Nick Kaye

Conceptual Performance

Enacting Conceptual Art

CONCEPTUAL PERFORMANCE

Conceptual Performance explores how the radical visual art that challenged material aesthetics in the 1960s and 1970s tested and extended the limits, character, and concept of performance.

Conceptual Performance sets out the history, theoretical basis, and character of this genre of work through a wide range of case studies. The volume considers how and why principal modes and agendas in Conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s necessitated new engagements with performance, as well as expanded notions of theatricality. In doing so, this book reviews and challenges prevailing histories of Conceptual art through critical frameworks of performativity and performance. It also considers how Conceptual art adopted and redefined terms and tropes of theatre and performance: including score, document, embodiment, documentation, relic, remains, and the narrative recuperation of ephemeral work. While showing how performance has been integral to Conceptual art's critiques of prevailing assumptions about art's form, purpose, and meaning, this volume also considers the reach and influence of Conceptual performance into recent thinking and practice.

This book will be of interest to scholars and students of theatre, performance, contemporary art, and art history.

Nick Kaye is Professor of Performance Studies, University of Exeter, United Kingdom. His books include *Site-Specific Art* (2000), *Multi-Media* (2007), *Performing Presence* (with Gabriella Giannachi, 2011), *Dennis Oppenheim: Body to Performance* (with Amy van Winkle Oppenheim, 2016), and he is co-editor of *Artists in the Archive* (2018).

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Enacting Conceptual Art

Nick Kaye

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INTRODUCTION

This book explores how Conceptual art changed and radicalised ideas and practices of performance. In doing so, *Conceptual Performance* also reviews and challenges prevailing histories of Conceptual art through critical frameworks of performativity, performance, and theatricality, addressing the staging and enactment of conceptual works in their emphasis on contingencies of place, time-based processes, interaction, and transaction. *Conceptual Performance* considers how and why principal modes and agendas in Conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s necessitated engagements with ideas and practices of performance, as well as expanded notions of theatricality, and how this genre's challenge to the stabilities and distinctions in which artworks had been conventionally defined gave rise to new "conceptual" engagements with action, time, and the body. While elaborating modes of performative and performance-based strategies integral to Conceptual art's critiques of prevailing assumptions about art's form, purpose, and meaning, this volume also considers the reach of these practices beyond their historical moment and into more recent thinking and practices of performance.

Conceptual art and the idea of performance

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, expanded notions of performance and theatricality became an integral part of work by a wide range of self-identified "first generation" conceptual artists. For these artists, performance further expanded their rejection of the consistency and stabilities of conventional genre and form, as part of diverse practices engaging with the problematics in which Conceptual art was first defined. Through the rapid development of new language-based work in visual art in the late 1960s, Conceptual art also frequently invoked the idea of performance in transformations of artwork and the art object. Performative strategies

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in Conceptual art included the "infiltration" of real-world processes and relations and the deferring of attention to the "theatricality" of everyday place and situation, each of which often recalled, implied, invited, or required enactment. Frequently, conceptual practices worked at the intersection of performance frameworks and practices and other processes, including social, political, and ecological systems. Where Conceptual art persistently interrogated the aesthetic and ideological basis of the category "work of art," it produced contentious and influential seams of performance and "theatrical" practice. These practices subordinated the visual to the performative effects of language; substituted objects with information or propositions regarding, anticipating, or inviting actions; and deployed documents that directed attention to events that lay elsewhere or had already occurred. Through these and other tactics, performance practices defined through Conceptual art put pressure on terms and tropes in which the anticipation, execution, and memorialisation of theatre and performance are conventionally stabilised, including score, document, embodiment, documentation, relic, remains, and narrative recuperation.

The art historical origins of "Conceptual performance" also lie in the interlocking of conceptual and performance art in the late 1960s, and in contemporaneous distinctions between these practices reflected in wider contentions between North American east and west coast art and criticism. These are differences that had also been elaborated through international developments in Conceptual art: in Latin America in particular, and more broadly through the comparative lens of a *Global Conceptualism* (Camnitzer et al. 1999a). While embedded in a wider range of practices, Conceptual performance is a term first used to capture ideas, curatorial practices, and works by California artists: Terry Fox, Tom Marioni, Linda Mary Montano, Bonnie Ora Sherk, and by extension early work by Lynn Hershman Leeson and Eleanor Antin. These artists are frequently identified as "first generation" conceptual artists, yet their work can appear at variance to the predominantly Anglo-American and east coast, language-centric modes of Conceptual art, around which a canonical history has frequently been drawn.

Conceptual performance is a term used by Dennis Oppenheim to describe his early actions and video following his move from the Bay Area to New York in 1967; and of Bruce Nauman's work, whose relocation to Pasadena in 1969 followed his experiments with performance and film in his San Francisco shop front studio. As early as 1972, the New York-based critic Robert Pincus-Witten published "Vito Acconci and the Conceptual Performance" in *Artforum* (1972) associating the term also with Nauman and a broader framing of "Postminimalism" (1981). Nauman's later "conceptual performance" *Body Pressure* (1974) comprised instructions to a reader in the gallery to "press as much of the front surface of your body (palms in or out, left or right cheek) against the wall as possible" and provided a further nine paragraphs refining the experience; instructions Marina Abramović performed against sheet-glass in a six-hour spectacle as part of her *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005). Subsequent work engaged overtly with performance as an elaboration of Conceptual art. Asco, the Chicana/o artists' collective formed in east Los Angeles

by Gronk, Willie F. Herrón III, Patssi Valdez, and Harry Gamboa Jr., conceived of their No Movies series (1973–80) as "conceptual performances created specifically for the camera" (Norte 2011: 404). Stephanie Sparling Williams accounts for Lorraine O'Grady's *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (1980–3) and her performance of direct address in disruptive challenges to the marginalisation of Black women artists, as "conceptual performances of radical (out-of-turn) presence" (2021: 64) (83). Williams' characterisation is also partly in response to O'Grady's insistence that "I AM NOT A PERFORMANCE ARTIST […] I am *writing in space*" (61, original emphasis), an allusion that draws her work back towards the linguistic basis of Conceptual art, as does the institutional critique that her persona enacts. Contemporaneously, journals such as *High Performance*, founded in Los Angeles by Linda Frye Burnham in 1978, facilitated a new and direct voice for artists engaged with ideas of performance through documentation. In her recollection of "*High Performance*, Performance Art, and Me," Frye Burnham recalled her editorial practice which facilitated artists' pages without overarching critical frameworks, allowing the magazine to become an authenticating voice for work not attested to elsewhere, even producing "performance" in its pages. Frye Burnham recounts publishing documentations and reviews of performance that "could take place literally any place, indoors or out, or it could be entirely conceptual and never exist at all" (1986: 29). More recently, performance has been recognised as a practice and idea embedded into methodologies and encounters characterising early Conceptual art. Stuart Comer, reflecting in 2015 on his approach as curator of media and performance at MoMA, New York, identified Sol LeWitt's earliest iterations of Conceptual art in his instructions for *Wall Drawings* from 1968 with the elaboration of performance and its documentation. Here, LeWitt specifies a "concept," in the form of instructions to be permuted in site-specific iterations, such that "the idea becomes a machine that makes the work" (LeWitt 1999: 12). The execution of such a *Wall Drawing*, Comer suggests:

> is as much a performance as is a Dada cabaret. That moment in conceptual art was a watershed moment for performance, especially in New York. It shows how an image can be an archival thought, it can be an action, it can occupy different registers of time.
>
> *Westerman 2018: 18*

In a critical commentary on Conceptual art and performance, too, the term Conceptual performance has persisted, if sporadically. Robert Morgan's writing of "Conceptual Performance and Language Notations" (1994) focuses on the primacy and ambiguities of documentation to argue that "Conceptual performance relies to a large extent on the presentation of documents as a substitute concern for the non-theatricality of the performance" (80). Contemporary criticism in California also visited the term, but differently again: for example, in W.C. Graham's reading of Leslie Leibowitz's *SPROUTIME SAN FRANCISCO* at the San Francisco

Site Gallery of 1981 as an "ongoing conceptual performance, and business" that adopted the time of organic growth, while conflating her work with "real life situations" (1981: 22). Tom Marioni's Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) which from 1970 in San Francisco showed time-based, ephemeral, and "theatre-oriented" art (Marioni 1970) has been associated with "conceptual performance" (Tedford 2011); as has Terry Fox's crossing of conceptual and site-specific sound practices, also associated with MOCA in the early 1970s. More recent publications have directed attention towards the "problem of critically framing conceptual performance," treating conceptual and performance art as distinct seams of practice and focusing on actions presenting the body as insensate or as an object (Johnson 2022: 306). In these various respects, Conceptual performance has emerged and persisted as a term capturing the play and effect of the "idea" of performance within conceptual work; as a designation of practices elaborating or further developing Conceptual art's integration of language and concomitant play with performativity and performance; and as a thinking of Conceptual art as performed acts and processes.

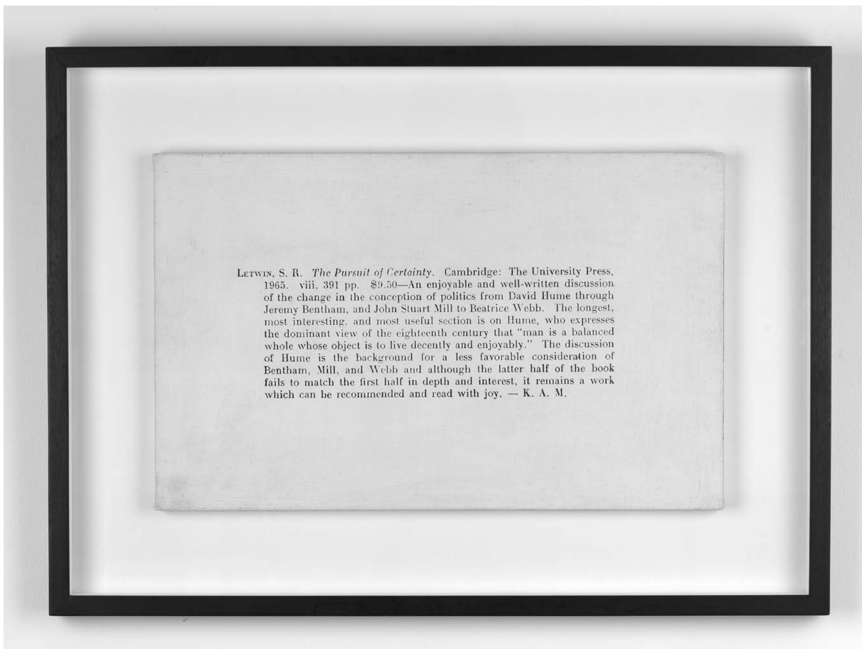
From language to performance

The art historical narrative of Anglo-American Conceptual art tends to cohere around a definition of language-centric practices in visual art in the later 1960s: practices that explicitly and critically rejected the perceived hegemony of the New York School of abstract art and its associated formalist critical narratives while also self-consciously overtaking the phenomenological emphasis of Minimalism. These rejections concerned not only the abstraction so influentially supported by the critic Clement Greenberg's account of the trajectory of North American Modernist art but also the ideals of autonomy and medium specificity these narratives rested upon. In inaugurations of Conceptual art, these departures were crystallised in 1967 in Joseph Kosuth and Christine Kozlov's *Opening Exhibition of Normal Art* in New York, which included Kosuth's realisation of *Proto-Investigations* conceived in 1965 and modelling Conceptual art as "analytic propositions," reproducing seemingly structurally self-supporting meanings found within language. It is a linguistic emphasis reflected in Sol LeWitt's publication in *Artforum* later in 1967 of "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," which set out the first systematic definition of the term. Conceptual art, LeWitt proposed, is art in which "the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work," such that "all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand, and the execution is a perfunctory affair" (1999: 12): a formulation enacted in his texts for *Wall Drawings* from 1968. It is an approach inflected further in Michael Baldwin and Terry Atkinson's proposal for *Air-Conditioning Show/Air Show/Frameworks*, comprising the designation of a current of air as a work of art; on which Baldwin published in *Arts Magazine* in November 1967, and which informed the work of Art & Language from 1968. It is a proposition, Robert Bailey suggests in his study of *Art & Language International*,

that demonstrated how language had the capacity to precede the phenomena of "art," as through this proposition:

> Baldwin revealed the extent to which a "viewer" of this phenomenon would need the linguistic dimension of a text (such as the very essay in which he proposed the work) explaining what the work of art is in order to perceive it as art in the first instance – and even then, its crucial component would remain invisible.
>
> *2016: 15*

In 1969, Bailey notes, the New York-based artist Ian Burn authored 12 declarative sentences on language and art, appearing to set out what was "at stake" in the *Air-Conditioning Show*. Burn noted that "Perception is no longer a direct and unified act; through language it has become fragmented and dispersed" (Bailey 2016: 19). It is in the context of such thinking that Baldwin's collaborations with Mel Ramsden made use of text to disrupt visual forms and processes, prior to their formal association with Art & Language. In their collaborations from 1965, Baldwin and Ramsden introduced language to the surface of mirrors and article abstracts from *The Review of Metaphysics* of September 1966 into spaces announced for "Abstract Art," so demanding reading in the conventional space for viewing.



Letwin, S. R. *The Pursuit of Certainty*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1965. viii, 391 pp. $9.50—An enjoyable and well-written discussion of the change in the conception of politics from David Hume through Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill to Beatrice Webb. The longest, most interesting, and most useful section is on Hume, who expresses the dominant view of the eighteenth century that "man is a balanced whole whose object is to live decently and enjoyably." The discussion of Hume is the background for a less favorable consideration of Bentham, Mill, and Webb and although the latter half of the book fails to match the first half in depth and interest, it remains a work which can be recommended and read with joy. — K. A. M.

FIGURE 1.1 Art & Language, *Abstract Art* (No. 8), 1967. Silkscreen on canvas. 38 cm × 61 cm. Private collection. © **Art & Language**

This linguistic turn was flagged in New York by numerous exhibitions in this period, including *Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read*, a re-titling by the artist Robert Smithson of the press release for *Language I* in 1967 at the Dwan Gallery, New York (Smithson 1996), and followed by *Language II* (1968), *Language III* (1969), and *Language IV* (1970). These New York-based exhibitions inflected the widely recognised history of Conceptual art's definition in a coalescence of specific language-uses in art emergent from 1965 to 1967 (for example, Buchloch 1990; Wall 1999; Harrison 2001; Osborne 2002). It is a tendency that gained momentum also in the founding of the Art & Language collective in Coventry, England, in 1968, around the collaborative practices of Baldwin and Atkinson, as well as David Bainbridge and Harold Hurrell (Art & Language 2006: 113) who were art history faculty of the then Lanchester Polytechnic. Following the publication of the first issue of their journal *Art-Language* in 1969 which was briefly subtitled "The Journal of conceptual art," Joseph Kosuth was invited to act as the journal's "American editor." Kosuth later edited the first issues of the corresponding New York-based journal, *The Fox*, from 1975 to 1976. In this period, Art & Language rapidly expanded in the United Kingdom and New York to include Michael Ramsden and Ian Burn in 1970, Charles Harrison as editor of *Art-Language* in 1971, to eventually bring together as many as 20 artists under a largely collective authorship.

It is a focus on the capacities and effects of language also crystallised in the influential curatorial work of Seth Siegelaub in New York in 1968 and 1969, and the subsequent development of his practice until his departure from the art world in 1972. In November 1968, Siegelaub organised the publication of what came to be known as *The Xerox Book,* (Seigelaub 1968), sometimes also titled *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner*. Made up of 25-page (Xeroxed) sequences without an "original," its image sequencing and self-referential address to the page forced a self-conscious reading of *The Xerox Book* as exhibition, and exhibition site. In early 1969, this development took further shape through Siegelaub's series of defining exhibitions for conceptual practice, beginning with *January 5–31, 1969* in New York, in participation with Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner. Utilising print media over gallery exhibition or installation, Siegelaub distributed material conventionally secondary to an exhibition as the exhibition; material was also given primacy by these artists' conflation of their artwork with information that could be disseminated simultaneously in a variety of media. Such tactics militated against identifying Conceptual art with a specific medium, displacing attention instead towards ways in which media are formed discursively, and how information may simultaneously be conveyed in multiple formats. Siegelaub's foregrounding of "primary information" also implicitly opposed the Modernist revelation of the recursive structure of a given medium, save for the possibility of recursive structures in language itself; an implication that shadows Joseph Kosuth's early work. These concentrations on language are also consistent with the earliest definition of

"Concept Art" by artist Henry Flynt, in his essay of that title written in 1961 from the vantage point of Flynt's discomfort with the emergent Fluxus group, orchestrated principally by George Maciunas in New York. Flynt's formulation appeared in the first publication around which Fluxus came to be defined, *An Anthology of Chance Operations* (Young and Mac Low 1963), and draws on the language-based, explicitly performative event-scores, mail art, and numerous informal publications that came to comprise the diverse work promoted by Maciunas. Here, Flynt suggests that:

> *Concept Art* is first of all an art of which the material is *concepts*, as the material of e.g., music is sound. Since *concepts* are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language.
>
> *Flynt 1963, original emphasis*

Flynt's statement positions language centrally within "Concept Art," yet captures one of the recurrent tensions within conceptual work, between concept and medium or material. In his subsequent "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," LeWitt also acknowledged the implicit fissure between concept and materiality in the new work, which, he argued, conceptual artists sought to "ameliorate" in the attempt "to engage the mind" rather than the emotions. In this address, LeWitt notes:

> The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction [...] Anything that calls attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual artist would want to ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible or to use it in a paradoxical way. (To convert it into an idea).
>
> *1999: 15*

It is a dilemma reflected also in discourses over the "dematerialisation" of the art object, first identified explicitly in Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler's article "The Dematerialization of Art" published in *Art International* in 1968, and then exhaustively catalogued in Lippard's book, *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* in 1973 (1997). Indeed, "dematerialisation" provides for one of a series of contradictions or problematics in which Conceptual art has frequently been defined, and that persist in its framing. As Mel Bochner points out in multiple self-reflexive works from 1969 entitled *Language is not transparent*, language on a page inevitably asserts its own materiality as mark and style, even as it seemingly "dematerialises" object-forms. The artist and critic Jeff Wall, in his review of the history of Conceptual art, also finds the link to Flynt, arguing that these linguistic practices at once critiqued and

implicitly extended a "reductivism" exemplified by attempts through Happenings and Fluxus to embed art in the everyday and theorised in the writings of artists such as Allan Kaprow (1966) in aspirations towards "the blurring of art and life" (2003). Such attempts, Wall argued:

> emphasized the work of art's resemblance to non-art and is the direct precondition for the "dematerialization" of the work of art into critical language. The transformation from emblematics to a directly critical and discursive form of expression is conceptualism's central achievement
>
> *1999: 507*

In his major survey of Conceptual art, the philosopher and art historian Peter Osborne notes the resonance of performance to these defining strategies and concerns. Performance, he suggests, by dint of its ephemerality alone might seem to offer a "paradoxical dematerialisation" as any specific performance work is "constituted through […] disappearing into time, and thus sustaining itself over time, and into history *only at the level of an idea"* (2002: 20, original emphasis). It is an argument in accord with Peggy Phelan's profoundly influential and earlier proposition within performance studies that performance's ontology lies in its ephemerality: that performance, as that which "cannot be reproduced in the ideology of the visible […] becomes itself through disappearance" (1993: 146). In this ephemerality, Osborne argues, performance offered Conceptual art formats of "score" and "documentation" as means of referring attention away from material form; tactics resonant to Lucy R. Lippard's identification of Conceptual art with the trajectory of dematerialisation in her book, *Six Years*. Performance in Conceptual art often engaged directly with "disappearance": sometimes comprising unseen actions whose realisation remained moot, or performances evidenced only in announcements, in "fictional" documentation, or as rumour. Harold Rosenberg, writing of "De-aesthetisation" in 1970, identified a "repudiation of the aesthetic" in Conceptual art with an elimination of the object in favour of ephemeral exchanges: "its replacement by an idea for a work or by the rumour that one has been consummated" (1999: 223). It is a characterisation also reflected in subsequent accounts of Conceptual art. Alexander Alberro, who has extensively documented conceptual practices, suggested in prefacing *Recording Conceptual Art* (2001), a collection of early interviews with conceptual artists by Patricia Norvell, that "ultimately only the document or record - what Norvell calls the 'oral history' – remains" (13). It is a tactic surveyed as an intersection of Conceptual art and performance in Philipp Kaiser's exhibition and publication, *Disappearing – California c.1970* (2019), exemplified, for Kaiser, in work by Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden, and Jack Goldstein. Yet, while Osborne's focus on score and documentation may emphasise potential and aftermath, they remain in Phelan's scheme irretrievably other to performance in their visuality, materiality, and permanence.

In the linguistic turn to Conceptual art, a play of performativity and the capacity to occupy positions performatively also gained prominence early in this history. In the first issue of *Art-Language* of May 1969, the journal of the Art & Language collective, Terry Atkinson's opening essay asserted "that this editorial, in-itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what 'conceptual art' is, is held out as a 'conceptual art' work" (Atkinson 1969: 10). So compelling were such conflations by 1969 that in his final entry in his "Sentences on conceptual art" reprinted in the same journal issue, Sol LeWitt felt the need to state that "*These sentences comment on art, but are not art*" (5, original emphasis). In fact, both statements converge in the assumption that the performative effect of language trumps form, as they present analogous linguistic acts of self-definition which define contrasting relationships, and so identities, with their respective readers. This intertwining of linguistic and performative turns in art is also evident in "conceptualism" considered more widely. Indeed, the art historical reading of Conceptual art, defined in part around its emergence as a self-conscious term and mode (Osborne 1999: 49), is usually made distinct from a broader conceptual turn in art prompted first by Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's influence was revived through his permanent relocation to New York in 1942, his association with John Cage from the 1950s, and the Sidney Janis and Arturo Schwartz galleries' release of new, multiple editions of Duchamp's lost Readymades in 1959 and 1964, respectively. "Conceptualism" at once embraces the linguistic turn of Conceptual art but follows an inclusivity reflected in Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" of 1967. Consistent with this, Adrian Piper, whose early work was influenced by LeWitt, proposed in an essay of 1997 that "we set aside that restriction and think of Conceptual art in this more open-ended way, as being art that subordinates its medium, whatever its medium, to intellectually interesting ideas" (2004: 345).

Taken in its broadest form, the furthest reaching of these inclusive perspectives is *Global Conceptualism* (Camnitzer et al. 1999a) a project surveying diverse origins of conceptualist work from 1950 to the 1980s, in Japan, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, China, as a development within "Soviet" art, and elsewhere. Here, too, the overarching framework in which conceptualism is considered sets out implicit shifts to performative and performance-based processes. Introducing the volume and exhibition it reflects, Louis Camnitzer, with Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, identifies heterogeneous and geographically dispersed conceptual turns after Duchamp with an underlying "shift from object to subject," pointing out that "a prioritisation of language over visuality; a critique of the institution of art; and, in many cases, a consequent dematerialisation of the artwork were set in motion long before the anointing of a Conceptual Art" (Camnitzer et al. 1999b: VII–VIII). Here these tendencies are elaborated as an opening and expansion of the use and purpose of art in response to rapid social change and turmoil, in which "the deemphasis – or dematerialisation – of the object allowed artistic focus to move from the object to the conduct of art" (VIII) and so towards a focus on processes enacted,

analysed, and documented, that also rest on the enunciation and performative effect of language. It is a conceptual turn that contrasts with a narrower definition of Conceptual art as “a formalist practice developed in the wake of minimalism” (VIII) as a broader range of “conceptual” work turned towards art’s implication in reproducing or intervening into social relationships. Performance maintains its relevance in these expanded fields, providing means of further articulating interconnections and mutual influences between geographically diverse centres. As it is constructed here, however, *Global Conceptualism* also rests on a narrow view of Conceptual art as a depoliticised practice that extends the formalism that in differing ways it challenged. Read as self-conscious disruptions of the then predominant formalist narratives, Conceptual art gains a more permeable relationship with this conceptualism, a permeability reflected also in the various drives towards performance practices and frameworks in Conceptual art and the political, ideological, and ecological imperatives enacted by artists in frequently politicised challenges to formalist constraints.

Furthermore, and despite retrospective readings implying an early well-defined momentum and a clear set of parameters for Conceptual art, Peter Osborne notes in his extensive survey of Conceptual art and conceptualism that the first exhibitions using this term were not until 1970 (2002: 17). Here, Osborne cites *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, in New York in August 1970, an exhibition “ghost” curated by Joseph Kosuth and Ian Burn (Bailey 2016: 23); and subsequently *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* in Turin, organised by Germano Celant, anticipated by Celant’s influential book, *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* (1969). Other contemporaneous large-scale survey exhibitions reflected not only these curatorial definitions but also the growing ubiquity of “conceptualism.” In March 1969, the international reach of this tendency had been demonstrated through *Op Losse Schroeven*, meaning *Situations and Cryptostructures*, curated by Will Beeren at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, which included work not only by Huebler, Morris, Nauman, Oppenheim, Smithson, and Weiner but also by Giovanni Anselmo, Joseph Beuys, Ger van Elk, Richard Long, and many others (Beeren 1969). In the same two months in Bern, Harald Szeemann had organised *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, which was even more wide ranging, prompting Alison M. Green, discussing “The Contest over Conceptual Art’s History,” to remark that “What the record shows, of course, is that the *Attitudes* show may have included conceptual art, but was in no way an exhibition *about* conceptual art” (2004: 127, original emphasis). In New York, in July 1970, Kynaston McShine’s large-scale survey *Information*, at MoMA, followed Siegelaub’s prompt and published an extensive catalogue in which the 96 contributing artists were invited, McShine notes, “to create his [sic] own contribution to this book, a situation which meant that the material presented would be either directly related to the actual work in the show, or independent of it” (1970: 138). The following November, the art critic Jack Burnham curated *Software* at the Jewish Museum, which set the conceptual turn in art towards

"information" in the context of real-time data processing, information technologies, and new media (Burnham 1970). Including exhibits not only by Kosuth, John Baldessari, Hans Haacke but also by American Motors, Art and Technology Inc., The Architecture Machine Group from M.I.T., and other industry and experimental interactive technology research groups and companies, Burnham further blurred the distinctions between realms and practices of art and the new technological systems, and so between "art information" and the emergence of real-time information systems.

Where language provided a clear point around which to critically define and historicise Conceptual art, so, in retrospect, it also became a principal locus of its contradictions and tensions, of the "faulted" character of conceptual strategies. It is an "instability" won in the rejection of the securities formalist assumptions offered, and a concomitant embrace of contradiction, relation, and processual change. The issues these instabilities presented have been reflected in historiographies of Conceptual art and the diversity of its practices. Writing in 1981, Ian Burn, the Australian artist and member of Art & Language from its inception until 1977, argued that "Conceptual art failed" through internal contradiction and its untenable position in attempting simultaneously to turn outwards to address the social relations in which art functioned while maintaining a "structural adherence to the avant-garde tradition of modern art." Developing through these fault lines, Burn concludes, "The real value of Conceptual Art lay in its *transitional* (and thus genuinely historical) character, not in the style itself" (65, original emphasis). For other artists, though, these fault lines provided a potent driver of change around the form, limits, and politics of art in the emergence of work that did not necessarily need to resolve the contradictions it produced or revealed. Thus, Adrian Piper's formulation of a "Meta-Art," which in her *Catalysis* (1970–1) and *Mythic Being* (1973–5) series included self-reflexive infiltrations of the everyday through performance, can be read in part through Conceptual art's troubling and rejection of the then predominating Modernist narratives, promulgated by Clement Greenberg and subsequently Michael Fried. Reviewing "The Logic of Modernism" in 1993, Piper argued that:

> The peculiarly American variety of modernism known as Greenbergian formalism is an aberration. Characterised by its repudiation of content in general and explicitly political subject matter in particular, Greenbergian formalism gained currency as an opportunistic ideological evasion of the threat of cold war McCarthyite censorship and Red baiting in the 1950s.
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> *1999: 546*

Piper's Conceptual art, including her performance, rejected Greenberg's repudiation of content and valorisation of the medium-specific autonomy of the work of art. Instead, Piper formulated a "Meta-Art" that worked across contexts, addressing and intervening into social constructs and relation by garnering differing meanings

and identities that remain in negotiation. In this context, one might observe that Conceptual art's identity and value lies in the problematics in which it is constituted, rather than their resolution; and, specifically, in its exposure of the uncertainties it uncovers and amplifies. In these regards, Conceptual art tends towards an undoing of secure aesthetic form and its seemingly inherent significance and exclusions, whether as "de-aesthetisation" (Rosenberg), dematerialisation (Lippard), ideological critique (Art & Language), institutional critique (Andrea Fraser), or numerous other tactics. Indeed, practices of Conceptual art tend towards contradiction in so far as they advance critiques of "the work of art" through the production and reception of "art" and so self-reflexively contest the very contexts in which they operate.

While Lippard's *Six Years*, like McShine's *Information* and Szeemann's *Live in Your Head*, embraced a broad definition of conceptual work, the art historical narratives reflected by Benjamin Buchloch, as well as other influential critical histories by Jeff Wall (1999) and Charles Harrison (2001) of Art & Language, rapidly closed around a concentration on specific aspects of linguistic effect and discursive intervention. Buchloch, publishing in 1990 for the journal *October* which from its inception in 1976 had initiated a theoretical and politically engaged art history and criticism defined in the wake of the changes he described, dates Conceptual art "roughly from 1965 to its temporary disappearance in 1975" (1990: 105). Setting out what rapidly became an orthodoxy, Buchloch tied Conceptual art not only to language-centric practices but also to the specific interrogation of language on which Joseph Kosuth's work had first been founded. He states:

> the proposal inherent in conceptual art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as analytic proposition), it thus constituted the most consequential assault on the status of the object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution [. . .] they performed the post war period's most rigorous investigation of the conventions of the pictorial and sculptural representation and a critique of the traditional paradigms of visuality. 107

Buchloch's summary captures the clarity and complexity that flows from an identification of Conceptual art as a linguistic-critical turn, in which the linguistic basis of artworks is demonstrated, conceptualised, and interrogated; sometimes positioning texts as the work, at other times in anticipation or in place of the work. It is a characterisation compelling not only in describing the trajectory of Anglo-American Conceptual art but also in capturing a distinct condensation of concerns and practices that can be differentiated from its precursors. Thus, Buchloch identifies Ed Ruscha's bookworks, such as *Twentysix Gasoline*

Stations (1962), Robert Morris' *Card File* (1962), and Sol LeWitt's "structures" of the early 1960s as "proto-Conceptual work" (1990: 111) and specifies the inauguration of a specifically linguistic Conceptual art and its limits in work by Kosuth and its elaboration by Lawrence Weiner, and others. Based on this definition, one might also identify early works of Conceptual art that were influential in advance of the broader currency of the term or idea, including Robert Smithson's *A heap of Language* (1966) and Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966–7), both of which provide a point of definition against which subsequent performance strategies can be read. It is a direction over language and the document also signalled in Mel Bochner's installation of four identical ring-binders, copies of *Working Documents and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art* (1966) at the School of Visual Arts, New York. Comprising the first recorded use of Xeroxed material in an art installation, and in advance of Siegelaub's *The Xerox Book*, Bochner's work opens specific questions taken forward in Conceptual art more broadly: the pun between "document" as noun and verb implicit in the use of Xerox; the primacy of the copy over the original; the privileging of reading above looking in a gallery context that institutionalises the visual.

Following Buchloch's emphasis, Charles Harrison, the British art historian and, from 1971, editor of *Art-Language*, proposed narrowing the period of Conceptual art further, from Kosuth's showing of the *Proto-Investigations* in 1967 to Art & Language's *Index 01* of 1972. In his first volume of *Essays on Art & Language*, Harrison proposed the installation of *Index 01* at the 1972 Documenta in Kassel, as the "summary work of Conceptual art" (2001: 75). Harrison argues that "it was only during that five-year period that a critically significant Conceptual Art movement could be said to be in existence as such" (29), in an implicit dismissal of conceptualism and explicit rejection of other claims to Conceptual art. In doing so, Harrison also conflates the history of Conceptual art with Art & Language's developing ideological critique, which departed from Kosuth's early linguistic model despite Kosuth's association with Art & Language from as early as 1969. Thus, regarding the west coast North American work that explicitly embraced performance, Harrison limited his reference to "A distinctly 'Californian' variety of Conceptual art [that] distilled the ethos of a wistfully agnostic hippiedom" (47): a statement that provides a useful measure of cultural, aesthetic, and political differences across the continuum of conceptual practices at that time. Yet, while focusing on language as a means of disruption and critique of the assumptions and exclusions of visual art, Art & Language's work also exemplified an engagement with the performative and performance; a feature not lost on Harrison but which stands outside the political imperatives of his account. For Harrison, as for Art & Language more broadly, it is the function and efficacy of Conceptual art as an ideological critique of an otherwise prevailing Modernism that provides its sense. Without this imperative, Conceptual art

becomes symptomatic of the very "Conditions of Problems" (2001: 82) that Art & Language's practices sought to unveil and correct.

These divergent views were acknowledged by North American west coast artists, such as Tom Marioni, who were nevertheless clear about the identity of their own work as Conceptual art, contemporaneously with Art & Language's reach extending into New York. In 2013, Marioni recalled that just as California Minimalism had been derided as "finish fetish" by east coast critics because of its use of colours and plastics, so:

> Joseph Kosuth said that John Baldessari's art wasn't Conceptual art, it was a cartoon of Conceptual art. And New York, they dismiss California as being – not serious […] Mel Bochner said that Larry Bell was just Sol LeWitt with colour […] there was no colour in Conceptual art because it was always about language and systems and theory. If it was about colour, it was painting.
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> *2013: 45–6*

Yet in further identifying Conceptual art's linguistic challenge to the art object with "the work of art as analytic proposition," Buchloch nevertheless opened the history of Conceptual art out to performativity and performance. In their very concentration on language, these strategies open to perceived and practised tensions and contradictions, observed by Art & Language themselves, in this case Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, and Mel Ramsden. In a later collective paper addressing the constraints and consequences of periodisation, published in 1997, they argued that:

> Conceptual Art does not correspond *tout court* to some sort of linguistic turn in artistic practice. It does represent an appropriation of certain dialogic and discursive mechanisms by artists who sought thereby to critically empower themselves and others, and to that limited extent it represents a linguistic turn. But Conceptual Art did not reduce (or attempt to reduce) the pictorial to the linguistic (or textual). The point is, rather, that the gaps and connections, the lemmas and absurdities between the pictorial and the textual, are spaces in which much cultural aggravation was and is possible.
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> *Art & Language 1999: 445*

Such "aggravation" is evident, also, in contemporaneous, contrasting approaches to language as a description and document of events. Other, early exhibitions on the North American west coast explored the gaps opened by an emphasis on the document, description, or other interpretations of the "absence" of a work implicitly occurring over time. In April 1969, the San Francisco Art Institute opened an exhibition of "Conceptual Art" (Anon 1969) *18′6″* × *6′9″* × *11'2 1/2* ″ × *47′113/16″* × *29″8 1/2″* × *31′9 3/16″* in a rotation of "proposals" by 15 artists.

Opening with work by Barry, Huebler, and Weiner; then in rotation with Stephen Kaltenbach, Dennis Oppenheim, and others, including Kosuth, Barry Le Va, James Lee Byars, and Iain Baxter, who required "the photographic documentation of the entire volume of the empty gallery" (SFAI 1969). Subtitled "Touring Exhibition of Documentary Materials etc." and comprising, Fred Martin, then President of SFAI, suggested of "only the residue of their deeds in that room, and our thoughts and judgments of our experience of that residue" (Martin 1969), the exhibition borrowed its title describing the dimensions of the SFAI Diego Gallery from Oppenheim's contribution, in which:

> The exact dimensions of the S.F.A.I. gallery was etched in an abandoned oil field and photographically documented and mapped. The second part photographically documents Oppenheim's chance discovery of wooden forms in the snow which represents a scaled-down replica of the same gallery.
>
> *SFAI 1969*

For Oppenheim, such displacements, linked also to his land and earth art, promised another form of dematerialisation whereby "you can't see the work, you can't have the work, you can't buy the work" (Oppenheim and Kaye 1996: 66). In his subsequent "conceptual/performance," Oppenheim transposed these tactics towards acts and performances that produced and were seen only or primarily in the documents or remains they generated.

Contemporaneously, Tom Marioni's inauguration of the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) in the then run down area South of Market Street (SoMA) of San Francisco in April 1970, which preceded the opening of *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* in New York in August, had been announced as "a museum for actions and situational art" (Foley and Lewallen 1981: 33). MOCA's opening exhibition, *Sound Sculpture As*, comprised time-based, ephemeral actions executed over a single evening. Artists directly associated with MOCA such as Terry Fox, Paul Kos, David Ireland, and Bonnie Ora Sherk also engaged in performance-based work that in multiple ways reflected Marioni's framing of Conceptual art as "idea-oriented situations not directed at the production of static objects" (2000: 10). At the time of Oppenheim's engagement with "conceptual/performance," Vito Acconci, Adrian Piper, Linda Mary Montano, Bas Jan Ader, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles also cast the idea and framework of "performance" over otherwise unseen, unacknowledged activities, or events otherwise in disappearance. In San Francisco, Lynn Hershman Leeson's *The Roberta Breitmore Series* (1974–8) involved Hershman Leeson's acting out of her alter-ego in the city, then evidencing her "breathing simulacrumed persona" (Hershman Leeson 1994) in photographs, objects, recordings of "real" interactions, and other traces. Performance, in these instances, was integral to the practices of a self-conscious Conceptual art at the time of its broader historical coalescence. Many of these performances explored language as a medium and frame for events, into which they incorporated personal