Against Expression

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An Anthology of Conceptual Writing

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To Marjorie Perloff

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Why Conceptual Writing? Why Now?

Kenneth Goldsmith

There is a room in the Musée d'Orsay that I call the room of possibilities. The museum is roughly set up chronologically, and you happily wend your way through the nineteenth century until you hit this one room that is a group of about a half a dozen painterly responses to the invention of the camera. One that sticks in my mind is a trompe l'oeil solution in which a painted figure reaches out of the frame into the viewer's space. Another incorporates three-dimensional objects into the canvas. Great attempts, but as we all know, impressionism won out.

With the rise of the Web, writing has met its photography. By that, I mean that writing has encountered a situation similar to that of painting upon the invention of photography, a technology so much better at doing what the art form had been trying to do that, to survive, the field had to alter its course radically. If photography was striving for sharp focus, painting was forced to go soft, hence impressionism. Faced with an unprecedented amount of available digital text, writing needs to redefine itself to adapt to the new environment of textual abundance.

When we look at our text-based world today, we see the perfect environment for writing to thrive. Similarly, if we look at what happened when painting met photography, we find the perfect analog-to-analog correspondence, for nowhere lurking beneath the surface of painting, photography, or film was a speck of language, thus setting the stage for an imagistic revolution. Today, digital media has set the stage for a literary revolution.

In 1974, Peter Bürger was still able to make the claim that, "because the advent of photography makes possible the precise mechanical reproduction of reality, the mimetic function of the fine arts withers. But the limits of this explanatory model become clear when one calls to mind that it cannot be transferred to literature. For in literature, there is no technical innovation that could have produced an effect comparable to that of photography in the fine arts."[1] Now there is.

With the rise of the Internet, writing is arguably facing its greatest challenge since Gutenberg. What has happened in the past fifteen years has forced writers to conceive of language in ways unthinkable just a short time ago. With an unprecedented onslaught of the sheer quantity of language (often derided as information glut in general culture), the writer faces the challenge of exactly how best to respond. Yet the strategies to respond are embedded in the writing process, which gives us the answers whether or not we're aware of it.

Why are so many writers now exploring strategies of copying and appropriation? It's simple: the computer encourages us to mimic its workings. If cutting and pasting were integral to the writing process, we would be mad to imagine that writers wouldn't explore and exploit those functions in ways that their creators didn't intend. Think back to the mid-1960s, when Nam June Paik placed a huge magnet atop a black-and-white television set, which resulted in the *détournement* of a space previously reserved for Jack Benny and Ed Sullivan into loopy, organic abstractions. If I can chop out a huge section of the novel I'm working on and paste it into a new document, what's going to stop me from copying and pasting a Web page in its entirety and dropping it into my text? When I dump a clipboard's worth of language from somewhere else into my work and massage its formatting and font to look exactly like it's always been there, then, suddenly, it feels like it's mine.[2]

You might counter by saying that, after all, home computers have been around for twenty-five years. What's so new about this? The penetration and saturation of broadband connections makes the harvesting of masses of language easy and tempting. With dial-up Web access, although it was possible to copy and paste words, in the beginning (or Gopherspace), texts were doled out one screen at a time. And even though it was text, the load time was still considerable. With broadband, the spigot runs 24/7. By comparison, there was nothing native to the system of typewriting that encouraged the replication of texts. It was incredibly slow and laborious to do so. Later, after you finished writing, you could make all the copies you

wanted on a Xerox machine. As a result, there was a tremendous amount of manipulation that happened after the writing was finished. William Burroughs's cut-ups or Bob Cobbing's mimeographed visual poems are prime examples. The previous forms of borrowing in literature—collage or pastiche, taking a sentence from here, a sentence from there—were predicated on the sheer amount of manual labor involved: to retype an entire book is one thing, and to cut and paste a entire book is another. The ease of appropriation has raised the bar to a new level.

The cut-and-paste scenario plays out again and again as we encounter and adopt other digital, network-enabled strategies that further alter our relationship with words. Social networking, file sharing, blogging: in these environments, language has value not as much for what it says but for what it does. We deal in active language, passing information swiftly for the sake of moving it. To be the originator of something that becomes a broader meme trumps being the originator of the actual trigger event that is being reproduced.[3] The "re-" gestures—such as reblogging and retweeting—have become cultural rites of cachet in and of themselves. If you can filter through the mass of information and pass it on as an arbiter to others, you gain an enormous amount of cultural capital. Filtering is taste. And good taste rules the day: Marcel Duchamp's exquisite filtering and sorting sensibility combined with his finely tuned taste rewrote the rules.

Since the dawn of media, we've had more on our plates than we could ever consume, but something has radically changed: never before has language had so much materiality—fluidity, plasticity, malleability—begging to be actively managed by the writer. Before digital language, words were almost always found imprisoned on a page. How different it is today, when digitized language can be poured into any conceivable container: text typed into a Microsoft Word document can be parsed into a database, visually morphed in Photoshop, animated in Flash, pumped into online text-mangling engines, spammed to thousands of e-mail addresses, and imported into a sound-editing program and spit out as music—the possibilities are endless. You could say that this isn't writing, and in the traditional sense, you'd be right. But this is where things get interesting: we aren't hammering away on typewriters. Instead, focused all day on powerful machines with infinite possibilities, connected to networks with a number of equally infinite possibilities, writers and their role are being significantly challenged, expanded, and updated.

Clearly we are in the midst of a literary revolution.

Or are we? From the looks of it, most writing proceeds as if the Internet

never happened. Age-old bouts of fraudulence, plagiarism, and hoaxes still scandalize the literary world in ways that would make, say, the art, music, computing, or science worlds chuckle with disbelief. It's hard to imagine the James Frey or J. T. LeRoy scandals upsetting anybody familiar with the sophisticated, purposely fraudulent provocations of Jeff Koons or the rephotographing of advertisements by Richard Prince, who was awarded with a Guggenheim Museum retrospective for his plagiaristic tendencies.

Nearly a century ago, the art world put to rest conventional notions of originality and replication with the gestures of Marcel Duchamp. Since then, a parade of blue-chip artists from Andy Warhol to Jeff Koons have taken Duchamp's ideas to new levels, which have become part and parcel of the mainstream art world discourse. Similarly, in music, sampling—entire tracks constructed from other tracks—has become commonplace. From Napster to gaming, from karaoke to BitTorrent files, the culture appears to be embracing the digital and all the complexity it entails—with the exception of writing.

Although the digital revolution has fostered a fertile environment in which conceptual writing can thrive, the roots of this type of writing can be traced as far back as the mechanical processes of medieval scribes or the procedural compositional methods of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. James Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* a meticulous and obsessive accumulation of information (replete with glosses similar to the way comments function on blogs today) was prescient of today's writing.

Modernism provided a number of precedents including Stéphane Mallarmé's falsified fashion writings, Erik Satie's experiments with repetition and boredom, Duchamp's readymades, and Francis Picabia's embrace of mechanical drawing techniques. Similarly, Gertrude Stein's epically unreadable tomes and Ezra Pound's radical, multilingual collaged works could be considered proto-conceptual. Perhaps the most concrete example of "moving information" is Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project,* a work that collates more than nine hundred pages' worth of notes.

By midcentury, with the advent of widespread technology, we see such diverse movements as musique concrète, concrete poetry, and Oulipo and Fluxus picking up the thread. Texts such as Walter Benjamin's writings on media, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Roland Barthes's *Mythologies,* and Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulacra provide a theoretical framework. From the 1940s to the early 1990s, the towering influence of John Cage—as composer, poet, and philosopher—cannot be underestimated.

The 1960s brought the advent of conceptual art and saw the emergence of Andy Warhol, perhaps the single most important figure in uncreative or conceptual writing. Warhol's entire oeuvre was based on the idea of uncreativity: the effortless production of mechanical paintings and unwatchable films in which literally nothing happens. In terms of literary output, too, Warhol pushed the envelope by having other people write his books for him. He invented new genres of literature: *a: a novel* was a mere transcription of dozens of cassette tapes, spelling errors, stumbles, and stutters left exactly as they were typed. His *Diaries,* an enormous tome, were spoken over the phone to an assistant and transcribed; they can be read as an update to Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. In Perloffian terms, Andy Warhol was an "unoriginal genius."

By the 1980s, appropriation art was the rage. Sherrie Levine was busy rephotographing Walker Evans's photos, Richard Prince was reframing photographs of cowboys taken from Marlboro ads, Cindy Sherman was being everyone but Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Koons was encasing vacuum cleaners in Plexiglas. Music of the period reflected this as well: from hip-hop to plunderphonics to pop, the sample became the basis for much music. Artifice ruled: inspired by the voguing craze, lip-synching became the preferred mode of performance in concert.

In the 1990s, with the emergence of the Internet, as chronicled earlier, uncreative writing developed as an appropriate response for its time, combining historical permissions with powerful technology to imagine new ways of writing.

What we're dealing with here is a basic change in the operating system of how we write at the root level. The results might not look different, and they might not feel different, but the underlying ethos and modes of writing have been permanently changed. If painting reacted to photography by moving toward abstraction, it seems unlikely that writing is doing the same in relation to the Internet. It appears that writing's response will be mimetic and replicative, involving notions of distribution while proposing new platforms of receivership. Words very well might be written not to be read but rather to be shared, moved, and manipulated. Books, electronic and otherwise, will continue to flourish. Although the new writing will have an electronic gleam in its eyes, its consequences will be distinctly analog.

Other approaches of writing will continue on their own path, finding solutions to their own lines of inquiry. What we're proposing here is very specific to those so inclined to that approach. In closing, the sentiments

of Sol LeWitt—who looms very large in conceptual writing—reminds us that there is nothing prescriptive in this endeavor: "I do not advocate a conceptual form of art for all artists. I have found that it has worked well for me while other ways have not. It is one way of making art; other ways suit other artists. Nor do I think all conceptual art merits the viewer's attention. Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good."[4]

NOTES

1. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 32. First printed in 1974.

2. The language environment we're working in could easily have been rendered unique and noncopyable: witness how unobtainable language and images are in Flash-based environments.

3. The word *meme* comes from the Greek word *mimema,* "something imitated."

4. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* (June 1967): 79–83, http://www.ddooss.org/articulos/idiomas/Sol_Lewitt.htm.

Even concepts are haecceities and events in themselves.

—Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

The Fate of Echo

Craig Dworkin

This book has its origins in the *UbuWeb Anthology of Conceptual Writing,* which Kenneth Goldsmith invited me to curate as part of his Internet archive of the avant-garde. More of an illustrated essay than any kind of comprehensive anthology (despite its rather grandiose title), the project set out to make an argument about genre and discipline. It assembled texts from the spheres of literature, music, and the visual arts to demonstrate that one could conceive of "a theoretically based art that is independent of genre, so that a particular poem might have more in common with a particular musical score, or film, or sculpture than with another lyric."[1] I wanted to show, for instance, that when put next to texts from a soi-disant poetic tradition, a work of conceptual art might look indistinguishable from a poem. Or, similarly, that when read next to works from the Oulipo, a book usually considered part of the history of language poetry might look much more like part of the broad postwar international avant-garde than the coterie 1980s New York poetry scene; and that the insular history of the Oulipo, in turn, might be profitably diversified when considered in the light of other experiments, and so on. The argument was directed at scholars and readers who typically know one tradition quite well while being largely unaware of others. Looking for a flexibly generic term to straddle those traditions, I coined the phrase "conceptual writing" as a way both to signal literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art and to indicate the use of text in conceptual art practices.[2]

The basic curatorial premise of the online collection was that by looking beyond received histories and commonplace affiliations one could more clearly see textual elements that otherwise remained obscured or implicit. The simple act of reframing seemed to refresh one's view of even familiar works, which appear significantly different by virtue of their new context. The present anthology is both an inversion and an extension of that premise. The inversion comes about because, instead of drawing indiscriminately from various disciplines or creating a new critical environment in which to juxtapose poetry with pieces from other traditions, this volume keeps its focus—with a few deliberate exceptions—on works published or received in a literary context. For that reason, we have not included artists' writings intended for the gallery wall rather than the book; nor have we included many of the symptomatic textual productions of the mentally ill—outsider writing that otherwise shares many of the characteristics of several of the works we have included. This insistence on context is not to imply, of course, that readers cannot approach a text on its own terms, regardless of its publishing history, but rather to insist on the way that such a history shades the text we receive. The hint can be taken or ignored, but the paratext always suggests a perspective from which to read. Posited as literature, these works take their part in an open dialogue with the cultures, conventions, and traditions of literary institutions, speaking to other literary works in a loud and lively discussion filled with arguments, refusals, corroborations, flirtations, proposals, rejections, and affirmations. Many of the very same texts included here might just as easily have been framed in a gallery or recorded in an Internet video or included as part of a psychiatric evaluation, but then their cultural dialogues would have been quite different, and they would have functioned in a different way. Their "meaning," as Ludwig Wittgenstein argued for words, is their use. Even in the case of the few exceptions to our focus, all of the texts included are presented here, in the new context of this anthology, as literary.

Conceptual Art

Although the focus of this anthology is resolutely literary, a comparison of the conceptual literature presented here with the range of interventions made by the foundational works of conceptual art is still instructive. A quick sketch of those interventions should help highlight the congruencies and discrepancies between the reformation of Western art after abstract expressionism and emerging literary tendencies today.[3]

In the 1960s, conceptual art challenged some of the fundamental assumptions of the art world: the nature of the art object, the qualifications for being an artist, the fundamental role of art in its various institutional contexts, and the proper scope of activities for the audience (those who, not long before, would have been called simply spectators). Initially, the art of the 1960s continued to mine the seam opened in the mid-1910s by Marcel Duchamp's readymades, a series of quotidian objects inscribed with a cryptic title and displayed as art: a rack for drying washed bottles, a metal comb for grooming animals, a suspended snow shovel, the crown of a hat rack hung and angled upside down, a prostrate plank of ranked iron coat hooks nailed to the floor, a typewriter dust cover, a pedestaled porcelain urinal flat on its back. In his 1961 portrait of the gallery owner Iris Clert, Robert Rauschenberg emphasized the illocutionary lesson of these readymades, or what Duchamp referred to as "une sorte de nominalisme pictural" (a kind of pictorial nominalism)."[4] The artistic status of the readymades, that is, depended not on any intrinsic qualities but rather on the assertion—implicit in the context of their gallery display—that they were to be considered as art. In response to the invitation to produce a portrait of Clert for an exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, Rauschenberg sent a telegram, substituting a line of text in place of the expected drawing or painting, however abstract or unlike Clert an image might have been. It read, simply: THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF IRIS CLERT IF I SAY SO.

Several years later, Joseph Kosuth emphatically elaborated several of the implications of Rauschenberg's terse portrait. Again presenting language as the artwork—one of conceptual art's most radical interventions—Kosuth's first exhibition at Gallery 669 (Los Angeles, 1968), *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea),* mounted a series of enlarged projection photocopies of different dictionary definitions of the word *nothing,* isolated from their original placement on the page and resituated on the gallery wall. Learned from Warhol, if not directly from Duchamp, this tactic of reframing would prove an important tool for conceptual art.[5] Part of the joke of Kosuth's exhibit, of course, was the implication that if there were so many different definitions of *nothing,* then those differences pointed not to an ineffable absence but to some positive, identifiable range of things. The dictionaries, as John Cage might put it, have nothing to say and are saying it.[6] With white type against four-foot-square, black backgrounds, the panels also poked fun at the theoretical language that had accumulated around the pure visuality of minimalist monochromes, and they evoked the tautological black monochrome squares of Ad Reinhardt in particular.[7] In later iterations,

individual panels challenged the dominance of painting (with a photograph of the definition of *painting*), compared modes of visual and verbal representation (with entries for the notoriously difficult to depict *water*), pointed to indexicality (*north, south*), collapsed form and content (with the word *meaning*), and so on.

In every case, Kosuth's selection of different dictionaries to supply the definitions emphasized the readymade aspect of *Art as Idea as Idea;* the principle artistic action was one of choosing and nominating.[8] Local context, as Duchamp understood, motivates meaning: selected to appear on the gallery wall, the different entries for *water* align themselves with different genres and artworks depending on the style of their definitions. The quotation from the *New Century Dictionary,* for example, opens with a conceptualized linguistic version of history painting—the etymology of the word—and passes into a sweeping atmospheric landscape and *paysage marin:* "the liquid which in more or less impure state constitutes rain, oceans, lakes, rivers, etc." The *Oxford* definition, in contrast, suggests the relation of the *water* panels to Kosuth's *nothing* series by stressing privatives: "colourless, transparent, tasteless, scentless." Avoiding the more scientific language of chemistry that other dictionaries emphasize, *Oxford* continues: "in liquid state convertible by heat into steam and by cold into ice." One might take that panel, accordingly, as a response to George Brecht's 1961 Fluxus score for "Three Aqueous Events":

- ice
- water
- steam

Regardless of the intertextual resonance with Kosuth's photostat, such Fluxus scores were important antecedents for conceptual art because their laconic propositions anticipated a wide range of possible actions and objects; the scores presented sufficiently abstract models of potential, rather than completed events or crafted objects, and so required thought both on the part of the performer, who had to work the cryptic sketches into concrete forms, and on the part of the audience, who had to make the mental connection between score and performance. At the same time, those specific events and objects, however quotidian and unremarkable they might be, necessarily constituted art by fulfilling the requirements of the score. Through the force of the score's nominalization, enactments were, by definition, artistic performances.

Rauschenberg and Kosuth, each in their own way, took Duchamp's lead in privileging the intellectual over the visual, ideas over mimetic representations, and linguistic play over mute visual language or sculptural craft. "Everything was becoming *conceptual,*" Duchamp explained: "that is, it depended on things other than the retina."[9] Eschewing the visual emphasis of illusionistic or referential imagery—with its call for aesthetic appreciation, narrative engagement, or psychological response—conceptual art equally abandoned the compositional bids for phenomenological experience or emotional intensities that abstract art elicited. Instead, conceptual art offered information. Abstraction, to be sure, had pioneered a mode of art that did not refer to something outside itself, but conceptual art substituted factual documentary—information about information—in place of the optical apprehension of composition, gesture, and the material facture of traditional media.[10] As Douglas Huebler put it, inspired by the insistently literal, nonmetaphoric, and exhaustive writing of Samuel Beckett and the *nouveaux romanciers,* the new interest was in "the facticity of that raw information without worrying about supposed meanings."[11] Robert Morris dramatized the deadpan literalism that would come to characterize conceptual art's recursive factual tactic with his 1961 *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making,* in which a roughly unfinished—if rather tidy—ten-inch-square walnut box encloses an audio tape player with a looped recording of the box's construction: sawing and hammering; the scuff and knock of parts being moved; long, silent moments of measure or cogitation or rest. The box turned Duchamp's *À bruit secret* (*With Hidden Noise*, 1916) inside out, displaying with documentary clarity what Duchamp had kept tactfully cryptic. The earlier sculpture, a roughly thirteen-centimeter-square assemblage securing a ball of twine between two inscribed brass plates with long bolts, conceals an unknown object—surreptitiously introduced by Walter Arensberg while Duchamp was constructing the piece—which rattles when the sculpture is shaken.[12] *À bruit secret* is animated by its surreal comixture of organically coiled twine and hard machined metal, as well as by its kinetic interactivity and the tension between its hand-scaled size and relative heft. In comparison, Morris's box—more pragmatic American shop product than industrial primitive fetish—forgoes the invitation to shake and invert the sculpture (one of the plates in *À bruit secret* is inscribed on the bottom), but it picks up on the cognitive dynamic of Duchamp's work, underscored in modern museum settings where the piece is displayed, unshakable, *en vitrine*. Apart from its visual, tactile, and sonic qualities, Duchamp's sculpture is a black box in the philosophical sense,

creating an epistemological puzzle and taunting its audience to speculate on the unknown object. Morris also relies on the audience's mental engagement to relate the temporally discrepant sounds to the object in front of them and to think through the logical tautology of recursion that explains their raisons d'être.

Equally important to conceptual art, Morris's *Card File* from the following year restaged his box in linguistic terms. The horizontally mounted drawer from a business filing cabinet sorts typed index cards in forty-four alphabetized categories.[13] Self-referential and cross-indexed, the cards note the circumstances of the work's conception and construction. A less procedural example of descriptive self-referentiality, Adrian Piper's portfolio suite *Here and Now* (1968) contains eight-by-eight chessboard grids, empty except for typed phrases indicating their location. On one page, for instance, the third square from the bottom right encloses the following sentence:

> HERE:the sq
> uare area i
> s 3rd row f
> rom bottom,
> 3rd from ri
> ght side.

Conceptual artists further realized that if an artwork could be self-descriptive and made of language, then that language could describe itself. Dan Graham's *Poem-Schema*, for example, enumerates the formal and grammatical properties of its printed instantiation, with "the exact data in each particular instance" of its publication set "to correspond to the fact(s) of its published appearance."[14] As Graham explained it elsewhere:

> A page of *Schema* exists as a matter of fact materiality. . . . It is a measure of itself—as place. It takes its own measure—of itself as place, that is, placed two-dimensionally on (as) a page.[15]

Graham considered his template (included in this volume) to be a schematic model for "a set of poems whose component pages are specifically published as individual poems in various magazines."[16] For each particular publication, the editor of the periodical was to provide information about the physical support and typography, adjusting the tally accordingly. When the work was published in the inaugural issue of the British journal *Art-*

Language, for instance, it was printed "offset cartridge" in a ten-point Press Roman face, so the entry listing the number of capitalized words, was "2."[17] The same held for its appearance in the anthology *Possibilities of Poetry,* where it was printed in ten-point Aster type on Dondell paper stock.[18] In another instance, for comparison, the number of capitalized words was calculated at four because it was printed in a Futura face on Wedgwood Coated Offset stock.[19] The entire process seems mechanical, but the answers are rarely as straightforward as they seem. Published in *Aspen* magazine, as "Poem, March 1966," the text was printed in ten-point Univers 55 type on generically "dull coated" paper stock, but the entry on the penultimate line, mysteriously, is "3."[20] Was the editor counting "55" as a capitalized "Fifty-Five," perhaps in recognition that Univers was the first typeface to incorporate numbers as part of its name?[21] Looking over the page, one recognizes that the majuscule subtitle "POEM" might be capitalized, though that would still leave one word unaccounted for (or suggest that the number of capitalized words should be raised to four). The editor, in any event, obviously did not consider Graham's name or the raw schema and explanation printed alongside the tabulated version as part of the poem, as they contain many capitalized words. No easy resolution presents itself. Similarly perplexing, when printed in a German catalog, the number of capitalized words is noted as two, accounting perhaps for the "Offsetplate Rohpapier" (Photo-offset Paper), which serves as a kind of title, or for the typeface "Antiqua" with the other "wörter versal" (capitalized word) still unclear; in either case, however, the data do not account for the many nouns capitalized by prereform German convention.[22] Such questions, as these different versions also attest, proliferate: does "letters of alphabet" refer to the total number of characters on the page or to the twenty-six letters of the alphabet? Is the poem printed in two columns—parentheticals on one side and nouns on the other—or is it considered a single, internally divided piece occupying one column of the magazine's larger layout? Does "paper sheet" refer to a brand, a weight, or a description? And so on. Part of the work's effect, it seems, is to explore haecceity by complicating the seemingly straightforward facticity of self-description and focusing attention on otherwise-overlooked material details.

Similarly self-referential, Mel Ramsden's series of paintings from the late 1960s, all titled *100% Abstract,* brought this kind of recursive logic to painting and continued to enunciate the move from works seeking an embodied viewership to those eliciting a mental thinkership. Compared with even the most austere abstraction, which invites one to gaze at paint on canvas,

Ramsden's "abstracts" offer information about the paint itself, wryly aiming at greater abstraction through increasing specificity. One neatly lettered painting from 1968 contains: "COPPER BRONZE POWDER 12% / ACRYLIC RESIN 7% / AROMATIC HYDROCARBONS 81%." Another, from the same year, is more slyly antiretinal; in blue letters on a gray background, it reads: "TITANIUM CALCIUM 83% / SILICATES 17%." The chemicals—calcium sulfate with a whitening agent of titanium dioxide and silicate extenders—indicate the acrylic gesso primer invisible beneath the text but nonetheless a essential part of the painting.

If "what the work of art looks like isn't too important," as Sol LeWitt summarized this new antiretinal dispensation in 1967, then perhaps, some artists wagered, the art need not be visible at all.[23] Ramsden's *Secret Painting* (1967–68), for instance, announces this position even more explicitly than his occult reference to unseen primer; it presents a square black monochrome accompanied by the following statement, framed in a slightly smaller square: "the content of this painting / is invisible; the character / and dimension of the content / are to be kept permanently / secret, known only to the / artist." Another version of this self-reflexive descriptive strategy of indicating what cannot be seen, intensifying abstraction with increased specificity, animates Robert Barry's 1971 project *This work has been and continues to be refined since 1969*:

> It is whole, determined, sufficient, individual, known, complete, revealed, accessible, manifest, effected, effectual, directed, dependent, distinct, planned, controlled, unified, delineated, isolated, confined, confirmed, systematic, established, predictable, explainable, apprehendable, noticeable, evident, understandable, allowable, natural, harmonious, particular, varied, interpretable, discovered, persistent, diverse, composed, orderly, flexible, divisible, extendible, influential, public, reasoned, repeatable, comprehendable, impractical, findable, actual, interrelated, active, describable, situated, recogizable, analysable, limited, avoidable, sustained, changeable, defined, provable, consistent, durable, realized, organized, unique, complex, specific, established, rational, regulated, revealed, conditioned, uniform, solitary, given, improvable, involved, maintained, particular, coherent, arranged, restricted, and presented.

Simultaneously more subtle and extreme, Barry's contribution to the landmark *January 5–31, 1969* exhibition at Seth Siegelaub's gallery in New York offered even less to see: an empty room. But what set that room apart from

similarly empty gallery spaces—such as Yves Klein's infamous "vides" or Warhol's 1965 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia—was Barry's installation of two invisible works from the previous year.[24] Small information placards enigmatically alerted visitors to *88 mc Carrier Wave (FM)* and *1600 kc Carrier Wave (AM)*. While the exhibit was open, hidden transmitters broadcast the eponymous frequencies through the space. The installation was in fact an interactive performance, because those waves would have been distorted by the presence of visitors, who unknowingly altered the artwork with the movement and dispensation of their bodies within the room. However, because the waves are detectable only with electrical equipment and "material" only in the strictest scientific sense, Barry's work clearly asked for something other than visual appreciation. With a similar play of imperceptible bodily engagement—and a double Duchampian pun on his own name—Barry's *.5 Micro Curie Radiation Installation* (1969–79) involved burying four capsules of the synthetic isotope barium 133 in the lawn at New York's Central Park. He estimated that the deteriorating work, invisible to begin with, would disappear completely after a decade.[25]

Dispensing with the retinal qualities of art altogether, these works no longer needed to be seen because "in conceptual art," as LeWitt flatly explained, "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work."[26] Moreover, he continued, "the idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product." Extending the postwar ethos of process over product to its logical extreme—a vanishing point where the product all but disappeared and the process extended back even before gesture to an initial mental notion or thought—conceptual art's radical interrogation of the status of the art object also renegotiated the role of the artist. Minimalist sculpture had already begun to gesture along those lines and would continue to reinforce conceptual art's related propositions. In one direction, the serial, modular, or permutational logics of minimalist sculptures such as Donald Judd's stacked wall units or LeWitt's open cubes incorporated the cognitive as an essential aspect of the work; the artist established the parameters of a system that was then elaborated in space.[27] In the other direction, the cool detachment of minimalism's industrial or unskilled materials—construction-grade steel, hay bales, plywood, unmortared bricks—underscored Duchamp's implicit claim that artists themselves need not personally sculpt or fabricate art objects. Deaestheticized and deskilled, aggressively unexpressive and resolutely nonsubjective, minimalism turned attention from the connoisseurship of manual craft and

the hand of the artist to gestalt phenomenology and cognitive analysis, so that the model for the artist was less the unique Romantic visionary and more the Enlightenment philosopher-mathematician or the witty 'pataphysician.

Encouraged by minimalism's attitude, conceptual art would position the artist in an even more oblique relation to the art object. At precisely the same time Kosuth was mounting his series of photostat definitions, for example, John Baldessari exhibited a set of similarly ironic quotations, neatly painted in black block letters on primed canvas. Drawn from art theory and art appreciation textbooks, these quotations were presented in place of the kind of art they were meant to illustrate. Ventriloquizing the presumption that text itself could not be an artwork—the very position conceptual art like Baldessari's was challenging—one canvas reads: "Do you sense how all the parts of a good / picture are involved with each other. Not / just placed side by side? Art is a creation / for the eye and can only be hinted at with / words."[28] Another, quoting from the same source, reinterrogates the status of a painting when its subject is indeed language, implying that tradition viewing habits may be inappropriate for conceptual art:

> COMPOSING ON A CANVAS
>
> STUDY THE COMPOSITION OF PAINTINGS. ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS WHEN STANDING IN FRONT OF A WELL COMPOSED PICTURE. WHAT FORMAT IS USED? WHAT IS THE PROPORTION OF HEIGHT TO WIDTH? WHAT IS THE CENTRAL OBJECT WHERE IS IT SITUATED? HOW IS IT RELATED TO THE FORMAT? WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIRECTIONAL FORCES? THE MINOR ONES? HOW ARE THE SHADES OF DARK AND LIGHT DISTRIBUTED? WHERE ARE THE DARK SPOTS CONCENTRATED? THE LIGHT SPOTS? HOW ARE THE EDGES OF THE PICTURE DRAWN INTO THE PICTURE ITSELF? ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS FOR YOURSELF WHILE LOOKING AT A FAIRLY UNCOMPLICATED PICTURE.[29]

Yet another piece makes the same move in terms of presumptions about the viewer's experience, disproving itself by means of its own unequivocal assertion: "a two dimensional / surface without any / articulation is a /

dead experience." Baldessari has wittily articulated the sentence, quite literally, through line breaks; in its original source, it happens to appear typeset intact across one full line of prose.[30] A slightly later canvas, for another example of this logical short-circuit of simultaneous assertion and negation, attempts to invert the Duchampian nominalist proposition with the oxymoron of "art as idea" without an idea; running up against the fact that the rejection of a concept is itself a concept, the canvas reads: "everything is purged from this painting / but art, no ideas have entered this work."[31]

Whatever their particular statements, all of these canvases also illustrate conceptual art's impulse to distance the artist from a position of creatively original authorship.[32] Not only are the texts unattributed quotations, but Baldessari did not even paint the canvases himself, and their production was deliberately impersonal and deaestheticized, suppressing the idiosyncractic in favor of the idiomatically vernacular. As with much conceptual art—such as Kosuth's photocopies or Ed Ruscha's influential photographic books from the 1960s—the visual rhetoric of Baldessari's canvases mimicked quotidian commercial or amateur processes rather than rarefied high-art modes. As Baldessari explained, "Someone else built and primed the canvases and took them to the sign painter . . . and the sign painter was instructed not to attempt to make attractive, artful lettering but to letter the information in the most simple way."[33] In his 1969 series *Commissioned Paintings,* Baldessari further removed himself from the creative process. Once again, others did the actual painting: sign painters for the lettering and amateur genre painters whom Baldessari hired to reproduce—"as faithfully as possible"—oil renditions of the snapshots he provided them. Although he had still taken the photographs himself, Baldessari outsourced the more fundamental Duchampian task of choosing. The snapshots documented a friend pointing at quotidian objects that the friend had selected, and the painters were asked to choose their subject from among a number of those photographs.[34]

Commissioned Paintings also points to another important tactic by which conceptual art distanced the artist at an oblique remove from the work. Although the production of any artwork can be retroactively described in abstract terms (e.g., "apply oil paint with a brush to a stretched and primed cotton canvas"), in Baldessari's case, the abstract procedure is an integral part of the final work and not merely an incidental means to an end. For the work as a whole to be effective, the conceptual formulation must be kept in mind along with any visual and mental considerations of the finished paintings. Like Graham's poem, in which publishers carried

out the task of producing the work's final form, conceptual artists often focused on the initial procedures to be followed—guidelines, parameters, and recipes—rather than the subsequent physical production. "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art," as LeWitt explained, "it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." To give a literal example of this mechanistic production of art, the score for György Ligeti's 1962 Fluxus composition *Poème symphonique (Symphonic Poem)* consists of detailed instructions on the windings and oscillation settings for one hundred metronomes, which are then set ticking and allowed to run their course without intervention. Ligeti carefully maps out parameters, but he does not score individual notes, and the mechanical performance eliminates any subjective interpretation by musicians. As LeWitt explained this Cagean ethos of nonintervention: "to work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity . . . the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work the better."[35]

LeWitt's focus on a work's abstract inception hints at conceptual art's most daring wager. Having tested the propositions that the art object might be nominal, linguistic, invisible, and on a par with its abstract initial description, the next step was to venture that it could be dispensed with altogether. Lawrence Weiner's 1968 exhibition *Statements*—an exhibit taking the form, significantly, of a catalog—contained two dozen self-descriptive pieces composed of short phrases, grammatically suspended by the past participle without agent or imperative, as if they had already been realized as soon as written (or read): "one aerosol can of enamel sprayed to conclusion directly upon the floor," "two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol can," "one quart exterior green enamel thrown on a brick wall," "one pint gloss white lacquer poured directly upon the floor and allowed to dry," "an amount of bleach poured upon a rug and allowed to bleach," "one standard dye marker thrown into the sea," and so on. The grammatical form with which these phrases float free of particular agents underscore Weiner's insistence that his artworks existed as statements, fully sufficient as they were printed, and not as particular enactments or unique objects. Although—like many Fluxus scores—they have subsequently been performed, as far as Weiner was concerned, the descriptive statements never needed to take any particular material instantiation. In his "Declaration of Intent," formulated the following year, Weiner lays out this conceptual faith in three articles:

1. The artist may construct the work.
2. The work may be fabricated.
3. The work need not be built.[36]

Here, again, the grammar does much of the work; in place of the necessity and obligation that would have been signaled by *must,* the modal *may* grants permission and opens the attendant possibility that the artist might *not* construct the work and that the work might not, in fact, be constructed at all. Completing the separation of the artwork from its presentation, conceptual art had moved beyond Duchamp's stalemate and proposed a new state of artistic *échec*.

Propriety

> —A quality or attribute, esp. an essential or distinctive one . . . the fact of owning something or of being owned by someone . . . correctness of language . . . strictness of meaning, literalness . . . conformity to accepted standards of behavior or morals . . .appropriateness to circumstances.

Conceptual art's insistent reinterpretation of the object of art—hunted all the way to the brink of extinction—highlights some of the fundamental differences distinguishing the art of the 1960s from the kind of literary writing we focus on here. First, recall that part of the radical force of conceptual art was its assertion that an artwork might not assume the familiar guises of painting (or drawing or sculpture) but could instead take the form of a text. Weiner's *Statements* catalog was not a souvenir of his show or a documentation of the exhibit; it *was* the exhibit. The crucial point, however, is not simply the occurrence of text but how it is used (in the Wittgensteinian sense); to equate conceptual art and poetry because both use words is like confusing numbers with mathematics, as LeWitt figured it, misled because of a superficial resemblance of signs and failing to account for what one scholar has summarized as "the peculiar function of texts in the institutional context of visual art."[37] One of those functions—to construe language itself as art and the art object as a text to be read—was, as we have seen, to challenge the retinal imperative of art with a deskilled antiaesthetic. From the literary side, of course, the assumption has long been that poems are meant to be read, and so the mere idea of a poem made of words does not intervene in the discipline in the same way as conceptual

art's linguistic turn does. Indeed, the equivalent move for a poetry that wanted to model itself on conceptual art would be to posit a nonlinguistic object as "the poem." That kind of conceptual poetry would insist on a poem without words. Although they often abandon traditional aesthetic criteria, none of the works included here attempts that kind of radical renominalization. In addition, the textual proposition of conceptual art undercut the presumption of a unique art object; a significant move in the restricted economy of art's commodity system, the force of that negation is obviously lost in a modern literary context, where editions are the status quo.

More interesting is that the supposed dematerialization of the art object was bought at the cost of the rematerialization of language. In the critical dynamic of the visual arts, the turn to text initially signified something supposedly less visual and palpable than traditional media. But positing language as an alternative sculptural or painterly material cut both ways. From one direction, it suggested that visual art could be read through the lens of literary theory, whereas language itself, from the other direction, began to be seen as carrying a certain opacity and heft. Robert Smithson identified this newly doubled potential for art in his announcement of a 1967 exhibition at the Dwan Gallery; with an inversion of the expected terms, Smithson identified the new art as "LANGUAGE to be LOOKED at and/or THINGS to be READ." In a 1970 mural of dripped black paint and scrawled chalk text, a format recalling situationist street graffiti from the summer of 1968, Mel Bochner proclaimed, with the haste of a manifesto and the apodictic tone of a foundational proposition: "1. Language is not transparent." In the move to oppose ideas to objects, conceptual art had to state those ideas in language, and the materiality of print, in turn, could not—in the final analysis—be ignored. "No ideas," as William Carlos Williams famously phrased it, "but in things."[38] With conceptual writing, in contrast, the force of critique from the very beginning was just the opposite: to distance ideas and affects in favor of assembled objects, rejecting outright the ideologies of disembodied themes and abstracted content. The opacity of language is a conclusion of conceptual art but already a premise for conceptual writing. The very procedures of conceptual writing, in fact, demand an opaquely material language: something to be digitally clicked and cut, physically moved and reframed, searched and sampled, and poured and pasted. The most conceptual poetry, unexpectedly, is also some of the least abstract, and the guiding concept behind conceptual poetry may be the idea of language as quantifiable data. As Smithson emphasized with an addendum to his Dwan Gallery advertisement, appended in 1972: "my sense of language is

that it is matter and not ideas—i.e., 'printed matter.'" Smithson's formulation, tellingly, recalls Stéphane Mallarmé's sense of poetry itself. Responding to Edgar Degas' complaint that it was easy to come up with good ideas for poems but hard to arrange particular words, Mallarmé wrote back to his friend: "ce n'est point avec des idées, mon cher Degas, que l'on fait des vers. C'est avec des mots" (My dear Degas, poems are made of words, not ideas). In conceptual poetry, the relation of the idea to the word is necessary but not privileged: these are still poems made of words; they are not ideas *as poems*.[39] A procedure or algorithm organizes the writing, but those procedures do not substitute for the writing. Moreover, although any poem might have originated in an abstract idea, for most of those poems, a variety of ideas could account for the final text; in conceptual poetry, the text and its conception are uniquely linked: only one initial scheme could have resulted in the final poem.

Conceptual art's willingness to distance the artist from the manufacture of the artwork and to discount traditional valuations of originality is another vantage from which to compare contemporary writing with its art world precedents. That relation is particularly interesting, given that precedent is itself a key factor in assessing creative originality. In this case, attempting the most uncreative repetition ultimately disproves the possibility of a truly uncreative repetition. In the mid-1960s, Elaine Sturtevant offered some of the strongest challenges to prevailing notions or originality when she began reproducing the works of other artists and exhibiting them under her name: Frank Stella's patterned coaxial pinstripes; Jasper John's matte encaustic flag; Roy Lichtenstein's enlarged benday dots; Andy Warhol's gaudily colored and bluntly misregistered hibiscus flowers. Sturtevant's works chided their audience, who too often glanced at a painting or sculpture rather than attending to its details; viewers were quick to identify "a Lichtenstein" and slow to notice the details that gave it away as a counterfeit (readers of the present collection should heed the admonishment; noting a method—transcribed radio reports, parsed grammar, alphabetized answers, et cetera—is no substitute for carefully reading the textual details of a work). Further, Sturtevant's imitations questioned the sense of property behind *le propre,* or what is one's own, by decoupling the artists' signature from a signature style. The twist, of course, was that many of the artists she duplicated had themselves made a point of featuring impersonal, iconic, or plagiarized images (Lichtenstein copied actual comic-strip frames, Warhol's flowers were transferred from a magazine photograph by Patricia Caulfield, and so on). Sturtevant's forgeries implicitly ask how

artists had so easily come to own what was never theirs to begin with: geometric lines, the American flag, someone else's commercial drawing or photograph, the look of mechanical mass reproduction. To complicate matters, Warhol had willingly loaned Sturtevant the screens used for the initial *Flower* prints, so in that case, any material discrepancies were even harder to perceive, and the question became more pointed, with more than a whiff of institutional and commercial critique: why, when one of the kids at the Factory made a print was it still considered a Warhol, but not when Sturtevant printed from the same screen? Or to ask the question in a way that more clearly delineates the limits being probed by her work: could one forge a Sturtevant? The same question pertains to many of the works included here. What, for example, is the status of a transcription of one day's *New York Times* after the publication of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*? If these works are so unoriginal, if indeed anyone could do them, then why do they acquire such a strong sense of signature?

The answer is twofold. On the one hand—and here we return to the importance of context—a work can never really be duplicated by formal facsimile. A retyping of *Day,* for example (as one Los Angeles artist already claims to have done), substitutes the transcription of a literary text for the transcription of a journalistic text, to note just the most obvious difference. But even a subsequent, identical retyping of the same day's *New York Times* will always occur in the context that *Day* created: one in which retyped newspapers have been posited as literature and in which Goldsmith's intertext is inescapable. As this collection tries to establish, there are always precedents, often unknown, so the important point is not simply that it has been done before but that the intervention made by Goldsmith's work is irrevocable. Photographs had been badly silk-screened before Warhol, but Warhol's silk screens became signatures because they established themselves as a referent that all subsequent works in that mode would have to acknowledge or labor to deny. In addition, cultural contexts change over time, so that with some distance the replication (rather than the mere reproduction) of *Day* will not be a retyped newspaper, just as the aesthetic shock of Duchamp's *Fountain* and its institutional critique cannot now be replicated by placing a urinal in a museum but would have to be approximated by some other means. For this reason alone, the tactics of twentieth-century conceptual art, when restaged by twenty-first-century poets, can never be simple repetitions. Equivalent objects, in short, do not constitute equivalent gestures.

On the other hand, as attentive readings reveal, identical procedures

rarely produce identical results. Indeed, impersonal procedures tend to magnify subjective choices (to keep with the example of the newspaper, how would different transcribers handle line breaks and page divisions, layouts and fonts, and so on?). The spoor of a personal signature remains in even the most deoderized works. More important, the question of forging a Sturtevant or a Goldsmith points out the degree to which creativity, like so many other traditional poetic values, has not been negated or banished by conceptual works but shunted to an adjoining track. The point is not that anyone could do these works—of course they could—but rather that no one else has. Judgments about creativity and innovation in conceptual writing are displaced from the details and variations of the final crafted form to the broad blow of the initial concept and the elegance with which its solution is achieved. The question remains not whether one of these works could have been done better, but whether it could possibly have been done differently at all. Here, then, is where conceptual writing shows up the rhetorical, ideological force of our cultural sense of creativity, which clings so tenaciously to a gold standard of one's own words rather than to one's own idea or the integrity of that idea's execution. The hundred-thousandth lyric published this decade in which a plainspoken persona realizes a small profundity about suburban bourgeois life, or the hundred-thousandth coming-of-age novel developing psychological portraits of characters amid difficult romantic relationships and family tensions, is somehow still within the bounds of the properly creative (and these numbers are not exaggerations); yet the first or second work to use previously written source texts in a novel way are still felt to be troublingly improper. Retyping the *New York Times,* after *Day,* would be considered unoriginal; a story in which one generation must come to terms with a secret family history would still be given the benefit of the doubt. In part, *Against Expression* is a litmus test for the reader's sense of where the demarcations between creative and uncreative writing lie.[40]

Appropriation

> —The making of a thing private property. . . . The assignment of anything to a special purpose.

There is no reason to believe that different institutions, even when interrelated like art and literature, would develop at the same pace, but one of the striking differences between these two spheres is the degree to which

practices long unremarkable in the art world are still striking, controversial, or unacceptable in the literary arena. Following the theoretical provocation of artists like Sturtevant and Baldessari in the 1960s, outright appropriation became a widespread tendency in the following decades. In 1977, a small exhibition titled *Pictures* opened at the nonprofit Artists Space gallery in New York City, curated by Douglas Crimp (whose revised catalog essay has since been widely cited); the show has become an almost-mythic foundational moment for what came to be called appropriation art. A few years later, a number of artists featured by the Metro Pictures gallery—including Sarah Charlesworth, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Richard Prince—established a critical mass of aesthetic poachers, presenting unauthorized reproductions of images in ways that radically expanded the limits of modernist collage.[41] These artists continued to follow the lead of Duchamp's readymades and his demonstration that the artist need not personally fabricate the art object but might merely nominate it from another area of culture, such as the hardware store (or, in the case of the Metro Pictures artists, a newspaper or glossy magazine). Moreover, the Pictures artists took a cue from Andy Warhol's silk-screened repetitions of journalistic photographs, exploiting the power of mechanical reproduction to reaestheticize and recontextualize images from popular media. Understood at the time in terms of Walter Benjamin's overcited essay on aura and mechanical reproducibility, the works appeared as if they were bespoke illustrations for a number of contemporaneous French theories: the situationist senses of *spectacle* and *détournement* as elaborated by Guy Debord, Gil Wolman, and Asger Jorn; Michel de Certeau's related concept of bricolage; Jean Baudrillard's ecstatic accounts of simulacra; the authorial deaths reported and autopsied by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

For one concrete example of this reworking of iconic imagery, consider Jack Goldstein's now-canonical 1975 film *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,* created by splicing and looping 16-mm strips of MGM's roaring lion, turning the heralding roar into a repeated two-minute announcement of nothing but itself, a trademark of a trademark finally fulfilling the legend on the banner encircling its head: *ars gratia artis* (art for art's sake). More widely seen, Richard Prince's rephotographed magazine and newspaper advertisements, which he began reproducing in the late 1970s, rendered commercial images—so ubiquitous that they were hard to see on their own terms—newly visible. Isolating, enlarging, and refocusing the found images, Prince organized them into categories (such as the descriptively titled *four single men with interchangeable backgrounds looking to the right* [1977], executive

luxury goods, or suites of Marlboro Man cowboys). Prince's prints show the most familiar images to be strangely uncanny, revealing their idiomatic repetitions and inducing a disquieting sense of déjà vu. More provocative still were Sherrie Levine's contemporaneous reproductions of images by Edward Weston (1980), Walker Evans (1981), and Eliot Porter (1981); Levine rephotographed their works with as little variance as possible and then presented them under her own name as works "after" the masters of modern photography.

In the thirty years since the Artists Space exhibition, such wholesale appropriation has become a staple of contemporary art, recognized—and often eagerly embraced—by critical, commercial, and curatorial establishments. Indeed, appropriation is now so prevalent in the art world that Jerry Saltz has likened it to "esthetic kudzu."[42] The same techniques applied to literary texts, in contrast, are likely to elicit the response that such works—innovative or passé, good or bad—do not qualify as poetry tout court. Following a reading by Kenneth Goldsmith at Stanford University in 1997, for instance, one of the leading scholars of modern poetry—a professor enthusiastic about a range of challenging and innovative writing from Ezra Pound to Robert Grenier, Robert Duncan to Susan Howe—was asked what he thought of the poetry reading. His response: "What poetry reading?" Years later, I was even more surprised to hear one of the central figures of language poetry—a writer who had in fact himself incorporated transcribed texts into poetry—insist in numerous conversations that Goldsmith's work was interesting, but that it was decidedly not poetry. I suspect that in another quarter century, the literary status of appropriation will be much more like it is for the visual arts today—where the debate has moved on to questions well beyond such categorical anxieties—but our interest in assembling the present collection is to gauge how such techniques operate in the current literary context (including how instances of appropriation from earlier literary periods appear in today's cultural climate).

To put this slightly differently, works such as Sturtevant's *Flowers,* Levine's *After Walker Evans,* and Goldsmith's *Day* all obviously raise some of the same general, theoretical questions about originality and reproduction (with the added twist that after Sturtevant and Levine, Goldsmith appropriates the tactic of appropriation, inventively deploying unoriginality in a new arena). But rephotographing in 1980 and retyping in 2000 or exhibiting an appropriated image in a SoHo gallery and publishing an appropriated text as poetry cannot be equivalent activities. Part of that difference has to do with the two media. Levine's work inevitably entered

into a century-old debate over the nature of photography, which initially had to fight for its status as a creative art to begin with; moreover, it resonated with a broader cultural concern about the political power of images and their functioning as signs. Goldsmith's work, for its part, entered into a century-old rivalry between poetry and the newspaper and an arena already divided—in Truman Capote's famous quip about Jack Kerouac—between "writing" and "typing."[43]

More important, part of the difference between 1980 and 2000 derives from the cultural changes brought about by an increasingly digitized culture. During those decades, appropriation-based practices in other arts spread from isolated experiments to become a hallmark of hip-hop music, global DJ culture, and a ubiquitous tactic for mainstream and corporate media. Concurrently, sampling, mash-up, and the montage of found footage went from novel methods of production to widespread activities of consumption (or a postproduction that blurs the traditionally segregated acts of production and consumption), coalescing into what Lawrence Lessig refers to as "remix culture."[44] In the twenty-first century, conceptual poetry thus operates against the background of related vernacular practices, in a climate of pervasive participation and casual appropriation (not to mention the panicked, litigious corporate response to such activities). All of which is directly related to the technological environment in which digital files are promiscuous and communicable: words and sounds and images all reduced to compressed binary files disseminated through fiber-optic networks. In a world of increasingly capacious and inexpensive storage media, the proliferation of conceptual practices comes as no surprise, and those practices frequently mimic what Lev Manovich argues is the defining "database logic" of new media, wherein the focus is no longer on the production of new material but on the recombination of previously produced and stockpiled data.[45] Conceptual poetry, accordingly, often operates as an interface—returning the answer to a particular query; assembling, rearranging, and displaying information; or sorting and selecting from files of accumulated language pursuant to a certain algorithm—rather than producing new material from scratch. Even if it does not involve electronics or computers, conceptual poetry is thus very much a part of its technological and cultural moment.[46] That moment is also, perhaps not coincidentally, one in which the number of poetry books published each year rises exponentially and in which the digital archive of older literature deepens and broadens by the day. Under such circumstances, the recycling impulse behind much conceptual writing suits a literary ecology of alarming over-

production. The task for conscientious writers today is not how to find inspiration but how to curb productivity. As the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler wrote in 1968, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting, I do not wish to add any more."[47]

Uncreative Writing

Theoretically, the argument about genres and institutions put forward by the online UbuWeb collection could have been made with any style of literature. In the event, that collection happened to gather a particular kind of writing to make a secondary argument: some of the presumed hallmarks of poetry—the use of metaphor and imagery, a soigné edited craft, the sincere emotional expression of especially sensitive individuals—might be radically reconsidered, and poetry might be reclaimed as a venue for intellect rather than sentiment. Understanding writing to be more graphic than semantic, more a physically material event than a disembodied or transparent medium for referential communication, the online anthology showcased works fundamentally opposed to ideologies of expression. Writing, in these cases, referred more to itself, or to other instances of writing, than to any referent beyond the page. Oriented toward text rather than diegesis, these works present writing as their subject rather than imagining writing to be the means to a referential end. Accordingly, the anthology privileged modes of writing in which the substitutions of metaphor and symbol were replaced by the recording of metonymic facts, or by the direct presentation of language itself, and where the self-regard of narcissistic confession was rejected in favor of laying bare the potential for linguistic self-reflexiveness. Instead of the rhetoric of natural expression, individual style, or voice, the anthology sought impersonal procedure. Instead of psychological development or dramatic narrative, it sought systems of exhaustive logical extrapolation or permutation. The test of poetry for such work, accordingly, was no longer whether it "could have been done better (the question of the workshop), but whether it could conceivably have been done otherwise."[48] Conceptual writing, to emend one of LeWitt's paragraphs on conceptual art, "is good only when the idea is good."

The present volume continues to explore the potential of writing that tries to be "rid of lyrical interference of the individual as ego" (as Charles Olson famously put it).[49] Our emphasis is on work that does not seek to express unique, coherent, or consistent individual psychologies and that, moreover, refuses familiar strategies of authorial control in favor of automatism,

reticence, obliquity, and modes of noninterference. With minimal intervention, the writers here are more likely to determine preestablished rules and parameters—to set up a system and step back as it runs its course—than to heavily edit or masterfully polish. Indeed, the exhaustive and obsessive nature of many of these projects can be traced back to an unwillingness to intercede too forcefully; to use the entirety of a data set, or to rehearse every possible permutation of a given system, is to make just one choice that obviates a whole host of other choices. The one decision removes the temptation to tinker or edit or hone. Frequently, we had to admit that works we admired were not quite right for this collection because they were simply too creative—they had too much authorial intervention, however masterful or stylish that intervention might be.

Above all, the works presented here share a tendency to use found language in ways that go beyond modernist quotation or postmodern citation. The great break with even the most artificial, ironic, or asemantic work of other avant-gardes is the realization that one does not need to generate new material to be a poet: the intelligent organization or reframing of already extant text is enough. Through the repurposing or *détournement* of language that is not their own (whatever that might mean), the writers here allow arbitrary rules to determine the chance and unpredictable disposition of that language; they let artificial systems trump organic forms; and they replace making with choosing, fabrication with arrangement, and production with transcription. In these ways, previously written language comes to be seen and understood in a new light, and so both the anthology as a whole—with its argument for the importance of the institutions within which a text is presented—and the works it contains are congruent: context, for both, is everything. The circumstance, as the adage has it, alters the case.

The case made here, we know, then, will alter as circumstances continue to change. This anthology documents the explosion of publications since the turn of the millennium under the sign of the conceptual, and it attests to the literary energy of uncreative practices currently orbiting in swarms about those two terms. Whatever those practices eventually come to be called, they will soon look very different, and one of the reasons for this collection is to offer a snapshot of an instant in the midst of an energetic reformation, just before the mills of critical assessment and canonical formation have had a chance to complete their first revolutions. As the table of contents reveals, we have not, however, confined ourselves to the present moment only, and by extending our own network of affiliations

to include the writings of canonical figures from much earlier generations, such as Hart Crane, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Denis Diderot, we hope not only to sketch certain legacies and histories but also to demonstrate that particular techniques and devices—such as appropriation or transcription, however novel they might seem—always have precedents. Moreover, those precedents remind us that compositional tactics are never inherently significant, but they do always signify; their meaning simply changes with the cultural moment in which they are deployed (context, again, is all to the point). And here is where the context of the literary reveals itself to be the most surprising. Despite the genuinely contrarian and oppositional stance of contemporary uncreative writing in its open rejection of some of the fundamental characteristics of poetry, the resulting texts frequently evince far most conservative and traditional poetic values than most of what passes for mainstream poetry: the formalist artifice of measure and rhyme (if not in the form of received metrics and patterned end rhymes); classical rhetorical tropes of anaphora, apostrophe, and irony (if not in their romantic or modernist modes); the evidentiary disclosure of the writer's most private activities (if not in the melodramatic style of the psychologically confessional); and more than a few passages of unexpectedly, heartbreakingly raw emotion, undiluted by even a trace of sentiment. In addition, if these poems are not referential in the sense of any conventionally realist diegesis, they point more directly to the archival record of popular culture and colloquial speech than any avant-pop potboiler or Wordsworthian ballad ever dreamed.

And in the end, the figure of the uncreative writer is hardly new. Jorge Luis Borges's Pierre Menard, for instance, publishes the same poem in two different issues of the same poetry journal, transposes Paul Valéry's masterpiece long poem "Le cimitière marin" from its heteroclite decasyllabics into the more familiar alexandrines of traditional French verse, and is the "author" (pace Cervantes) of the *Quixote*.[50] Or at least of the "ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of the first part of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of chapter twenty-two."[51] "He did not want to compose another *Quixote*—which is easy," Borges's narrator goes on to explain, "but *the Quixote itself*. Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it." Instead, Menard hoped "to produce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes." The result, the narrator opines after a careful stylistic comparison of seemingly identical passages, "is more subtle than Cervantes'."[52] Herman Melville's Bartleby, in diametric contrast to Menard, does indeed copy and transcribe "mechanically" (at least before

his perplexing work stoppage), duplicating "an extraordinary quantity of writing" with "no pause for digestion" and no taste for editing. Gustave Flaubert's two scriveners, François Bouvard and Juste Pécuchet, also abandon their clerkships for a time, but they return to copying with the conceptual vengeance of inclusive, exhaustive, arbitrary systematization. Like interfaces to the proliferating database of printed matter in the Troisième République, their writing careers culminate in an uncreative frenzy of imitation and transcription. No longer seeking a referential or instrumental language, their graphomania evinces "plaisir qu'il y a dans l'acte materiel de recopier" (the pleasure that there is in the physical act of copying).[53] As Flaubert imagined the final jouissance of their scrivening:

> Ils copient au hasard tout ce qu'ils trouvent . . . cornets de tabac, vieux journaux, affiches, livres dechires etc. . . . Aux environs se trouve une fabrique de papier en faillite, et la ils achetent de vieux papiers. . . .
> Puis [ils] éprouvent besoin d'un classement. Ils font des tableaux, des parallèles antithétiques comme "crimes des rois" et "crimes des peuples", "bienfaits de la Religion", "crimes de la Religion" . . . "beautés de l'Histoire," etc.; Mais quelquefois ils sont embarrassés de ranger la chose à sa place. . . . pas de réflexions! Copions tout de même. II faut que la page s'emplisse—egalite de tout, du bien et du mal . . . du Beau et du Laid . . . il n'y a que des faits,—des phénomènes.
>
> Joie finale.

> They indiscriminately copy everything they find: tobacco wrappers, old newspapers, posters, shredded books, etc. They discover a bankrupt paper factory in the neighborhood, and they buy old papers.
>
> Then, they discover the need for a taxonomy. They make tables, dialectic parallels such as "crimes of the kings" and "crimes of the people," "blessings of religion," "crimes of Religion" . . . "beauties of history," etc.; but sometimes they are confounded by how to classify something properly . . . enough speculation! Let's copy everything! What matters is that the page gets filled—everything is equal: good and evil . . . Beauty and Ugliness . . . there are only facts—and phenomena.
>
> Ultimate bliss. [*Translation mine.*]

The list of literary amanuenses goes on: Nikolay Gogol's Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, another deliriously focused copy clerk; Moses taking God's dictation; above all, the nymph Echo. In Ovid's characterization:

She liked to chatter
But had no power of speech except the power
To answer in the words she last had heard. . . .
Echo always says the last thing she hears, and nothing further.[54]

Echo, literally, always has the last word. And she sets the first example for many of the writers included here: loquacious, patient, rule bound, recontextualizing language in a mode of strict citation. Ostensibly a passive victim of the wrath of Juno, Echo in fact becomes a model of Oulipean ingenuity: continuing to communicate in her restricted state with far more personal purpose than her earlier gossiping, turning constraint to her advantage, appropriating other's language to her own ends, "making do" as a verbal *bricoleuse*.

Against Expression puts proof to the mythology of figures such as Echo, recognizing their tactics not just as allegorical conceits or fictional characterizations but as viable strategies for actual authors in their own rights. Moreover, this anthology will separate those who would rather read about Menard or Flaubert's *bonhommes* from those who dream of actually reading what they supposedly spent so much time—inspired, sly, compulsive, obstinate, pernicious, mechanical—copying out. Here, then, is the legacy of Echo, recontextualized as the birthright of an author rather than a victim, and this is her fully reconceptualized challenge to those who would instead chose the confession of Narcissus or the romance of Orpheus as their muse.

Notes

Special thanks to Julie Gonnering Lein, Jeremy Fisher, Katie Price, and Ara Shirinyan for their invaluable help in seeing this anthology to print.

1. Craig Dworkin, "Introduction," *The UbuWeb Anthology of Conceptual Writing,* http://www.ubu.com/concept.

2. One of the most interesting aspects of the current discourse in poetics is the discrepancy between how many writers and critics are invested in the term *conceptual* and how few share even the same basic definition. The rubric itself is of little import, but the variety of activities it attracts are worth noting. These discrepancies are legible in venues such as the Poetry Foundation's online publication (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet); Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman's *Notes on Conceptualisms* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009); and the international symposium convened by Marjorie Perloff, "Conceptual Poetry and

Its Others," at the University of Arizona Poetry Center, from May 13–29, 2008 (see http://poetrycenter.arizona.edu/conceptualpoetry/cp_index.shtml).

The term, in any event, should not to be confused with the Kontseptualizme poetry movement that flourished in Moscow in the 1980s (associated most closely with writers such as Dmitri Prigov and Lev Rubenstein) or with the commonplace connotations of writing relating in some vague way to abstract ideas or philosophical questions. With an amusing coincidence, the economist David Galenson coined the phrase "conceptual poetry" to designate writing that is diametrically opposed to the work that actually goes by the name. Galenson explains (with a definition of experimental poetry equally estranged from its literary associations): "Conceptual poetry typically emphasizes ideas or emotions, and often involves the creation of imaginary figures and settings, whereas experimental poetry generally stresses visual images and observations, based on real experiences" (*Old Masters and Young Geniuses: The Two Life Cycles of Artistic Creativity* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005], 123). Replacing *emphasizes* and *stresses* with *refuses* and *ignores* would bring the passage in line with how the terms *conceptual* and *experimental* are used in contemporary literary discourse.

3. This is obviously not the place for anything like a history of conceptual art; several monographs, catalogs, and sourcebooks provide fuller introductions. See, to begin with, Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998); Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002); Paul Wood, *Movements in Modern Art: Conceptual Art* (London: Tate, 2002); Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004); Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2000).

4. Marcel Duchamp, *À l'infinitif* (New York: Cordier et Ekstrom, 1966); see *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp,* ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 78.

5. Kosuth's display of uniform panels and repeated forms with minor variations seemed to directly acknowledge the precedent of Andy Warhol's 1962 Ferus Gallery show of soup cans. More pointedly, *Titled* also contained one panel with a quotation from Warhol instead of from a dictionary: "In the future everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes." A striking punctum in the series, that panel seems to ask the viewer to supply the word for which Warhol's phrase would serve as a definition. It also underscores the cold war shadow of Warhol's comment and the existential threat of "nothing" behind the funereal black of Kosuth's panels: fifteen minutes was the widely cited time officials believed a Russian nuclear missile would take to reach the continental United States.

6. The main motif of Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" reads: "I have nothing to say

and I am saying it, and that is poetry" (*Incontri Musicali* 3 [1959]: 128–49, passim; republished in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* [Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan, 1961]: 109–40, passim). Kosuth's work would have been considered a kind of poetry by W. H. Auden's definition as well, as it "makes nothing happen." Kosuth conducted a similar exploration of negative ontology with the replete definition of the word *empty*.

7. Reinhardt's understanding of artistic tautology is most clearly stated in an essay that opens this way: "The one thing to say about art is that it is one thing. Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else. Art-as-art is nothing but art. Art is not what is not art." ("Art-As-Art," *Art International* 4, no. 10 [1962]: 38).

8. Definitions are drawn from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language,* unabridged, 2nd ed. (1957); *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1960); *New Century Dictionary* (1934); one of the *Pocket, Little,* or *Concise* Oxford dictionaries based on the work of Henry Watson and Francis George Fowler, and so on. At least one version of "universal" (private collection; see the image reproduced in Godfrey, *Conceptual Art,* 132), cleverly, points to the title of its source: *Webster's New Universal Unabridged*.

One might compare the uninflected presentation and format of Kosuth's dictionary works with one of the index cards from Michael Harvey's *White Papers* (1971), which spells out the punctuation from the definition of *punctuation* in *The Oxford English Dictionary:*

> the practice comma art comma method comma or system of inserting points or open single quote periods closed single quote to aide the sense comma in writing or printing semicolon division into sentences comma clauses comma etc period by means of points or periods period other punctuation marks comma e period g period exclamation marks comma question marks comma refer to the tone or structure of what precedes them period a sentence can contain any of these symbols comma its termination marked by a period period

9. Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 39, emphasis added; cf. 43.

10. Ian Wilson makes the interesting argument that "the difference between conceptual art and poetry, literature, and philosophy is that conceptual art takes the principles of visual abstraction, founded in the visual arts, and applies them to language. When it does that a nonvisual abstraction occurs" ("Conceptual Art," in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art,* 414).

11. Qtd. in Alberro, *Conceptual Art,* 71.

12. For more on Duchamp's sculpture, with special attention to the inscription on its plates, see Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), chap. 3, 101–7, passim.

13. The categories are accidents, alphabets, cards, categories, cement, changes,

communications, completion, conception, considerations, criticism, cross-filing, dates, decisions, dissatisfactions, deleted entries, delays, duration, dimensions, duration, forms, future, index, interruptions, locations, looses, materials, mistakes, names, number, owners, possibilities, prices, purchases, recoveries, repetition, signature, size, stores, tenses, time, title, trips, and working.

14. Dan Graham, "Variant for *Possibilities of Poetry,* from Schemata Conceived in 1966," *Possibilities of Poetry,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Dell, 1970), 180. The work, significantly, is alternately titled "Poem," "Poem Schema," "Schema (March 1966)," "Poem-Schema (1966)," and so on: a perfect example of how the same text can function in different ways in different contexts (art and poetry, in this case).

15. Dan Graham, *For Publication* (Los Angeles: Otis Art Institute, 1975), n.p.

16. Graham, "Variant," 180.

17. Dan Graham, "Poem-Schema," *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* 1, no. 1 (1969): 14.

18. Dan Graham, "Schema," Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Possibilities of Poetry* (New York: Dell, 1970), 182.

19. Dan Graham, "Schema," Suzanne Zavrain, ed., *Extensions* 1, no. 1 (1968): 23.

20. Dan Graham, "Poem, March 1966," *Aspen* 5–6 (1966–67); single folded sheet, n.p.

21. Designed by Adrian Frutiger in the mid-1950s, the numerals indicated weight and style; in this case, for instance, "55" indicates a medium-weight Roman face. When "Schema" was published in *Studio International,* "univers 689" was listed as uncapitalized (as was the "hunterblade" paper stock). Dan Graham, "Schema," *Studio International* 183, no. 944 (1972), 212. *Aspen,* for the record, misspells the face name with an anglicized "Universe."

22. Rolf Wedewer and Konrad Fischer, eds., *Konzeption/Conception* (Cologne: West-Verlag, 1969): n.p.

23. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5: 10 (June, 1967): 80.

24. In 1957, Klein had dedicated an otherwise-empty room in the Gallery Colette Allandy in Paris to "Surfaces and Blocks of Pictorial Sensibility," reprising the idea in 1962 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris as a *zone de sensibilité picturale immatérielle* (zone of immaterial pictorial sensibility), whence he removed the paintings from the gallery walls. See Voids, 57, *et passim*. Warhol's exhibition became so crowded on its opening the art was removed from the walls. "It was fabulous," Warhol exclaimed: "an art opening with no art!" (Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* [New York: Harvest, 2006], 166).

25. Not counting a likely oxidation, the half-life disappearance would actually be closer to 10 years and 186 days, assuming one did not consider the work surviving in the transformed state of cesium 133.

26. LeWitt's sentence has been frequently reprinted with the infelicitous typo

"idea *of* concept." I have quoted from the first publication in the special issue on sculpture of *Artforum* 5 (June, 1967).

27. In Judd's *Untitled* stacks, for instance, the number of units depends on the distance between the floor and the ceiling. Similarly, the relative size of the units in his horizontal *Progression* sculptures from the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as the distance between each unit, was determined by the ratios of the Fibonacci series. LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes,* in turn, presents every possible variation on an axis-oriented cube missing one or more of its sides; the effort and phenomenological effect of actually constructing or viewing the cubes is not inconsequential, but the point was that once the project had been defined, its conclusion was inevitable.

28. Baldessari's source is *The Family Book of Hobbies* (New York: Sterling, 1973), 167.

29. Ibid., 167.

30. Compare György Kepes, *Language of Vision* (New York: Paul Theobald, 1944), 36.

31. Note that the line break and use of a comma rather than a semicolon open the possibility of a less ironic reading, in which the second phrase can be understood to indicate that "no ideas have entered the work except for [the idea of] art."

Rauschenberg had attempted a related denominalization in 1963 with *Document,* made in rebuke to the collector Philip Johnson (whose payment for Rauschenberg's work *Litanies* was tardy) and including a notarized document attesting: "The undersigned, Robert Morris, being the maker of / the metal construction entitled Litanies, / described in the annexed Exhibit A, hereby withdraws from / said construction all aesthetic quality and content and / declares that from the date hereof said construction has / no such quality and content."

32. On this topic, see the canvas, which reads:

WHAT THIS PAINTING AIMS TO DO

IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN PAINTING FOR
QUITE SOME TIME THAT YOU WILL BEGIN TO RE-
ALIZE THAT YOUR COMPOSITIONS SEEM TO LACK
IMPACT—THAT THEY ARE TOO ORDINARY
THAT IS WHEN YOU WILL START TO BREAK ALL THE
SO-CALLED RULES OF COMPOSITION AND TO
THINK IN TERM OF DESIGN.
THEN YOU CAN DISTORT SHAPES, INVENT FORMS,
AND BE ON YOUR WAY TOWARD BEING A CREATIVE ARTIST.

33. Qtd. in *John Baldessari,* ed. Jan Debbaut (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum and Essen, Museum Folkwang, 1981), 6.

34. Dan Graham had attempted to outsource a poem by placing an advertisement in the November 1966 *National Tatler* (Lucy Lippard lists the issue date as November 21 [*Six Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 19); elsewhere it is noted as November 31 [Birgit Pelzer, Mark Francis, and Beatriz Colomina, *Dan Graham* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 140]; I have not been able to locate a copy to verify which is correct:

> WANTED: PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL WRITER to write medical, sexological description of sexual detumescence in human male (physiological and psychological aspects) laxity and pleasure should be dealt with. Needed *for reproduction as a poem by Dan Graham* to be deseminated [*sic*] 25,000 readers in June issue of ASPEN. Respondent retains all rights and fees from use of. [*Emphasis added.*]

When no one responded he placed another ad in *New York Review of Sex* (August 1, 1969, and possibly again on August 15):

> Wanted: Professional medical writer willing to write clinical description covering equally the physiological and psychological (lassitude/pleasure) response to the human male to sexual detumescence. The description selected will be *reproduced as a piece* in a national magazine. Writer of piece retains copyright and is free to use description for his own purposes. [*Emphasis added.*]

When no one responded, he placed another ad in *Screw* (1969). No one ever replied.

35. LeWitt, "Paragraphs," 13.

36. First published in the catalog *January 5-31, 1969* (n.p.) and later appended to many of Weiner's works.

37. Osborne, *Conceptual Art,* 27. See LeWitt's sixteenth thesis in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art": "if words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature; numbers are not mathematics" (in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art,* 107). In an interview with Jeanne Siegel, Kosuth denies any relationship between his text-based art and (concrete) poetry with the following assertion: "Absolutely no relationship at all. It's simply one of things superficially resembling one another" (*Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990* [Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991], 51). Kosuth protests too much, but his general point is well taken. Jack Burnham makes the same observation: "conceptual art resembles literature only superficially" ("Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art," in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art,* 216).

38. William Carlos Williams, "Paterson," *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, 1909–1939* (New York: New Directions, 1986), 264.

39. The important exception is Darren Wershler's *The Tapeworm Foundry (andor*

the dangerous prevalence of imagination) ([Toronto: House of Anansi], 200), the one book of poetry closest to art works such as Weiner's *Statements*.

40. Signing a text that one hasn't written will surely become less remarkable, and the next frontier of propriety will materialize when conceptual writing antagonizes the institutions of poetry by signing for others under texts that they have not written. Jacques Debrot published a number of poems under John Ashbery's name, as well as a fabricated interview (*Readme* 4 [2001]). See the related entry in the present volume for Ted Bergigan and *Issue #1*. It is one thing for Duchamp to display a urinal in a gallery, but still another to go into the museum men's room and post an information card next to the urinal claiming it as a Duchamp. In Darren Wershler's *Tapeworm Foundry,* he proposes this: "publish an issue of a magazine without telling it's official editors."

41. The *Pictures* exhibition included Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith. Metro Pictures, founded by Janelle Reiring and Helene Winer, who had been the director at Artists Space, was a commercial gallery committed to "concerns emanating from the culture as represented in the popular media" (Helene Winer, "Metro Pictures," *For Love and Money: Dealers Choose* [New York: Pratt Manhattan Center Gallery, 1981], n.p.); the opening group show for Metro Pictures included Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Michael Harvey, Thomas Lawson, William Leavitt, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, James Welling, and Michael Zwack. The first solo shows, in late 1980 and early 1981, featured Goldstein and Sherman (showing concurrently), Longo's *Men in the Cities,* and Prince and Zwack (concurrently). Sherman's work in particular exemplified a less tangible mode of appropriation. In addition, consider the corroborative work of Allan McCollum from this period, as well as the widely reproduced work of Barbara Kruger, although she exhibited at Metro Pictures only in a 1986 group show and was active at the time in other venues.

Readers interested in the critical response to this tendency might turn first to Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (1979): 75–88; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (1982): 43–56; Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs," *Art in America* (November 1982): 88–92; Hal Foster, "Readings in Cultural Resistance," *ReCodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 157–79; Rosalind E. Krauss: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1986); Craig Owens: *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture,* ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

42. Jerry Saltz, "Great Artists Steal," *New York Magazine* (May 10, 2009): 66–67.

43. For just two tokens of the feud between journalism and poetry, and of particular relevance to *Day,* consider Ezra Pound's definition of poetry as "news that

stays news," and Stéphane Mallarmé's observation that his poetry consisted of "les mots mêmes que le Bourgeois lit tous les matins, les mêmes! Mais voilà: s'il lui arrive de les retrouver en tel mien poème, il ne les comprend plus" (the same words that businessmen read every morning (in the newspaper)—exactly the same!" But then: if they should come across them in some poem of mine, they no longer understand them) (René Ghil, *Les dates et les œuvres: Symolisme et poésie* [Paris: G. Crès, 1929]: 214).

44. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: La culture comme scénario, comment l'art reprogramme le monde contemporain* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2004); Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

45. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002); see especially 212–43, passim.

46. For a more detailed examination of this condition and its political resonance, see Craig Dworkin, "The Imaginary Solution," *Contemporary Literature* 48, no. 1 (2007): 29–60.

47. Douglas Huebler, "Untitled Statements," *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* ed. Kristine Stiles and Howard Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 840.

48. Ibid.

49. *Charles Olson: Selected Writings,* ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1971): 24.

50. Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings,* ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964): 37.

51. Ibid., 39.

52. Ibid., 42.

53. Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* ed. Alberto Cento (Paris: Libraire Nizet, 1964), 124.

54. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955): 68, passim.