

Introduction to Information

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

source: 'Introduction to Information' Kynaston Mcshine, introduction text to the catalogue for the exhibiton Information at Museum of Modern Art, New York 1970

Insertions in Ideological Circuits

When, in a philosophical definition of his work, Marcel Duchamp stated that, among other things, his aim was to free "art from the dominion of the hand," he certainly did not imagine the point we would come to in 1970. Something that at first sight could easily be located and effectively combated tends nowadays to be located in an area that is hard to access and to apprehend: the brain.

It is clear that Duchamp's phrase is an example, now, of a lesson that has not been learnt correctly. Duchamp fought not so much against the dominion of hands as against manual craftsmanship and, in short, against the gradual emotional, rational and psychological lethargy that this mechanicalness, this habituation would inevitably produce in the individual. The fact that one's hands are not soiled with art means nothing except that one's hands are clean.

Rather than against manifestations of a phenomenon, the fight is against the logic of that phenomenon. What one can see nowadays is a certain relief and a certain delight at not using one's hands. As if things were finally OK. As if at this specific moment, people did not need to start fighting against a much bigger opponent: the habits and handiwork of the brain.

Source: Insertions in Ideological Circuits, Cildo Meireles, "Perspectivas para uma Arte Brasileira," 1970

Sales of Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility

Yves Klein, Cession de zone de sensibilité picturale immatérielle, cession à M. Blankfort/Série no.4, zone 01, Paris, 2 février, 1962

As part of the work a numbered receipt was 'exchanged' with an art collector for 20 grams of fine gold. The receipt was burned, the gold was thrown into the river.

The Dematerialisation of Art

During the 1960's the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making characteristic of the last two decades have begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. As more and more work is designed in the studio but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen, as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the

object's becoming wholly obsolete.

Source: The Dematerialisation of Art

Lucy R. Lippard, an essay published in Art International 12:2 (February 1968)

Reconsidering Conceptual Art

One of the recurring characteristics in much art that is referred to as conceptual art is the consideration of every one of the constituting elements of the artwork as equal components. In the process, the valuation of technical manual skill is largely (if not entirely) abandoned, as well as the notion of an original, cohesive work. In turn, serial and highly schematic structures emerge, placing the inherently hierarchical concept of quality under duress. The second trajectory, what can be termed "reductivism," will push the conventional objectness of the artwork towards the threshold of a complete dematerialization. Increasingly, in works following this strand, the visual elements of an artwork are challenged, the prominence of text expands, and the degree to which viewing is dependent upon the contingent and contextual elements becomes a focal point. The negation of aesthetic content marks a third genealogy of conceptualism. This is an antecedent that can ultimately be traced back to the work of Marcel Duchamp and which, by way of a series of mediations throughout the twentieth century, places art at the threshold of information. The fourth trajectory that leads to conceptual art is one that problematizes placement. Here, the subject of the work becomes both a reflection on the conventions that will frame it or situate it, and a self-questioning of how it will be communicated or displayed. Among the results of this lineage will be the melding of the work with the surrounding architectural environment, and its integration within the context of publicity (including newspapers, magazines, books, even advertisement billboards). In its broadest possible definition, then, the conceptual in art means an expanded critique of the cohesiveness and materiality of the art object, a growing wariness towards definitions of artistic practice as purely visual, a fusion of the work with its site and context of display, and an increased emphasis on the possibilities of publicness and distribution.

Source: Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977
Alexander Alberro, Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology, MIT Press 1999

Joseph Schillinger, a minor American Cubist who wrote, over a twenty-five year period, an often extraordinary book called The Mathematical Basis of the Arts, divided the historical evolution of art into five "zones," which replace each other with increasing acceleration: 1. preaesthetic, a biological stage of mimicry; 2. traditional-aesthetic, a magic, ritual-religious art; 3. emotional-aesthetic, artistic expressions of emotions, self-expression, art for art's sake; 4. rational-aesthetic, characterized by empiricism, experimental art, novel art; 5. scientific, post-aesthetic, which will make possible the manufacture, distribution and consumption of a perfect art product and will be characterized by a fusion of the art forms and materials, and, finally, a "disintegration of art", the "abstraction and liberation of the idea."

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Anathemas have been hurled since the middle of the last century against the industrial civilization in the name of emotional life. To claim that Industry's means of production have damaging emotional effects is to recognize it as an important moral force – even in the denunciation of its demoralizing influence. How does it come to this power? Only in that the very act of an object's fabrication questions its own purpose. What is the difference between the use of appliance-like objects and the use of objects produced by art, which are useless for our subsistence? No one would think to confuse an appliance with a simulacrum. Unless the object could be of use only as a simulacrum.

– Pierre Klossowski, The Living Currency (La Monnaie vivante) (Paris: Losfeld, 1970).