shine out as metaphors in the literary disciplines, belong to the material facets of what is real, they are part of the world of things. And their creators have no other choice than to illustrate in the visual form of things the supernatural, the divine, and the spiritual. It is not by chance that we apostrophize what picture works deal with, even as objects. Nevertheless, there often emerges in the visual exploration and portrayal of the respective objects a moment of the fourth, temporal dimension. It is sometimes weaker, sometimes stronger in the pictures, but it is on principle closed to the picture works themselves due to its specific nature—except as a reflection of the passage of time happening in them as such. Up to the late modern times, before the beginning of the Modern movements, it was even customary that literally in and on the surface of paintings the most varied time periods found their places beside each other, so that earlier and later events were realized in the same time frame. To cite only a random example, there is the way Baroque master Caspar de Crayer (1584-1669) places the *Pietà*, the grieving Mother of God with the corpse of her son lying in her lap, immediately next to the wealthy Brussels citizens Henric van Dondelberghe and his wife as donors of the work of art. The gap in time only strikes an eye schooled in the modern mode of perception. To portray the life and passion of Christ from station to station in small cassettes within a topographically secluded context was a common practice of medieval wall painting, by the way. The picture language of comics maintains only a superficial, formal reference to this mode of portrayal today. The murder ballads in medieval folk art and modern film served as the models for this.

Also, in the late-medieval portrayals of the changing seasons, such as we find in the famous *Book of Hours* of the Duke of Berry by the Limbourg Brothers, a moment of the progression of time is revealed, albeit only subliminally. It may well be that it is physically experienced in the act of the book's user turning the pages. Most likely he will have given no thought to this, however, since time was not yet a problematic factor of his cosmos. Yet at the beginning of the modern times in panel painting, Pieter Breughel the Elder and a whole army of painters occupied themselves with the theme of the seasons. However, the rediscovery of Antiquity in the art of the Renais-



sance proved to be the more important impulse. By the artists' adapting and renewing antique narrative patterns, they decisively enlivened what had been, for the most part, a static picture surface prior to this. In comparison with the rigid picture world of the Middle Ages, the pictures and sculptures literally burst with movement in a view of the world more oriented to life before death, and it is a truism that movement takes place in time. Time is, so to speak, the non-visible desideratum of movement. A polemic art criticism later branded the achievement of picture representation and narration as elements of a machinery of illusion. In doing so, starting in the second half of the 19th century its proponents helped the cause of the artistic avant-garde against the superior strength of what had in the meantime become a hardened and too academic tradition, thereby attributing to the avant-garde a higher content of truth—whatever that is in art. Nonetheless, in the repertory of narrative painting a certain duration is bound to develop, within which the narrated material takes place, regardless of whether the dimension of time (as time) was relegated to the periphery of artistic interest. The painters and sculptors always commit the kinetic realization of what is portrayed to the imagination of the viewers of their pictures.

In such works of art, expressly focusing on the birth and passing in the human and material world, the situation is considerably different. Granted, they too force the capacity of the viewers' imagination in a special way. But the demands put upon them not only comprise the visual level of the events shown, the iconic signs, but rather some of the objects portrayed indicate a meaning beyond what they factually appear to be in the pictures. They are symbolic signs referring to a repertory of knowledge. In the *Still Lifes* by Willem Kalf and his contemporaries in 17th century Netherlandish painting, the deciphering of the symbols still seems to be relatively simple, when for example, the wonderfully painted fruit is accompanied by one bearing signs of decay. Like the famous bad apple that spoils the whole bunch, this fruit, too, infests the rest of the pieces and imbues the entire atmosphere of the painting and its demonstratively shown splendor with the admonishing undertone of transience, with a 'memento mori'. In addition, certain animals and plants also stand for the passage of time. Flies above all. On the one hand, Christian iconography attributes to them features such as sinfulness, death,

and destruction, but on the other hand the insect, due to its short lifespan, embodies the transience and limits of human life.

And thus, unabated until the beginning of the Modern, it is death that sets the measure for the orientation to the temporal in the visual arts. As opposed to this, the civil techniques and forms for meeting life's challenges, originating in the cities with their inhabitants, the craftsman, merchants, and bankers and expressed in measuring, scaling, and a maximum of efficiency in the use of disposable time do not play a significant role in the visual arts. At best the fact that the pictures gradually detached themselves from their one-time ritual ties, emancipated and established themselves as works of an art tending towards autonomy, attests to the growing social influence of the bourgeoisie. The rise of genres such as portraits, landscapes, and still lifes and the decline of history painting marked the best side of social and cultural development.

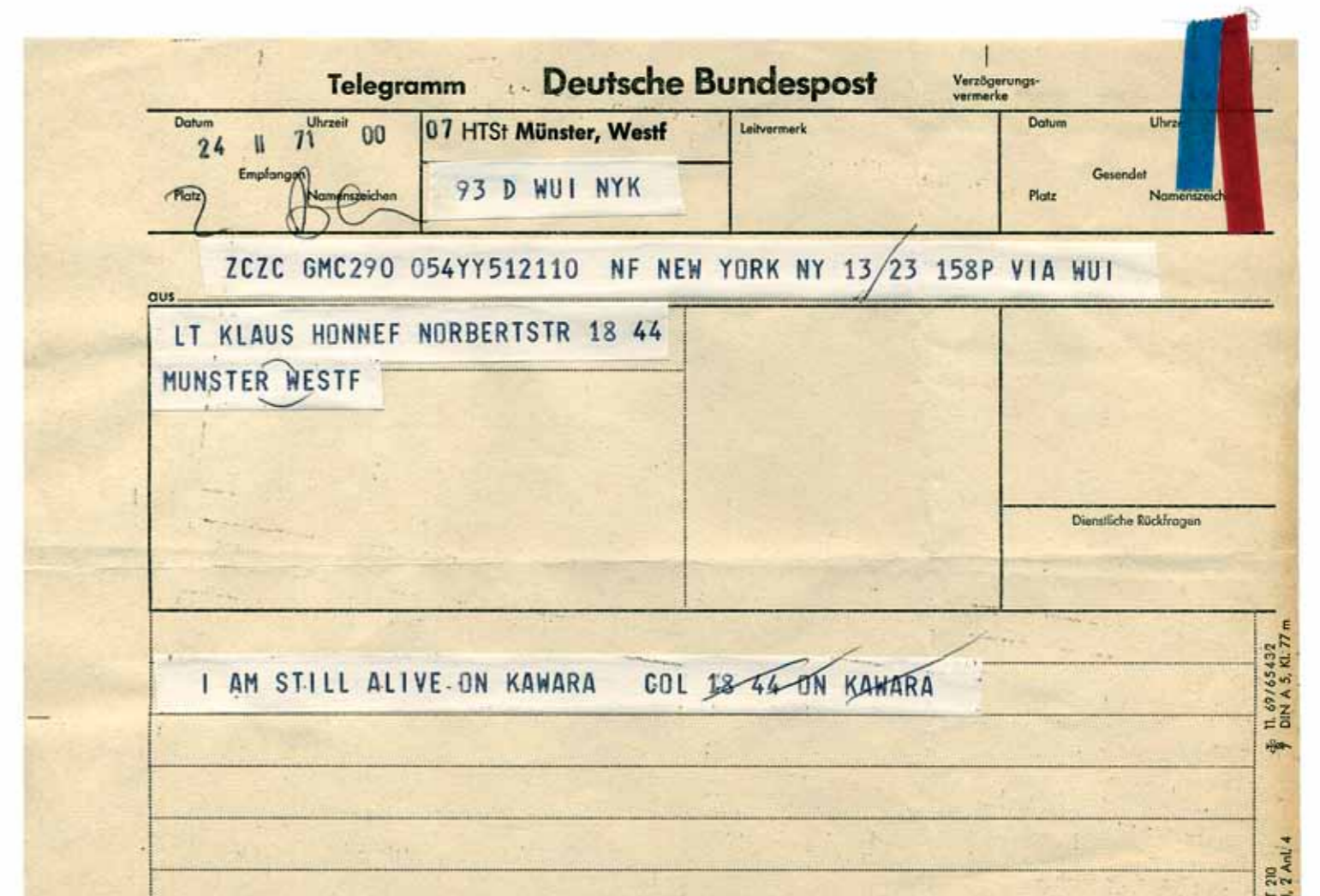
Anyway, the particular world view of the bourgeoisie, which had established itself in the western hemisphere in the mid-19th century as the leading social power, rather made a way for itself through external, formal, methodical and technical innovations in the world of pictures than through its thematic reformation. Nevertheless they threatened the notion of the world that was literally adopted in the art of the past five centuries. In the window view of a painting determined by central perspective, which subordinated and made everything calculable that was visible from a specific viewing angle, it had found its valid form. The seemingly external innovations undermined, shook up, and demolished this picture, leaving only pieces as remains. It is an aspect of time, which reveals itself to be one of several causes: speed. The quicker movement uses the disposable quantum of time more effectively than the slowness of the pre-Modern. Time becomes objectified. The Industrial Revolution brings a fast acceleration of life, its consequences deeply affecting all aspects of the universe both for the individual person and society in general, changing everything completely. All of a sudden, time is the prevalent theme. "Time is money", so the saying goes, as "Benjamin Franklin formulated it, and according to Max Weber the epitome of the capitalist spirit." (Wolfgang Reinhard, *Lebensformen Europas*, Munich 2004, p. 582).

Human perception changes at the same pace as the changing conditions. The "distracted view" (Walter Benjamin) begins its rule, and art, the most prominent branch of the picture world, reacts with increasingly vehement and ever quicker successive attacks on the traditional structures of pictures. The distracted view is also the accelerated view. Sometimes it has been negatively assessed by culture critics. "My contention, on the contrary," art historian Jonathan Crary states emphatically, "is that modern distraction was not a disruption of stable or 'natural' kinds of sustained, value-laden perception (...) but was an effect and in many cases a constituent element of the many attempts to produce attentiveness in human subjects. If distraction emerges as a problem (...) it is inseparable from the parallel construction of an attentive observer in various domains." [Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 49].

The attacks on the traditional structure of pictures come in explosive bursts and at ever-shorter intervals. They find their expressions in the infamous '-isms' of the artistic avant-garde. Because of their impact the modern plastic picture has shattered into thousands of individual, heterogeneous parts. Modern Art may be defined as the ongoing attempt to put individual parts back together again, each time in a new way. And at the opposite end of the spectrum, especially in the European variations of abstract art, there is a contrary, idealistic design that dissolves the contradictions in a loftier aesthetic unity, and releases them from any notion of time. Things become independent—in art and elsewhere. The form, which once gave objects its artistic shape, becomes a decisive key to the picture relationship and sometimes even to the autonomous category, to its actual content. The assemblage replaces perspective as a symbolic structure, the technique replaces craftsmanship, and the tension-filled, dynamic interplay of the fragments replaces the ordered overall view.

Thanks to a new technique the figures on the cinema screen have gained the ability to actually move before the eyes of the viewer. The time it takes to complete a movement is now also the object of the portrayal. It no longer unfolds merely in the viewer's imagination; it may be directly experienced and measured. Time and movement are suddenly becoming illustrative standards as reference points within an apparently objective framework. In reality, however, only the pictures move and create a grandiose machinery of illusion. A perforated film that races through a projector so quickly as to combine the individual phases of a movement to form a continuous progression, overcomes the natural sluggishness of the eyes. Granted, it did take a long while for the film, which had won out over traditional painting in matters of illusionism, to be attributed any artistic quality.

The distracted view, which is not the same as a fleeting view, corresponds to the flickering pictures of the film and the rhythm of the scene-settings and sequences. It is an attentive view, always vigilant and flexible, directed from the outside and at once externalized—a view which reacts to the increasing demands with respect to real life and the social changes, but which is also easily diverted. Like the pictures in a film the view jumps from object to object, from event to event, sometimes lingering for a longer or shorter period of time, sometimes concentrated, sometimes incidental. To capture this view is the goal of a surging world of pictures, increasingly industrially produced, that vies for our attention, inevitably unleashing 'media competition' with the traditional craft of the visual arts. The distracted view is one with temporality written into it, and contrary to the contemplative view, it has a processual character. Impressionist painting, the pictures of Manet, Pissarro, Monet, and Cézanne answer to the changes in the "regime of perception" (Jonathan Crary) required by the exterior conditions that liquefy, so to speak, the phenomena on the screen. It takes an active perception in order to be able to recognize the objects portrayed in the frenzy of color spots. It requires a perception involving physical effort to expose the physiologic core of seeing. At the same time the form of the portrayal relying on spots of color and complementary contrasts puts the objects out of the



psychic reach of the viewer, making the symbolic grasping more difficult, and incorporating into the perception a subjectively detectable factor of time. Whether the painters already made use of the most recent knowledge of the flourishing science of perceptual physiology, as some scientists believe, or achieved the changes in visual structures of portrayals intuitively or by way of experiment in the interplay of 'trial and error', as others believe, does not play a role in this context. Of more importance for the development of art is rather that color attained an individual value with the Impressionist manner of painting.

To the extent the trend in the traditional visual arts was heading for a 'realism' of concrete things—actually a nominalist tendency—and a denial of the 'as if' of appearance, their share in conceptual content was increased. As a result the viewer's power of imagination won renewed interest and significance. 'Art in your head' was an apt motto at the height of this development. In this connection the dimension of time played a major role. In order to track the laws of movement, at least to subject its continuous progression in time to the demands of visualization, Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, in the second half of the 19th century and independently of each other, created experimental photographic set-ups, which made this possible. In their pictures movement became materialized as an element in the realm of the visible. The respective stages in the gallop of a horse, in a person's walk, in the flight of a bird or in the trajectory of a bullet added up

to a temporally marked succession of pictures. The thing about it was that time became spatial in the portrayal. More than Marey, Muybridge extended the formal program of the pictures to include the scheme of the series, so to speak, breaking out of their traditional and customary frame. He introduced models into the world of pictures that had been used for analysis in the natural sciences as well as served in the professional sectors of the Industrial Age to make work more efficient and productive than before.

On the other hand, the division of a continuing process of movement into equal intervals has a hint of illustrative awkwardness about it. In comparison to the pictures in Baroque painting that were so loaded with mobility, the visual picture series seemed to be dry and didactic, as if the dynamic energy had been completely driven out of movement. Even the efforts made by painters of the Futurist Movement, in trying to do justice in their paintings and sculptures to the general acceleration of existence, makes an impression of a shaky construction. It is no coincidence that Marcel Duchamp ended his career as painter after finishing his famous *Nude descending a Staircase*, declaring painting to be a purely 'retinal art', which stood in striking disproportion to the aesthetic claims of a modern industrial civilization. In doing so, he opened the door to a largely Conceptual art, whose visual phenomena are limited to the most significant hints in the form of signs, words, sentences, drawings, and photographs and whose structures are only grasped through more or less complicated operations of thought. It is no



coincidence that a fundamentally non-visual phenomenon such as time has become a preferred motif for Concept art.

The opposite path was taken by abstract art and its geometric variant of constructivism. Distilled from the viewing of pictures emphasizing structure, such as those of Fauvism (color) and Cubism (form), which still primarily referred to the visual interpretation of the experience of nature, they aimed at portraying the elementary laws of the universe beyond empirical perception. Either they were looking to convey experiences of the mystical void with a formal apparatus reduced to an extreme, such as Kazimir Malevich and his followers in Suprematism or, more politically, sought to explore the elements for creating the 'new man' and a 'new world', such as Alexander Rodchenko and the protagonists of Revolutionary Art. Or else they were artists like Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky who, albeit with different results, tried to achieve the absolute in art as well as the dissolution of all contradictions in this life in the sphere of aesthetic utopia. In the name of a new artistic "nominalism", painters such as Frank Stella were to object to their designs with claims that they remained within the boundaries of portrayal and in the final analysis only extended 19th century artistic illusionism in a different form. Frequently, the pioneers of abstraction, by claiming to use a quasi-scientific approach, drew their concepts from rather obscure sources, as Beat Wyss has determined.

Be that as it may—in the light of an increasingly disillusioned world at once stoned on the commercially-oriented and industri-

ally produced narcotics of illusion, it was space and its aesthetic assimilation, and not so much time, that continued to be the key issues of painting, sculpture, and drawing, which had emancipated itself as an independent medium in the meantime. Whereas photography, film, and the electronic techniques, due to their conditions and their 'noema' (Roland Barthes), as well as their nature, were a priori more receptive to the influences of a radically changed notion of time and in addition, more suitable for making the respective means available. Although Einstein's theory of relativity, which mowed down all traditional relationships of space and time, has blocked (up to now) any plausible aesthetic presence other than a mathematical one and only reveals its stunning beauty, according to widespread conviction, in the gripping power of the mathematical formula, the evenly progressing linear model of time is gradually losing its sovereign meaning both in our everyday world and in the world of art. The more comfortable the social conditions, the stronger mankind's desire is to stop time from passing and extend it to an indefinite eternity. The craze to stay young and the thriving of the cosmetics industry and cosmetic surgery are a few of the major symptoms. Time has become an important element in the psychic budget of human subjects. And this, by the way, in the reverse form of the quote by Alfred Polgar cited at the beginning: When I looked at my watch after five minutes, I had to realize in dismay that years had already passed, and this is probably a widespread experience by now.

The arts have long since taken up the complex structure of the individual as well as the collective experience of time in the OECD-societies, i.e. in the western hemisphere, reflecting it in various shapes and structures. The commercial narrative cinema film no longer follows almost exclusively the 'and-then-and-then' narrative pattern scheme of unfolding the story. Flashbacks, jumps to the future, the exchange of time levels through a change of the levels in the plot—the life reality versus the cosmos of the stars as well as slowing down and speeding up are part of what is in the meantime its most natural formal means. With Conceptual art the visual arts have conquered a terrain, if at the price of a plastic vividness, which they could only grasp in metaphors and symbols. The prismatic space conception of the Cubism of, say Picasso or Braque, had placed the visual identification of each picture at the viewer's temporal discretion and his or her ability to (re-)construct. And according to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (in his phenomenal monograph on Juan Gris), it transformed the picture vocabulary into a kind of writing. Concept Art tied into this via many interim phases.

Out of mere numbers and a mathematic trick—the sum of the digits—Hanne Darboven construed a mighty cyclical system of time. The mathematical mechanism ensures the cyclical character and destroys the pressure for continuity ad libitum. Each day of each year, be it B.C. or a day in the distant future, is listed in her elaborate operations of numbers. The result is a time for all the world, containing all of life and all of death. On Kawara unfolds

time as well. In practically unending series he not only fixes the progression of each day of his life, but also constantly extends the subjective perspective by integrating impulses from the outside world into his diversified work. His artistic documentation gathers so-called date pictures, paintings on which the date of their completion is recorded in white numbers and digits on various monochrome-colored grounds. Series of telegrams such as *I got up* with the time noted or *I am still alive*, which he sends to selected representatives of the art business in telegram or postcard form, the headlines from newspapers of a respective country or city, in which he happens to be, or the recording of the steps and paths he takes every day. The result is the archives of an existence apparently exclusively dedicated to the archiving of his own life data. And even in Lawrence Weiner's sentence-sculptures the theme of time plays an essential role. His artistic 'handle' is the grammar of a language. As one of many examples, I mention here the work *SLOWLY RAISED WATER*, which he did in 1970 for his first large outdoor exhibition I organized and produced in the little town of Monschau in the Eifel region. German grammar has no conjugation for the future in the past tense: "Slowly raised water" melts nevertheless on the level of the sensefully-combined words past, present, and future. Granted, water may slowly rise, it might have also slowly risen, but the adverb 'slowly' indicates a continual process and its position at the beginning of the work shows that here the present and the future are addressed in the mirror of the past.

MICHEL BAUDSON

Text as presented during the symposium *Time at Arti et Amicitiae* in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 15 June 2007



Michel Baudson is Honorary Director of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels (Belgium), School of Fine Arts / a.i.c.a. / lcom.

The exhibition *Art & Time (Art and Time – A Look into the Fourth Dimension)* held at the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels in November 1984 was later shown in Geneva (at the Rath Museum), Humlebaeck (Louisiana Museum), Mannheim (Kunsthalle), Vienna (Museum of the Twentieth Century), London (The Barbican Centre) and at Villeurbanne / Lyon (The New Museum).

The idea of an exhibition with this concept came as the result of my interest at the beginning of the 1970s in video art, which led me to curate the Artists' Videotapes Exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in February 1975, and later on in June of the same year to organise an exhibition of the work *Double Mirror with Double Time Delay* by Dan Graham. I was then put in charge of a course *Audio Visual Theory* at the National Visual Arts College at Cambre, Brussels. In 1976 I met Roman Opalka at a time when he was exhibiting at the Palais des Beaux Arts.

The conjunction of these several meetings, exhibition commissions and the theoretical and practical questions raised on the course set the idea in motion of this exhibition, which was subsequently put to and accepted by IBM Europe. Their support permitted me to bring the project into being and organise it for international presentation.

I wanted to show that the distinction, largely accepted as such at the time, between space art and other artistic disciplines such as music, dance, theatre cinema etc. had become obsolete. Successive discoveries in photography, the cinema and the theory of relativity, at the same time as scientific, philosophical and artistic thought developed from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, brought about a critical, analytical and theoretical break with the past after which time and space dimensions could no longer be differentiated without taking into account their connections and their globality, notions which were prominent right throughout the twentieth century.

The following extracts from the introduction to the book, published on the occasion of the exhibition, give an impression of the ideas being pursued at this time.

«As a result of Einstein's theory of relativity, the fourth dimension has definitely come to mean a temporal dimension included within the dimension of space.

The notion of space-time is now a commonplace in both the sciences and philosophy.

René Thom, the mathematician and founder of catastrophe theory, recently noted that, "The only true scientific concepts are those connected with the geometry of space-time,"¹ and the philosopher Henri Bergson pointed out on several occasions that 'spatialized time is in reality a fourth dimension of space.'²

Now that the notion of space-time has become such a natural element in the relationship between perception and thought, is it not something of an anachronism for the art lover to go in using theories such as those put forward by Lessing in his *Laocoön* (1766) to make a distinction between the arts of time and the arts of space? There is something incongruous here, something that goes against the grain of contemporary thought.

Is it not time to consider not only modern and contemporary art but also the history of art in terms of a multi-dimensional critique or aesthetic in which space-time becomes a continuum rather than a dislocated referent?

Such is the ambition of this exhibition on *Art and Time: Looking at the Fourth Dimension*: to consider time as a dimension which is both integral and essential to our perception and understanding of the visual arts, of the so-called arts of space.

In a sense, this takes to a question the art historian E.H. Gombrich raised twenty years ago: "Whilst the problem of space and its representation to an almost exaggerated degree, the corresponding problem of time and the representation of movement has been strangely neglected."³

(...)

It becomes apparent that time is essential to any understanding of contemporary art and that it offers a wealth of possible ways to renew our perception of other works of art. The idea of a multidimensional aesthetic suggested two objectives. The first was to organize

an exhibition in which contemporary works of art conveying a specific notion of temporality could be both shown together and alongside certain statements from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Our second, related objective was to publish a collection of studies which would develop and refine the various notions of temporality that come to mind when we begin to want to look at the fourth dimension, to include it in visual space rather than to excluding or banishing it from our field of perception. »

The book takes on a threefold approach, scientific, philosophical and artistic. (The French, Dutch and German versions and a catalogue version in English giving only limited choice of text were sold out on publication). From the various texts two sections emerge. The first part deals with the temporality of knowledge and the temporality of scientific research on the one hand and philosophical time or that of poetical time on the other. The second section emerging is the temporality of art in works of art. Some particularly striking examples in the history of art are presented in the book, not as part of a new museum of the imagination but as propositions from space / time based on our cultural references, similar to the articulations of the late nineteenth century or the multi-dimensional expansion of works in contemporary art. Ilya Prigogine, granted the Nobel Prize for Physics, the philosophers Paul Virilio, Umberto Eco and Jean-Francois Lyotard, the writer Michel Butor, have all contributed, amongst other individuals of international renown, to this theme.

The notion of irreversibility which pervades the book is based on the spatial concepts explored at the first exhibition in Brussels, proposing to visitors a number of thematic approaches and directions to be taken on their visit by the interplay of correlated themes, confrontations and reversals suggested by the suspension of the works displayed. The exhibits were placed in perspective alongside each other in the form of cloisters of panels emphasizing the seamless passing from one theme to another and also in the theme of *The course of man* by Muybridge, repeated along the frieze. The intention here, which was to link visitors to the connections between the various parts of the exhibition and draw their attention to its multi-dimensionality, was evident in each of the successive presentations according to the specific nature of the individual exhibits.

The works of more than one hundred artists lent rhythm and movement to the exhibition. From painting to photography, from sculpture to environments or installations, from experimental cinema to video art and conceptual propositions, the various researches marking the movement from artistic thought at the end of the nineteenth century to the eighties, were all included.

Some examples we can give representing amongst others the space / time relationship are: *Rouen Cathedral* by Monet, *Sad Young Man in Train* by Duchamp, the futuristic works of Balla and Boccioni or the research by Kupka and Delaunay and also *Man Walking* by Rodin, opposite a *Danseuse* by Degas, or the *Flight of Goeland* by Marey and studies of movement by Malevich. The fourth dimension concept was examined in works by Malevich, El Lissitzky, Van Doesburg, and in research integrating the cinematograph techniques of Eggeling, Richter and Moholy-Nagy. The walking theme was articulated at various points, with examples

from Rodin, Muybridge, Boccioni, Archipenko, Giacometti to Stanley Brown, Fulton, Long, Shigeko Kubota and *Foxtrot* by Warhol. In contrast, the theme of 'Time at a stop' was developed, with exhibits such as the bronze *Zip*, the *Here I* by Newman, *Minute* by Broodthaers and sculptures by Segal. With surrealist time by Dali, Magritte and Man Ray, to archaeological time by Poirier or Charles Simmonds, to cosmographic time by Luca Patella and Nancy Holt, to the narration by Boltanski and Le Gac or the theme of gesture as sculptural as pictorial representation by Pollock, Van Anderlecht, Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Andre Lambotte, Comesi.

But the exhibition also brought to light those artists whose works had impressed me at the time I initiated the project. Let me mention for instance *Time Delays* by Dan Graham, the videos of Nam June Paik, who set up an installation specially for the exhibition, *Details* by Opalka, *Clock one and five* by Kosuth, *Date Paintings* by On Kawara or *One Century* by Hanne Darboven, and to this list I should add *Questions of Simultaneity* or the *Times Zones* video by Ira Scheider and also *Themes on Accident and Waiting* by Dennis Oppenheim in his *Prediction* pavilion.

Projections of video themes were also a mark of the exhibition. Complementing these were two documentaries, one on the history of art produced by BRT (*Tijdsbeelden*) and the other primarily a scientific work produced by RTB (*The History of Time*), which were shown on Belgian television and in the exhibition halls.

This exhibition was the first of its size to raise the question of the integrality of time in the spacial arts, plastic and visual. Twenty five years later art is seen as a single space / time whole, accepted as an everyday experience and as a notion so normal that the question of integrality no longer arises. The onset of the internet and the web, communication in real time and virtual exchanges have made the difference well and truly obsolete between time art and space art. An exhibition thought out identically today would appear an anachronism. Which convinces me long after the event of the relevance of its message which has now become part of the history of art, and of science and philosophical thought.

The logogram by Christian Dotremont *Time is an active partner* illustrated early on in the book remains today as relevant as ever.

1 René Thom, *Parabola and Catastrophes. A Discourse on Mathematics, Science and Philosophy*, Paris. Flammarion. 1983 p. 122

2 Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity. On the Theories of Einstein* (1922) in *Melanges*, Paris PUF 1982 p. 112.

3 E.H. Gombrich, *Moments and Movements in Modern Art*. In: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol 27 1964 p. 293.

ROMAN OPALKA

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 15 June 2007



Roman Opalka (1931 in Abbeville, France). In 1965, Opalka began a conceptual work, painting the numbers from one to infinity.*

(At the beginning you hear a recording of numbers read out in Polish for several minutes)

Roman Opalka: I will simply tell you what this is all about: about time, about numbers. Most of you are aware that I am realizing a program with which I document time. The pictures I paint are my *Details*. I call them that because the pictures are parts of one work, one concept. There is only one date, the beginning: 1965, at some point, of course, there will be an end, but there will be no other dates. It is about the time we find ourselves in. I cannot know when I will die. I know that I will die, but the moment when it happens is so infinite because no one will know that he has died. This is something I have meditated upon in my work, that perhaps it is a chance for people who will never receive this news that they are no longer there. In this sense we are eternal.

The numbers in Polish are more logical than in German or French. I would still like to say something about the concept of time: Time cannot be measured. That is the one difficulty most people have with my work, even when compared with other works that refer to dates, such as those of Hanne Darboven or On Kawara. To give you an example: Back then I was waiting for my wife in Warsaw, and she was two hours late. What happens in the interim time, this relativity of how long an hour or two hours can last, cannot be measured. This is an entirely phenomenal emotion as opposed to time. Normally it works like this: If I fly to Paris tomorrow, of course, I have to look at my watch. But what happens in my head during the flight, that is time. And my work features precisely this. It is like taking a walk. There is nothing to see in particular, no problems, you just have time for time. So you could say, I am the one person on this earth who has more time than other people, that is for sure. This is not a *boutade*, as they say in French, no joke. It is unfortunate that I am unable to tell you all of this in French, but I will try it in German, since

the translation would otherwise be so complicated that we would lose one another. My work was interpreted at the beginning as if I were a prisoner, an inmate in my work program. This also had something to do with the socialistic society I was living in at the time, of course. There was also this certain *nyet*, as they say in Russian, to the system. But it is also what any person would like to do. I say I am not a prisoner, I have more time, and I am freer than other people. When I go to my studio, I have no questions concerning how I am to do my picture. Most people have this problem, even other artists who also make time manifest. Even they have to select something. I have chosen my life as the time period, as the emotion facing what would be time. This is the work of someone freer than any man in history has ever been before. He reflects upon his existence and thus, it is also an echo of philosophy, for example, Heidegger, the 'existence' is in my work. I have often asked myself, if I met Heidegger, would he be able to understand this? This is extremely complicated, the philosophers, the scientists, they do not understand the phenomena, the *cosa mentale*, as Leonardo da Vinci called it. Most philosophers, probably poets as well, would probably not understand it, because it is such nonsense as maybe nothing ever before in history. But this nonsense has a meaning. Like a *dimension de non-sens*, to put it in French. This is a story that is very difficult to convey. But it is slowly emerging. My work has been going on for 42 years now, and slowly, slowly people are beginning to understand it.

Rene Rietmeyer: Roman told me that when he began this work, he thought: "Each time I make a new picture, I will add one percent more white to the background so that this background will become increasingly light. And estimating an average age of 75 years, then I will probably die and at 75 my numbers will be white on white."

RO: Most people think it is just numbers, but what's the sense? It is a painterly concept. It is part of the world of painters like Robert Ryman, of artists trying to create a painting that can still be proud in the face of history. And this white would be a so-called 'well-earned' white,

because I had to earn it. It was referred to as 'monochromy', and naturally, monochromy is a wonderful thing for Yves Klein or Manzonni, for example. But here we are dealing with something entirely different. This has more to do with Malevich. His work is the white square on a white ground, but in my case, when I painted the first number—which is not a number, basically, the 1 is everything, a unit—the square already existed. And then comes life, and to that then comes the work. Malevich was unable to paint any further, this was the end stop.

Question from the audience: I would like to know the reason for and meaning of the constant repetition of the same thing, all these numbers we see and what you are talking about.

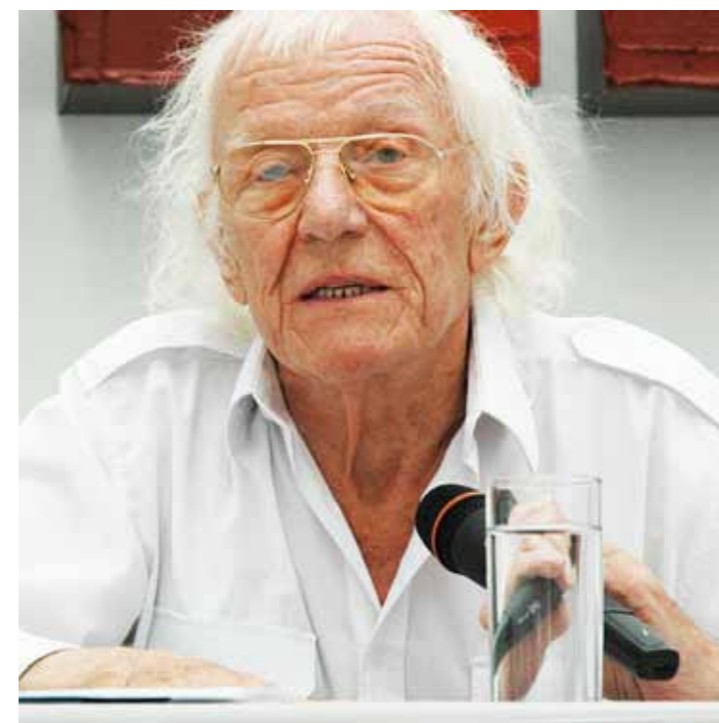
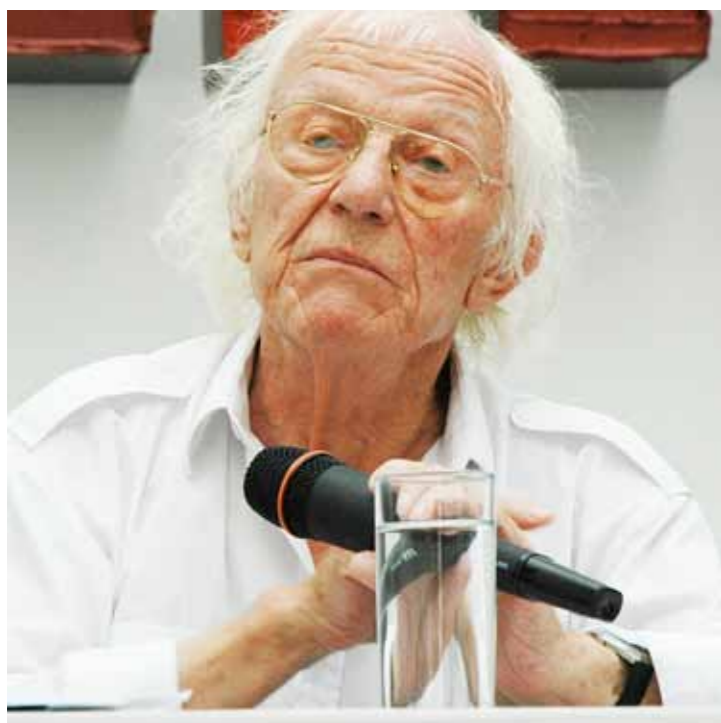
RO: I am sorry, but you have misunderstood my work because there is not a second, which is repeated here. When you get up in the morning, you only seem to repeat yourself, but the body, the marks of your existence are not the same. And in my work, this may be very logically determined. It is what is called in French a *unité en extension*, not a repetition. If you live on, do you repeat yourself? With my work it is something like a river, but the river has only one direction. The voice you heard in the recording goes in all directions. That is this *mixage*, the mix we always have going on in our heads. If you go for a walk, you go in one direction, but your head goes all directions. And that is why there is certainly no repetition, no monotony. It only looks like there is. It might sound pretentious now, but such emotions have never been there before in art history. Because I paint my existence, just like Heidegger. So, no one else has ever accomplished this. May I say something about repetition? Basically, every artist repeats himself. Only that is not so clear. You cannot simply produce things here and there, back and forth. All great artists, if I may reckon myself to be among them, repeat themselves. It just doesn't happen at all that artists always produce something new. It isn't possible and it doesn't happen. And this is also a certain criticism of this back and forth. I was already recognized as an artist before the time when I began my pro-

gram. Without this past, without this experience, I would not have given myself the credit of realizing such a program, such a crazy work for my entire life. I had to know what I was doing. It is about art history as such, if I may be so pretentious as to think this.

Klaus Honnef: This model stands in opposition to our notion of time. I quoted the main catchphrase: "Time is money". That means time is needed in order to do something allegedly efficient with it. What you do, Mr. Opalka, is in reality something very luxurious, a wasting of time, since nothing meaningful and practical is produced. You can neither fly to the moon with your pictures nor can you wash your hands with them or eat them. It does not lack sense, but it is without purpose. It violates a purpose-oriented utilization of time.

RO: The sense of my program is in its nonsense. That is its definition, if you will. This is also part of the socialist system I lived in. In Poland there were galleries, good galleries, but "time is money" was not part of it. And that was my chance. I was freer, strangely enough, than people such as On Kawara or other artists, say Bob Ryman, certainly good artists. The phenomenon of the strangeness of this concept comes from these experiences. That was also, of course, a catastrophe for the system. Like I said, I was already known as an artist, who had received many prizes in Bradford, in Tokyo, fairly well-known. And they said, the party comrades: "Get a load of this guy, now he stops getting prizes and starts to count numbers, that is scandalous." And this is how it was presented on television, as a criticism, as ideological impertinence. Because this nonsense was so pronounced. Here in the free world, which nowadays also applies to Poland, it would not be so strong, but at that time, such a crazy concept was a provocation.

Peter Lodermeier: You mentioned freedom. This morning I also talked about freedom, specifically about freedom from time. I quoted the philosopher Michael Theunissen who said, we feel happy when we are able to detach ourselves from the rule of time, under which we in reality only



suffer, even if only for moments at a time. Of course, we may not escape time, but there are the intensively experienced moments, for example during aesthetic contemplation, and thus, I could imagine, also in the production of art. Moments, in which time is experienced so intensively that paradoxically these moments become timeless. From Kierkegaard we get the idea, for example, that the moment contains eternity.

RO: Yes, Kierkegaard has contributed a lot to my thought. It has often been said that there was an obsession in this concept, I might be able to accept that, but here, the concern is for painting, particularly for painting. Painting in order to be able to portray time. All the machines we know of, the clocks, tell the time, but I show time, and that is something entirely different. This is the painterly solution to the question concerning what a visualization of time might be. In this sense numbers accomplish best what we up to this day may show of time in the sense of progression, in the sense of dynamics, in the sense of the unity and the expansion of time.

RR: A year ago I had a discussion with Roman in Saint-Étienne. We had a difference of opinions. Roman said he wants to continue painting these numbers until he is no longer able to stand proud and upright before a new picture and paint any further. For me, it was always impressive to see photos of Matisse, how he lay there and drew on the wall with a long stick. I hope that one day I will be able to experience that Roman Opalka, old and bent, but with unbroken dignity, continues to paint his numbers.

RO: I have nothing against that. I can continue to paint as long as my strength holds up and I can still stand. Of course, I do not wish to sit or lie down, but this pride that manifests itself in this work I call *verticalité du peintre*, this is something I wish to keep. Perhaps then I will only paint one number per day. This work simply contains all aspects of existence. Also the psychogram aspects, the nervousness, the differences between morning and evening, etc. Back then in Warsaw I hardly traveled, but these days I have to travel a lot and only have a little time

to paint time. Back then, however, you could see the difference between eight in the morning and twelve at night. I was able to work so much because it was not so attractive to leave my studio. My picture had a certain magic. I had to profit from it somehow, otherwise it would not have been possible to realize such a program over such a long period. This always sounds strange, but maybe it is very important to say that my work is always virtually complete. It is no problem, not to finish a picture. Excuse me, this is not aggressiveness, but On Kawara says: "If I do not finish a picture a day, then destroy it." I have always completed the work. Like my life, it is always complete. There is always enough there to die, here again Heidegger's 'Sein zum Tode, Being-toward-death'. Maybe you could say I am pretentious or crazy, but I know what I am talking about: I am always there, like in a mirror. This is my work, that is my body, it is almost Christian. It is part of it, even though I am an agnostic, but that is in our culture, in our tradition, *la cosa mentale*. In the work the concern, as I mentioned, is for the completion of existence. This is a very special situation inherent to its construction. The work is always sufficiently there. You could say, in the beginning, when I painted the first number, the one, the *l'unité*, everything was there already. Of course, this was only in the sense of a concept. In order for it to be a work I had to make this sacrifice, otherwise it would only have had a logical basis, but would not be a work. For example, if I had died after two or three years. I still have to mention, in the beginning, after the first picture, I had a heart problem. I was in the hospital for a month, because it was unbelievable even for me, to understand that I would carry out such crazy work. The body revolted. After a month I returned and took a look at my picture on the easel—the pictures always stand on an easel, which is a certain homage to painting as such—and then I continued.

In 1965 I painted my first picture. It is a feature of my work that it not only unfolds as a program, but also as thoughts about the program. This runs parallel. When I paint, I do not reflect upon my numbers.

When you are at the computer, always jumping back and forth, and if then something doesn't work, you start again anew... With me everything always works! Even if I make a mistake, it is correct because it is part of existence. Maybe I was thinking about something else and made a mistake. Of course, I react to the mistake. Like a person, who sets out to achieve a certain goal and then realizes: "Oh, that is the wrong direction." Then he retraces his steps, but this path that was wrong, is still there. And that is how it is with the numbers: When a mistake occurs, a wrong number—no problem! I am a free person. It's like a walk. Only each step I take includes all other steps. It is very important to understand this. If you take a walk, somewhere at the seaside or lake, the water comes and all the footsteps are erased. In my case there is this obsession that all the steps are there, each individual step.

RR: Your concept has remained the same since 1965, but have your thoughts about it, about what time is, changed over the past 42 years?

RO: And how! It simply developed like the work. I understand it better, though even today I don't really understand it. Like life. Do you understand what that is, life? How can you understand a thing as stupid as our existence? Maybe that sounds too brutal, but this existence makes no sense, it is nonsense. And this nonsense is my work.

PL: Once I tried to describe your work to a painter-friend, who is about your age. He was not acquainted with it, though he found it fascinating. But there was one thing he could not understand. This painter has a lot to do with color. For him, color is life and he said, how can Roman Opalka do without color? Doesn't he sometimes miss the green, red and blue?

RO: Strangely enough, your friend is right, since I began with a black picture, and the next was a gray one. And the third was red, it is in Germany today. I was naïve back then. Your friend is also naïve in that sense. Basically all colors are contained in the gray, that is something that is known. We are dealing here with a painterly concept that extends to white. And if I may be permitted to say, extending to the

German "Weiß/sheit", the wisdom of white, something which could not have happened with color. *Weiß/sheit*, this has a wonderful ambiguity in German. *C'est la sagesse*, you could say. And this has been fully calculated. As I only came to understand later, the thing about the red didn't make any sense. But you cannot just set up a perfect work that will apply your entire life, it doesn't work like that.

Question from the audience: What did your works look like when you were 20 or 30 years old?

RO: A while ago I mentioned the Christian aspect. I began my concept when I was 33 years old. You can't determine work like this before you understand enough about it and have experience with it, also in art. To this I must add that we in Poland were totally free towards art. Sometimes people did not seem to know this in the west. Stalin died in 1953, things were still bad until 1955/56, but then there was total freedom for art. But total freedom without commerce, that is very important. I think such work, would not have been possible in young years. And by the way, also not if I had had children. I did not want children. My wife at the time was also an artist, and we decided not to have children. That was already a certain sacrifice to art. An obsession for art. We were crazy. I was already known as an artist. I did a retrospective show in various museums where all of the early works of significance were included from the time when I was a student in the first year at the art academy. These were very simple, figurative works, and I must tell you very pretentiously, I was a so-called talent, I could do anything. And that was my chance. Before the concept, before this story about the Café Bristol, I had already tried to paint something along the lines of an hourglass. I asked myself how time could be painted. At the moment when I was waiting for my wife, the idea occurred to me that each dot could be a number. For these *Chronomes*, that's what I called these pictures, there is no direction. Time has a direction, however.

JO BAER

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 16 June 2007



Jo Baer, * 1929 in Seattle, USA. Jo Baer was one of the pioneers of Minimal Art in the 1960's, committed to painting as a radical art form. In the mid-70's she switched to a style she called 'radical figuration'. Since 1984, she has been living and working in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The following text is reprinted from *The Pursuit of Painting, the catalogue to a group show of the same name at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1997. The text was expanded for the catalogue Jo Baer: Paintings 1960-1998, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1999, pp. 26-27, as reprinted below. Jo Baer made additions and corrections to these texts for her symposium presentation, Personal Structures: TIME.*

When I was working as a minimalist painter in the 60's and 70's I used the diptych form as an iterative device, which is to say that saying something twice or more can reinforce what is meant (or for the viewer, practice makes perfect). Chasing 'essences', I became interested in the differences between the singular, the doubled and the many, whereupon I came to realize that single paintings objectified the unique, doubled identical ones spoke of entity, and three or more under or within one rubric implied sets, series, and continuums ad-infinitem. These concepts served me well as simple thumb-rules for muck of that body of work.

I should stress that the above passage refers particularly to my Minimalist, ABSTRACT art, and—as is rather infamously known, "I am no longer an abstract artist." So I would like to interpolate here a few remarks and revisions of the above, in consideration of the parameters of this symposium.

As the expression goes, in time all things can change. In deference to this forum's requisites and although a single painting still enunciates the unique, in today's-speak, an 'entity' might also designate EXISTENCE. (I have changed horses here). And in a further volte-

face, today's triptych may now address SPACE (since each part of a series can be expanded into very large pieces or else be divided into an infinity of miniscule parts that could, as well, be made very large). Accordingly, the serial —when bounded by a subject or statement of function or purpose—is a spatial term.

Which, for the nonce, allows the diptych to express TIME.

Today, thirty years later, I once again find the diptych form efficacious, but now use it to embody relational propositions rather than assigning it to redouble entity and its specifics. Augmenting this shift, current diptychs have also become asymmetrical in size, configuration, and matter. Three recent large works produced in this new, up-dated approach investigate three particular but related courses: coupled panels now delineate examples of conjunction, alternation and the conditional.

Conjunction is a mode of composition which joins elements to make a fuller, compound entity. In the painting titled *It's Time*, one panel, *When Every Lamplight Spent*, abstractly lists images of incorporated lines of poetry that itemize illustrations. Its larger sister panel, *The Sardana Becomes Infernal*, depends instead on colour, composition and a variant, yet similar set of images to treat the same text. In other words, in this single work the diptych form allows two separate ways of conjoining the same material at the same time: in form, a "this and that" exposition.

A 'this or that', alternating use of the diptych is seen in the painting *Vision and Prayer*. Here the two-part division performs a linkage in which, although each panel addresses opposite moods and intentions, together they still speak of their one implicit subject, 'Creation', in both its dark and light-adoring modes. This kind of ordering, an 'and/or' or 'or both' set of alternatives, allows an expansive and varying view of complementaries (and hence complexities) for rendering broad gists or motifs.



Of a particular relevance for today's symposium, a third use of doubling can be seen in the painting titled *The Old Lie*, an 'if this then that' [p-horseshoe-q] conditional orchestration, wherein the horizontal panel *Slaughter* shows some contingent effects arising from the words of the vertical panel, *Holy Oil and Holy Water*.

The painting's signifying texts—*Holy Oil and Holy Water*, *Mix* and *Fill the World with Slaughter*—have been reversed in each panel vis-à-vis its Images, so allowing each part then to also be read in a 'this from that' manner. As it so happens, the truth of conditional statements is essentially time-neutral, that is, is indifferent to the tense of its indicative verb—*Mix*, in this case—so that by using this causal short-hand, TIME'S past or future dimensions are available as well, for a reading usually denied to the tenseless, primary-language of painting, dreams and animals.

Inclusions and parsings of poetry along with the divided format of the diptych would seem an odd or even bizarre avenue to follow in the fabrication of paintings. Yet through inclusions of texts plus assays of their logistics, I find I can greatly extend the prospects of possible meaning in a discipline (painting) which has latterly become trivial and almost exclusively a decorative (or journalistic) art. Arid while both 'headlining' and 'doubling' in one's work require some care with a close attention to grammar, syntax, and content, results can be rewardingly broad. For instance, the premise of the painting mentioned immediately above rests intrinsically on its verb 'mix'. The 'mix' is dogma and power, its effect carnage, a subject, action and predicate implying 'War'. Outside of such a focused reciprocating duet, this is a leitmotiv which more usually appears in paintings only as still-born description, metaphor, or strip illustration.

The nod to (symbolic) logic need not unduly surprise. The conjugation of logic and painting offers several things in common, amongst which one finds both endeavours able to present huge subjects via the com-

mand and manipulation of the finest details. For just as logic's operant marks exist to specify the most exact relations occurring in its scrutinized sentences, so too, it is painting's precise surface marks—no matter how general, fuzzy or oceanic an artist's chosen concept—which must finally specify and deliver the work of art. Equally, where logic's primary objective is to sort out and render the truth or falsity of statements, so too must a painting's *raison d'être* reside in placing that other form of truth—authenticity—before the viewer.

It appears that the well worn idiom holds good yet once again. Whether early or late, as tautology or paraphrase, the diptych has granted my undertakings a productive framework imparting identities of both instance and sort. *Plus ça change...*

Question from the audience: Could you tell us more about your figurative diptychs?

Jo Baer: For the first one I did (1993/94), I used a text by Eugenio Montale called *It's Time* and I did an illustration of the words he used. I used different ways of portraying time. The earliest dog and the modern dog, the earliest horse, the modern horse, some Egyptians scarabs, thousands of years, the globe of Pangaea... It's excerpted from a poem called *Piccolo Testamento*: "and a shadowy Lucifer descends on a prow / at the Thames or Hudson or Seine / thrashing bituminous wings half- / shorn from the effort, to tell you: it's time." So I took a modern stealth airplane, a modern nuclear submarine, the prow, the boat, etc., stuck a Lucifer on it because I enjoyed that. I put a list of the illustrations on one panel, and then I used all these kinds of images in totally different form. I kept the text on the list like a laundry list of things. And then played with it. It's remarkable that what I started as an abstract artist just to say: Hey, here's how it is. This is how time has changed me, if you're interested about time changes—or age has changed me, I don't know.

HENK PEETERS

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 16 June 2007



Henk Peeters (1925 in The Hague, Netherlands) was part of the ZERO movement. Together with other Dutch artists, including Jan Schoonhoven, Jan Henderikse and Armando, he formed the NUL movement in the 1960s. Typical for Peeters's work addresses our sense of touch by using soft materials as feathers or cowhide. He lives and works in a village near Arnhem, Netherlands.*

To be able to see time, you can only look back. Because of what will come, you know nothing—not yet. Is that actually not the essence of our profession: you see, foresee the time until it stops in zero?

Then you fill in: you draw your conclusions. Only afterwards can you look back and see to what extent the conclusions you made were correct.

I find myself in the advantageous position that I, now 81-years-old, can look back to oversee what I have done. But my way of seeing is determined by the manner of seeing, which again is determined by the way I see today and that will be different tomorrow. That is the nice thing about Time: it always changes—although only few see that.

I grew up in a 'left', so to speak, communist family. We learned at home to think critically: this dialectic thinking always helped me to take the steps I had to take.

To analyze a given situation and to see from there the contradictions, the conflict, as information for the decision I had to take.

Like Marx, who saw the solution for the struggle of the classes, in the classless society I also saw, in post-war expressionism, all components of my ZERO art.

It was simply to omit, or to redirect to the opposite, all elements their art had been built upon.

Thus, you could remove color and composition, because the forms could also be eliminated and I could go on like that.

It was astonishing that certain things remained; it became obvious that it was not possible to eliminate them. No content, no message anymore, but nevertheless there came Yves Klein with his Rosicrucian Order and Uecker with Buddhism.

Here again, the building blocks for art, or the social commitment or the personal handwriting, became elementary components.

Fortunately, in art you can never say that the one statement produces better quality than the other—in that sense Mondriaan is, for example, not a better artist than Pollock.

While writing this and listening to Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*, I consider that the grandeur of this music has, in fact, arisen outside these matters. It has been built out of elements from that time, but Time has in fact disappeared in it. You can hardly imagine that Bach, sitting between his sons, said a prayer before each dinner.

For any moment of the art, we can also think outside of the time in which it was created. Through the eyes of this time. This causes whatever is created at a certain time to be lifted out of that time, to transcend it. I have that with my own work.

When I began in the Bauhaus tradition I foresaw a society, of which only little has come to fruition. Instead of a society without classes, in which private property has been abolished, we now have a G8 conference, formed of capitalists who can suppress the young anti-globalists, with whom I must sympathize from a historical standpoint.

Because in searching for a solution for the problems of today, you must, just like in art, look up the contradictions again and be aware that the person at the bottom today will get a new chance tomorrow. I have always seen my work with this in mind.

Therefore, to the topic 'Time', a statement fits by Raspail, "we think that the time goes by, but we are mistaken: the time remains and we are it that go by." Looking back, I think that this is the motive, from which I have always worked.

As a teacher I always pointed out to my students that in the structure of their time, they had to look up the contradictions again, to make going from there something new. That to be an artist you always have to be non-confirmative, otherwise you do not find anything.

It has, however, the result that you are never financially successful with those confrontations; you will never sell this point of view, you only face trouble. I nearly lost my job at the academy, because we had made a leaflet showing how we had fun with the idea that



everybody thought that we were Nazi-followers. And this because the Chairman of the Board of the academy had been a member of the Nazi friendly 'Artze Kammer' during the war. The core of the NUL-group thus consisted of artists, who earned their living not from selling their art, but had to get through in a different way.

Armando was a journalist at a newspaper in The Hague; Jan Schoonhoven worked for the postal-service; I taught art history after having worked for a while in a psychiatric institution and at the Gemeente Museum in The Hague for the educational service. Thus, you always have to try to be independent for your income, because "if 'time is money', everyone lives above his class," Ludwig Fulda once said.

And George Ade once said after his work was sent back by numerous publishers: "It is better that you write for posterity and not send the text to the publishers at all."

Because you can only see the actual day today really clearly with the light of tomorrow and it is in this light that you must see your profession as well. Do not lengthen the past, but make yourself independent of the so-called appreciation or recognition of the existing art world, supported by the timelessly-valid rule: time will tell.

Although it was not our intention in those beginning years, we were only able to hang our work in the canteens of universities, in the midst of youngsters who were of an age that accepted everything against the good taste of their forefathers.

In 1961 the whole art world asked itself how we managed to get the NUL-exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. That was certainly not towing to the taste of director Sandberg, because he did not see anything in our work, and he did not spend any money on it. But Sandberg provided sufficient encouragement with his point of view that you have to show everything that showed the change of time. If it is worth anything, time would tell. His joy in the museum was in fact that he always got it right, so parallel to the 'boring' art he showed us as well. It was frequently the artists, who persuaded him, not their work.

There are examples of people who made sure that in my time exhibitions were talked about: Spoerri with the moved movement,

Tinguely, and after him, the Nouveaux Réalistes such as Arman, especially promoted by Sandberg's nearest employee Ad Petersen.

I was writing a text concerning 'looking back' for an exhibition, which I have at the moment in London (with the NUL-group) and I thought of a beautiful statement by Georges Bataille:

"the past is not behind us, the shadows of what was are in front of us: what is dead exists and goes ahead of us. So, time exists out of future and past at the same time."

Whilst writing this text, I of course reflected about the meaning of this topic, which connects us all here: Time. Of which Berlioz once said, that time is a great teacher, but unfortunately kills its students.

I also considered that defining the term 'Time' must be man's work, because structuring Time, in the ovulation cycle or the nine months of the pregnancy is already a naturally built-in clock, which man does not have.

Emerson wrote already that women do not have the desire to have a strict time setting. There is a clock in Adam, but not in Eve. She is one herself, and in keeping with this, you could say: there is a clock in historians, but artists have to do without it.

"We do not need the power of the word, because people believe their eyes more than their ears", Seneca once stated. I feel myself going beyond my territory, by trying, with my humble words, to persuade you of what you more rapidly can see in our works.

That you can understand Time better by feeling yourself to be a part of Time instead of feeling like a spectator, because the people of yesterday are not the people of today.

Is it already time to finish? Then as an ending, I have a quote by Charles Lamb: "Nothing puzzles me more than time and space; and yet nothing troubles me less, as I never think about them."

KITTY ZIJLMANS

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 16 June 2007



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Reflections on Time in Art and Art History

Art history is faced with a particular space/time problematic. An artwork is—mostly—a physical object created in a temporal moment whose bounds are defined relatively precisely. The artwork will—mostly—continue to exist, and in that respect has a coexistence in space as well as a duration in time. In contrast, the ‘tool’ of art history is language, which is characterized by a succession in time: Lessing meets Virgil again. The encounter with a physical artwork in the here-and-now is contrasted by the time consuming writing and reading about it. However, where the first has an heuristic, the latter has an ushering effect on the artwork. The first implies a more aesthetic, the latter a more historicist view. To complicate matters, art history ceased to think in teleological ways; contingency brings about multiple histories. How would contemporary relational art fit into this picture?

Time seems to be mainly something I am short of. This is however just a matter of how you experience it. To paraphrase a poem of the nineteenth-century Dutch poet Hildebrand (pseudonym of Nicolaas Beets), it is not by the measure of the hours, but of what one endures, that we live by, and every day is either long or short according to what one has experienced. This brings us near Henri Bergson’s distinction between temps and durée, between the rigid time grid of the clock and how we experience time.

All art is connected to time: it takes time to produce art, and to see and to understand it. And it has a life of its own. It may continue to exist for years, centuries even. An artwork is, mostly, a physical object created in a temporal moment whose bounds are defined relatively precisely. The artwork will, mostly, continue to exist, and in that respect has a coexistence in space as well as a duration in time.

In contrast, the ‘tool’ of art history is language, which is characterized by a succession in time: Lessing meets Virgil again. For the eighteenth century Lessing, the artwork—and to be more precise—a sculpture, had an immediacy and a direct impact, a text could never have. A text (in this case Virgil’s recount of the priest Laocoon who with his two sons was strangled to death by a sea

monster) has a time span to cover, in which the story enrolls in the passing of time. The, by many, admired quality of duration, the building up of the suspense, the detailed descriptions, and the fact that the reader can construct his own image, was precisely what Lessing found the weaker aspect of this art form. The encounter with a physical artwork in the here and now—what he preferred—is contrasted by the time-consuming writing and reading about it.

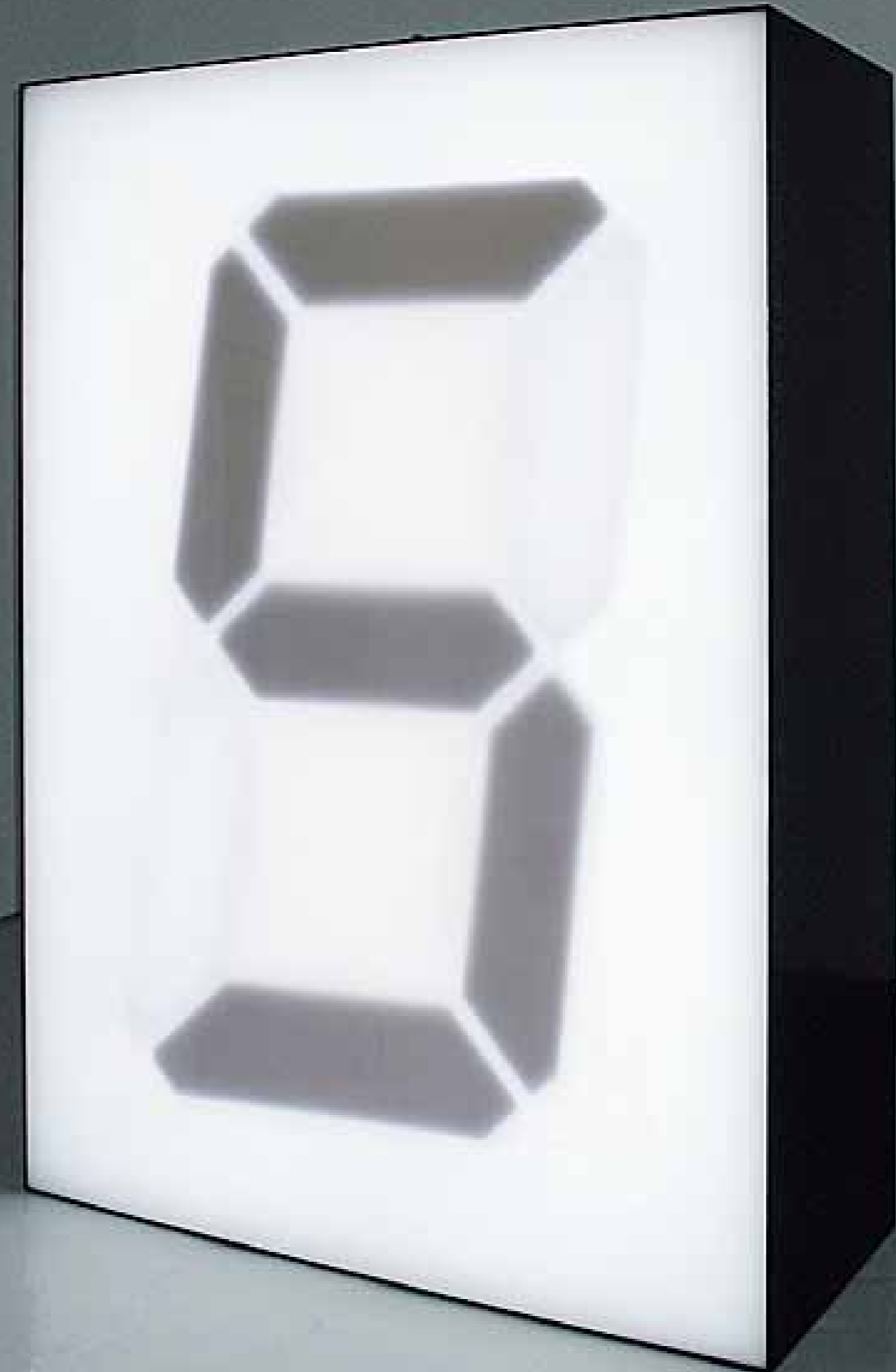
Yet, art history’s medium is the time consuming text. Precisely here lies the unbridgeable gap between the visual, tangible object and the fact that reflection on it is always carried out in text—thus in time—in writing about what we see; and in doing so we take along with us in the process what we think we see. Whereas the direct encounter with the artworks has a heuristic effect, the process of reading takes you step by step into the artwork: you read how another person has seen (and digested) the artwork.

The direct interaction with an artwork implies a more aesthetic, evaluative approach; written encounters or encounters through text a more historicist view. To complicate matters, art history ceased to think in teleological ways; its contingency brings about multiple histories. Consequently, art history is always also about time, about layers of time, about the simultaneity of dissimilar processes. It is inherent of the discipline.

Albeit the fact that in all art the aspect of time is involved, not all art is about time. In the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, we see art that tried to depict the succession of a story; we see for example in one painting the birth of Christ, as well as his life until his crucifixion, and his resurrection. Reading the image as a story tells us about the passing of time. Time, and the grasping of time as a subject of art however, is predominantly a twentieth-century and a contemporary one. Michel Baudson’s book *De Tijd. De vierde dimensie in de kunst* (‘Time, the Fourth Dimension in Art’) of 1984 is still the most comprehensive book on the subject.¹

Time in/and Art

An example of art – or rather of an artist – who is consumed by time is the German artist Hanne Darboven. For her the writing of time is her way of existing: ‘I exist when I write’. She is obsessed by time; by systemizing time through writing, the writing of numbers, of words





or just mimicking words in her Konstruktionen (Constructions), abbreviated to the capital 'K', it seems like she clings to existence. In the work 'Schreibzeit' (Writing Time) 1975-1980 from 1980, for example, she has taken texts by Baudelaire, Sartre, Homer, interviews, articles from magazines, excerpts from encyclopaedia, etc., and all is ordered on the basis of dates. Time becomes history. Writing is a by Hanne Darboven self imposed assignment. Registering time makes that time does not escape the artist; however, in doing so time passes by. Darboven's work enrolls in time, but at the same time it has the direct confrontation of the physical object: directness and duration meet in her work. The heuristics are the astonishment when the visitor comprehends what the artist has been doing, but it takes far more time to take in the work systematically and wholly. It makes you think about what one does with one's life.

Hanne Darboven's name is often mentioned in one breath with On Kawara. Kawara takes his own life and his own travels as the starting point of his 'storage of time'. On January 4, 1966 he started to paint a painting every day, registering the date of the day on a monochrome surface in colours ranging from red and blue to black on which he paints the date using a template. When finished, he puts them in a box, often accompanied by a newspaper clipping of that day. The yearly production of works is registered in a Journal listing country, city, language, colour, time, and event: he thus systemizes time and is holding on to it. He also sends telegrams stating 'I am still alive', or he lets you know how he has travelled, as testimonials of his existence.

The work *One Million Years (Past)* and *One Million Years (Future)* [1969] registers time that was, and time to come. The starting date of *One Million Years Past* covers from 998.031 BCE (Before Common Era) until 1969 AD, On Kawara's then present time. This is when the future starts and it continues until 1.000.980, another million years. He spans two million years by writing down in numbers year after year. Both Past and Future consist of ten big volumes. The entire work was also performed live in London on Trafalgar Square in 2004, taking two readers seven days of non-stop recital to recount all the years listed in the ten volumes. The average human life is equivalent to only a few lines, and human history transpires over no more than a few pages.

A third artist I would like to mention is Tatsuo Miyajima, who in his work has been presenting a unique view of the world with flashing light emitting diodes displaying numbers and letters. The LED components, each counting at different speeds in linear rhythm from 1 to 99 and back again, use the global and universal language of digits, to show the actual motion and flux of infinite time passing. According to art critic Fumio Nanjō, Miyajima raises philosophical questions with his work, such as: 'What does it mean for time to be counted for 300.000 years? Is time that we can see and count the same as time that passes by after our deaths? What is the significance of time that we are unable to experience?' Miyajima's answer to that is: 'Keep Changing, Connect with Everything, Continue Forever'.² His study of Buddhist philosophy is undercurrent in many of his works, but most all-embracing in his *Revive Time Kaki Tree-Project* (2000 onwards). Fifty years after the destruction of Nagasaki, Miy-

ajima visited the city and was deeply impressed by the story of a single tree, a Kaki tree, that was exposed to the radioactive radiation from the atomic bomb but that miraculously had survived. A tree surgeon managed to revive the tree, and its cuttings started to grow again. Moved by the beauty of this, Miyajima started his *Revive Time Kaki Tree-Project*, first in Japan and then as an international art project. The project revolves around the planting ceremonies, the adopting, planting and tending of the cutting, complemented by meetings with local artists, workshops and activities with children.³ The issues at heart of the project consist of major themes of life: How are we shaped by the past? How vulnerable are we at the passing of time? What are our hopes for the future? The Kaki tree project literally lives, and will continue to do so for times on end. But that is not all: Of paramount importance is the bonding between people, their communication and exchange. With each planting ceremony, the project increases not only geographically but also socially because the sites, and through them the people, are connected.

Linkage

This brings me to my last and central point: the aspect of time in what Nicolas Bourriaud calls 'relational art'. In his view, the social bond has turned into a standardised artifact. The world is governed by the division of labour and ultra-specialisation, by mechanisation, the law of profitability, and the channelling of human relations. They are no longer 'directly' experienced. He pleads for, and discerns more and more, an art form he refers to as relational art: an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context.

In this art form, the substrate is formed by inter-subjectivity, and it takes the beholder as a central theme, it is the power of linkage. At an exhibition, so Bourriaud states, there is the possibility of an immediate discussion—both between the viewer and the artworks, and between the viewers. Art is for him a place that produces a specific sociability, it represents a social interstice. "The interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly in the overall system, but it suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within the system. (...) It creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us."⁴ As part of a 'relationist' theory of art, inter-subjectivity becomes the quintessence of artistic practice.

The artistic practice is focused upon the sphere of inter-human relations, inventing models of sociability. It tends to draw inspiration from the processes governing ordinary life. Since human relations are involved, this 'durational' art is inherent to time—time is its medium. It poses a challenge to Art History to cope with this time-related art form.

1 Michel Baudson (ed.). 1984. *De Tijd. De vierde dimensie in de kunst*. Amsterdam: H.J.W. Becht.

2 Alexandra Munroe. 1994. *Scream Against the Sky. Japanese Art After 1945*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, p. 223.

3 Nicole Roepers. 2000. 'Revive Time Kaki Tree', in: *Decorum*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, July 2000, Special Issue: 'Voices From Japan. Contemporary Japanese Art in Leiden', Supplement pp. 10-12.

4 Nicolas Bourriaud. 1998. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Les Presses du Réel, p. 16.

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“Wreckage is More Interesting than Structure”

Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark and Modernism in/as Ruin

1. Structure + Time = Ruin

Ruins are hot. In the world of (contemporary) art, they even seem all over the place, as several recent exhibitions prove.¹ Contemporary, post-nine-eleven-society seems to be flirting with aspects of decay & deconstruction. In many installations by younger artists, fragments of modernist structures are combined with trashy or defective elements. Progress is history, the future uncertain: trash and debris take over, erosion and entropy seem to be around again. For centuries these characteristics were closely associated with ruins. Combining the picturesque and the poetic, ruins seem to be an old-fashioned and even sentimental motif from 17th century topographical prints, 18th-century landscape paintings and 19th century photographs. But since the turn of the century, ruins have lost their friendly face. Our millennium kicked off with the catastrophic images of Ground Zero: together with the Twin Towers our belief in high-tech security and the monopoly of materialism imploded. 9/11 and new notions such as ‘collateral damage’ might have changed our perception of ruins; turning the friendly face of slow decay into the terror of destruction.

With this paper I will focus on the ruin as a creative force and a critical metaphor. I plan to illustrate this with the cases of two American artists I regard as being of crucial importance for the recent re-interpretation of the ruin: ‘earth artist’ Robert Smithson (1938-1973) and ‘anarchitect’ Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978). Both artists died very young (at 35) but can be considered forerunners of the contemporary fascination with ruins. So it is no coincidence that the interest for the work of these artists, and especially Matta-Clark, is big but still growing as the row of posthumous and recent catalogues on my bookshelf testify to. In a conference on ‘personal structures’ the choice for these two post-minimalist and, therefore, ‘anti-structure’ artists might seem a bit awkward. By using the ruin, one of the most ‘a-structural’ things we know, as a keyhole, we can see certain things more clearly. Taking the ruin as

a late modern answer to high modernism’s preoccupations with clear cut forms, slick structures and geometrical grids, this essay tries to serve as a counterbalance and reveal the fact that structures and anti-structures share a dialectical relationship.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the heritage of postwar/cold-war modernism evokes ‘archaeological’ feelings. Often not yet considered as being of art-historical value by officials, many buildings from the fifties, sixties and 70s are considered outmoded, and hence, treated with indifference, left in an abandoned state or simply demolished. In many ways (physically and mentally) high modernism can be perceived as a field of ruins. And these modern ruins speak of different things than the same buildings did when they were brand new. This ‘post-modern’ appreciation of modernism in or as a ruin goes back to the late 60s and the early 70s. At the end of the sixties, the formalist and reductivist appearances of late modernist, minimalist sculpture seem to provoke some counterreactions. Artistic practice in the U.S. in the late 1960’s is obsessed by fragmentation, ephemerality, erosion and entropy. This tendency was already spotted in 1968, when critic and curator Lucy Lippard wrote her seminal essay on the dematerialisation of art: “Today many artists are interested in an order that incorporates implications of disorder and chance, in a negation of actively ordering parts in favor of the presentation as a whole.”² It is very seducing to project a link between the way some artists turn to chaos, entropy and decomposition and the troubled American society after the euphoric Summer of Love of ‘67 (with images of Vietnam, racial tensions and political killings filling the daily news). As a matter of fact, already in the early 1960s, in the wake of Allan Kaprow’s happenings and the beginning of fluxus, some traces of ‘ruinism’ can be found, for instance in Walter De Maria’s proposal of May 1960 for an Art Yard in La Monte Young’s *An Anthology*: the happening consists of digging a big hole in the ground using steam shovels and bulldozers, while explosions go off: “bulldozers will be making wonderful pushes of dirt all around the yard. Sounds, words, music, poetry.”³

At the end of the decennium however, post-minimalism, anti-form, process art, land art, earth art and Italian arte povera all seem to share this fascination for disorder and decay. Talking about ‘disorder and chance’ Smithson and Matta-Clark come to mind of course, but

one can also refer to the installations, projects and proposals of Walter De Maria, Robert Morris and Dennis Oppenheim. The ruin motif is later used in a more explicit and literal way by, among others, Charles Simonds, Anne and Patrick Poirier and Giulio Paolini, paving the way for 80s postmodernism and its fixation on art historical references and/as fragments. Where the ‘grid’ can be considered as a pars pro toto for a big part of early and high modernism (especially in American art), the ‘ruin’ might be an equivalent for the late-modernism of the late 60s and the roots of postmodernism in the 70s. Entropy, deconstruction and utopia are the key-concepts here. Entropy relating to the post-minimal debate on sculpture and earthworks during the late 1960s; deconstruction referring to the debate on modernism and architecture during the late 1970s, and utopia relating to the social and activist component of much art of the 1960s and 1970s.

Ruins and ‘art’ as we know it were born in the same period. As a matter of fact, ruins were more or less ‘invented’ at the beginning of the Italian renaissance.⁴ The ruin is an artifact: it is in the eye of the beholder. Resulting from the fact that people are beginning to look back to the past at the same time they are concerned with progress, it is a crucial cultural construction. So, in many ways, the cult of ruins is connected with the birth of modern thinking. The so-called renaissance was triggered when artists and architects considered the ruined fora, palaces and temples of Rome as monuments, for the very first time giving them the right to be a ruin. From that time on, they have been used as a source of inspiration by architects and painters. In many ways, a ruin is an abstraction of architecture. A ruined building has become obsolete, no longer bears a roof or a function, but becomes a bearer of meaning. In its incomplete and ‘destructured’ state, the ruin becomes a fluid frame for personal projections and possible reconstructions. Some periods are more ‘ruinophile’ than others.

The 18th century for example is ‘ruinist’ *par excellence*. Bored with the burden of classicism, rococo architecture was heavily inspired by nature, mixing organic forms and floral motifs with traces of a defect classicism. In many cases the result of this synthesis resembled a ruin. Piranesi produces ruins in print popularizing the motif on a grand scale. Faked and forged ruins in gardens and interiors evoked poetical and political reflections. Until the late 19th century, ruins inspired modern (neo-classicist and neo-gothic) architecture and critical thinking. During the 20th century, classical and medieval ruins were to become more and more associated with bourgeois culture and tourism. They become old-fashioned clichés and for hardcore modernists as the futurists, symptoms of ‘passeism’. ‘Modern’, instant ruins, resulting from new ways of warfare, will become the emblems of the troubled 20th century. The most popular ruins, the Roman Coliseum, took ages to become the image it is now, while new ruins only need a few seconds. In other words: the old ruins resulted from erosion, the new ones from explosion, the latter ones showing the traces of slow decay, the former ones showing the results of quick destruction. In short: the ruin as an indicator of tourism and the ruin as an indicator of terrorism.

But quick destruction is merely a 20th-century invention. Already in the early 19th century the American painter Thomas Cole (1801-1848) represented the destructive impact of man in his magnum



opus *The Course of Empire* (1833-1836), a series of five paintings that the artist explains this way: “The history of a natural scene as well as an epitome of Man, showing the natural changes of landscape & those affected by man in his progress from barbarism to civilization, to luxury, to the vicious state or state of destruction and to the state of ruin & desolation.”⁵ The series depicts the rise and fall of a fictive, but very classical and ‘Roman’ looking civilization, by representing the same site in five ‘states’, the last one being the state of ruin and desolation after war destroyed the city with its magnificent temples and palaces. Both kinds of ruins, the peaceful one and the catastrophic one, have indeed always existed and were depicted by artists from the 17th century on, although artists until the early 20th century were mostly fascinated by the former ones. Modern, technological warfare has created enormous amounts of ‘modern, ready-made ruins’ and the medium of photography was perfectly suited to document them as happened for the first time in the second half of the 19th century with the depictions of destroyed buildings in the photographs of the American Civil War and the revolt of the Paris Commune.⁶ The romantic ruin as a site for longing and melancholy, had to clear the way for the modern ruin as a site of conflict and loss. Think about the postwar *Trümmerfotografie* (photography of the rubble) showing the bombed cities of Berlin and Dresden and the haunting images of the all-but-erased Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

2. ‘Disintegration in highly developed structures’

Ruins are hybrids. In the images of ruins, catastrophe, creativity, and criticism are combined. There seems to be some continuity in the way artists and architects have used the ruin as inspiration and/or allegory. Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark can be seen as part of a tradition of ruin enthusiasts and entropists that started somewhere in the mid-16th century in Italy and continued with Giambattista Piranesi, Hubert Robert, Caspar David Friedrich, Thomas Cole and many others. Isolating the motif of the ruin in the oeuvres Smithson and Matta-Clark gives us the opportunity to focus on its role as a critical and a creative tool for deconstructing modernity. Robert Smithson is one of the first contemporary artists to reconsider and to reintroduce the motif of the ruin, giving it a new artistic meaning. Probably the first to point out Smithson’s fascination for ruins is critic Craig Owens in his review of Smithson’s posthumously published writings.⁷ While

his sculptural work of the late sixties demonstrates how Smithson tries to find a way out of the impasse of minimalism, his essays already show an involvement with the decomposed and the decayed.

The same year in which Lippard wrote her aforementioned essay, the magazine *Artforum* published Robert Smithson's remarkable article *The Monuments of Passaic*.⁸ In it Smithson describes a very unconventional walk through the suburbs of Passaic (where he was born) as a picturesque expedition through an entropic landscape, and he makes snapshots of some of the 'monuments' he finds on his way: a bridge, a pontoon, pipelines and a derelict sandbox at the playground. In the following, famous quote, he watches the wasteland with the eyes of an archeologist from the future: "That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new construction that eventually would be built. This is the opposite of the 'romantic ruin' because the buildings don't fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built. This anti-romantic mise-en-scene suggests the discredited idea of time and many other 'out of date' things. But the suburbs exist without a rational past and without the big events of history."⁹ For Smithson the landscape is not a homogenous and idyllic synthesis of nature and culture, as it was conventionally depicted in the traditions of landscape painting. He reads the suburban site (a "zero panorama") as a decomposed tissue of contingent elements, gaps and layers of several histories, in other words as a ruin.

Smithson stresses the differences between the 'romantic' ruin as a trace of natural decay, and the 'ruin in reverse' as the rising skeletons of unfinished buildings. As a matter of fact, in the 19th century Goethe already observed that there is not so much difference between a decayed and an unfinished building. And going even further back in time, we can point to the fact that Pieter Breughel's *Tower of Babel* actually used the image of the ruined Roman Coliseum to represent the unfinished Tower of Babel. Paradoxically, Smithson connects his entropic visions with the clean geometrical shapes of minimal art. One year before his essay on Passaic, he wrote the famous essay *Entropy and the New Monuments*.¹⁰ (There he relates the works of minimalist sculptors such as Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Dan Flavin to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, "which extrapolates the range of entropy by telling us energy is more easily lost than obtained, and that in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness." He refers to the electricity blackout that struck the Northeastern states as a preview to that future: "Far from creating a mood of dread, the power failure created a mood of euphoria. An almost cosmic joy swept over all the darkened cities. Why people felt that way may never be answered."¹¹

In Smithson's eyes the minimalists seem to create monuments against time, forever young, without decay and erosion. He connects these a-historical or even post-historical constructions with the high modernist skyscrapers in NY and postwar housing developments in the suburbs. For the artist, minimalism seems to have been inspired by the dullness and vapidness of these modern structures. Read that way, minimalism and its fetishism of grids compositions, geometrical shapes and slick surfaces is more a mannerism of modernism than a symptom of it. Smithson also refers to the fact that many contem-

porary artists are finding inspiration in horror- and SF-movies and in collecting piles of printed matter at random, using it without any hierarchy or rational method. All these are symptoms of entropy as an artistic inspiration, he concludes. A few years later, in the early 1970s, however, Smithson seems to interpret entropy less as the visual emptiness of hardcore minimalism than increasingly as the complete disintegration of rational structures. Entropy becomes less a symptom of, than it is a reaction against high-modernist minimalism. Probably inspired by Rudolf Arnheim's influential book *Entropy and Art. An Essay on Disorder and Order* (1971), the concept of entropy is more understood as a form of deconstructurization.

In an interview with artist and critic Gregoire Müller, Smithson argues: "Some day I would like to compile all the different entropies. All the classifications would lose their grids. (...) It would be a study that devotes itself to the process of disintegration in highly developed structures. After all, wreckage is often more interesting than structure."¹² The 'losing of the grids' and 'disintegration of structures' point to a discovery of disorder that can be seen as an aesthetic correction to Greenbergian modernism and its obsession with repetition and grid-structure. A year later, in an interview with Gianni Pettena, he explicitly refers to the ruin: "It's interesting too, in looking at the slides of ruins there's always a sense of highly developed structures in the process of disintegration. You could go and look for the great temple and it's in ruins, but you rarely go looking for the factory or highway that's in ruins. Lévy-Strauss suggested that they change the word anthropology to entropology, meaning highly developed structures in a state of disintegration. I think that's part of the attraction of people going to visit obsolete civilizations. They get a gratification from the collapse of these things."¹³

Again a year later, in an interview with Alison Sky (from the collective SITE, that created fake ruins for supermarkets), Smithson relates the topic to architecture: "Architects tend to be idealists, and not dialecticians. I propose a dialectics of entropic change."¹⁴ He refers to a building pit in Central Park as "entropic architecture or a de-architecturization". He mentions an anecdote of his childhood: "I know when I was a kid I used to love to watch the hurricanes come and blow the trees down and rip up the sidewalks. I mean it fascinated me. There's a kind of pleasure one receives on that level."¹⁵ Some projects and proposals from the same period, the years between 1970 and 1972, seem to illustrate Smithson's changing interpretation of entropy from minimalism to a contemporary form of ruinism, that in many ways reflects the ruin-traditions of the earlier centuries. Crucial in this regard is the *Partially Buried Wood-shed Project* (Kent State University, Ohio, 1970), for which Smithson covered a derelict wooden building on the periphery of the university campus with several truck loads until the central beam was about to crack. Drawings such as *Partially Buried Two-Storey Building* and *Island of the Dismantled Building + Demolition Site* (both 1970) demonstrate that Smithson was interested in the creation of modern ruins.

Giving nature a hand, the artist speeds up the natural forces of entropy. In the famous *Hotel Palenque* lecture for architecture students, delivered in 1969, Smithson describes a derelict Mexican hotel near the famous Maya ruins where he had recently stayed.¹⁶ Illustrated

with color slides, the fully detailed lecture, given with a tongue-in-cheek seriousness, mimics a guided tour through a modern Pompeii, where nature and structure, growth and geometry all lose their proper identities and seem to mix up in a continuous cycle of decay and reconstruction. Time and process, two aspects of modernist architecture seemed to lack, are omnipresent in *Hotel Palenque*. This aspect of Smithson's work demonstrates how the ruin functions as a critique of modernism and its architectural offspring.

3. 'Violence turns to visual order'

In the first minutes of the lecture, Smithson introduces the word de-architecturization that in one way or another seems to presage (and parallel) Gordon Matta-Clark's notion of anarchitecture. Smithson's ideas appealed to the young architecture student Gordon Matta-Clark. In 1969 Smithson received a fried Polaroid photograph of a Christmas tree, resulting from a performance in the NY John Gibson Gallery, from Matta-Clark as an entropic Christmas wish. Five years younger than Smithson, Matta-Clark was heavily influenced by the land artist, whom he had met as a student during the Earth Art exhibition at Cornell University in 1969. A few years later Matta-Clark himself would become known for his cutting actions in abandoned buildings. Creating 'modern ruins' by cutting the walls, floors and ceilings of empty houses in the Bronx, the former architecture student would point to the decay of the urban fabric. The 'created' ruin was to inspire a reconstruction of social and ecological values.

As a matter of fact, Matta-Clark's oeuvre is a ruin in itself: it has come to us in many fragments, photographs and leftovers. Trying to understand Matta-Clark's work means taking the position of an archeologist, reconstructing the whole from bits and pieces. After his premature death in 1978, his work was 'rediscovered' in the early 1980s. The link with ruins had already been made at that time. "A Matta-Clark 'deconstruction', unlike minimal, pop or conceptual art, allows historical time to enter", artist Dan Graham wrote. Graham was the first one to recognize the ruin-value in Matta-Clark's art: "Matta-Clark used houses and building structures which were about to be demolished and created deconstructed 'ruins' which reveal hidden layers of socially concealed architectural and anthropological family meaning... Matta-Clark's work attached itself to the notion of the instant ruin of today: the demolition."¹⁷

The former architecture student started cutting up walls during the renovation of the artist-run restaurant (and performance space) *Food*. "This cutting up started with a number of counters and built-in work spaces. It then progressed to the walls and various other space dividers", he recalls in an interview.¹⁸ Later that year, in 1972, Matta-Clark started to perform this cutting act in abandoned buildings in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the Bronx, stopped on several occasions by the police and by gangs from the neighborhood. The young artist had been attracted by the ruined state of the derelict houses: "I couldn't help but feel for the claustrophobic, cluttered rooms, stinking hallways, burned-out and windowless environment that, in their abandoned condition, still reverberated with the miseries of the ghetto lives. By undoing a building there are many aspects of the social condition against which I am gesturing: to open a state of enclosure which had been preconditioned



not only by physical necessity but by the industry that profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive, isolated consumer—a virtually captive audience."¹⁹ Using abandoned buildings in derelict districts such as the Bronx, Matta-Clark tried to revitalize and redefine the already existing ruin by cutting it up and transforming it into a vital site of artistic meaning.

In the beginning the cut out fragments were carefully removed and transported to the gallery, where they were presented as geometrical shapes, not very different from minimal sculpture, but showing the architectural layers (wood, plaster, wall paper, linoleum) and the traces of their history. Referring to his love for "big, rough edges", artist John Baldessari adequately describes Matta-Clark as a "messy minimalist".²⁰ The former clean cut and hard edge aesthetics of hardcore minimalism have indeed become messy: they show the traces of wear and tear. The high modernist cult of the forever new makes room for a sensitivity towards patina and history. This becomes manifest in Matta-Clark's well-known piece *Splitting (Four Corners)* from 1974, in which he cut through a complete one family house in New Jersey, literally transforming it into a site of *Unheimlichkeit* (mostly translated as uncanniness, this German word literally means 'unhomeness'). Cutting through the house Matta-Clark was also cutting through an American ideal.

Smithson being first and foremost a gallery-artist rooted in the late 60s, Matta-Clark was more into the Soho alternative spaces movement of the early '70s. Together with the members of the Anarchitecture group (with Laurie Anderson, among others), Matta-Clark evolved towards a more critical and creative position towards the social implications of late modernist and capitalist urban planning: "I am altering the existing units of perception normally employed to discern the wholeness of a thing. It is an organic response to what already has been well done. More than a call for preservation,

this work reacts against a hygienic (sic) obsession in the name of redevelopment which sweeps away what little there is of an American past, to be cleansed by pavement and parking.²¹ Whereas Smithson chose the post-industrial wasteland, Matta-Clark gradually became more interested in sites as social tension and possibilities for real change: "I will be collaborating with a well organized, very aware and integrated group of ghetto youths on envisioning and funding a large-scale take over of derelict property for their rehabilitation into community owned alternatives to a substandard environment", he writes to ICC-director Flor Bex in 1976.²²

In this proposal for Antwerp, he states clearly: "I use the urban fabric in its raw, abandoned state transforming unused structures or spaces into revitalized areas. The actual space in its final stage is the 'exhibition' and hopefully will have a life of its own within the community." He concludes: "My special hopes for a project in Antwerp would be to complete a 'non-u-mental' work that the city could go on enjoying for a certain period after its realization."²³ Eventually, this action would result in Matta-Clark's major piece *Office Baroque* (1977), in which he created a dazzling composition using all the five floors, the walls and the roof of a former office building in the historical centre of Antwerp.²⁴ Although the work might provoke sensations of intimidation and even aggression, Matta-Clark stressed the fact that his actions were more about positive energy: "The confrontational nature of the work is every bit as brutal physically as it is socially. Tackling a whole building even with power tools and a couple of helpers is as strenuous an action as any dance or team sport. Perhaps the physicality is the easiest reading of the work. The first thing one notices (is) that violence has been done. Then the violence turns to visual order and hopefully, then to a sense of heightened awareness. ... My hope is that the dynamism of the action can be seen as an alternative vocabulary with which to question the static inert building environment."²⁵ Just the way ruins might provoke feelings of tranquility and of anxiety, beauty and terror, hope and despair, Matta-Clark's anarchitectural interventions are ambiguous. Their combination of elegance and violence, of creation and destruction, makes them hard to grasp but easy to love.

In the practices of Smithson and Matta-Clark, the 'ruin' functions on a different level. Postminimalist Smithson's aesthetical discovery of 'de-architecturization' (the beauty of the catastrophe and the dialogue between art and nature) gains an activist dimension in anarchitect Matta-Clark's urban practice (the social aspects of demolition and the transformation of abandoned sites in living areas). Both artists use the ruin as a critique and an alternative for high modernism and its idealist and Cartesian preoccupations. Smithson, Matta-Clark, and other artists of their generation have liberated the ruin from its sentimental and/or catastrophic associations, and reintroduced it as a sharp tool for a possible critique of post-war modernism, be it in its sculptural-aesthetical, its social-ecological or architecturally-urban appearance. Smithson introduced entropy as a possible alternative for the cult of the new and the permanent modern. Matta-Clark introduced the transformation of derelict buildings as a trigger for rethinking modern urbanism. It is a tempting contradiction to say that the rhetoric of decay, the fragment and the cut form a link between late modernism and so called postmodernism, but modernism probably never really

ended. The erosion, the mutilation and the recycling of the modernist idiom pave the way for rethinking its heritage and its value (in ruins or not) for today. Ruins always contain the possibility of renewal.

1 In 2002 I curated a show *Le Petit Cabinet d'un Amateur de Ruines* (with contemporary photographs and ruin-images from the 16th century until today from my own collection). Since my lecture *Personal Ruins* at the symposium *Personal Structures: Time* (15.6.2007) there have been several exhibitions dedicated to the motif of ruins in or as art. A few examples dating from 2008: the Ghent Museum of Fine Art (Belgium) hosted a wonderful exhibition on Piranesi. The curatorial concept of the first Brussels Biennial centered around the notion of the modernist heritage and its image of decay. The Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane) had a group show called *Modern Ruin*. The London Hayward Gallery hosted a show called *Psycho Buildings. Artists & Architecture* (an explicit reference to Martin Kippenberg's subversive photobook with the same title of 1988) were the relationship between art and architecture is explored. The Bozar in Brussels had a show titled *Reality as a Ruin* presenting ruins in photography from the early 19th century until now, and based upon a text I wrote a few years ago. While I am writing this, the Generali Foundation in Vienna even presents a group show *Modernism as a ruin*. An archaeology of the present, in which Smithson and Matta-Clark have a key role. In recent years, some interesting books have been published about ruins in/as art, such as Christopher Woodwards *In Ruins* (Vintage, London, 2002) and Michel Makarius' *Ruines* (Flammarion, Paris, 2004). In 1997 The Getty Research Institute had a show called *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles, 1997). Things seem to go back to Rose Macaulay's pioneering *The Pleasure of Ruins* (1953).

2 The Dematerialisation of Art, *Art International*, vol. XII, no.2 Feb. 1968, reprinted in Lucy Lippard, *Changes. Essays in art criticism*, New York, 1971, pp. 260-255-276, quote from pp. 260.

3 Walter De Maria, Compositions, essays, meaningless work, natural disasters, in La Monte Young (ed.), *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, New York, 1963 (no pagenumbers)

4 For a historical survey of the ruin motif in art, see Makarius 2004.

5 Thomas Cole, quoted in Ella M. Foshay, *Mr. Luman Reed's Picture Gallery. A Pioneer Collection of American Art*, Abrams, New York, 1990, p. 130.

6 See my own essay on ruins and photography *De realiteit als ruine (Reality as a ruin)* in Inge Henneman (e.), *Het archief van de verbeelding (The archive of imagination)*, Fotomuseum Provincie Antwerpen, Mercatorfonds, Antwerpen, 2002, pp. 59-89.

7 Craig Owens, *Earthwords*, October 10, fall 1979.

8 *Artforum*, dec. 1967, reprinted as *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, New Jersey in Jack Flam (ed.), Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1996, pp. 68-74.

9 *Ibd.*, p. 72.

10 *Artforum*, June 1966, reprinted in *Flam* 1996, pp. 10-23.

11 *Ibd.*, p. 11.

12 "... The earth, subject to cataclysms, is a cruel master." Interview with Gregoire Müller, *Arts Magazine*, Sept. 1971, reprinted in *Flam* 1996, pp. 253-261, quote from pp. 256-260.

13 Conversation in Salt Lake City. Interview with Gianni Petenna, *Domus*, nov. 1972, reprinted in *Flam* 1996, pp. 297-300, quote from p. 299.

14 Entropy made visible. Interview with Alison Sky, *On Site # 4*, 1973, reprinted in *Flam* 1996, pp. 301-309, quote from pp. 304.

15 *Ibd.*, p. 308.

16 See www.ubu.com/film/smithson.html.

17 Dan Graham and Marie-Paule Macdonald, Project for Matta-Clark Museum, 1983, reprinted in *Dan Graham. Works 1965-2000*, Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf, 2001, p. 206.

18 Interview with Matta-Clark, Antwerp, September 1977, in cat. *Matta-Clark*, ICC, Antwerpen, 1977, p. 8.

19 *Ibd.*, pp. 8-9.

20 John Baldessari in cat. *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1985, pp. 19.

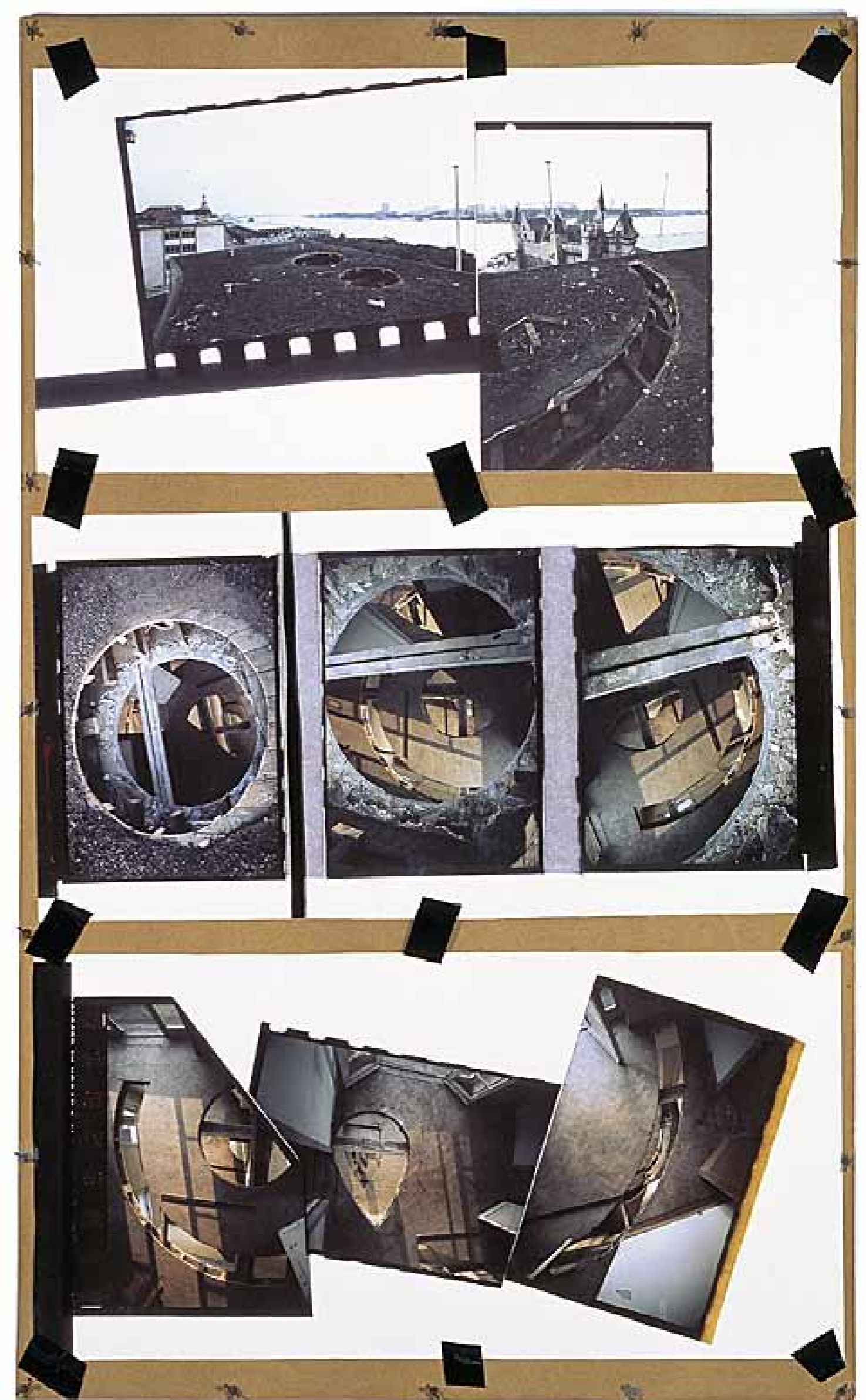
21 Cat. ICC 1977, p. 11.

22 Letter to Flor Bex 28.7.1976, quoted in Johan Pas, *Beeldenstorm in een spiegelzaal. Het ICC en de actuele kunst 1970-1990 (Iconoclasm in a mirror hall. The ICC and contemporary art 1970-1990)* LannooCampus, Leuven 2005, p. 204.

23 *Ibd.*, quoted in Pas 2005, pp. 207-208.

24 For a detailed account of the history and reception of *Office Baroque*, see Pas 2005, chapters VII and IX.

25 Cat. ICC 1977, p. 12.



LAWRENCE WEINER

Text as presented during the symposium Time at Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam, Netherlands, 16 June 2007



Lawrence Weiner, *1942 in the Bronx, NY, USA. Since 1968, Weiner has been using language as the primary vehicle for his work. He lives in New York, USA, and Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Lawrence Weiner has opted not to edit the transcript and accepted it in this form as an authentic documentation of his talk.

I have been able to catch some of the talk that has preceded mine, and some of it I found interesting, some charming, and some about people whose work I genuinely like. But it has very little to do with time, unless time in relation to—what? At the worst, an attempt to place those activities of human beings within a linear historicality—essentially, a place in the sun, without any sense either of knowing or of giving [a care about] what the sun is, or any accord of what the sun does. It all seems to me it's not about time, it's about "slam, bam, thank you ma'am." I am not trying to be funny.

When we speak of time, especially since so much art since, I can almost say, since Mondrian is involved with the passage of time—not the reflection of time, but the passage of time, reflections of times, or nostalgia at present. And that's all we have in our lives. Time is relative to expectations, and it's based upon the real-time needs to fulfill those expectations. We have no other means of judging the value of time. Essentially, to be really vulgar, it can't be about lifetime, it can't be about lifespan. It's the same problem that all artists have. We all make movies, and yet, a movie is the great imposition on another human being, because it asks them to give up their real time. Your real time is making a movie. I don't know if their real time is watching a movie, because it's an imposition of time.

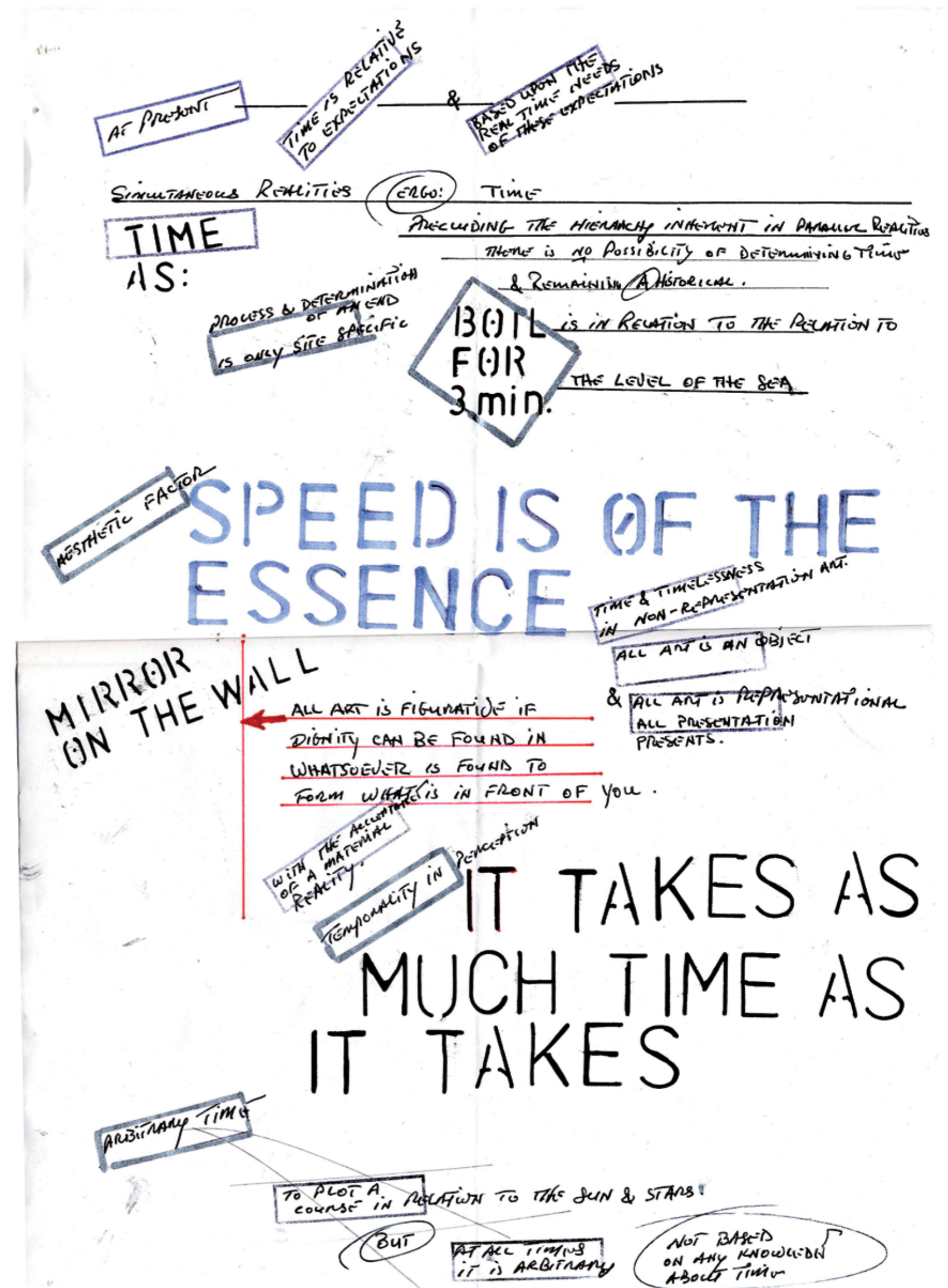
I use time as a designation within the process of making art. That designation, though, is never an absolute. I'm a materialist, personally, and as an artist, I really see things in relation to the materials as they're presented. I read through the questionnaire of the panels and of the discussions that we're having, and in an attempt to sort of answer them, I kept coming up against these very, very strange things. These notes—you must excuse me—we were on board the boat and it was literally the only paper I could find that I could write on. But we have this problem here about non-objective art, figurative art, so-called minimal, so-called this, so-called that. Now

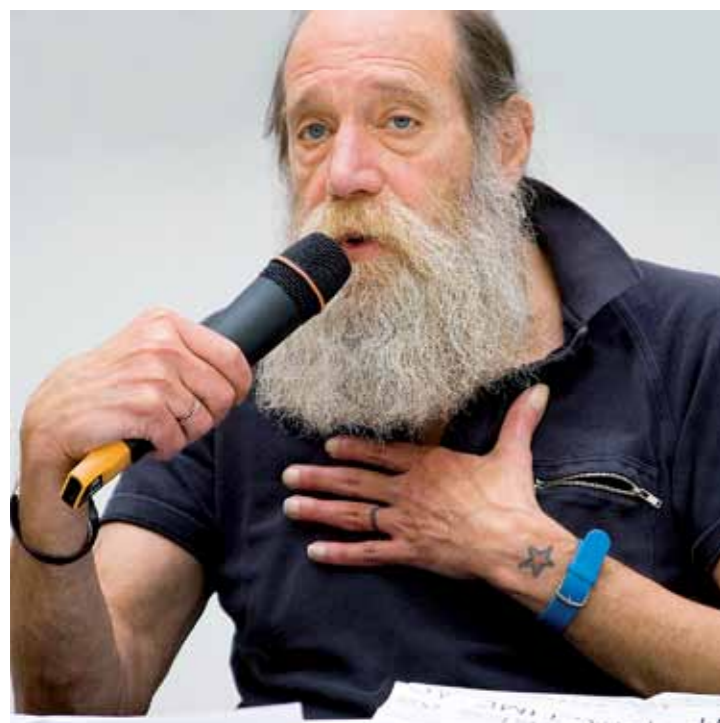
let's just step aside—there is no art that is non-representational. If you can see it, it exists. If it exists, it represents itself. If we can—and all art is essentially figurative—if we can find dignity in whatsoever is found to form, whatever you come across—"All art is representational," "All art is an object"—it's another false issue. It's another problem of trying to single yourself out from linear time.

Process is determination, in the way I have used it—spray something, do something, for a period, an amount of time, and then tell somebody about it in the past perfect, that it is already an accomplished, accommodated fact. It has already entered the culture. Try boiling an egg for three minutes in Amsterdam, and try boiling an egg for three minutes as you go higher and higher and higher, and you rise to the heights. It's not the same, but it is the same idea. But a three-minute egg on the top of Kilimanjaro is not a three-minute egg sitting in the Harbor of Amsterdam. It takes into account where you are, when you are.

If you can, leave behind what we're running into this afternoon, parallel realities—I'm sorry to have missed the discussions yesterday, but we're seeing so many parallel realities. These parallel realities allow for a hierarchy though the entire reason for making art was to help reduce the hierarchies between materials. If we attribute a metaphor to absolutely everything that's being done that fits into whatever culture you happen to be in and this idea of a linear historicality, fine. Otherwise, the only aesthetic factor, essentially, of art is "speed is of the essence"—time and timelessness. All art is involved in time, all things are involved in time. But at present, why are we not accepting the fact that perhaps there is a simultaneous reality? Have we been so absolutely messed about by probably one of the few people in the world who would love the idea of postmodernism, namely Heisenberg—whose egocentricity was to such an extent that he really convinced the entire world, after the Second World War, that if it weren't for him going to the bathroom a lot, the Nazis would have had atomic power. But he slowed it down.

Heisenberg is interesting. Chaos theory liberated all of us. It liberated Gordon Matta-Clark, who I have a great admiration for. It liberated everybody to the fact that it empowered us. The whole purpose of art is to empower other people—not yourself. Touch it, it will never be the same. It all sounds just marvelous. The only problem is there





was another person who came along long before this called Galileo. And, although he had to recant it, he recanted it with great wit. After having to admit that he was wrong—that the world did not revolve around us—he said, “But you have to admit, at least it moves.” That’s about all you can get as an artist sometimes. But in fact, why are we accepting with no restrictions, an idea of talking about time, which is—again, I don’t know how it fits into art. It’s like going to a Michel Butor lecture that Dory Ashton had set up once in the 60s, all excited to see him talk about language in art, because we were all artists who were being rejected because we used language, and he showed pictures with words on them. That’s not language in art. And that’s not time, when you talk about the historicity in the things.

There is an accord for an idea to come together about what time is, but I don’t know why it’s necessary as an artist. I was reading a book last night where something turned up, and they were talking about working with the Maasai. The Maasai have a different sense of time, a different way of explaining it. But in fact, the egg boils for a certain period of time and it has a certain desired expectation. It doesn’t matter. It really and truly doesn’t. I’m so completely involved in the fact that—why are we so jealous of entropy? We are. We as human beings, we as intellectuals, we’re completely jealous of entropy. Entropy takes care of it all by itself. The entropic nature of life is the entropic nature of life; it’s not a philosophical fact. In becoming a philosophical fact, again we get into this thing—we use arbitrary time.

I just did a show at the Maritime Museum in London, and it was dealing with the rhumb line. The rhumb line is that line that curves around and allows you to have a flat surface, to understand how to get from point A to point B, and the problem is that you can’t get lost. I thought exploration was all about getting lost. We’re caught up in a problem here. There has to be a way to put in what they call “postmodernism”—but I don’t really see why. There was no need to put in the tachists. They existed, they came, they went, and it didn’t

really influence anybody. Schneider didn’t influence a soul. We can leave out the so-called little escapade of postmodernism. All it led to was some urban renewal; it didn’t lead to any genocides or anything.

If “speed is of the essence,” and “mirror, mirror on the wall,” is what we’re looking for [with respect to] time, I’m totally confused about why we are staying within this Heisenbergian concept, which is totally pre-Galilean, instead of existing within a post-Galilean sense as artists, where the work one makes has no metaphor—it has nothing implicit in it. It is totally explicit, and each person comes to this explicit thing that stands in the way—because all art gets in the way—and he or she brings whatever needs and desires [it takes] for understanding their own place in the world. That’s time. That’s time, not as a quantitative thing, and it’s not as a qualitative thing. It’s time just for what it is. It takes as much time as it takes. And each thing takes as much time as it takes, and each person does [as well].

As artists, why do we have to intellectually determine what this arbitrary time is? I mean, if you were on a Julian Calendar, if you were on another calendar, you’re all working on different times. I mean, it’s nice in New York sometimes, where there are four different New Years that go on—one right after the other—and they’re not even close together most of the time. But they are New Years. And each one, you walk around, and you learn whatever the phrase and whatever the culture is having it, and you learn how to say, “Happy New Year” in an awful lot of cultures—but it makes no sense whatsoever.

Now, art is not supposed to make sense. Art is supposed to have meaning. And if we really believe that we’re international, this concept of time has to be moved about again. Somebody who’s hungry has to be fed really rather quickly. Somebody who’s not hungry doesn’t have to be fed really as quickly. Our determination as artists within this time span is to decide how much of our resources can be used to speed up, for the people who need it, and perhaps to slow down, for the people who don’t need it. But that’s slow down, that’s speed up—that’s all still arbitrary time. That’s not time as any way of designating your place in a linear, historical thing.

They’ve made a big fuss about a colleague of mine, who I used to be friends with—I’m not friends with now, and there wasn’t even a falling out. It just—it was a political problem. There is no answer. It’s nice; I’m so glad when somebody else talks about what I do, so I don’t have to. I’m very serious—you know, it’s the old theatrical thing that you read in the newspapers. “Oh, did we get any coverage for our play?” “Yes, they say it stinks.” “Oh, good! Did they use capital letters or did they use small letters?” Art is something that is talked about. Art is something that—it’s this concept that we have, where somebody does something that strikes a universal chord, and that’s placing something in the way of something else. And that universal chord can then be used by other people without any rules, without any regulations. It’s almost the joke—there used to be a time in Africa where people had never seen a motion picture. They even didn’t quite know what a motion picture was. But every single person knew that Greta Garbo wanted to be alone.

Aha! You got to the core of the whole thing: All art is the anecdote that you walk away from it with, the anecdote that you use. It’s why a



Caspar David Friedrich functions the same as a Barnett Newman. There’s nobody there! It’s a picture of somebody, but there’s nobody there. And you, if you were at that moment in an existential crisis, can use that at that time—but it’s always at present. And our present, I’m afraid, is being taken over—no offense meant—but by an academic need in order to convey information that we’re only talking about the past. I had hoped when I entered the world of being an artist that I would be able to spend my life trying to reach that one point of making work that was in the present. Because there is no future. The future would mean that you were determining things. Nobody determines anything. As Jo Baer said, you think you’re changing the world a little—maybe you don’t even change it at all.

But the present—if you can make something and present it to other people, in any culture—and language is not a problem in my terms, because it can all be translated, it’s all quite simple. And that gives a sensual pleasure at the moment, a sensual awareness at the moment—sensual, not visceral. Design is visceral and art is sensual. At that moment, it does not rely upon your remembrance of the past. I ain’t been able to do it yet, but I’m trying. And I think every artist essentially is trying to do that—to make something that, at that given moment, changes your entire sensuality to such an extent that when you think back on it, in the next moment, you’ve changed your whole logic pattern. And that’s all I have to say about time.

There was one English thing that was wonderful. The English knew they had to have accord on time because they invented “false time”

with the Greenwich Mean line. They had to invent it in order to do what they had to do. And they used to stand up in English pubs and say, “Time, gentlemen.” Now I thought that was sufficient, but when I told this to a colleague from Britain on an airplane recently going to Munich, he said, “Lawrence, you forgot. It was, ‘Time, gentlemen, please.’”

Please accept my reading of temporal time. And that “please” is what all art is supposed to be about.

Question from the audience: First of all, I would like to apologize for my academic question. I wish to mention it is a fact that, for me, without love, there is no real academic activity. I think even academic activity is stimulated by a love for something. It might be a love of the arts. But I would like to ask you about a specific subject, the fact that you stopped making paintings and started making textual or text related works, and how the aspect of time, in a way, played a role in this process or in this moment or in this decision, or whatever it was. For me, there is a gap in my perception of your work between painting and the textual pieces.

Lawrence Weiner: Hmm-mm. I don’t know if I ever stopped making paintings, because the paintings themselves—by the time you got to know about them, not the things that sort of went through one’s life—by the time I got to that, the paintings were doing exactly what the use of language was about. They were presenting a material fact—the fact of removal, the fact of a spray for a period of time. And then I began to discover that they were

ROUND ROOM



LETTERS ARE APPROXIMATELY 65 CM TALL
GLOSSY RED VINYL OR PAINT WITH BLACK OUTLINE
RED: PANTONE RED 032 C OR AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE

AMPERSAND IS APPROXIMATELY 170 CM TALL
GLOSSY BLUE VINYL OR PAINT WITH BLACK OUTLINE
BLUE: PANTONE 299 C OR AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE

DOTS ARE APPROXIMATELY 40 CM TALL
GLOSSY ORANGE PAINT OR VINYL WITH BLACK OUTLINE
ORANGE: PANTONE ORANGE 021 C OR AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE

not believing me that the paintings were just basically a conversation. And they were turning them into these other objects, and I found that language allowed itself to function better. But in a sense, I'm still doing exactly the same thing I was doing then. I'm making things to show to people that they can identify with, what I had seen as a logic pattern—I hope. So there was never any break. I happen to like painting. I like painters. I like Jo. I mean, I have no real problem with any of that, there is not a problem about who I show with. I don't believe that they were even minimalists. I don't believe certainly that there are certain things called conceptualists; it's as if... I just saw some beautiful Ellsworth Kellys that I was very impressed by at Venice. And don't tell me they're not conceptual—you have to figure out what size canvas to buy, what size stretcher to stretch, what kind of paint to mix. I don't know where the word "conceptual" came from. It was—I think, and this is maybe a little low shot—but there came a point somewhere, when it began to look like it might be hard to make a living. It was before the work was really beginning to be accepted, and somebody called it "conceptual" and they figured, "Oh, well. If I screw up, I can become a professor of conceptual art in the university or in an art school." Now, wanting to survive is no reason for me to look down on anybody—I wanted to survive all along, it's just about what you're willing to do for it. Might be a little bit sad. But I have nothing against the academy. I believe in teachers, you know, I really... the reason I don't teach is that I think it's a full-time endeavor. And the few times that I've had to give seminars for financial reasons, to try to do something, I found myself not being able to work. I found myself totally engaged with these other human beings in a room, who were passing their real time—and they only get one real time. And you have an obligation. I live with somebody who's fascinated by history. And history is an interesting aspect for me—but not when I'm making art. I don't want to make art that relies upon the past in order to

have validity. I think that we are dignified enough at our own present time in this moment that we don't have to justify what we do by the accomplishments of other people. We really ought to be able to go [action] without having to say, "See? It looks a little bit like a Picabia." Yeah, it might look a little bit like a Picabia, but we all look a little bit like whatever grandparents we had. There's no real way to get away from it. That would be the answer. But it's not about—when I say "academic" I meant an academic reading of looking at something that perhaps had no explanation, and the only explanation would be to put it in line with our knowledge of history. Somebody who had been educated in Asia would not have that same line of history, and yet the same work would have the same amount of power, like Gordon Matta-Clark. The same work could mean all of that, but it doesn't always have to be counter-cultural. Let's say it's acultural. Maybe art is acultural. Art is not about opposites—it's about apposites, and it could be acultural. Acultural means that each individual time, as we know it, attempts to find a means and attempts to find its own level. And with global warming, we've discovered that the level of water is probably the most profound thing in the world, because there is no level of water any longer. [using the term Waterstand in Dutch] Yeah, it's true! [a few words in Dutch] And as long as that's every single day, we have another water level, the level of water is the only question we can answer—and [the fact] that the level of water finds its own level. Well, that's very interesting because we had hoped that for artists as well, didn't we? Yeah, it's a piece I'm doing in Liege, at the University, and it's all about water finds its own level, because its own level is the most important part of it.

Question from the audience: Why is it so difficult to be an artist in the present, I mean, not related to the past, which is anyway hard enough? Why is it so hard to deal with the here and now? Is it because it is actually now learned?

Lawrence Weiner: Oh, but it actually is there—it's just that by the time you tell me about it, it's gone, okay... That kind of paradox sounds great, you know we're living in the City of Ammm... and the City of "everybody being better then everybody else because they have an inner glow." But in fact, it's not any harder to be an artist now than it was to be an artist—and again, I can only speak from the '50s or the '60s. What happens is you are not content... "One is not content with the configuration that is presented to us." That configuration is what we build our logic pattern for survival out of. We get through the day by using our logic pattern to get through it. That logic pattern can come from a Mondrian, it can come from a popular song, it can come from Beethoven. It doesn't much matter. But we build a structure within our heads for how to get through each day. That is the present. The reason that it looks so complicated for artists to find something to do, which is what the problem was that I saw in Venice—not that they don't know how to do what they do. They do. But they don't really know why they're doing it, because they didn't—and they'll say it out loud—they don't know what they're doing, they're just doing something to do something. That's not an answer. When there's nothing to say, maybe it's best to say nothing. Yeah. I mean, I'm sorry—you know, artists are no different than any other person. When I'm speaking, I'm speaking from the standpoint



of being an artist. And that's why I was asked to speak, because I'm an artist talking about something else. I don't really—I'm not a scientist. Yes, I mean, we all know Heisenberg, we all know how to sing *Melancholy Baby*. These are things that our Western culture has taught us as we were growing up. Calculus is not complicated. Fixing a VCR might be—but they're not going to exist any longer, so it's one of those things you didn't have to learn. The thing about art is maybe there are things that artists are supposed to be smart enough that they don't have to learn because it's not going to be of any use—they're dead ends. But every dead end has always produced [things] like a cure for syphilis or a cure for this or a cure for that. So I don't know why we're all supposed to know so much—but time itself is the interesting thing. How do we give a value to time that's not related to our own fear of death? You know, there's that joke about—this thing about a lifetime. How can you give value to a life when it's the thing that everybody has? And everybody has it like the level of water for a different period of time. That's it, I don't really know. As I've said, I'm one of those people who, if given the opportunity, and when I've had the opportunity, would start schools and start things. I think people should know about the past and should know about history, but I don't know if it's a necessity when you're talking about art. And it has a tendency to trip up a lot of the aspirations of a lot of younger artists—and I don't mean in their twenties, I mean in their teens—who are starting to enter into the world and want to have a discourse to force them, to make it resemble what they have heard of. Maybe art is taking on another phase, but it does that every 10 years—happily. Yeah. You know, there's no such thing as a young artist. There are artists who show a lot and artists who haven't shown a lot, and that's the difference. And art is a public thing—when it's not shown, it doesn't exist. Art is a public conversation. I mean, that's the horrible thing. You must all have [conversation] when you have seminars, and sometimes you see intelligence in eyes, but they say, "Oh, I can't talk about that!" And you look at them and say, "Then get the

fuck out of here." Because art is a public job and if you can't talk in public about what you are thinking, then you shouldn't be an artist—you should be something else.

Question: How is time related to the medium of artists' books?

Lawrence Weiner: I don't see them related really to time. It's a real-time experience to read a book, but I've always made books because—and if you'll notice all the books I've made, and there seem to be a lot of them, they don't have any explanation or any table—they don't tell you how to use them. It's one of the ways of leaving around things that I've been working. You can do books for children, you can do them for adults. Where they turn up, it's the one thing that our overwhelming society can never get rid of. They can burn books, they can kill the people who make them, they can kill the people who read them. Somehow or other, one turns up behind the toilet, one turns up under the bed, and then you're back in business again. And media, you forget, if they turn off the electricity, you're screwed. Forget it. That's the big mistake of McLuhan. McLuhan misread immediately and it became obvious that the benevolence of the society should be in no way, means, or otherwise, to restrict yourself in your communication with other people. Remember artists like Ian Wilson or artists like Stanley Brown, where the expenditure of the time of the involvement is an essential part of it? For me, the expenditure of trying to figure out how to use what I make is an essential part of a person's use of my work. They basically first have to figure out what it is, and then they have to figure out if it's of any use to them—and if it is, they have to change their logic pattern—without my having to tell them how to do it. So I find books wonderful as long as they don't have instructions on them. And I continue to make books and I will continue to make books. I like making children's books, too, because you can talk about something like time without worrying about historicity and things.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Joseph Kosuth (in absentia) e-mailed his answers to questions about Time

Joseph Kosuth (*1945 in Toledo, Ohio, USA) is one of the pioneers of Conceptual art and installation art, initiating language based works and appropriation strategies in the 1960s. Due to other commitments, Joseph Kosuth couldn't participate in the Amsterdam symposium in person. He did agree to take part in the form of submitting written statements, however. The idea was that Peter Lodermeyer would ask him a series of questions on the theme of Time and he would select those he wanted to answer. The answers we print here reached us by e-mail, and served as the departure point for a panel discussion, to which numerous speakers at the symposium and people from the audience contributed.

Peter Lodermeyer: After 2500 years of philosophical contemplation about time, the German philosopher Michael Theunissen has reached a conclusion that "Time is not definable" [Negative Theologie der Zeit, p. 39]. What is the meaning of time for you personally?

Joseph Kosuth: There couldn't possibly be a meaning of time, for me or anyone else.

PL: The main subject of your work is "meaning". What, in your opinion, is the prevailing effect of time, the formation or the erosion of meaning? Is time an ally or an enemy of the artist?

JK: On first thought I would assume 'time' to be, intrinsically, devoid of meaning. At best it would be a flow which provides the dynamic within which meanings are formed for individuals or society. But for itself, it has no 'meaning' per se.

PL: A very significant time structure in the life and career of an artist is artistic success. Lately, a critic wrote in relation to your show at Sean Kelly Gallery: "Theory's over. [...] Like it or not, intentional or not, both Theory and Conceptual art have made it. They're the establishment." (Matthew L. McAlpin, The Brooklyn Rail, November 2006). The art critic Klaus Honnef has referred to the "Pyrrhic victory of Conceptual art." Does the art world still need debates on theory or theoretical debate?

JK: Well, the word 'success' seems more precise than it is. A market success like Damien Hirst or, once upon a time, Markus Lupertz, is clearly not an artistic success, for example. The 'success' of my own activity—as a cultural contribution—has shown a healthy indifference to the market, for a different example, with interest in my work

quite often based on grounds quite independent of whatever charm the market had for my production. As for your quote, what a curiously enslaved avant-gardist idea to equate having 'made it' with being 'over'. So, apparently, at the moment in which one is exercising influence and arriving at the possibility of an enlightened responsibility for a social and cultural impact, the suggestion is that the actual unavoidable destiny is one of impotence, since it's only the possibility of the new rather than the reality of responsible engagement of an actual 'arrival' that matters? I think not. If so, 'the new' becomes a formalism without content or value. Are the Conceptual artists the establishment? I really doubt it.

Do I feel that my contribution opened art up, cleared out modernist prescriptions, replaced the male expressionist shaman model of the artist for a practice open to both genders based on the power of ideas? Yes, I feel I helped that happen. Just because I was right forty years ago doesn't make me the establishment, even if respect tends to take an institutionalized form. It amuses me to hear that when I see artists of my generation, painters, who are well known but, frankly, artistically mediocre (like Ryman or Marden) sell for millions in the auctions simply because they make their production out of paint and canvas and, thus, impact with an appeal to the market's prejudice toward formal continuity, thus appealing to its conservatism rather than effecting the history of ideas. Or Richard Prince, no mediocrity in terms of his original contribution, but look what happened in the market to his work when he switched from photography to painting! In this way the market often numbs the brain, so one can only follow it with sociological amusement. I would need to know how Klaus is applying 'Pyrrhic'.

But an 'art movement', be it mine or someone else's, tends to have two contributions. You have those who started doing it first, and we know it's often one person who personally influenced others, so it's rooted in their work and from that the movement gets its authenticity, it flows from those first works and the ideas that formed them. Such authenticity is the result of work being anchored in the lived location of an actual human being, a human being connected to a particular historical and cultural moment. In short, it originally flows from their own belief in their own work. Then, the other contribution is that belief becomes the basis of the discourse within which other artists work. I had to confront Duchamp and Ad Reinhardt, but I think my work has certainly added more than you would get by just adding up those two. Yes, we need debates on theory (or theoretical debates) because that is how we can pull back and see the concrete instances of our practice and get an overview of where we might seem to be going.

PL: In your text *On Picasso* (1980) you wrote about the "point when Picasso stopped making art and began painting Picassos. This process [...] is a potential fatal side-effect of success for any artist." No doubt, you are a successful artist. Have you ever been in danger of beginning to make Kosuths? (If not, how have you been able to avoid it? / If yes, how has this come about?)

JK: I think Picasso's problems are not mine. As Freud put it, 'The tiger and the polar bear cannot fight.' But I do apparently share a historical space (or, as the joke goes, 'we went to different schools together') with others who have fallen into similar traps. My works connect, they really come out of the historical and cultural location that forms them.



They are always too much 'about' something to simply be signatures. However, I'm often asked about my thoughts on the work of Lawrence Weiner and have said relatively little over the years. I've always thought that the ad hominem gossip around us makes a serious discussion rather difficult. But maybe I should try. For me his work is a continuous variation on the same graphics job (those zappy colors and joyfully bouncing type fonts!) and the 'look' functions as a kind of parody of style enough to have a market identity, since it's important that you can easily identify them, as they feed from each other.

The promise of profundity is in continuous delay. But what he actually 'writes', frankly, is functionally devoid of any actual effective content. I don't think that is an accident. I was quite amused recently when I was told that his criticism of my work is that he says he actually 'writes' but 'Joseph just cites.' Apparently the fact that what he writes is quite consistently meaningless is not an issue for him. We'll forget the 23 or so books I wrote, compared to his prudent absence of nearly any theorizing in the last 40 years, but I ask you: my appropriation or his pseudo-poems, who generates the meaning? I would gently point out to Lawrence that he didn't invent the words he uses any more than I invent the sentences and paragraphs that I use, and, in any case, that language functions differently within an artwork than in the practical world. (Should I quote Wittgenstein here?)

As I've written a lot about how that works (which means, of course, I actually thought about it as well) and he hasn't, it's hard to know what he claims now his activity is based on. Post minimalists (this term, not Conceptual art, was invented for work like his and it is actually appropriately descriptive) like Weiner, and minimalists like Judd, Andre, Flavin are joined by the fact that formal identity from one work to the next gives them a market identity that parodies earlier art historical notions of 'style'. The minimalists get my respect in spite of it, but Andre's got to put it on the floor, Flavin's got to use fluorescent lights, Judd's box is always nearby. Their form of late modernism, along with Weiner who uncritically inherited it, insists that consistent, repetitive form insures

integrity. Well, it might have for the former, but it collapses when attempted with language, or more accurately in Weiner's case, really with just words. Words as objects suffer along with the rest of concrete poetry by having neither the integrity of a Juddian 'specific object' nor the essential quality of language: signifying acts, a system of relations between relations, ultimately the production of actual meaning coming from the work. In short, the transparency of meaning-generating relations. Such work as Weiner's and concrete poetry in general, is, to my mind, deeply bankrupt. Such work reifies language ultimately into dumb decoration at best, as it parodies itself in a shell-game performance of signification, exploiting the authority of language but without generating any actual new meaning, parasitically hoping some myth of profundity can be simply borrowed from art history to mask its emptiness. But a pretention of the celebration of meaning shouldn't be confused with a practice which actually produces it. After the minimalists I prefer Nauman, who risks play as an artist and generates new meaning with each work. But the one artist who actually uses objects linguistically is Haim Steinbach. To my mind he is one of the few artists to actually make a new contribution to the use of language within art, and he does so without using words. I speak here of his most well-known work in which he positions objects on shelves. Later, with delicious paradox, he underscored this work by using actual words as objects, thereby exposing the cultural, and political, homelessness of work like Weiner's by appropriating words from mass culture and not just putting them into play like cultural objects, but putting them into a particular play: from word to object, from object back to language, and in the end arriving with works quite the same as his other appropriations. His linguistic use of them are in spite of the fact they are words, and in this way he shows the complexity of the relations between language and art, and art and its objects. Sorry, but how simplistic and naive post minimalist production looks when compared with work such as this.