



FKW // ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG UND VISUELLE KULTUR

NR. 77 // JULI 2026

**TO BE SEEN, HEARD, READ:
ARTISTIC PUBLISHING AS CRITICAL ART PRACTICE**

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004–005 // **FKW-Redaktion**
EDITORIAL

006–019 // **Kathrin Barutzki & Franziska Rauh**
INTRODUCTION //
TO BE SEEN, HEARD, READ: ARTISTIC PUBLISHING AS CRITICAL ART PRACTICE

ARTIKEL

020–035 // **Anne-Grit Becker**
CORRESPONDING PROPOSITIONS: LYGIA CLARK AND DAVID MEDALLA

036–050 // **Marie van Bömmel**
POSING AS A CATALOGUE, ACTING LIKE AN ARTISTS' BOOK: *KÜNSTLERINNEN INTERNATIONAL 1877–1977*

051–065 // **Marie Egger**
SHARED UTOPIAS. TOMASZ SCHULZ'S COOP-BOOKS (1979–1988) IN THE CONTEXT OF MAIL ART

066–079 // **Corinna Kühn**
MAIL ART ACTIVITIES AS ARTISTIC TACTICS: EWA PARTUM'S AND RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT'S INFRASTRUCTURES
WITHIN THE MAIL ART NETWORK

080–094 // **Sandra Križić Roban**
DOUBLE, INVISIBLE, HAND-MADE, EXPERIMENTAL: BOOKS AND MAGAZINES AS WORKS OF CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS FROM
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

095–103 // **Mela Dávila Freire**
"THINKING IS A REVOLUTIONARY ACT": ARTIST'S PUBLICATIONS BY MARIE ORENSANZ

104–115 // **Regine Ehleiter**
MATERIALIZING ABSENCE, ABSENT MATERIALS: MIRTHA DERMISACHE, ROLAND BARTHES, AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLISHING

116–126 // **Francesca Valentini**
MATERIALITY AND SONORITY IN THE WORK OF GIULIA NICCOLAI AND PATRIZIA VICINELLI

EDITION

127–128 // **Doris Weinberger**
PRAYER TO ARTEMIS

REZENSION

129–134 // **Ian Clewe & Camille Parker**

BOOKS AND GUTS AT COLOGNE UNIVERSITY:

AN ARTISTS' REVIEW OF THE INSTITUTIONAL LIFE OF THE KATHY ACKER READING ROOM
AS EXPERIENCED BY IAN CLEWE & CAMILLE PARKER

135–139 // **Leonie Schuster**

BUCHHOLZ, AMREI / FUENTES VEGA, ALICIA / KLOSS-WEBER, JULIA (EDS.) (2025):

TURNING THE MIRROR. GENDERED ART HISTORIES OF IBERO-AMERICA AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA,
BERLIN AND BOSTON, DE GRUYTER

NACHRUF

140–149 // **Sigrid Schade**

ANSTELLE EINES NACHRUFES. REFLEXIONEN ANLÄSSLICH DES TODES VON PROF. DR. DANIELA HAMMER-TUGENDHAT

// Cover

View into the collection holdings of the Centre for Artists' Publications in the Weserburg, Bremen.

Photo: Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen.

EDITORIAL

Liebe Leser*innen,

das Heft Nr. 77 der *FKW//Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* widmet sich Künstler*innenpublikationen als eigenständigen Medien künstlerischer Praxis. Besonders seit den 1950er Jahren experimentieren Kunstschaaffende weltweit mit diesen oftmals mobilen, reproduzierbaren und vergleichsweise erschwinglichen Formaten. Im Vergleich zu den kanonischen Kunstformen wie Malerei, Skulptur, Grafik oder Architektur wurden und werden Künstler*innenpublikationen jedoch verhältnismäßig wenig erforscht. Anlässlich des 25-jährigen Jubiläums des Forschungsverbunds Künstlerpublikationen, der sich seit seiner Gründung um Grundlagenforschung in dem Feld bemüht, fand 2024 eine internationale Tagung in Bremen statt, deren Ziel es war, aktuelle Forschungsperspektiven von (Nachwuchs-)Wissenschaftler*innen zu Künstler*innenpublikationen zusammenzubringen. Dabei stand insbesondere das dem künstlerischen Publizieren inhärente kritische Potenzial im Fokus. Die vorliegende Ausgabe versammelt nun unter dem Titel *To Be Seen, Heard, Read: Artistic Publishing as Critical Art Practice* die überarbeiteten Beiträge der Tagung.

Wir bedanken uns herzlich bei allen Autor*innen sowie bei der Künstlerin Doris Weinberger für die begleitende Edition. Ebenso gilt unser Dank den Autor*innen der beiden Rezensionen, welche die Tagungsbeiträge ergänzen. Karl Hoffmann danken wir für seine große Unterstützung durch das englische Korrektorat, Fabian Brunke von Zwo.Acht für die Gestaltung des Bandes.

Besonders danken wir zudem Sigrid Schade für ihre Reflexionen anlässlich des Todes von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat am 17. September 2025. Mit ihren wegweisenden Beiträgen zu feministischen Fragestellungen, von denen einige auch in der *FKW* erschienen sind, war Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat für die Zeitschrift stets eine wichtige Ideengeberin sowie prägende intellektuelle Orientierung. Nicht zuletzt ihr universitätspolitisches Engagement ermöglichte Generationen von Studierenden und jungen Forschenden überhaupt erst den Zugang zu kunst- und kulturwissenschaftlicher Geschlechterforschung. Wir gedenken ihrer in großer Verbundenheit und Wertschätzung.

Die Herbstausgabe 2026 *FKW* Nr. 78 mit dem Titel *Jewish Visual Culture. Bilder des Jüdischen in Kunst und Medien* widmet sich einem gegenwärtig emergierenden Bereich kunst-, kultur- und medienwissenschaftlicher Forschung vor der Folie der *Jewish Visual Culture Studies*. Das von Alma-Elisa Kittner und Véronique Sina herausgegebene Heft versammelt interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur kulturellen und historischen Konstruktion sowie diskursiven Re-Produktion künstlerisch-medialer Bilder *des Jüdischen*. Der transdisziplinäre Ansatz der *Jewish Visual Culture Studies* verbindet kunst-, kultur-, film- und medienwissenschaftliche Perspektiven mit repräsentations- und diskriminierungskritischen Ansätzen etwa aus den Postcolonial, Gender und Queer Studies. Ziel ist es, Formen von Ein- und Ausschlüssen in Kunst und visueller Kultur zu analysieren und tradierte Wahrnehmungs- und Darstellungsmodelle sowie gesellschaftliche Machtdimensionen kritisch zu hinterfragen. In Bezug auf die Bilder *des Jüdischen* untersuchen die Beiträge im Heft etwa die Wiener Tanzmoderne als intersektionale Jewish Visual History, die Konstruktion der *schönen Jüdin* oder mediale Inszenierungen *des Jüdischen* in Berlin und der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft.

Das folgende Heft *FKW* Nr. 79 *Leaking Relations: Watery Worlds and Migrations in the Arts* möchte Perspektiven und Herausforderungen relationaler Ökologien im Spannungsfeld von Kunst und Migration zur Diskussion stellen. Die Ausgabe wird von Lena Bader, Birgit Hopfener und Mona Schieren in Zusammenarbeit mit der AG Kunstproduktion und Kunsttheorie im Zeichen globaler Migration (Ulmer Verein e.V.) herausgegeben; sie erscheint im Frühjahr 2027.

Leider müssen wir uns von Julia Noah Munier verabschieden, die aus der Redaktion der *FKW* ausgeschieden ist. Für ihr Engagement als Redaktionsmitglied (seit 2021) möchten wir ihr herzlich danken und wünschen ihr für zukünftige Projekte alles Gute. Als neues Mitglied der Redaktion dürfen wir Elena Zanichelli sehr herzlich begrüßen. Sie ist Kunsthistorikerin und Professorin für Kunst der Moderne und Gegenwart an der Philipps-Universität Marburg und hat die Publikationstätigkeit der *FKW* bereits als Gast-Herausgeberin des Hefts Nr. 70 (2022): *WIE:// SPRECHEN WIR #FEMINISMUS?// NEUE GLOBALE HERAUSFORDERUNGEN – EIN GLOSSAR* bereichert. Wir freuen uns auf die Zusammenarbeit.

Wir wünschen eine inspirierende und anregende Lektüre!

Kathrin Barutzki (Gast-Herausgeberin) & Franziska Rauh (für die *FKW*-Redaktion)

INTRODUCTION //

TO BE SEEN, HEARD, READ: ARTISTIC PUBLISHING AS CRITICAL ART PRACTICE

In art history as well as in the broader art world, artistic publications have long been regarded merely as marginal phenomena in the work of many artists.¹⁾ This issue of *FKW* focuses on those published, often small-format and reproducible art forms such as books, magazines, posters, Mail Art, and multiples. From various research perspectives, it particularly highlights the critical potential of artistic publishing practices as alternative forms of art production and distribution. The collected texts are revised and expanded contributions to the international conference that took place at the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Bremen on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Research Association Artists' Publications in June 2024.²⁾

RESEARCH ASSOCIATION ARTISTS' PUBLICATIONS — The Research Association was initiated in 1999 as an interdisciplinary network that has since then been dedicated to the study of artworks appearing in a published or reproduced form. Its members come from a range of disciplinary, professional, and practice-based backgrounds, including literary studies, art and cultural history, the visual arts, archiving and collecting, as well as curatorial practice. The research cooperation is institutionally supported and financially sponsored by the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, the University of the Arts Bremen, the University of Bremen, and the Research Centre for East European Studies attached to it.

— From the onset, the Research Association has been closely connected, both in content-related and conceptual terms, to the previously founded Centre for Artists' Publications at the Neues Museum Weserburg (today's Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst) and its holdings. The cornerstone of this collection was the acquisition of the Archive for Small Press & Communication (ASPC) of the Belgian collector and exhibition-maker Guy Schraenen. As a guest curator, Schraenen had already been presenting his large collection of artists' books at the Weserburg for several years as a "museum within a museum" (Thurmann-Jajes 2011: 17), before the collection was transferred to the holdings of the institution in 1999 and established as a separate department, the Study Centre for Artists' Publications.³⁾ Today, the institution, which was renamed to Centre for Artists' Publications, houses more than 300,000 published works

1)
More than twenty years ago, the art historian and critic Abigail Solomon-Godeau observed that the "artists' book is an integrally marginal form. Few critics write about them, even fewer specialize in them, and they are rarely the subject of museum exhibitions" (Solomon-Godeau 2004: 184). Over a decade later, in 2015, the literary scholar Annette Gilbert, for example, identified a proliferation of such artistic forms of publishing and sought "to push publishing into the center of aesthetic and academic discourses" (Gilbert 2016: 7). Yet even today, a discrepancy remains between the enthusiasm for publishing practices within the art field (and increasingly within exhibition contexts) and the comparatively limited scholarly engagement with them.

2)
Artists' Publications – A Critical Approach to Historical and Contemporary Formats of Artistic Publishing, June 28–29, 2024: Centre for Artists' Publications at the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen. A project by the Research Association Artists' Publications and the Centre for Artists' Publications at the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Bremen in cooperation with the IKFK. Institute for Art History – Film Studies – Art Education and the Mariann Steegmann Institut. Kunst & Gender at the University of Bremen.

3)
During this time, more than 30 exhibitions and a catalogue series with 25 editions were developed and supervised by Schraenen and his assistant curator Bettina Brach. The acquisition and conception of the study center took place in close cooperation between the Weserburg and the University of Bremen, namely by Anne Thurmann-Jajes, reviewing the museum's collection at the time, and Sigrid Schade, Professor for Art History and Aesthetic Theory at the University of Bremen between 1994 and 2005. The founding of the Research Association Artists' Publications also mainly owed to their commitment.

of art by more than 27,000 artists from around the world—ranging from stamps, to books, films, videos, and records, all the way to multimedia editions. With its more than 100 archive and collection holdings, it thus ranks internationally as one of the most significant archives for artists' publications. The second starting point of the activities of the Research Association was the archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies, which since 1982 has placed its collection focus on documents, objects, and images from the informal cultures of Eastern Europe, which were often self-published (samizdat) to avoid censorship.⁴⁾

— Based on these two holdings, while also drawing on other archives and collections, the Research Association seeks to advance and disseminate foundational research on artists' publications and their cultural, historical, and media-related contexts. Over the past 25 years, an international network of researchers has thus emerged, leading to cooperative research projects, public lectures and talks, university seminars, workshops, and symposiums, as well as exhibitions (conceived together with students) and publications. Particularly significant is the series for artists' publications, featuring not only anthologies on artistic publishing but also dissertations, thereby supporting emerging scholars.

CONFERENCE / PROCEEDINGS — The original idea for the anniversary conference of the Research Association, the contributions of which are brought together here, was to build on the network's previous activities and to gain insights into current research on artistic publishing. The call also specifically addressed early-career researchers and was deliberately kept open; proposals dealing with the critical potential of artists' publications were particularly encouraged, since this potential constitutes a central dimension of artistic publishing, manifesting itself not only in content but also in media-specific and formal strategies. The strikingly strong focus of the submissions on women artists engaged in artistic publishing pointed both to a research gap and to a shared interest among the contributors. We took this impulse into account when selecting the conference papers, and it also informed our collaboration with the Mariann-Steegmann Institut Kunst & Gender, ultimately resulting in this issue of *FKW*.

— The authors' research interest coincides with the current heightened attention given to female artists in the exhibition context, mainly historical positions, which is also evident in the field of artists' publications.⁵⁾ Their publishing-based work is increasingly being presented in large-scale institutional shows as well, like the

4)

For more information on the origin and the current holdings of the Centre for Artists' Publications and the Research Centre for East European Studies, see: <https://weserburg.de/zentrum-fuer-kuenstlerpublikationen/>, <https://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/> (accessed May 20, 2026).

5)

See, for example, *Off-Register: Publishing Experiments by Women Artists in Latin America, 1960–1990* at the New York Center of Book Arts in 2023, curated and edited by Mela Dávila Freire, as well as the exhibition *Mirtha Dermisache: To Be Read*, curated by Regine Ehleiter in 2024 in the spaces of A–Z in Berlin, whose title inspired us to the title of this issue of *FKW*.

retrospectives of Yoko Ono at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (2024/25) and of Lygia Clark at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2025), or the presentation of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's work at the *documenta* 14 (2017). In this way, these forms gain (renewed) visibility as independent artistic formats, potentially enabling further critical and discursive engagement.

— On the one hand, the curatorial fascination with works by women artists should be viewed positively, particularly in light of the current conservative backlash and associated political attacks on gender studies at universities.⁶⁾ On the other hand, this increased engagement also gives cause for skepticism: Does the attention given to a select few female positions translate into broader representation in exhibitions and collections, or into an improvement of their economic situation in general? Does it indicate a transformation of the patriarchal power structures within the art world, or merely a form of market-driven exploitation? Moreover, the frequently invoked gendered trope of the “rediscovery” of forgotten women artists obscures the fact that their absence from art historiography was the result of deliberate exclusion; it also negates the previous achievements of feminist scholarship on these artists and their work (Nugent 2023). Against this backdrop, the demands as they have been expressed since the 1970s by art historians such as Linda Nochlin (1971), Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker (1981), as well as Nanette Solomon (1991) are still highly relevant today: Instead of simply adding to the existing canon and engaging in a mainly biographical manner with women artists, thereby marking them as exceptions and perpetuating their status as such within art history, what is needed is a structural, intersectional analysis of the institutional and social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, particularly through a critical examination of the discipline itself.⁷⁾

— Taking this as a point of departure, we basically understand the interest of the participating authors as a valuable expansion of research on artistic publishing. This issue seeks to bring their perspectives and the forms of publication they have unearthed and examined into dialogue with the debates in gender studies, for which *FKW* serves as a central platform. The contributions' common ground, however, does not lie solely in the artists' (perceived) gender. Rather, it is the practices and strategies of producing and disseminating artists' publications—and their inherent critical potential—that closely align with *FKW*'s power-critical perspective on visual culture and its institutional frameworks.

6)

The chairwoman of the German right-wing AfD, Alice Weidel, for instance, declared at the party convention on January 18, 2025, that they would shut down all gender studies institutes if the AfD were to form the government. <https://www.fg-gender.de/angriffen-auf-die-freiheit-von-forschung-und-lehre-entschlossen-entgegenzutreten/> (accessed June 11, 2026).

But also outside the AfD, an increase in anti-feminist attacks on the field of gender studies can be observed since the turn of the millennium. See: Hark and Villa (2025), Einwächter (2022), and Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2025).

7)

For discussions in the German-speaking context—Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—see Zimmermann (2018). Following the 3rd Conference of Women Art Historians (Kunsthistorikerinnentagung) held in Vienna in 1986, the journal *FKW* (then titled *Frauen Kunst Wissenschaft*) was established as an independent forum for scholarly exchange which documents the subsequent development of debates surrounding gender-specific issues. See also Sigrid Schade's contribution in this issue, published on the occasion of the death of Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat.

ARTISTIC PUBLISHING AND ITS INHERENT CRITICAL POTENTIAL

Since the 1950s, artists' publications have been produced foremost as aesthetic forms of expression and as materializations of a conception of art that has become increasingly widespread, particularly in response to technological innovations and moments of social, cultural, and political transformation.⁸⁾ This development was significantly driven by a younger generation of artists who were interested less in traditional art forms than in ideas and processes as well as in breaking open rigid genre boundaries and hierarchies in the art world. For them, concepts and actions took precedence over style and the *one* unique object as an object of art and consumption. Dichotomies such as high and low art or art and life were called into question and dissolved: many artists increasingly reflected on and integrated pop-cultural products and aesthetics alongside everyday actions and objects into their works. They shifted the traditional understanding of authorship—tied to a singular creative genius—to the assumption that art production and reception should be conceived above all as relational, process-oriented, and collective, and as substantially determined by the participation of the audience.

Concrete and Visual Poetry, Pop Art, Happenings and Action Art, Fluxus, Conceptual Art, Performance, Land Art, and Minimalism formed the historical and ideologically heterogeneous background against which artists increasingly turned to new media and experimental forms and formats of publishing. The greater accessibility of communication technologies and systems since the mid-20th century functioned as a catalyst for the mass-media dissemination of artistic and activist content (Frohne 2013: 38–43). The unprecedented possibilities of recording and reproducing opened up unimagined potentials for the expansion and spreading of art and/as information, contributing to new forms of audience participation and activation.⁹⁾

As the heyday of artistic publishing, the 1960s and 1970s were shaped by the idea of artistic freedom and autonomy to circumvent aesthetic norms and institutional restrictions of an increasingly commercialized art world (Moeglin-Delcroix 2016): During this time, artists' publications were produced worldwide, including books, magazine contributions, periodicals, and Mail Art formats such as postcards, as well as mobile exhibition formats that blurred the boundaries between exhibition and publication: editions in boxes, exhibition catalogues in the form of index cards or bulletins.¹⁰⁾ They were predominantly produced in large editions, which were usually neither numbered nor signed; low-cost production by means of DIY methods and inexpensive, partially also found mate-

8)

In 1977, the artist Howardena Pindell, for example, published a comprehensive overview of artists' periodicals that had appeared in North America and Europe until then. It also included precursors since the year 1900 (Pindell 1977). For a general overview on artists' publications, see also: Drucker 2004, Schade and Thurmann-Jajes 2009, Moeglin-Delcroix 2011, Clive Phillpot 2013.

9)

The *Instruction Pieces* by Yoko Ono—which can be categorized between poem and score—can be regarded as a prime example of this. They are artistic instructions on viewing the world and becoming active in it, published as a collection for the first time in *Grapefruit* in 1964.

10)

In New York in 1970, Marian Goodman and her publishing house Multiples, Inc. issued a collaborative artists' edition in the form of a box, which simultaneously functioned as a mobile group exhibition: in a relatively large edition of officially 1,200 copies, *Artists & Photographs* brings together 19 artistic positions from Pop, Conceptual, Land, and Minimal Art from Western Europe and the United States. In 1973, Lucy Lippard published her now long iconic "cross reference book" *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, in which numerous publishing formats in art at the time are listed and commented on.

rials (texts, photos, newspapers etc.), and affordable, anti-commercial distribution were at the core. Such artworks based on different dimensions of ephemerality challenged the market's notion of value and exclusivity.¹¹⁾

— Alongside these emerging artistic practices and forms in artistic publishing, new spaces for presentation and distribution emerged, often run by artists and supported by like-minded critics, art historians, and independent curators. At a distance from established museums and commercial galleries, the publications were presented and distributed in small, self-organized art bookstores, galleries, project and publishers' spaces. Their circulation was based on local, national, and transnational networks connecting these newly formed infrastructures.¹²⁾ As a mobile form of art, artists' publications themselves functioned as alternatives to the privileged exhibition space, enabling more direct and contingent forms of contacts as well as a more intimate and activating relationship between object and audience. In the form of magazines, they additionally offered space for documenting and reviewing the artists' ideas and practices, beyond the dominant leading media such as *Artforum*.¹³⁾ However, periodicals were not only viewed as a site for documentation or exhibition, but as the event itself (Pindell 1980: 282).¹⁴⁾

— Establishing independent infrastructures served the artists not only as a means of distinction, but also as a structural necessity, as the established art-world institutions remained oriented toward classical modernism and provided only limited support and visibility for artists' publications (Thurmann-Jajes 2004: 62). Yet there were exceptions already early on: individual exhibitions and the founding of the first archives and special collections, which integrated these new art forms into their holdings or used them as a starting point for new collection focuses.¹⁵⁾

— Notably, it was especially women who turned to artistic publishing in order to circumvent the structural marginalization with which they, as artists, art historians, or curators, were otherwise confronted within the field: for example, the future renowned gallerist Marian Goodman co-founded the publishing house Multiples, Inc., with a few colleagues in New York in the mid-1960s after realizing that, at the time, she would not be able to secure a curatorial position in a museum because of her gender. (Glenn 1998: 45). Lucy Lippard, one of the few (freelance) curators and critics to have consistently reviewed and presented artists' books by women, also emphasized that feminist artists in particular used the books as "vehicles of propaganda" to spread their political message (Lippard 1977: 77). And decades later, Abigail Solomon-Godeau postulated

11)

In contrast, there were also so-called book art works, as well as unique artist's books or book objects produced in small editions, which were often more expensive to produce and handmade.

12)

At the end of the 1960s, George Wittenborn's bookstore in New York was the place to go for European art literature and artists' publications. Walther König, who had worked with Wittenborn, played a decisive role in Cologne and beyond where he founded his own bookstore in 1969 and started disseminating international artists' publications in Europe; from 1976 onwards, with the founding of the non-commercial organization Printed Matter, there was then a central location for the presentation and exchange of artistic print formats in New York. Even before that, women active in the art world—such as Rosa Esman with Tanglewood Press, Marian Goodman and her colleagues at Multiples Inc., and Toiny Castelli, who ran Castelli Graphics—had been key promoters of these new, reproducible art forms (Barutzki 2025: pp. 73–111, in particular pp. 91–92). The establishment, expansion, and reorganization of infrastructures (archives, libraries, collections) as well as an institutional localization associated with this can be exemplarily observed at the following places and institutions: Something Else Press, as early as 1964 in NY/Chelsea; Archive for Small Press and Publication, Antwerp, 1974; Artpool, Budapest, 1979; Bookie Wookie, Amsterdam, 1986.

13)

With regard to their appearance, some artists' magazines imitated the glossy look of *Artforum* and others or pursued more unconventional forms and a DIY aesthetic. For more information on the format of artists' magazines, see Allen 2011.

14)

In the case of unfolding posters, Leporello fold-outs, or paper objects that can be assembled, the work is only fully realized when the recipients unfold, open, or build them.

that in her opinion particularly feminists and other politically motivated persons have dealt with the possibilities of artistic publishing in the most creative ways. “The book,” Solomon-Godeau goes on to cite the art critic Kate Linker “has provided space for women and special interest; for ‘marginal’ art with little financial value, and for artists geographically removed from regional commercial centers” (Solomon-Godeau 2004: 185). Therefore, artists’ publications were not always, but quite frequently, spaces for otherwise marginalized content and political protest, in which critique of the media and critique of society often intersected. They were used to address both the causes they advocated as well as the respective communities, to facilitate communication within them, or to constitute them in the first place. With regard to samizdat publications from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc or those produced within the context of state dictatorships in Latin America at the time, the distinction between “making public” and “making a public” gained special relevance (Gilbert 2016: 25–27, Thurmann-Jajes 2004: 75–76).¹⁶⁾

— Today, publishing is an integral component of artistic practice, as well as of collecting and exhibition-making.¹⁷⁾ The often critical, nonconformist impetus of the 1960s and 1970s has increasingly been absorbed by market logics and capitalist structures. Yet, even in its early days, a discrepancy can be observed between the utopian aspiration to provide an alternative to the art world and its actual conditions. As Gilbert has argued, the binary opposition underlying this assumption is itself questionable (Gilbert 2016: 16). Moreover, those supposedly alternative spaces were often only perceived within the artists’ own circles (Thurmann-Jajes 2004: 72 and 77/78). Even at the time, contemporaries themselves already questioned the political effectiveness of artistic publishing as a means of addressing broader and more diverse audiences. This is reflected in Lippard’s somewhat cautious characterization of such works as “potentially ‘democratic’” (Lippard 1985: 50).

— However, published artistic formats retain their capacity to continually reinvent themselves across decades (Solomon-Godeau 2004: 184). Following the rise of desktop publishing in the 1980s, artists soon began expanding their practice to the internet in the 1990s. Today, platforms such as Instagram and artist websites also function as spaces for the presentation and circulation of artistic work. At the same time, a post-digital trend toward self-publishing can be observed, foregrounding artisanal production processes and the specific material qualities of printed matter. Despite these diverse developments, amid multiple and overlapping crises, artist

15)

Early exhibitions in North America and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s were *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* by Mel Bochner in 1966; “publications as exhibitions,” exhibition projects by Seth Siegelaub and Lucy Lippard with artistic forms of publishing like the *Xerox Book* by Siegelaub and the *Numbers Shows* by Lippard; *Information* at the MoMA in New York in 1970 as early example of an artists’ catalogue as an exhibition catalogue; as well as exhibition and catalogue *When Attitudes become Form* by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969. In the 1970s, institutions such as MoMA in New York began adding artists’ publications to their collections, and starting in the 1990s, this area of the collection was expanded significantly. See also footnote 12.

16)

On samizdat publications, see for example Hänsen (2015).

17)

Books, zines, digital publications, and especially independent fairs (since 2009: Miss Read Berlin; since 2006: New York Art Book Fair; since 2013: LA Art Book Fair; since 2010: Offprint Paris; since 2015: London; since 2012: I Never Read, Basel).

and educator Paul Soulellis, in his essay “Urgent Publishing After the Artist’s Book,” argues that the value of publishing still lies in its capacity “to circulate stories and information in public space,” which he describes as one of the “superpowers of the underserved,” enabling individual empowerment and the formation of global coalitions (Soulellis 2021: 34).

— To sum it up, the inherent critical potential of artistic publishing—particularly since the 1960s—lies not only in the content of the works themselves, but even more so in the alternative forms, infrastructures, and modes of circulation through which they are produced and disseminated. This potential manifests itself in the choice of publication format, aesthetic concept, materiality, as well as in the collaborative structures of production and distribution that are used. By operating relatively independently of established institutional frameworks, artists’ publications have enabled the development of artistic formats that challenge conventional genre boundaries, thus making their ideas publicly accessible in a particular, often mobile form.

ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS — The authors of this issue research, teach, mediate, and curate art and artists’ publications. Drawing on questions of material aesthetics, production, and reception, they examine institutional frameworks of artistic production and reflect on the hegemonic power structures and mechanisms of exclusion within the worlds of exhibiting, publishing, and producing, as well as on existing classifications and canonizations of art. The focus is placed on artistic practices and strategies that subvert established paths of creating, circulating, and presenting art by developing alternative modes, formats, and networks. The contributions engage with material that is often difficult to access, sometimes only to be found in private archives or estates, and that has not yet been systematically examined. The essays combine different approaches: while some articles are more analytical and discourse-oriented, others are more descriptive, reconstructive, and contextualizing.

— The artists’ publications discussed here were produced between the 1960s and 1980s within various political and cultural contexts across Europe and the Americas. Despite these often very different circumstances, significant parallels can be identified in both the artistic approaches and forms of publishing. From the many possible condensations, we propose three thematic focal points that bring the contributions into dialogue with one another and may serve as starting points for further research: (1) Working Through International Networks, (2) Artistic Infrastructures in and

out of Eastern Europe, and (3) Materializing Thought, Language, and Absence.

WORKING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS — The three contributions brought together in this section examine different publishing formats that highlight the crucial role of transnational personal and professional networks in their production. The focus is particularly on the close exchange among creatives such as artists, curators, and publishers. In doing so, the essays illuminate both the collaborative dimension of producing the works and the conceptual interrelations between individual artistic positions, while also reflecting on the conditions that shaped these processes.

— The essay **Corresponding Propositions: Lygia Clark and David Medalla** by Anne-Grit Becker examines a dialogue between the two artists that developed in the mid-1960s across continents: Clark in Brazil and the Philippine artist Medalla in London. Brought into contact via the Signals gallery in London and the eponymous news bulletin—Clark as a contributor, Medalla as the magazine's editor—they became catalysts for each other's creative work. Becker traces the parallels between their approaches to language and form, as well as their active engagement of the audience or readership. It is precisely through the medium of the magazine that they established a direct relationship between the artwork and its viewers, in which individual participation becomes the actual form of artistic expression and, in turn, redefines conventional notions of authorship.

— Marie van Bömmel's case study **Posing as a Catalogue, Acting Like an Artists' Book: *Künstlerinnen international* 1877–1977** reflects on the possibilities and limitations of the catalogue format on the basis of a complex, multi-voiced publication project that accompanied the eponymous exhibition in Berlin in 1977. The author examines the economic and institutional framework conditions, as well as the individual resources and collective working methods of the persons involved, and performs a close reading of selected catalogue contributions. In doing so, she shows how *Künstlerinnen international*, as a feminist network, undermined patriarchal models of artistic practice, curatorial authority, and art-historical canon formation. Instead, it revealed the structural obstacles faced by women artists and developed new forms of self-representation.

— In her essay **Shared Utopias. Tomasz Schulz's COOP-Books (1979–1988) in the Context of Mail Art**, Marie Egger explores a publication medium that emerged from the artist's

personal network. Unlike the magazine and catalogue discussed above, these are collectively produced, unique books. Egger provides the first art-historical analysis of the COOP-Books by the Polish Mail Art artist Tomasz Schulz. Based on detailed readings of selected pages, she demonstrates how the book embodies typical strategies of the international Mail Art network of the time and how the contributors used it to exchange artistic ideas, political views, and insights into their personal lives. Through its collective, collage-like mode of production, the book becomes a mobile site for negotiating the private and/as the political, as well as the attendant web of social relationships.

ARTISTIC INFRASTRUCTURES IN AND OUT OF EASTERN EUROPE — The next two contributions trace the infrastructures in and out of Eastern Europe that were used and specifically established by artists in the context of the Cold War. They analyze alternative spaces and channels for producing and distributing artists' publications, as well as the reception of these artistic print media at the time.

— Corinna Kühn's essay **Mail Art Activities as Artistic Tactics: Ewa Partum's and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's Infrastructures Within the Mail Art Network** examines how women artists were active in the male-dominated Mail Art network in the GDR and Poland in the 1970s. Discussing Partum's traveling Galeria Adres, Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewriter graphics, and the correspondence practices of both artists, the article sheds light on how they appropriated the existing postal infrastructures as well as private and public spaces as exhibition and communication spaces. Their activities circumvented institutional and geopolitical limitations and facilitated transnational artistic exchange behind and across the Iron Curtain. The author argues that the artists' participatory and mobile practices challenged gendered role expectations and opened up new forms of agency, particularly for women artists with caregiving responsibilities.

— Sandra Križić Roban's contribution **Double, Invisible, Handmade, Experimental: Books and Magazines as Works of Conceptual Artists from the Former Yugoslavia** provides insights into the art practice of publishing that emerged in former Yugoslavia between the late 1960s and the early 1980s as a form of artistic exchange and counter-positions to canonized conceptions of art. The often collaboratively created publications, such as magazines and books, were produced in limited editions or as unique copies, originally intended for a close circle of friends and colleagues, where they circulated as mobile sites of exhibition and discourse.

Roban focuses on their material fragility, conceptual design, and institutional distance, highlighting the use of found, inexpensive materials, the reduction of language, and non-commercial distribution. On this basis, she turns to economic and ecological questions that also reflect on the current context of reception.

MATERIALIZING THOUGHT, LANGUAGE, AND ABSENCE — The last three contributions address the necessity of publishing as an act of self-expression and self-positioning in the world of art, publishing, and exhibiting, particularly where conventional forms of publication are expanded in aesthetic and conceptual terms. What is thought and said, but also what is unspoken, the unrealized, the not directly comprehensible, and the blank page become the themes and motifs in the artistic positions under discussion.

— Mela Dávila Freire's essay **"Thinking Is a Revolutionary Act": Artist's Publications by Marie Orensanz** examines the publication activities of the Argentine artist, who, alongside her sculptural and painterly work in the 1970s and 1980s, also produced yet largely unknown publications. Under Argentina's military dictatorship of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a strong need amongst artists to reflect on the restricted communication systems and institutional conditions. Consequently, Orensanz' publications, which ranged from manifestos to posters and brochures to books, and were issued both in editions and as unique copies, also drew on this context. They thus presented artistic publishing as a necessary means of articulating and visualizing ideas in a society in which artistic freedom could only be expressed in ways conforming to the regime.

— Regine Ehleiter's essay **Materializing Absence, Absent Materials: Mirtha Dermisache, Roland Barthes, and the Politics of Publishing** shifts the focus from the artist's much-discussed concept of asemic writing to her dealing with both the limited material and infrastructural resources, alongside the publishing industry's mechanisms of exclusion. By making recourse to unpublished archival material, including the artist's correspondence with the French philosopher and literary critic Roland Barthes, the article reconstructs their plans for a joint but ultimately never realized publication, and thus reveals the mutual expectations invested in this project as well as the structural barriers within the publishing field. The analysis further reflects on Dermisache's engagement with the sociopolitical repression of Argentina's military dictatorship at the time: between artistic ambitions and the practical constraints of disseminating her work.

—— Francesca Valentini's article **Materiality and Sonority in the Work of Giulia Niccolai and Patrizia Vicinelli** explores the interplay between materiality and sonority in the neo-avant-garde work of the two Italian artists. Her discussion of Niccolai's plaquettes *Humpty Dumpty* and *Poema & Oggetto*, as well as of Vicinelli's performances and video works in the exhibition *Materializzazione del Linguaggio* at the Venice Biennale 1978 demonstrates how both artists focused on the phonetic and performative dimensions of concrete and visual poetry in their art practice. The author argues that, through the merging of visual form, objects, and sound, the selected works challenged conventional literary and curatorial hierarchies and highlighted the essential role of voice, gesture, and auditory experience in the reception of poetic material.

LOOKING FORWARD —— While the contributions assembled in this volume expand current scholarship on artistic publishing as a critical art practice, they also reveal productive blind spots that point towards future research. The focus remains largely on artists' books and magazines, while more ephemeral, audio-visual, performative, collective, and otherwise unconventional forms of artists' publishing receive comparatively little scholarly attention. Such imbalances reflect hierarchies operating within artistic publishing itself, where certain formats have proven more readily collectable, preservable, and canonizable than others, shaping both archival holdings and art historical research.

—— Future research would also benefit from embedding artistic publishing more consistently within intersectional frameworks. If publishing is understood, following Paul Soulellis, as one of the "principal tools of hegemonic power and colonisation," (2021: 34) its infrastructures must equally be examined as sites where exclusion and resistance are negotiated. Rather than treating gender, race, class, sexuality, or geopolitical location as supplementary perspectives, these categories should be understood as constitutive of artistic publishing's histories, networks, and material conditions. This also entails asking which communities, practices, and materials have remained outside the established art historical canon, and how artists themselves engage with coloniality, ecological and economical entanglements, and material politics through publishing.

—— The critical potential of artistic publishing lies precisely in its mobility, adaptability, and resistance to stable categorization. Its fragmentary and ephemeral forms, unpretentious or even irreverent treatment of materials and conventions, and capacity to generate alternative infrastructures offer productive points of dialogue

with queer-feminist theories of aesthetics, temporality, relationality, and spatial practice. More broadly, research should explore forms of identity, desire, intimacy, and kinship beyond binary and heteronormative conceptions emerging—both literally and figuratively—between the pages of artists' publications and across the networks through which they circulate and have circulated.

— At the same time, these perspectives require reflection on our own situatedness. The contextual framework developed in this introduction reflects the editors' expertise foregrounding primarily North American and European developments. While these contexts remain central to the present discussion, they also point to the need for further decentralizing Euro-American perspectives and expanding the geographical and epistemological scope of artistic publishing research.

— The accompanying contributions engage with many of these questions, although not necessarily within the realm of artistic publishing. Doris Weinberger's edition of a bracelet reappropriates the rosary as a feminist object of solidarity, pointing to questions of colonial violence, gendered beauty politics, and resource extraction through the use of human hair. Clewe and Parker revisit the Kathy Acker Reading Room at Cologne University through the lens of queer bibliography, reflecting on the productive tensions between institutional archives and transgressive literary practice. Leonie Schuster's review on the publication *Turning the Mirror* (2025) foregrounds feminist and post-/decolonial approaches to the art histories of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, while Sigrid Schade's reflection on the passing of Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat underscores the importance of intellectual infrastructures, feminist networks, and the continuing urgency of making oneself seen, heard, and read.

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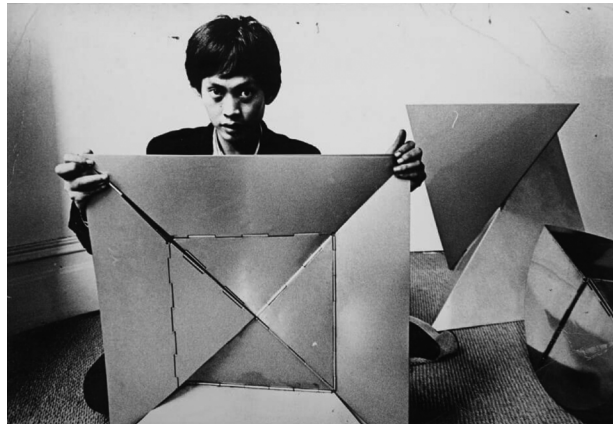
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CORRESPONDING PROPOSITIONS: LYGIA CLARK AND DAVID MEDALLA

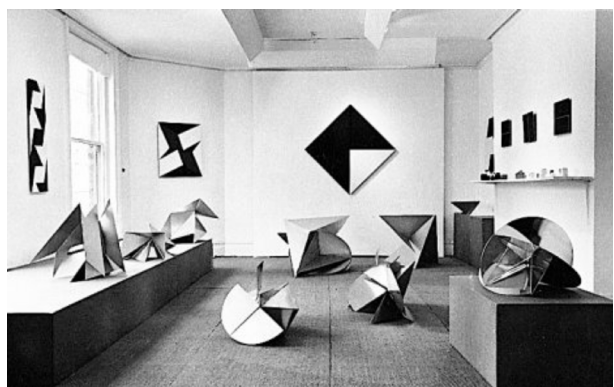
ABSTRACT — This essay explores a mid-1960s dialogue as it unfolded between two artists from opposite ends of the world: Lygia Clark from Brazil and David Medalla, originally from the Philippines. Through the London-based gallery Signals and its newsbulletin, they became catalysts for each other's work. Medalla, active not only as a kinetic artist but also as a writer, poet, and editor, played a key role in staging Lygia Clark's work in London and mediating it for an international audience. In turn, Clark offered direction to the younger artist by addressing a mode of art-making that challenges binary thinking and fosters audience participation. By closely examining both artist-writers' use of language—pragmatic, imaginative, and experimental—correspondences in their practices and thinking emerge, revealing how their early efforts to expand and complicate the notion of authorship were grounded in theory and supported by the possibilities of the artists' magazine.



// Figure 1

David Medalla with Lygia Clark's *Defoliated Animal (Bicho Desfolhado)*, 1965. Photograph by Clay Perry

— Sometime in early summer of 1965, kinetic artist, sculptor, dancer, and writer David Medalla, originally from the Philippines, posed for a photograph not with one of his own works, but with an unusually flat sculpture by the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark [Fig. 1]. Made of hinged aluminum plates, the construction is held by Medalla, drawing attention to the moment just before it unfolds into different constellations, like the three-dimensional pieces standing next to him. The picture was taken on the occasion of Lygia Clark's first solo show in London, at a time when her work was gaining recognition in her home country yet remained largely unknown in Europe. In contrast to other photographs documenting the exhibition for later publication [Fig. 2], the one featuring Medalla with the planimetric square—part of a series titled *Bichos* in Portuguese and translated into English as *Animals*—served a different purpose. It was sent to Rio de Janeiro to initiate a dialogue with the Brazilian artist, whom Medalla had not yet met in person. On the back of the picture, he wrote:



// Figure 2

Installation view of the exhibition *Lygia Clark: First London Exhibition of Abstract Reliefs and Articulated Sculpture* at Signals London May–July 1965. Photograph by Clay Perry

Dear Lygia,
Here is a photo of myself
holding the sculpture which I want
to buy.
With best wishes,
David
Medalla

—Straightforward and pragmatic, the lines speak of the author's inclination towards the other artist's work. At the same time, both picture and writing build on an invisible, almost "magical" moment that occurred only a few months earlier, when Medalla helped prepare another show on *Modern Art from Latin America* in the same gallery space.¹⁾ Named Signals London, this space was established by a group of avant-garde artists, curators, and critics who aimed to make kinetic art from around the world better known [Fig. 3].²⁾ Medalla was one of the group's founding members and also served as editor of its bimonthly publication, *Signals Newsletter*.³⁾ In the spring 1965 issue, readers could learn about a discovery that he had made while handling an exhibit for the survey show:

When removing one of her [Clark's] sculptures from the Bedford van, one end, which I was holding accidentally slipped from my grasp. To my astonishment, the sculpture, instead of falling completely to the ground as I had expected, *began to unfold itself in the air*. The sculpture unfolded itself swiftly until, almost by magic, from a flat two-dimensional piece it transformed itself into a spatial construction shaped like an abstract bird.
(*Signals* 1, no. 6 [1965]: 11).

—Blending experience with imagination, the passage emphasizes that moment when the sculpture, while falling, seems to have a life of its own. With no accompanying reproduction, the text provokes curiosity and expectation, especially as Medalla, in the same article, announced Clark's forthcoming first solo show in London from May to July and concluded with the "hope that when you are in London then, you will come around and see it." Certainly not the only attempt to advance Clark's work abroad, Medalla's choice to "appreciate" her work in published form contributed to the show's international success. His analogies were taken up by other critics, for instance in a review for *The Times*, highlighting the "flowing

1)

The exhibition, titled *First Festival of Modern Art from Latin America*, ran through October 1964 and featured around 70 artists, amongst them Lygia Clark (1920–1988), Sergio de Camargo, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero, and Jesús-Rafael Soto (see *Signals* 1, no. 2 [1964]: 12).

2)

International in scope, the group included artists such as the German Gustav Metzger, the Italian Marcelo Salvadori, the musician Christopher Walker, and the British critics and curators Guy Brett and Paul Keeler. Medalla (1942–2020) moved to Europe in 1960, alternating between Paris and London to maintain his visa status (Brett 1995: 43–47).

3)

The first issue, published in August 1964 with a print run of 3,000 copies, was titled *Signalz: Newsletter of the Centre for the Advanced Creative Study*. From the second issue (10,000 copies) until the final one in March 1966, the spelling changed to *Signals*, dropping the reference to the *Centre* as the gallery's predecessor. In 1995, all eleven issues were reprinted in a facsimile edition of 1,000 copies by the Institute of International Visual Arts, London (see Tyson 2017). For discussions of *Signals* as a community, exhibition space, and publishing project, see Lee 2004: 125–131. On Medalla's sculptural work in relation to *Signals*, see Praepitmongkol 2020: 339–359.



// Figure 3

Mailing *Signals Newsletter*, Cornwall Gardens, 1964. Clockwise from front: Guy Brett, Sergio de Camargo, Paul Keeler, Christopher Walker, David Medalla, Gustav Metzger. Photograph by Clay Perry

rhythm” that moves and surprises the viewer like an “unfolding musical line” (*The Times*, June 15, 1965: 15).⁴⁾

Throughout his life, Medalla often acted as a catalyst for other artists’ works. As critic and curator Guy Brett, another founding member of the group, noted, his support of artists from diverse backgrounds, at a time when much of the art world was focusing on Europe and North America, was a significant part of his own artistic practice (Brett 1995: 13–14).⁵⁾ Expanding on this observation, the following essay explores how Lygia Clark’s work was staged and mediated for an international audience in London and beyond. By closely reading key passages of Clark’s texts and focusing on David Medalla’s role as an artist, writer, poet, and editor of *Signals Newsbulletin* in introducing her artistic and theoretical approach, this essay reveals a dialogue: while engaging with Clark’s work, Medalla simultaneously found direction for his own. By examining both artist-writers’ use of language—in the sense of naming what is given and inventing what is or can be there—correspondences in their practices and thinking emerge, revolving around the question of audience participation. Although Clark and Medalla would later be recognized as “pioneers of participation art” (Cairns/Hellberg 2022: 119), it is no coincidence that their early efforts to expand and challenge the notion of *authorship* were grounded in theory and supported by the possibilities of the artists’ magazine.

Within the spectrum of 1960s artists’ magazines, *Signals Newsbulletin* presents a special case. As Gwen Allen notes, artists’ run periodicals, especially those focused on conceptual art, offered an “alternative space” for experimentation and exchange (Allen 2011: 7, 121–145). Sidestepping the constraints of galleries, museums, and profit-oriented art journals, they reached broader audiences through inexpensive printed matter. While *Signals Newsbulletin* shared this democratizing vision, it worked in tandem with Signals London: the newsbulletin and the gallery, run by the same group between 1964 and 1966, supported each other. The showroom fostered a local community, the newsbulletin reported on events for a global audience. Yet *Signals Newsbulletin* went beyond mere documentation. The group’s conviction that “everything was connected” (Whitelegg 2018: 21–38) shaped the magazine’s interdisciplinary approach. Reflecting wider 1960s trends such as systems theory, cybernetics, and the notion of an interconnected world, it proposed a holistic view, suggesting that all pursuits—whether in the arts, humanities, science, or technology—could benefit from one another.

Published in April 1965, the seventh issue of the newsbulletin, dedicated to the work of Lygia Clark, was remarkable in several

4)

The review was likely written by Guy Brett, then art critic for *The Times*.

5)

Medalla wrote appreciatively about other Latin American artists within *Signals Newsbulletin*, such as Mira Schendel and Jesús Rafael Soto. He likely invited Hélio Oiticica to present his projects in the magazine and dedicated another found-poem to Alejandro Otero.



// Figure 4

Cover of *Signals Newsbulletin* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965)

ways [Fig. 4]. It was the first time a female artist was featured in a solo exhibition at Signals and, accordingly, was the subject of an entire special issue.⁶⁾ Moreover, unlike any other edition, it placed the artist's theoretical writings at its core, prominently featuring them on the first double-page spread (*Signals* 1, no. 7 [1965]: 2–3). Arranged chronologically from 1960 to 1964, the five reflections by Clark seek to bridge the gap between artist and “common man” and move from the examination of specific works to discussions on the relation between art and religion, time and space, for ultimately reaching metaphysical considerations. Medalla had arranged for this selection of texts to be translated into English, allowing Clark's words to reach a wider readership even before her collected writings appeared in Portuguese (Clark 1983).

Writing holds a central place in Clark's artistic practice, as is evident not only from its prominent placement on the first pages of the newsbulletin, but also from the signature that links the written words to their author and the artist's portrait above it [Fig. 5]. In this photograph, Clark looks directly into the camera, holding a cigarette: the relaxed posture of an intellectual, an artist who positions herself in front of her work and, while smoking, envisions a world in which not only she but also those who engage with her pieces become active participants in creation. The sentences and paragraphs, interspersed with reproductions of her works, convey the impression of encountering Clark in thought. Emphasizing her intellectual practice in this way anticipates a quote that appears just a few pages later, namely: “Lygia Clark is a thinker among artists” (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 6).⁷⁾

By the early 1960s, Clark had radicalized her understanding of art-making in terms of “relation,” “dialogue,” and “action,” as her first note on the series *Animals* shows. The title emphasizes the “organic aspect” of these works, made possible through incorporating hinges (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 2; all further quotes by Clark are from this source unless otherwise noted). Clark refers to this structure metaphorically, speaking of a “backbone” in order to transfer qualities inherent to living beings, such as movement, self-propulsion, and responsiveness, into the realm of objects. Accordingly, she also points out the “functional” interaction of the parts, heightening

6) Shortly before the gallery closed in October 1966, Mira Schendel was also featured in a solo show at Signals (Whitelegg 2018: 25). However, the planned newsbulletin issue was never published.

7) The quote is from Brazilian artist Sergio de Camargo, previously featured in the special issue of *Signals* 1, no. 5 (1964–1965).



// Figure 5
Signals 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 3

this idea through an as-if analogy with a “living organism.” The fictional approximation brings into focus the distinctive nature of experiencing Clark’s art—an experience grounded in reciprocity. Yet Clark does not anthropomorphize her works: “When asked what are these possibilities of movement, I usually answer: I don’t know, neither do you, but ‘he’ does.” By assigning a grammatical gender to the *Animal*, she introduces a distinction both from the neutral “it” and from her own gender. In doing so, she personalizes the relationship between *Animal* and viewer, yet without turning it into a substitute for the relationship between her and the viewer. For although, in this scene, only the “I” of the artist and the “you” of the viewer initially speak, the reference to “he” draws attention to the *Animal* as an equal third. Consequently, Clark refrains from self-reference in the further course of the text; her “I” disappears. Through writing, she opens a space for imagination and theoretical reflection, where she, as first-person narrator, can come and go freely. The detachment of the *Animals* from her own hands is thus grounded in writing, with the resulting texts and concepts still tied to Clark as their author. This seems to be the condition for focusing on what happens between the viewer and the *Animal*, a sequence of actions and reactions that Clark distinguishes from a “game,” instead presenting it as a “real relationship.”

— Medalla’s engagement with Clark’s *Animals* exemplifies not only the dialogue Clark envisioned but also its deeper implications. His narrative of encountering one of her *Animals* fictionally enhances its capacity to almost defy gravity, while his photographic portrait provides a moment of stillness to identify the work. Both Medalla’s narration and his annotated photograph reveal how physical interaction with the *Animal* can spark the desire to grasp this *other* and make it part of one’s own reality. It is likely that Clark was aware of this effect, as she had considered the edition of the *Animals* as multiples.⁸⁾ And yet, the text itself does not address this possibility. Rather, it introduces a second note on a piece that implicitly resolves the problem of accessibility by making use of the very material and medium on which Clark’s texts are printed: paper and the magazine.

— Dated 1964, Clark’s second note focuses on the work *Caminhando*, translated as *Going* in English. Its structure echoes her note on *Animals*, similarly commenting on the title with a phrase that leaves it open whether it originates from her: “My latest works have been called ‘going’ because of the absolute aspect of immediate action.” It remains unclear how closely the translation reflects the original, whether Clark indeed had “immediate action”

8)

In 1970, one of Clark’s *Animals* was presented in the exhibition *Multiples by Unlimited* at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol. Around 2015, a plastic version of her *Bicho Caranguejo (Crab Critter)* was produced and is available for purchase online at <https://tienda.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/bicho-crab-critter> (accessed March 11, 2025).

in mind or, as later publications suggest, “immanent action” or “immanent act” (Clark in Borja-Villel/Enguita Mayo 1998: 151–152). What stands out, however, is the shift towards the performative. For Clark, this shift signifies nothing less than a step towards the “absolute,” which the text asserts as a fact. “It’s the absolute itself,” she claims, “that you hold in your hands.” Separated from the surrounding paragraphs by line breaks, this simple sentence contains dynamite for thought. Along with her later assertion that “the action is the only time there is,” it expresses Clark’s concern: to focus on that which cannot be arrested, caught, or captured—the present, the instant—but which, through bodily attention, becomes available for experience.

— Unlike later revisions, this version of the note is marked by a high level of abstraction. To characterize the action, Clark refers to the “substantial void,” “totality,” “metaphysical reality,” and an “a priori concept” from which she distances her work. The text reads as a preliminary sketch, where bold leaps yield theoretical fragments. These stand in stark contrast to the simplicity of the “action,” which involves handling paper and scissors by continuously cutting along the edges of a Möbius strip. Though Clark briefly mentions the strip’s subversion of conventional understandings of space and time, the text omits the work’s practical aspect, leaving readers in a state of wonder. Clark intensifies this effect of simultaneous obscurity and illumination by emphasizing unpredictability, as in the previous note: “When asked what will come out of this ‘going,’ my answer is: ‘I don’t know, neither do you.’ We will see how it reveals itself.”

— The similarity in syntax and phrasing to the note on *Animals* highlights the difference. The “I” and “you” merge into a collective “we,” while the work itself remains on the neutral level of “it.” Although “action” is the key term in this text, the use of the vague pronoun “it” raises the question of its reference: Does it pertain to a thing, an object, an event, or a process? While the theoretical pendulum swings towards the performative, Clark’s early verbalization, often overlooked in previous research, reveals that *Going* oscillates between different modes of being. This fluidity, itself an aesthetic effect, is evident in the fact that *Going*, Clark’s earliest “proposition,” is neither called a “proposition” nor is the “you” in the text addressed as a “participant.” Even at this point, however, *Going* challenges classical dichotomies: “You and the object—unique, total, existential reality. There is no separateness between subject and object.”

— What Clark seeks to initiate with *Going* is grounded in this fusion of subject and object, where the body becomes both medium and agent of experience.⁹⁾ While metaphorically “walking” and lit-

9)

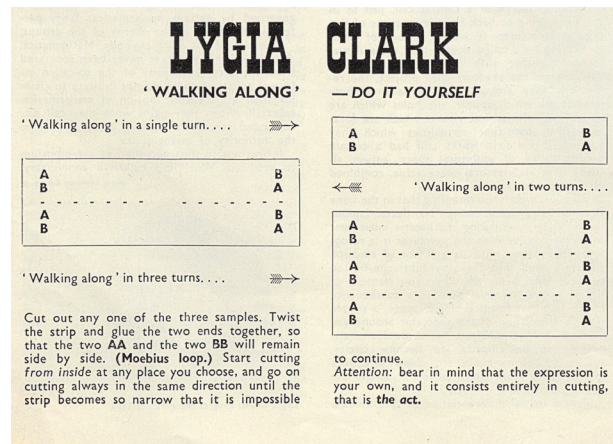
Though Clark did not explicitly draw on phenomenology in this context, her work resonates with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body as a nexus between self and world. Notably, art critic and poet Ferreira Gullar cited Merleau-Ponty in the 1959 *Neo-Concrete Manifesto*, which Clark co-signed (see especially Brito 2017: 89–142).

erally “cutting,” it always encounters a fork in the road, choosing one path over another. Consequently, Clark writes, “[. . .] it [*Going*] only exists in the dialogue that you will establish between yourself and the moment of action.” This condition raises the question of how such a work can be received in practice, and to what extent its *outcome*—be it a remnant or a trace—inevitably becomes an object that endows the action with an afterlife.

— If reading Clark’s writings remains as challenging as it is fascinating for readers past and present, what follows a few pages later seems all the more accessible. On page seven, at the bottom, a schematic diagram is printed, which consists of three rectangular cutting patterns for producing Möbius strips, labeled with the artist’s name, the title ‘*Walking along*’—*Do it yourself*, and explanatory instructions [Fig. 6]. The deviation of the title from the earlier *Going* is striking, suggesting that the theoretical concept has shifted into an instructional form:

Cut out any one of the three samples. Twist the strip and glue the two ends together, so that the two **AA** and the two **BB** remain side by side. (**Moebius loop.**) Start cutting *from inside* at any place you choose, and go on cutting always in the same direction until the strip becomes so narrow that it is impossible to continue.
(*Signals* 1, no. 7: 7).

Using the anonymous language of an operation manual, the writing is clear, precise, and unambiguous. In this sense, it recalls the word pieces that Liz Kotz, in her study of New York-based avant-garde artists, traces back to John Cage’s 1950s compositions. However, while those pieces, especially Georges Brecht’s event scores, tend to “focus attention on existing things” (Kotz 2007: 91), Clark’s approach differs in that her instructions, rather than highlighting what is given, lead participants to recognize their own action as “expression.” Accordingly, the last sentence deviates from the pattern of shortened imperatives: “Attention: bear in mind that the expression is your own, and it consists entirely in cutting, that is **the act**” (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 7). How can cutting be experienced as expressive? Unlike drawing a line on paper, cutting creates edges that can be razor-sharp. Each cut, violent or cautious, produces a separation, dividing one surface into two or more. Yet when cutting



// Figure 6

Lygia Clark, ‘*Walking along*’—*Do it yourself* (detail) in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 7

along a Möbius strip, this separation never fully takes place. Instead, it preserves material continuity, as loops of paper unfurl that remain interconnected. While increasing in structural intricacy, these loops decrease in recognizable shape. Drawing attention to this double movement, Esther Gabara writes: “*Caminhando* reimagines the shape, substance, and temporality of the work of art as an act of unmaking that is its making” (Gabara 2022: 86). Just as unmaking and making coincide, each becoming the condition and consequence of the other, Clark’s use of the Möbius strip reflects her interest in the paradoxical structures explored in topology.

— As Anna Dezeuze has pointed out, in parallel to Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, both Clark and Lacan seem to have “used the Möbius strip [. . .] to challenge their [viewers’] usual binary thinking by questioning the simple opposition between inside and outside [. . .]” (Dezeuze 2013: 234). Moreover, if, for Lacan, the Möbius strip holds “the position of the unrepresentable” (ibid.), in Clark’s world, *Going* is tied “to the whole problem of the substantial void” (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 2). As this “emptiness full of potentialities” (Dezeuze 2013: 234) cannot be represented either, *Going* creates problems, or at least tensions, as soon as it is made accessible to an audience across space and time. For even if, as happened later, the act of cutting is photographed, the work’s temporality, the transformative experience that differs from person to person, evades representation.¹⁰⁾

— The challenges in grappling with such a work can be observed in the newsbulletin’s special issue as well. Unconsidered in the extant literature, the schematic diagram of ‘*Walking along*’—*Do it yourself* shows a curious discrepancy in scale. As soon as one imagines taking scissors to follow the instructions, it becomes clear that the printed samples are small, almost too small to glue the ends together, and certainly too small to cut along by hand. Although printed on the very material meant for use, Clark’s samples for the do-it-yourself work undermine their function. By scaling them down, the work seemingly leaps into the virtual and verges on self-contradiction, yet in doing so, it evades objectification. It requires readers to translate a model into a material action and to begin this process by first choosing a piece of paper that fits.

— At the same time, the schematic diagram of ‘*Walking along*’—*Do it yourself* was designed for publication in a magazine. In keeping with the newsbulletin’s emphasis on interconnectedness—not as the erasure of difference, but as the creation of meaning between cultural, aesthetic, socio-political, and scientific concerns—the diagram both contributes to and benefits from the adja-

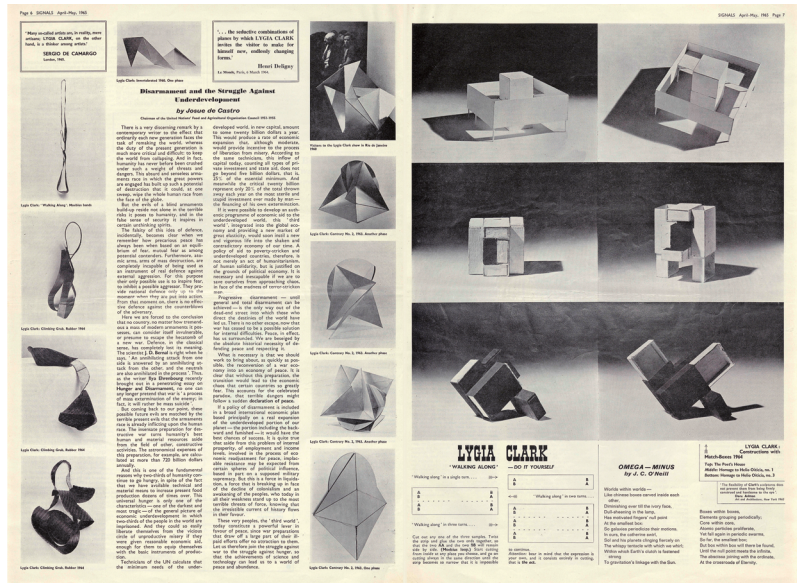
10)

Taken for a monograph on Clark in 1980, the photos show a woman cutting a Möbius strip with her head out of frame (Dezeuze 2013: 228; Gogan 2023).

cent pieces. This is immediately evident in Clark's *Constructions with Match-Boxes* (1964), presented as small-scale monuments occupying most of the page (right side of Fig. 7). These works not only allude to architectural models; they also blur the boundary between modernist building design and the imaginative reinvention of space. By interlocking matchboxes in open and closed forms, Clark explores their material and spatial possibilities, conjuring experiences in which interior and exterior merge. The resulting perceptual and epistemic uncertainty aligns with *‘Walking along’—Do it yourself*, as both works generate complexity by interweaving seemingly simple things.

Medalla as the editor and producer of the newsbulletin was in charge of graphic design, layout, acquisition, and the selection of presented materials. By combining these tasks, he not only foregrounded the union of different arts into a more powerful collective, capable of becoming an active part of the world through their shared use of imagination, but also created what can be called a “constellation.” Coined by Walter Benjamin to refer to a “thought-image” in which past and present meet, the term disrupts linear modes of thinking and, on a general level, describes his “method of reading, writing, and philosophizing” (Sahraoui/Sauter 2018: xi). As grasping such a “constellation” gives rise to critical insight that affects “our perception of time” (ibid.), it may provide a useful lens for registering what happens on the pages of issue seven.

Consider the arrangement of pages five and six [Fig. 7] as a double-page spread: opposite the reproduction of *‘Walking along’—Do it yourself*, an article by Josué de Castro takes centre stage. In this text, the former medical doctor and Chair of the Food and Agricultural Organization Council critiques the logic of militarization, arguing that it heightens the risk of global war and perpetuates poverty, hunger, and economic underdevelopment in the Third World. Advocating for an “economy of peace,” de Castro calls for political action, particularly from developing nations, to pursue “progressive disarmament” as a precondition for a sustainable future (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 6). As if to suggest that art, too, can be a space of



// Figure 7
Double-page spread of *Signals* 1, no. 7
(April–May 1965): 6–7

resistance and a viable path to transformation, de Castro's vision of a non-hegemonic world is framed by several reproductions of Clark's works. Amongst them is a seemingly inconspicuous photograph depicting three fragile, interconnected paper loops hanging on a wall. It is annotated: *Lygia Clark: 'Walking along': Moebius bands* [Fig. 8]. On its own, the photo could have passed as part of the *Climbing Grubs* series, which is presented underneath and indeed shows a formal affinity. With the caption, however, *'Walking along': Moebius bands* becomes legible as an afterimage that relates to the do-it-yourself work but raises doubts about whether it is part of it.

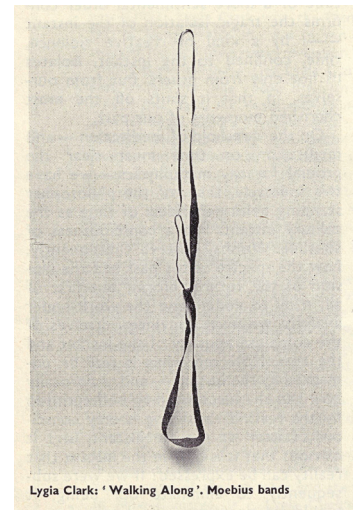
— The first published photographs—in the Brazilian newspaper *Tribuna da Imprensa* in 1964 and in *Signals Newsbulletin* in 1965—document *Going* precisely in this past state (Dezeuze 2013: 228, 230).¹¹⁾ In this context, Anna Dezeuze situates Clark's "most precarious work" at "the cross-roads of sculpture, instruction, performance, and participation" (Dezeuze 2013: 227, 230). Yet, as in other literature, the ambiguous role of these photographs and their impact on the work's reception remain unexplored, as does their relationship to the medium of the magazine, which allows the work's different manifestations to coexist in the same space.

— Given that a photo of an action's leftover at least partly takes away the surprise of future realizations, it reminds us that neither is the action meant to become a spectacle, nor is the leftover documented to make it last. Taken because the leftover will be thrown away, the photo acts as a witness; it presents a material trace that is neither simply a substitute nor a mere addition, but a "supplement," to use the notion introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to problematize how secondary structures lying at the edges sustain what is assumed to be primary (Derrida [1967] 1997: 157–164, 215ff.). Jumping in to fill what is missing in the "actual body," the supplement provides an opening towards the outside (Kofman 1984: 17). As both the photo and the diagram reach backwards and stretch forwards, they too seem to embrace that which evades representation—the present—which, for Derrida, always already constitutes an originary lack and defers meaning (see Spivak's "Translator's Preface," in Derrida [1967] 1997: ix–lxxxvii, esp. xvii, xxxii). And yet, the photo and diagram also function as visual and verbal bridges, prompting readers to explore new realizations and enact the proposed action.

— Introducing *Going* through these means, in combination with a theoretical text that reflects on the action as a singular event, transforms the work into something that needs to be searched for.

11)

Based in Rio de Janeiro, *Tribuna da Imprensa* was an influential daily that initially supported the 1964 civil-military coup. Despite its right-wing stance, it published cultural voices such as poet and art critic Waldir Ayala, who wrote a short article on Clark's latest invention. Describing her art practice as a "laboratory" and linking it to her upcoming trip to Europe, he suggestively titled the piece "Vamos fazer um 'Caminhando'?" ("Let's make a 'Going'?"), offering instructions but no diagram (Ayala 1964: 5; see also Gabara 2022: 86 on Ayala's phrasing and interpretation).



// Figure 8

Detail: Lygia Clark, *'Walking along': Moebius bands* (detail) in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 6

In contrast to the *Animals*, which were exhibited in the gallery and could be manipulated there, *Going* was absent from Clark's first London show. In 1965, it seems that either the setup for presenting such a work was not considered, or it was thought more appropriate not to include it in the physical exhibition. This second option is substantiated when considering that *Going* initially appeared in print on the pages of a newspaper and a magazine. These periodicals not only offered an alternative space but also gave 'unlimited' time for keeping *Going* precarious. It was here that the work could be encountered one-on-one; it was a genuine reading experience onto which a work that encouraged individual action could be grafted.¹²⁾

— If using the magazine as a medium for dissemination meant liberating the work from physical constraints, it simultaneously implied a loss of knowledge about how readers responded. Apparently, there is no extant documentation on whether and how *Going* was realized at that time. Facing this lack, Medalla's contributions in issue seven become even more revealing. Although he had frequently used the newsbulletin to present his own artistic work, the inclusion of two of his pieces in the issue dedicated to Clark can be read as an implicit response to her work, since no other contemporary artist's visual work was reproduced in that issue.

— Medalla chose the back side of issue seven for his contributions [Fig. 9]. The upper half of the page features a photographic detail of sinuous foam, produced by one of his bubble machines. Since 1964, these machines had made him known as a kinetic sculptor, although Medalla was also active as a writer, poet, mime, and dancer.¹³⁾ His textual piece in the lower half of the page is evidence of this boundary-crossing practice. The handwritten title reads *found-poem for TAKIS by David Cortez de Medalla*. Even though the piece is dedicated to the Greek kinetic sculptor Takis,¹⁴⁾ from whose tensile objects the Signals group took its name, its appearance in this issue gains significance through its proximity to Clark.

— Printed in a small typeface in a shimmering copper hue, it consists of ten columns of alphabetically ordered nouns, participles, verbs, and prepositions, for instance, "blast effect," "enemy," and "passed through" (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 12). Allowing multiple modes of reading and seeing, this found-poem is visibly a collage in print, displaying, on top of the listed words, a diagram of "THE NIGHT SKY IN MAY" and a vertical box with information for readers: "See page 11 [. . .] for instructions

12)

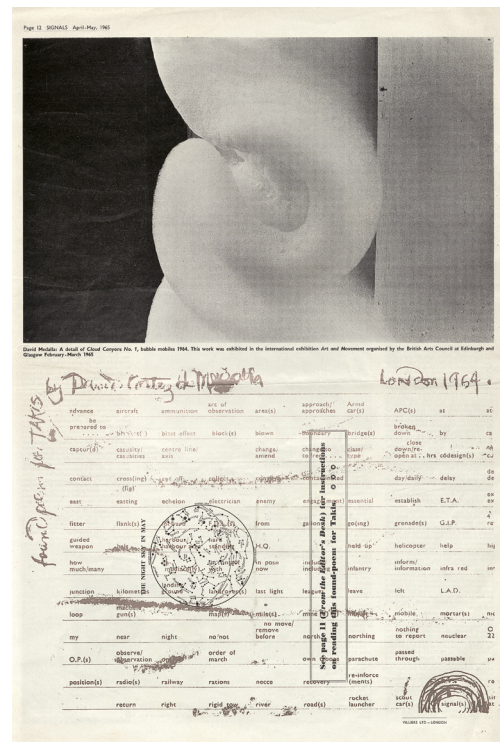
The *Times* review mentioned earlier confirms that, from the outset, *Going* was disseminated through print, where it could be closely linked to Clark's theoretical writings: "One of her 'works,' in fact, is no more than a set of simple cutting instructions, published along with some very intelligent writings, in the gallery newspaper" (*The Times*, June 15, 1965: 15).

13)

For Medalla's boundary-crossing practice, see Arriola 2024: 19–25; and Yve-Alain Bois, "Virtual," in Brett 1995: 212–214.

14)

Moving between Athens, Paris, and London, Takis was a seminal figure in the postwar European avant-garde and supported the activities of Signals from the start. In his autodidactic practice, he explored electro-magnetism, energy, and motion, producing a synthesis that resonated with the group's vision. In November 1964, Signals inaugurated its Wigmore Street space with a solo exhibition of his work, accompanied by a double issue of its newsbulletin (no. 3/4) dedicated to him.



// Figure 9

David Medalla, *found-poem for TAKIS by David Cortez de Medalla* in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 12

030

on reading this found-poem for Takis.” Within the poem, the reading instructions are referenced as structuring it, literally supporting it from the other side. Any expectation that the work could stand on its own is thus suspended and further questioned by Medalla’s account of how the found-poem came into being, namely, that it was found “in a printer’s storeroom in windsor” and may have belonged to an “army manual of the signals (?) corps.” (*Signals* 1, no. 7: 11). Medalla marks these details and the instructions on page eleven as coming “from the editor’s desk,” thereby changing roles and substituting authorship for the mediation of pre-existing material [Fig. 10]. “Go To Work On A Poem,” reads the headline of the instructions, asking readers to manipulate what is now generically called a poem. Medalla’s imperative corresponds with Clark’s do-it-yourself approach, opening up a field in which words turn into actions and poetry becomes an elastic and uncertain thing.

Playful and witty, the procedures described in the instructions completely reverse the military connotations of the found-poem’s possible source. Some of them leap into the imaginative, others turn to the pragmatic, and still others verge on the absurd, including baking or boiling it in the kitchen. While the list continues, accumulating more and more procedures through which the poem expands, almost all the instructions lead to a common task: that of reading.

Poem-sheet may be constructed into any origami shape; exposed words to be read as poem, hidden words to be read as counter-poem.
(*Signals* 1, no. 7: 11).

Reading in Medalla’s world becomes a mysterious process that requires imagination. By adding the preposition “as,” he encourages readers to jump to the level of hypothesis. Only through the readers’ performances, be it silently in their heads or aloud with their voices, is the “poem-sheet” transformed into a “poem” and a “counter-poem,” producing an aesthetic effect that emerges as instantly as it disappears. If Clark makes palpable the continuity between inside and outside, rendering the two interchangeable, Medalla expands



// Figure 10
David Medalla, “from the editor’s desk: reading instructions (an extract)” in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 11

on this fluid mode of thinking by creating an intertextual dialogue and placing several reproductions of Clark's work alongside his column. In particular, her coiled and twisted metal piece *inside is outside* (upper left of **Fig. 10**) erases the coordinates for spatial orientation and materializes the paradox referred to in the title. While it makes a topological idea available to sensuous experience, it also affects the reading of Medalla's work.

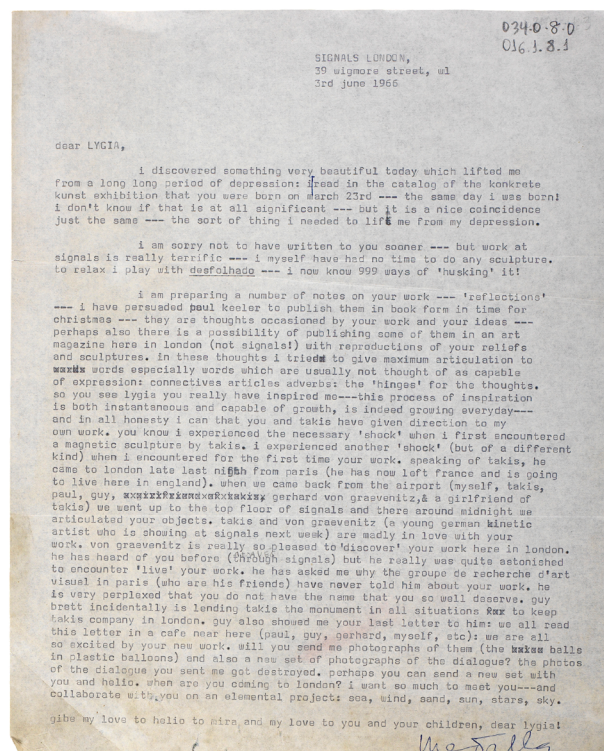
— Note that the arrow next to the reproduction's upper right directs the reader to Medalla's column, as if to suggest that *inside is outside* points to the operations at play in the found-poem's instructions. Placing Clark's paradoxical structure next to his "Go To Work On A Poem," Medalla not only recodes the poet's "work" as that of the reader but also renders the poem's location unstable. It literally slips away as soon as one starts working on it. The *found-poem for TAKIS by David Cortez de Medalla*, an appropriation from the beginning, branches out into another text, into specific procedures and material traces, and into the performances and events of others. What is at stake, then, is not only the transformation of a poem into something else, but also the process through which it is shared with, and adapted by, the reader. Medalla makes this clear at the end of his instructions, announcing a forthcoming publication: [. . .]

999 instructions on reading david medalla's found-poem for takis. Although this publication remained a fiction, its attempt to let no potential go uncounted opens a space for experimentation that no longer depends on Medalla as its (sole) author. In this way, he kept the readers' curiosity alive, suggesting a multitude of events to come.

— It was a similar sense of direction that he found through his encounters with Lygia Clark. A year after co-organizing her London exhibition and writing and editing a special issue on her work, he wrote her a letter—this time, more than a few words, using the full repertoire of language to share his reflections and express his affection, excitement, gratitude, and love [**Fig. 11**]. Dated June 3, 1966, Medalla reached out to Clark when *Signals Newsbulletin* and the showroom lost financial support (Brett 1995: 67).¹⁵ Although he describes "work at Signals" as "really terrific," it leaves him with no time to pursue his own artistic projects, a dilemma, it may seem, in which he nevertheless plans to publish a book with "thoughts occasioned by your work and your ideas:"

15)

Signals 2, no. 2 (January–February–March 1966) was the last issue released. From June to August 1966, the gallery still hosted a group exhibition titled *Towards the Invisible*, featuring "abstract reliefs and articulated constructions by Lygia Clark." The exhibition leaflet is available online at <https://portal.lygiac Clark.org.br/en/archive/59423/towards-the-invisible-signals-londres> (accessed March 11, 2025).



// Figure 11

Letter from David Medalla to Lygia Clark, June 3, 1966

032

[. . .] so you see lygia you really have inspired me—this process of inspiration is both instantaneous and capable of growth, is indeed growing everyday—and in all honesty I can [say] that you and takis have given direction to my own work. (Medalla in his 1966 letter to Clark, see **Fig. 11**; all further quotes by Medalla are from this letter).

Describing what Clark's work means to him, Medalla includes Takis at this point, relating his own work to two artists who are both approximately a generation older. To convey the impact of Clark's work, he speaks of inspiration, a concept articulated by ancient poets and philosophers to acknowledge the divine as either conditioning or influencing the act of creation. Although Medalla does not elaborate on this, he distinguishes between the temporal modes—immediate and durational—through which this “process” unfolds. Clark's work consequently appears as a source that may occur suddenly but does not cease to flow.

— Evidently taking pleasure in writing about these matters, Medalla moreover tells Clark about other artists who are “madly in love with your work,” but also “perplexed” as to why “you do not have the name that you so well deserve.” Dropping this remark casually in indirect speech, Medalla offers no explanation for this fact. He leaves unnamed what, from today's perspective, can hardly be seen as anything other than signs of gender inequality and euro-centrism. Instead, he focuses on actions that might help change the situation. His entire letter reveals how a lack of recognition can be countered. His being a member of the Signals group and making use of its network undoubtedly played a major role, acting as a lever to make Clark known in London and, from there, around the world.

— At the same time, Medalla's engagement is inseparable from his being an artist who wants to know Clark better. Jumping directly to the question of timing and omitting any considerations of (im) possibility, he asks her, “When are you coming to London?” and adds, “I want so much to meet you—and collaborate with you on an elemental project: sea, wind, sand, sun, stars, sky.” Medalla the artist and Medalla the poet speak equally here, formulating the first idea for a proposition to Clark as his reader. A few words that amplify through alliteration and expand in meaning, reaching, perhaps even literally, for the stars, his note for a collaborative project lists the basic ingredients for building a world to share. While the project remained unrealized, Medalla's letter strongly resonated with Clark. She imagined walking with him through the streets of London and sensed a “recognition between us, even though we do not know each

other personally.”¹⁶) Even as a mere possibility, belonging to a future that is past, Medalla’s proposition carries weight and sharpens our perception of what made it into publication. With a multitude of poems in mind and a notion of an “inside” that is “outside,” his words, his longing to make present someone who is far away, form the undercurrent of the issue that was dedicated to Lygia Clark. On the pages of *Signals Newsbulletin*, a correspondence emerged between their propositions, with Clark and Medalla both turning to a third—a reader, a “you”—who becomes an “I” by taking up the thread they left behind.

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16)

Written in Portuguese and undated, it is unclear if the letter was translated into English and sent to Medalla. Its first page has been digitized and is available through Lygia Clark’s archive at <http://portal.lygiack.org.br/en/archive/10769/de-lygia-clark-para-david-medalla-incompleta-1882131-carta> (accessed March 11, 2025).

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Figure 1: Photograph by Clay Perry. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

<https://portal.lygiaclark.org.br/en/archive/18116/n-a>

Figure 2: Photograph by Clay Perry (publ. in *Signals Newsletter* 1, no. 10 [November–December 1965]: 16). Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 3: Photograph by Clay Perry (reproduced in Brett 1995: 43).

Figure 4: Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 5: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 3. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 6: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 7. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 7: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 6–7. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 8: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 6. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 9: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 12. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 10: Published in *Signals* 1, no. 7 (April–May 1965): 11. Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

Figure 11: Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association.

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POSING AS A CATALOGUE, ACTING LIKE AN ARTISTS' BOOK: *KÜNSTLERINNEN INTERNATIONAL 1877–1977*

ABSTRACT — The 1970s were a heyday for artists' publications. While artists' books were regarded as allowing for a more democratic and dynamic circulation of art, the traditional medium of art communication, the exhibition catalogue, also took on new forms. In 1977 Berlin, a group of artists and activists collaborated at the intersection of both: on the occasion of a major exhibition on artist-women, they created a publication that at first sight complied with the codes of a catalogue but upon closer examination mobilized it for feminist purposes. Through the self-reflexive articulation of its production process and the aesthetic disruption of its content, the catalogue makers pointed to the social and cultural fabrication of art histories. *Künstlerinnen international*, posing as a catalogue and acting as an artists' book, was able to attract and educate people from various backgrounds—thus realizing the subversive impetus of the latter by building on the popularity of the former.

— In 1976, the U.S. art critic Lucy Lippard dared to dream: "I have this vision of feminist artists' books in school libraries (or being passed around under the desks), in hairdressers, in gynecologists' waiting rooms. . ." (Lippard et al. 1976/1977: 10). In short, she wished them to be both as appealing and as ordinary as "Girl Scout Cookies" (ibid.). Some months later, she travelled to Berlin, and there, I will argue, her fantasy came true—at least as far as the cookie part is concerned.

— Lippard traveled to Germany at the invitation of seven women who in 1977 organized the exhibition "Künstlerinnen international 1877–1977."¹⁾ According to the press, this group was well off in the "cookie business": Italian art critic Lea Vergine called them "a group of girl scouts"²⁾ (Vergine 1977: 38) and was joined by German journalist Margarete von Schwarzkopf who found them selling "cookies" to the "women's front" (Von Schwarzkopf 1977). However, what is so telling about these reviews and what connects them to Lippard's vision is not their vocabulary. Rather, their mere existence hints at what indeed made it possible to lend the show's catalogue the same appeal as hot cookies straight from the oven. The fact that "Künstlerinnen international" was not only reviewed by major German newspapers but even attracted (or, in the case of Vergine, repelled) an international audience was an effect of its pompous conception.

— From March to April 1977, the exhibition took place at three locations in Berlin, one of them Charlottenburg Palace,³⁾ a historical

1)

In the following, I refer to the exhibition as "Künstlerinnen international" and the accompanying publication as *Künstlerinnen international*.

2)

All translations from German or, as in this case, Italian into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

3)

The other two venues were also located in the west of the city: performances, videos, slides and photographs were shown in an exhibition space of the art library on Jebensstraße, while a documentary photographic project by artists Gerhild Liebenberg and Marianne Wex on gendered body language was exhibited in the spaces of the neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (New Society for Visual Art, in the following: nGbK) on Hardenbergstraße, see the press release of the group from March 7, 1977, available on the website of the nGbK: https://ngbk.de/media/pages/media/3cb2487cc8-1715521911/kunstlerinnen_international_1877-1977_1977_presse-text_00566.pdf (accessed June 17, 2026). Both venues offered less space than the Orangery of Charlottenburg Palace and had shorter opening hours; for instance, they were both closed on Sundays. This led contemporary critics to suspect an implicit hierarchy from the part of the curators: Cillie Rentmeister considered it no coincidence that works that challenged norms of the art market were "hidden" (Rentmeister 1977: 54) in the less "representative" (ibid.: 52) exhibition sites (see also Behrens 1991: 83–84). Irrespective of the curators' intentions, these sites clearly received less attention, with many press articles failing to mention them at all.

building with whitewashed walls and high ceilings that housed the main part of the show. The curators chose around 150 artist-women⁴⁾ to exhibit on an area of more than 1,000 square meters. Among them were many names that nowadays still do not compete with the art market's top sellers but have since received profound scholarly attention, including Helen Frankenthaler, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Eva Hesse, Frida Kahlo, Natalia Goncharova, Hannah Höch, Marie Toyen, Sonia Delaunay, Maria Lassnig, Suzanne Valadon, Joan Mitchell, Anna Oppermann, and many, many more. The curators had 100,000 Deutschmarks at their disposal (Schor 2015: 481) and spent three years on preparing the show (Kaiser 2013, Buschmann 2009, Behrens 1991).⁵⁾ To them, "starting small" (Bierther et al. 1977: 1) was not an option. This longing for grandiosity also manifested itself in the show's catalogue: not restricting itself to the exhibited works, it expanded the selection to 265 artists and their works on 370 well-filled pages.

— At first glance, the rather opulent format of both the exhibition and the catalogue seems to be at odds with Lippard's vision of artists' books as mundane objects spreading feminist thought. Wasn't the art critic thinking of ways to circumvent the institutional constraints of the art world when sketching her little utopia (Lippard et al. 1976/1977: 10)? And doesn't the Berlin project seem to be all too well integrated in that very cosmos? Lippard's take on artists' books was part of a now canonical issue of *Art-Rite*, published a few months before the Berlin show opened. The magazine shared 50 statements on artists' books that it had collected from the art world. Artists, editors, writers, and librarians responded to its call for writing "something informal, but brief and concentrated, about your views on any of the issues related to artists' books" (ibid.: 6). These comments mirror the intense practical and theoretical interest in the genre starting in the 1960s. Until today, they remain an important reference for international scholars. Their heterogeneity substantiates the formal variety and communicative potential of artists' books, and at the same time points to the inadequacy of applying rigid criteria to them. The *Art-Rite* editors, too, found that the "collective quality of these statements functions as the most basic and genuine definition of artists' books" (ibid.). Picking up on this, most analytical takes on artists' books refrain from sharp distinctions: Johanna Drucker, for instance, explores them as a "zone of activity" (Drucker 1995: 2), which, as Michael Glasmeier puts it, arises from artists' engagements "with books, about, around, for or against" (Glasmeier 1994: 11) them. However, even in the broad sense offered by such a praxeological definition, the asso-

4)

I am following Griselda Pollock here, who proposes this term (and accordingly: artist-men) instead of "women artists" to counter the naturalization of the "artist" as male. See, for example, Pollock 2024: 53, fn. 7. Yet this vocabulary still risks naturalizing a binary conception of gender. At the same time, a term like "artist-person" would misrepresent the self-conception of most historical actors who framed their actions as being of and for *women*. Against the backdrop of research that has shown how many of these actors contributed to complicating the normative interpretation of this latter category (for *Künstlerinnen international*, see footnote 19), I therefore use the imperfect concept of "artist-women."

5)

This sum corresponds to roughly 50,000 Euros, and today would not even come close to covering the costs for an exhibition of the same format. In 1977 it was enough to pay for the transport and insurance of works both loaned from institutions and private lenders and acquired directly from the artists. However, as the correspondences of the curators show, it was not enough to compensate any of the participating artists whose work was not yet held by galleries or museums, or to pay for their trip to or accommodation in Berlin. But the organizers helped arrange private sleeping options. In response to such an offer, artist Rose Finn-Kelcey replied that she and her colleague Tina Keane "will bring sleeping bags" (letter from February 21, 1977, AST). The *documenta 6*, which was held in the same year, disposed of a budget of 4,800,000 Deutschmarks for a comparable number of works (1,400) but many more artists (624, of which 66 were women), see the entry on the show on the website of the *documenta* archive:

<https://documenta.de/de/retrospective/documenta-6> (accessed June 17, 2026).

ciation of the Berlin publication with a seemingly well-financed, broadly received show seems to contradict its interpretation as an artists' book, since market orientation is a factor that defies even the most flexible approach to artists' books (Drucker 1995: 4–5). Among the *Art-Rite* contributors, too, a critical positioning towards the art market is considered one of the most important potentials of the medium.

— At second glance, though, things were more complicated. Looking at the conditions under which the show and its catalogue were realized reveals, first, that the curators of “Künstlerinnen international” were not simply bourgeois women successfully roaming the art world, and second, that the accompanying publication was more than an excessive record of the show. The impressive conception of the exhibition was neither taken for granted nor easily achieved by the organizers. *Künstlerinnen international* was not simply a product of the system; it was created *with and against the system*.

— In 1973, three artists, Evelyn Kuwertz, Antonia Wernery, and Sarah Schumann, proposed the project to the nGbK, which was founded in 1969 West Berlin based on a grassroots democratic model. They dreamt of staging a major exhibition that would allow tracking works of artist-women through the last century and therefore provide young artist-women with role models. Aware of the financial and organizational requirements of such an ambitious project, they looked for institutional support. The nGbK, which they valued for its political awareness and innovative approaches, seemed a good choice.⁶⁾ However, the predominately male members of the society kept on rejecting the project (Kaiser 2013: 141; Behrens 1991: 81). While they did not oppose its motives, they considered its shape to be immoderate (Bierther et al. 1977: 1). But the applicants refused to give up. Having been involved with the women's movement, they had already faced worse resistance. Before approaching the nGbK, the women had worked together on another project. As part of the group Brot und Rosen (Bread and Roses), they published a handbook on abortion and contraception.⁷⁾ Back then, the entire production relied on feminist structures. In the case of “Künstlerinnen international,” though, the women knew that separatism would not do it. The exhibition the three of them wished for required funding that the movement could not provide. Nevertheless, the ties that the artists had developed with other activists proved vital for acquiring these funds. As the nGbK did not relent, the group decided to beat it with its own weapons, namely, a democratic vote. They called for support among the women's movement, and at the next meeting,

6)

Evelyn Kuwertz discussed the women's perception of the nGbK with me during a conversation on February 12, 2025. In 1977, the society already looked back at more than eight years of researching, publishing, and exhibiting on various dimensions of the social importance, role, and impact of art. From 1970 to 1973, for example, the working group Kinderspielzeug (Children's Toys) set up an action room for children to try out new forms of group interaction and collaboration; and in 1977, just before “Künstlerinnen international,” the nGbK hosted a show of about 100 pictures that were created in the context of the fight against the criminalization of abortion during the last hundred years.

7)

The *Frauenhandbuch Nr. 1* (Women's Handbook No. 1) was a small but information-packed booklet that immediately sold 10,000 copies, and in 1974 saw a reprint of 100,000 copies (Othmer 2021: 395; Boehm 2024: 107–116). It was self-published by the women without any institutional association or support, as Evelyn Kuwertz told me in a conversation on February 12, 2025. Brot und Rosen was founded by Helke Sander after the dissolution of the Aktionsrat zur Befreiung der Frauen (Action Council for Women's Liberation) that in turn had been formed in opposition to the patriarchal structures within the SDS (Socialist German Students' Union) (Lux 2022: 31–35). Four of its members (Evelyn Kuwertz, Sarah Schumann, Verena Stefan, and Antonia Wernery) were, at least temporarily, involved with “Künstlerinnen international.”

the art society registered a (temporal) member high. Encouraged by word of mouth, many women—even if they were acquainted with the applicants only casually or not at all—joined the nGbK, took part in the vote, and got the project passed (Kaiser 2013: 141; Behrens 1991: 81).

— The project's institutional association came with many advantages: the group's official correspondence, for instance, now featured the nGbK letterhead. It lent professionalism to a group whose members had zero to little experience with organizing exhibitions.⁸⁾ Moreover, the society provided the women with an office that could be used for typewriting, phone calls, meetings, and material storage.⁹⁾ But most importantly, the institutional integration meant: money. Money that the nGbK received from the state-funded Lotto foundation. Thus, for the sake of realizing their vision and contrary to their former separatist approach, the organizers of "Künstlerinnen international" made use of *Staatsknete* (public funds). Yet, while the sum of 100,000 Deutschmarks covered most of the material concerns including the catalogue, it wasn't enough to remunerate the organizers. In the catalogue's foreword, the women refer to the three years of unpaid labor as "self-exploitation" (Bierther et al. 1977: 1). This personal sacrifice of the seven organizers, however, already came with certain privileges: thanks to a supportive social background and (side-)jobs that were compatible with the organization of the show, they *were* able to work for no money, even if under humble circumstances.¹⁰⁾ This points to the precarious conditions under which in 1977 a project "for women about women by women"¹¹⁾ could come into existence. It attests to the fact that expanding women's scope of action by organizing an exhibition and writing a catalogue, tasks that had been almost exclusively male domains beforehand, weren't socially sanctioned anymore—but by no means did they proceed on equal terms. While thus sticking to female personnel at the level of production,¹²⁾ the curators still wished to present the fruits of this work to an audience of all genders.¹³⁾ And successfully did so: 35,000 visitors came to see the exhibition (Kaiser 2013: 138).

— The challenge that such a venture presented to the androcentric art world would, after all, fit Lippard's conception of the artists' book. In line with her call for subversive energy, the project mobilized institutional structures for feminist concerns. But what about the accompanying publication? Of course, one can't simply equate the publication with its context of creation. However, I would claim that it was exactly this context that made *Künstlerinnen international* an artists' book. A context that emerged on the threshold of different,

8)

Between 1971 and 1973, Evelyn Kuwertz, Antonia Wernery, and Brigitte Mauch worked on an exhibition about the conditions women face in society and in the family (*Zur Situation der Frau in Familie und Gesellschaft*) that, due to the depiction of domestic rape, was cancelled by the Berlin government. In protest, the women showed it at short notice at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (University of Fine Arts). Kuwertz and Wernery were among the initial proponents of "Künstlerinnen international," but only Kuwertz remained in the group until the show's opening. I owe this information to conversations with Evelyn Kuwertz on September 27, 2023, and February 12, 2025. See also Kaiser 2013: 49–60.

9)

Curator Karin Petersen told me about this in a conversation on May 3, 2024.

10)

Alongside "Künstlerinnen international," artist Sarah Schumann, for instance, presented her works in a solo show at the Berlin Gallery at Savignyplatz (Courage 1977: 48) to earn a living. Karin Petersen, one of her co-curators, financed herself through homework tutoring (hp 1977).

11)

The said motto is quoted from a letter to the editors from March 23, 1977, in which a visitor expresses her enthusiasm about the catalogue. The letter is part of the private archive of curator Inge Schumacher-Tyroller (AST).

12)

While the women did not accept artworks that had been created in collaboration with an artist-man, they did not refuse to work with men in general: Peter Weibel, for instance, took over the correspondence with the group for his partner VALIE EXPORT when she was abroad (see letter from January 11, 1977, AST), while Wolfgang Oppermann stepped in for his partner artist Anna Oppermann and took care of the installation of her work (Schäffler, Kleine and Hossmann 2024: 78).

but partially overlapping social spheres: while feminist artists, activists, and scholars created the publication, it was sold not only to their peers but also to a wider middle-class public, which was interested in art but lacked connections to the women's movement. And it wasn't sold as a pamphlet, artwork, or scientific survey, but, while integrating elements of these forms, was distributed as an exhibition catalogue—a medium that this audience was familiar with. The publication's catalogue-like appearance was not only due to formal decisions, but an effect resulting from its point of sale. Its distribution in conjunction with a major, state-funded exhibition conformed to the codes of the art world and lent the publication the appeal of an exhibition catalogue. At the same time, the critical inclination of its producers and the precarious conditions of its production made it deconstruct these art world norms. Endowed with the subversive energy of an artists' book, the Berlin publication, however, still circulated under the label of an exhibition catalogue and could thus reach a broad audience. I therefore argue that *Künstlerinnen international*, precisely because it was *distributed* as an exhibition catalogue, could *act* as an artists' book.

— At first sight, the publication maintained several key elements of what was then, and still is today, conceived as an exhibition catalogue: it included a foreword, an essay part, biographical material on the artists, and even a color-printed picture section. However, departing from the traditional function of an exhibition catalogue, *Künstlerinnen international* only provided an incomplete index of the show. Instead of documenting the exhibition, it opened up to the visual and intellectual cosmos that inspired its creation: a memoir by Virginia Woolf about her great aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, was placed next to a home story about Hannah Höch, compiled by curator Karin Petersen; a theory-loaded essay on the Czech surrealist Toyen by philosopher Rita Bischof neighbored field notes of curator Sarah Schumann having coffee with Meret Oppenheim in Paris. And while the chief editor of the international art magazine *heute Kunst*, Gislinde Nabakowski, discussed how to work amidst and against misogynic capitalism, a few pages further VALIE EXPORT presented her "reflections on the relationship between women and creativity" (Bierther et al. 1977: 100). In the second half of the publication, artist's biographies completed this collection of essays, interviews, and reports. These biographical entries, varying in length and form, were compiled by everyone at hand, including the represented artists themselves. In fact, the conception of the entire publication was mainly in the hands of artists, as four of the seven curators were artists themselves. However, it is

13)

For some hours on March 20, 1977, though, the exhibition was closed for men. This decision was due to an intervention by a group of women who protested against the curatorial politics of the exhibition makers (Courage 1977: 48). They accused the curators of having applied a traditional concept of art by choosing artworks that conformed to the norms of the art market rather than spurring political change. By encouraging other women to bring their artworks to the Charlottenburg Palace, they wished to promote a broader and less hierarchized interpretation of art (Behrens 1991: 95–96). During a discussion between these critics and the curators, men were not allowed to enter the exhibition space for about two hours, according to a retrospective statement in the organizers' records. This statement is part of the AST.

not the professional background of its editors that accounts for the catalogue's proximity to artists' books but the choices they made when creating it.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY — One of these decisions concerns the publication's self-reflexivity, a characteristic that was emphasized by many of Lippard's contemporaries as integral to artists' books (Lippard et al. 1976/1977). Many artists' books that critically reflect on their bookishness either address it as a formal feature or an abstract idea. When referring to their production, they merely do so by exploring its technical side (Drucker 1995: 185–191). Other artists' books, however, lay out the complex social and cultural interactions forming their basis (Thurmann-Jajes 2009: 178). It is this transparency towards the conditions of its creation that marks the closeness of *Künstlerinnen international* to artists' books of the same era. By disclosing the ecologies of knowledge on which it was based, the catalogue's authors demonstrated a specific sensibility to the medium they used, discerning both its economic and epistemic limitations. They not only tried to transmit the structural obstacles to women in art but also articulated the hindrances they encountered when researching them, and more specifically, when creating what was conceived of as a catalogue. In meta-reflections, anecdotes, reading recommendations, address listings, and acknowledgements, this task is conveyed as particularly challenging, and primarily collaborative. The scarcity of sources resulting from poor archival and historiographical records on artist-women and their works is manifested in brief remarks such as “no information to be found” (Bierther et al. 1977: 182; [Fig. 1]) as well as in regrets over the loss or inaccessibility of artworks (ibid.: 162; 144). The catalogue makers also admit the economies of time that limited their research, be it in explicit notes (“Unfortunately, we were not able to get all the material for the catalogue in time, so here are just a few illustrations as examples” (ibid.: 286)) or more implicitly through the time-saving reprint of articles or essays. In the same vein, *Künstlerinnen international* discloses the personal and professional network it relied on to counter these economic and epistemic challenges. The Berlin publication introduces itself as a forum that spans disciplines and nations;¹⁴⁾ it contains articles by international art historians and critics as well as contributions by philosophers and literary scholars. These pieces stand alongside texts which were compiled by women whose language skills or first-hand experience had brought them

14)

The artist biographies in the second half of the catalogue are sorted by nation. Most of the time, the concept is interpreted as place of residence and not of birth. The publication's claim to internationality, though, is narrowed down to “the most important *European* art movements” (Bierther et al. 1977: 2, emphasis mine) in the catalogue's foreword. This corresponds to the Eurocentric bias of the selection, which is explained with procurement problems (ibid.: 3). Betye Saar is the only Black artist who is featured in the catalogue with a photograph of her work *The Queen of Sheba/She* in an entry on the Californian feminist art scene (ibid.: 339), yet she was not represented in a biographical entry. This imbalance is symptomatic of the emerging feminist art history in German-speaking countries of the 1970s and 1980s. While eager to build on American feminist art histories that focused on gender, it ignored the same discipline's critical study of race as hierarchizing principle. This reluctance was finally addressed by the 6th *Kunsthistorikerinnentagung* (Conference of Women Art Historians) in 1995 (Schmidt-Linsenhoff 1997: 8).

Alma Lessing
(um 1900)

Keine Angaben zu finden



182

Friedrich von Olfers, Berlin

// Figure 1

Artist biography of Alma Lessing with the indication “No information to be found”

041

to the project: journalist Lilia Bevilacqua, for example, who wasn't particularly familiar with art but fluent in Italian, conducted vast research on Italian artists, while artist Ilse Teipelke wrote an article on the Californian women artists' movement, which she got to know during a DAAD funded scholarship. The curators themselves wrote eight of the 18 catalogue essays, driven, first and foremost, by curiosity, but also by pragmatism: their limited resources did not allow them to outsource work—except at no pay. This is why, eventually, an important part of the catalogue was compiled by the featured artists themselves: while the curators granted them the freedom to choose how to represent their work in the publication, the artists took work off their hands. The plurality of voices condensed in *Künstlerinnen international* and the precarious circumstances under which it was produced, however, also show in less intentional ways: brimming with information and ideas, *Künstlerinnen international* is simultaneously full of misspellings and formal irregularities. These imperfections, too, expose the tension between a high level of passion for the cause and the limited resources the curators were constantly dealing with. After all, the will to provide information on artist-women in the past and present outweighed the pursuit of perfection—and met with the wish for a more structural critique by also addressing the fragile status of this information.

— This display of the production level was certainly inspired by publishing strategies developed within the women's movement. In the 1970s, most feminist publications came with either a foreword or an afterword in which the authors disclosed both the economic conditions and social-cultural biases of their writing.¹⁵⁾ Magazines such as *Courage* or *Die Schwarze Botin* were especially eager to integrate a meta-discourse that would reflect the presented contents as being shaped by these factors. In the case of *Künstlerinnen international*, such strategies had already been explored by most members of the curatorial team in diverse contexts,¹⁶⁾ not least by publishing the previously mentioned *Frauenhandbuch*.

— Thus, the catalogue both stimulated and documented the transnational transfer of knowledge between academia, art, and activism. Through reading recommendations (Bierther et al. 1977: 57, fn. 17), the indication of addresses of magazines (ibid.: 99, fn. 11), or calls for participation in art projects (ibid.: 282), it even enabled its readers to continue this transfer. The transparency of *Künstlerinnen international* regarding its social, intellectual, and economic roots lends the catalogue a striking resemblance to artists' books. But it also relates to the central and most critical topic when investigating the scope of this proximity: the diffusion of knowledge

15)

In the afterword to her bestselling novel *Häutungen (Shedding)*, Verena Stefan, for instance, lets her readers know about the challenges that came with independent feminist publishing (Stefan 1976: 125–127). In this afterword, she also refers to her involvement with "Künstlerinnen international" (ibid.: 127). Social and cultural conventions that affect personal expression are addressed by Marianne Wex in her afterword to "*Weibliche*" und "*männliche*" *Körpersprache als Folge patriarchalischer Machtverhältnisse* ("Female" and "Male" Body Language as a Manifestation of Patriarchal Power Relations) that she self-published following on the presentation of her research at "Künstlerinnen international" (Wex 1979: 9).

16)

Karin Petersen, for instance, was a member of the editorial team of *Courage* and Evelyn Kuwertz worked on the layout of the magazine's first issue. Two years earlier, she had compiled and published a publication in the form of a newspaper that accompanied the exhibition *Zur Situation der Frau in Familie und Gesellschaft*, see footnote 8. Sarah Schumann contributed to *Die Schwarze Botin*, and both she and Kuwertz designed covers for Helke Sander's magazine *Frauen und Film*.

and the question of whether and when it should be regarded as a defining element of artists' books.

DOCUMENTATION — Historically, the transmission of information about art had been distinguished from artworks themselves, relying on a hierarchical understanding of the latter as original utterance and the former as its mere reproduction or contextualization. Yet, starting in the early 1960s, artists had destabilized that dichotomy by introducing the collection, archiving, and transmission of information into their practices. Instead of privileging the act of creation, they embraced different techniques of recording, ordering, and transmitting lived experience. This development abandoned the traditional difference between art and documentation (Mœglin-Delcroix 2009: 34–35) and contributed to the emergence of artists' books in the 1960s and 1970s. To discern the specific quality of the latter, Anne Mœglin-Delcroix proposes to differentiate between the documentation *of art* and documentation *as art*, acknowledging that the will to document can become an art practice itself—while at the same time maintaining that such practices tend to blur that very opposition (Mœglin-Delcroix 2009: 34, 37). Hence, she concludes that any attempt to determine whether or not a book that predominantly serves as documentation should be considered art, and respectively an artist's book, cannot rely on “outward visible signs” (ibid. 2009: 37) but must look for its historical functions. These are conditioned by the intentions of its makers, its discursive surroundings, and actual reception.

— Thus, investigating the artistic character of *Künstlerinnen international*, and consequently its qualification as an artists' book, I will turn to the catalogue's contemporaries. What did they want artists' books to do? What did the catalogue makers want the catalogue to do? And what did it ultimately do according to its readers?

— As for Lippard, she had found the aspiration of both documentation and information to be at the very heart of feminist artists' books. She opens her statement in *Art-Rite* by pointing to their “value as a means of spreading information” (Lippard et al. 1976/1977: 10) and characterizes them as “inexpensive vehicle[s] for feminist ideas” (ibid.). Although the material assembled in *Künstlerinnen international* meets this definition, Lippard herself would certainly not have referred to every feminist publication that wanted to inform as an artists' book. Nor did the curators themselves consider their passionate but hasty composition of the publication to be a decidedly artistic practice. To the contrary, they repeatedly stressed their will to provide information.¹⁷⁾ This function was also

17)

In an advertisement from 1976 in the magazine *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* (Vol. 7, Issue 25, p. 91), they refer to the catalogue as a “documentation.” Moreover, in a letter to photographer Gisèle Freud, curator Petra Zöfel holds: “The catalogue will be an important document for the study of female art history” (letter without date [end of 1975], AST).

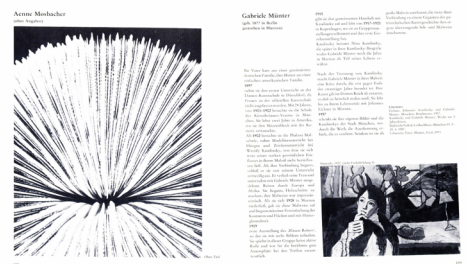
highlighted by most reviewers: complimenting the catalogue's information value, they praised it as a "foundational documentation" (Schimming 1977) bearing the quality of a handbook (Blechen 1977). However, they also pointed to its "unprofessional" appeal (Spatz 1977), noted the clumsy language of entries composed by artists (Blechen 1977), and at the same time emphasized its specific ability to transmit "the often tangled biographies" (ibid.) of artist-women. Similarly, they recognized the catalogue's attempt to convey the conditions under which artist-women worked and continue to work (Stromberg 1977), and enthusiastically rated it as "one of the most beautiful, exciting books I have read in the past few years" (Spatz 1977). These observations resonate with the self-reflexive approach of the catalogue makers discussed above. This self-reflexivity not only applied to their work as editors but also to the lives and work of the artists they researched: instead of accumulating isolated facts, *Künstlerinnen international* addressed both the conditions behind the captured lives and behind this capturing itself. Thus, "to both its makers and its recipients, the catalogue was indeed" a tool of information, but one that surpassed an uncritical amassing of data. *Künstlerinnen international* not only documented what artist-women of the past and present had "worked on until now" (Bierther et al. 1977: 3), but by revealing the complex contexts in which they worked and the categories through which art history retold them or not, pointed to the *fabricated* character of that very knowledge.

COLLECTION AND COLLAGE — This effect was mainly a result of the collaborative character of the catalogue's composition: the collection of material, involving many people in its making, translated into a practice of compilation that corresponded to one of the techniques most important to feminist artists in the 1970s, the collage (Krieger and Streim 2024: 16). Much like the catalogue, feminist art of that era did not ignore the premises of its creation but most often made them its subject. This ambition spurred works that aimed to both reveal and counter androcentric conventions. Collage provided a sophisticated means to realize such simultaneity: it allowed to document and to disrupt at the same time. That same effect was achieved by *Künstlerinnen international* when juxtaposing the diverse material on the artists' lives and works gathered by the curators and their collaborators. On the one hand the catalogue made an effort to comply with the conventions of how to tell an artist's life, while on the other exposing them as contingent and constructed.

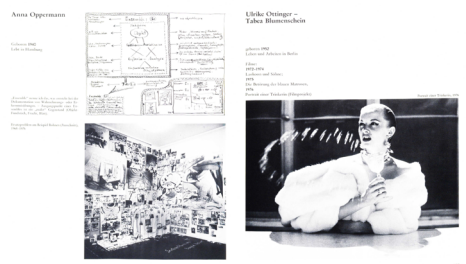
— Due to limited resources, the editors not only relied on the help of friends, colleagues, and the participating artists to obtain

material, but also included most of the material received in the catalogue without further editing. The effects of this editing policy can be observed at both the micro and macro level. It is reflected in diverse types of texts (essay, interview, report, survey) that, despite their heterogeneity, are all assembled under the same heading ("Biographien"). The diverging interpretations of this genre are also reflected in the way the entries use the available space of usually one to two pages: while some of them contain life data presented in tabular form, as personal statements, or in elaborate prose, others forego biographical information altogether (see [Fig. 2]). Unless explicitly stated, it is not always clear whether this is due to a lack of resources or the result of conceptual considerations (see, for example, [Fig. 3]). This irritation proves to be a productive one: it not only draws attention to the paucity of archival records on artist-women but also points to the constructed character of biographies in general, often disguised by standardized tables. In *Künstlerinnen international*, the relation between life and art, which is forged by biographical writing, differs from entry to entry. The readers need to approach it on their own terms and establish connections between materials spanning historical sources, sketches, manifestos, or even letters that explain the absence of a more sophisticated entry by referring to children, sheep, and chicken (see [Fig. 4]). The co-presence of multiple ways of representing an artist and her work attests both to the social and cultural fabrication of art historical writing and to life histories in general. The deconstruction of the artist biography peaks when artist Annette Messenger, mimicking the language of a poetry album, notes: "What she doesn't like: biographies" (Bierther et al. 1977: 291).

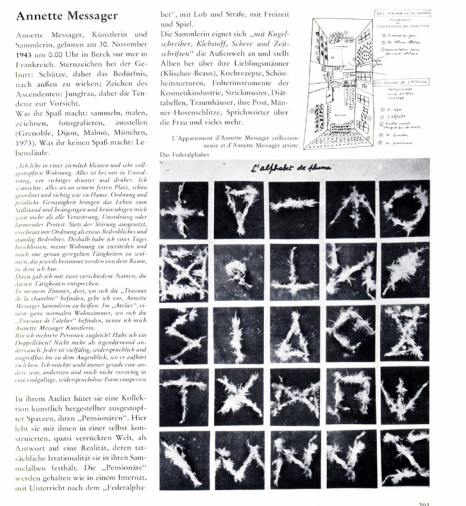
— This aversion of Messenger towards biographies points to the tension that permeated all entries. Taking up one of the most conventional genres of art history, and, from Vasari's *Lives* onwards, one of the dearest to patriarchy (Salomon 1991; Christadler 2000; Berger 2002), this choice of genre, on the one hand, tied in with the traditional function of the exhibition catalogue as a means of promotion. The artist biography offered particularly the younger artists the opportunity to present themselves and their work to the art market. Thus, interpreted as an instrument of capitalizing art, it could be (and indeed was) criticized for merely adding artist-women to a deeply patriarchal and capitalist system



// Figure 2
Artists' biographies of Aenne Mosbacher and Gabriele Münter



// Figure 3
Artists' biographies of Anna Oppermann, Ulrike Ottinger, and Tabea Blumenschein



// Figure 4
Artist biography of Annette Messenger, including a sketch of her apartment floor plan

that, in consequence, would be left untouched.¹⁸⁾ On the other hand, however, the biographies included in *Künstlerinnen international* do not simply recycle a reactionary category but reshape it: not only through the juxtaposition of the diverse yet entirely fabricated shapes an artist's biography can take, but also on the level of content. By referring to life events that in conventional catalogues would have been considered either irrelevant private matters (at least for artist-men) or central information outweighing any discussion of artworks (at least about artist-women), they relate art history as social history: information on love affairs, mental health, and care work are placed alongside questions of style, exhibition records, and prize listings (see [Fig. 5]). In this way, the social conditions that shape an artist's life are made visible and corrupt the idea of the autonomous, God-given genius. At the same time, the specific barriers artist-women encounter also materialize. What would otherwise only show up as fewer exhibitions, poorer training, or long work breaks, is explained, for example, by childcare, "mencare" and poor or no educational opportunities.¹⁹⁾ Through the sheer mass of the biographies assembled in *Künstlerinnen international*, these factors are conveyed as structural obstacles imposed by society, hindering their interpretation as individual fate, or worse, personal failure. Thus, while sticking to the traditional form of the artist biography, at least by title, the catalogue makers were also testing its limits.²⁰⁾

— This tension between assimilation and reformation mirrors what is constitutive of the entire project: the organizers of "Künstlerinnen international" set out to question a system that at the same time provided, even if poorly, for their professional existence. This led to a clashing desire for recognition and change. The catalogue presented a fitting medium to meet this conflict: the unconventional adoption of a conventional form corresponded to both the curators' wish for approval by the art world and the will to reform it. Thus, one could interpret *Künstlerinnen international* as a feminist mobilization of the exhibition catalogue, oscillating between adaption and subversion. The both extensive and fragmentary character of *Künstlerinnen international* calls for its interpretation as an artists' book that emerged as such through its perception as an exhibition catalogue. It was this somehow paradoxical disposition that finally caused it to sell like a batch of hot cookies.

18)

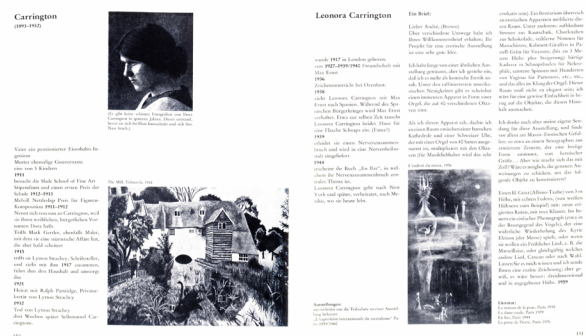
This reproach has been discussed among feminist art historians since the 1970s (Lindner et al. 1989; Salomon 1991; Schade and Wenk 1995; Zimmermann 2009). Among its earliest proponents in Europe were Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker (1981).

19)

This approach did not explicitly abandon the idea of a biological sex. Yet, although it is difficult to generalize the catalogue's stance towards this topic, at multiple instances throughout *Künstlerinnen international* (for example, when VALIE EXPORT analyzes the androcentrism condensed in the concept of creativity (Bierther et al. 1977: 100–104) or Marianne Wex and Gerhild Liebenberg study the social dimension of body language (ibid.: 105–113)), the social and cultural fabrication of gender is emphasized.

20)

The deconstruction of the artist biography performed by *Künstlerinnen international* anticipated how, in the catalogue's wake, feminist art historians started to reexamine the genre, see, for example, Hoffmann-Curtius and Wenk 1997 and Lindner et al. 1989 for the German-speaking context or Pollock 1980, Parker and Pollock 1981, and Salomon 1991 for the Euro-American context.



// Figure 5

Artists' biographies of Dora Carrington and Leonora Carrington, in which "passionate love affairs," care work, and mental health problems are mentioned alongside details on the artists' exhibitions and training

DISTRIBUTION — Even if it is not possible to track whether *Künstlerinnen international* made it to gynecologists' waiting rooms, it is at least not too improbable, as it managed to reach a more diverse public than both artists' books and exhibition catalogues usually did at that time.

— In 1977, just before the opening of the exhibition, Lippard nuanced her earlier statement in an article for *Art in America*. She confessed being guilty of having too easily equated medium and content: While the format of artists' books would, indeed, allow for a broader democratized reception, their content, often obscure and "wildly self-indulgent" (Lippard 1985a: 48), would mostly not—thus keeping the books off the supermarket shelves. At the same time, she questioned that very fantasy of circulation by pointing to the inherent danger of mere adaption to capitalism and instead supported avoiding the commodification of art (ibid.: 47–48).²¹⁾ *Künstlerinnen international* could relate to both findings: While it corresponds to Lippard's observation by presenting one instance where relatively affordable²²⁾ but diverse content was presented in a way accessible enough to reach radical feminists and bourgeois art lovers alike, thus expanding the audience for feminist thought as well as for contemporary art, her warning fittingly names the conflict *Künstlerinnen international* needed to navigate and, astonishingly enough, successfully did. Neither did the catalogue simply adapt to art market conventions, nor did it settle for being an insider tip among activists. Both the catalogue and the show allowed art to be *publicly* questioned from a feminist perspective. While by then, the women's movement was already addressing the androcentric premises of the art world, with *Künstlerinnen international*, this discourse migrated into the public discussion. "Never," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported, "has an art exhibition in Berlin caused so much discord, provoked such heated controversy and protests" (Rhode 1977). This public exchange unfolded in bourgeois newspapers and feminist publications, with both even taking notice of each other.²³⁾ For a rare moment in time, these discourses met—if not for agreement, then at least for debate. A crucial source for this discussion was the exhibition catalogue, which, other than the show, met almost unanimous approval. Karin Petersen, one of the curators, recalls that most of the visitors did not wait until they saw the show but bought it straight away.²⁴⁾ Soon, it went into a second print run. By choosing an exhibition catalogue to publish the scattered universe that the joint effort of artists, scholars, and activists had put together, the creators took advantage of the format's common reputation: people bought it because they saw it as a

21)

Almost ten years later, and looking back on the preceding developments, Lippard (1985b) deepened this critical stance.

22)

The catalogue was sold for 20 Deutschmarks (Ohff 1977).

23)

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Rhode 1977), for instance, refers to an article that appeared in *Courage* (Haffner 1977), although without naming the exact source.

24)

I owe this information to a conversation with Karin Petersen on May 3, 2024.

medium they were accustomed to, or at least not afraid of—factors that should not be underestimated in a time when feminism was on the verge of entering popular culture (a development *Künstlerinnen international* both fostered and was indicative of) but still provoked anxious to angry skepticism. While the Berlin publication stretched the conventions of an exhibition catalogue, its distribution context and outward structure (foreword, essays, picture section, and biographies) let it appear to comply with them. Thus, the fact that *Künstlerinnen international* was able to attract both middle-class art lovers and feminist audiences can be explained with a careful bending of common structures.

— If one places this story in a broader context, this formal disposition of *Künstlerinnen international* proves to be quite conventional: scholars, such as Michael Glasmeier, Anke te Heesen, and Regine Ehleiter, have shown how, from the 1960s onwards, the exhibition catalogue had taken multiple paths, not only befriending artists' books (Glasmeier 1994: 159; Glasmeier 2004), but also borrowing from academic writing (te Heesen 2015) or occasionally becoming the exhibition itself (Ehleiter 2024). Moreover, new concepts, such as that of "artists' publications" (Schade and Thurmann-Jajes 2009), offer an analytical framework for capturing and contextualizing these intermedia exchanges. However, the feminist contribution to this diversification has only rarely been considered in the historiography of the exhibition catalogue. In addition to *Künstlerinnen international*, many other artists' publications call for closing this gap. They reinterpreted the form of the exhibition catalogue—and at the same time challenged social and cultural hierarchies. It is high time to tell their stories. The historical actors are now between 70 and 80 years old. Talking to them gets *Künstlerinnen international* off the shelves, or sometimes even out from under them. Most often, it is then placed next to some coffee pots and, from time to time, a bowl of cookies.

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Figure 2: Scan from: Bierther et al. 1977, pp. 188–189.

Figure 3: Scan from: Bierther et al. 1977, pp. 256–257.

Figure 4: Scan from: Bierther et al. 1977, p. 291.

Figure 5: Scan from: Bierther et al. 1977, pp. 150–151.

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SHARED UTOPIAS. TOMASZ SCHULZ'S COOP-BOOKS (1979–1988) IN THE CONTEXT OF MAIL ART

ABSTRACT — This paper presents the first art historical analysis of Polish mail artist Tomasz Schulz's (*1951) COOP-Books, focusing on *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* (1979–ca. 1986). By examining selected pages, it explores how the book embodies strategies typical of the international mail art network of the 1970s and 1980s and how contributors used it to share artistic ideas, political views, and insights into their personal lives. By comparing the book and its entries with Birger Jesch's *The First Mail Art Project of Dresden* (1980), the concepts of *CONTART* by Robert Rehfeldt and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, and *arte íntimo* by Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, as well as relating it to the notion of a "tautological feminist sign" by Ewa Partum, *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* is interpreted as a particularly intimate mail art object. While operating in a pre-political sphere, it blends politically engaged and deeply personal content, exemplifying the concept of contact as art and contributing to the utopian vision of a global artists' union shared within mail art.

Dear Friend, this is [a] COOP-Book about the very important matters. What's important for you? Add. . . & send to your[']s art friend that will repeat the operation when you find this book finished—return please to: Tomasz Schulz [. . .] keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch keep in touch¹⁾

— With this note, the teacher, artist, and cultural manager Tomasz Schulz introduced readers and potential contributors to his COOP-Book *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters*. From 1979, when he initiated it, to 1988, when he left his home country Poland and moved to Germany, Schulz launched approximately 30 such artists' books. Conceived as collaborative works, they were realized in two ways: Most of them grew in a rhizomatic manner, with Schulz leaving the creation to unknown contributors, who independently decided whom to pass the book on to next.²⁾ Others were tied to his physical presence, as he carried them on his travels and used them as diaries. They featured entries by himself, by the artists he encountered, or by both together.³⁾ In this way, each COOP-Book was realized through the rapidly expanding international artist networks of the time.

1)

Schulz 1979: 6–7; I thank Tomasz Schulz for answering my questions, Marie Gerbaulet for introducing me to his work, Kathrin Barutzki and Franziska Rauh for inviting me to present this research in Bremen and reviewing this text, the participants of the seminar series *Intellectual Art History in Eastern Europe* (Vienna, October 2024 – January 2025) for their critical input, and Evangelisches Studienwerk Villigst for financially supporting this research. This investigation also benefitted from the online workshop *Women and Mail Art. Gendered Perspectives on Marginal Artistic Practices* (Bern/Warsaw, October 2024; see Egger 2024b).

2)

Schulz's personal archive in Potsdam holds five such COOP-Books: *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* (1979–ca. 1986), *Dada is. . . . as Dada* (1979–ca. 1984), *1980* (1980–1981), *Signs, Numbers, Letters, Words* (ca. 1986), and *Rubber, Rubber* (ca. 1988), the second in a three-part series on rubber stamps.

3)

Schulz's personal archive in Potsdam holds four such COOP-Books: *Radioactive Passport* (1981–1984), *Identiteitskaart van Mars* (1984–1986), *Contact Non Stop. Make Art Daily* (1984–1988), and *Th. Schulz. . . on the road* (1988).

THE COOP-BOOKS: EPISTOLARY DOCUMENTS OF A PRE-POLITICAL SPHERE ON THE ROADS OF TRANSNATIONAL ARTISTIC NETWORKS IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

— In 1975, after studying Polish linguistics in Toruń, Tomasz Schulz moved to Łądek Zdrój, a Polish city near the Czech border, to work as a schoolteacher. He actively followed the Polish Conceptual art scene, where, four years earlier, curator Andrzej Kostolowski and artist Jarosław Kozłowski had launched the non-commercial, independent, international artist network *NET*. It stated that “points of the net can be anywhere” and that they “are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation” (Kemp-Welch 2018: 98). At around the same time, West German art historian and mail artist Klaus Groh began to establish a similar infrastructure for international artist collaborations. His *International Artists’ Cooperation* (IAC) circulated a newsletter to connect artists across both Eastern and Western bloc states who sought to participate in transnational projects (Groh 1972). Through these initiatives, Schulz discovered mail art—a form of artistic exchange practiced primarily in Europe and the Americas, open to anyone, and relatively easy to access through discreetly circulated contact lists (see, for example, Röder 2008; Mrotzek/Röder 1996).

— Mail art consisted in the international postal exchange of graphic works on paper through the abovementioned networks to assert independence from traditional artistic institutions on a global scale. Through the network, artists, art professionals, and enthusiasts shared ideas, personal encounters, and practical information. This decentralized approach encouraged amateurs like Schulz to join and develop their mail art practices from the peripheries of national and international art centers.

— During the Cold War, postal activities in the countries addressed here were monitored, censored, and obstructed by state authorities. In Poland, this was carried out by the Security Service; in East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR), by the Stasi; in Argentina, by the military junta; and even in the United States (U.S.), by postmasters (Kienle 2022: 6). The Stasifile of German mail artist Friedrich Winnes, with whom Schulz frequently corresponded, for example, confirms that at least one COOP-Book was confiscated by the GDR (Winnes/Wohlrab 1994: 108). The fact that censorship and the issue of how to deal with it were fundamental concerns of mail art is occasionally reflected in *Artist’s Contact Book About Important Matters*. The COOP-Books represent these clandestine or immaterial intellectual networks by actively circu-

lating and distributing mail art in ways that were similar to, yet distinct from, the letters, postcards, and other projects researchers have previously studied.

— Created from blank notebooks measuring 15 × 21 cm, the COOP-Books are compact containers for numerous artistic contributions that comprise several characteristics of mail art. They resemble the format of a mail art project, are created collaboratively, and adopt influential artistic ideas that frame human contact as a form of art. A closer look at how this unfolds in *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* reveals that—like mail art in general—the COOP-Books can be understood as epistolary documents of a “pre-political sphere,”⁴⁾ (Zanichelli 2015: 102, 118) raising questions about the interplay between public and private realms in mail art. Compared to other projects, this book's unedited content offers a particularly unfiltered glimpse into how the transnational network of mail art facilitated the sharing of what might be termed “private utopias.” Because at a time when the private was increasingly considered to be political, mail art represented a “parallel public” (Blaylock 2022) or “second public sphere” (Cesh-Varga 2022) within state socialism, military dictatorships, and marginalized communities, in which various artistic concepts could be circulated clandestinely. *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* provides valuable insights into the artistic concepts and the role of the private, where domestic and intimate matters, such as friendship, family, love, and everyday life, emerged as integral components of the networked practice of mail art.

AN INTIMATE MAIL ART PROJECT: THE COOP-BOOK ARTIST'S CONTACT BOOK ABOUT IMPORTANT MATTERS (1979–CA. 1986)

— In the 1970s and 1980s, mail art projects typically started with a call to action, often featuring a conceptual, humorous, poetic, or politically engaged theme. German artist Birger Jesch launched *The First Mail Art Project of Dresden* (1980) with a paper clip, asking recipients to “mail it. . .to Dresden!” and thus place the city on the map of international artist networks (Jesch 1980a; Egger 2024a). The call includes a deadline, an address for submissions, suggestions for size and technique, and a promise to create a documentation afterward, and adheres to the network's rule for mail art projects: “no jury, no fee, no return” (Freire 2017: 50; Jesch 1994: 96). Schulz's introduction to *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* strongly resembles such a call, following the rule in the form of an add-and-pass book.

— Jesch's *First Mail Art Project of Dresden* served as an anti-war campaign. To convey this agenda to the recipients, he included

4)

Zanichelli, quoting Hannah Arendt (2010 [1958]: 27, 31), offers a historical definition of the private in the arts, considering a “feminist critique of the liberal term of privacy and its consolidation as a pre-political realm.” Drawing on Beate Rössler (2001), she recounts a 1970s feminist critique of the private as a non-public space that enabled women's oppression and led to the call to eliminate the distinction between public and private.

an artistically altered shooting target with each paper clip (Jesch 1980b; Egger 2024a). With a frontispiece of a dancing figure at whose hands and feet four flames were penciled in (Schulz 1979), *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* adopted a similar visual strategy.⁵⁾ Just like an eye focusing on an unseen entity outside the frame, that Jesch added to his shooting target, Schulz's allegory of a play with fire, too, suggests the book could be a risky endeavor if intercepted by a third party, such as the Stasi. Schulz himself was the first to contribute, with an entry featuring a collage of a black-and-white self-portrait and a portrait of Lenin on a red background, merging the revolutionary's head with his own ([Fig. 1]; Schulz 1979: 10–11). Echoing the famous Marxist slogan, Schulz called on “artists of all countries [to] unite,” linking the project to the idea of building a global artists' union through the international artistic networks—an “important matter” the book meant to contribute to.⁶⁾ Crucial to achieving this goal, or to “keep in touch,” as Schulz suggests again on a business card with a lip impression, were contact lists. They were commonly attached to the *NET* and *IAC* newsletters, printed in the documentary brochures of mail art projects, or displayed in exhibitions (Winnes/Wohlrab 1994: 51; Egger 2024a). In the *COOP-Book*, contributors successively added their details to the first and last pages, making it possible to trace the book's journey from Poland to the GDR, the UK, Ohio, and California.

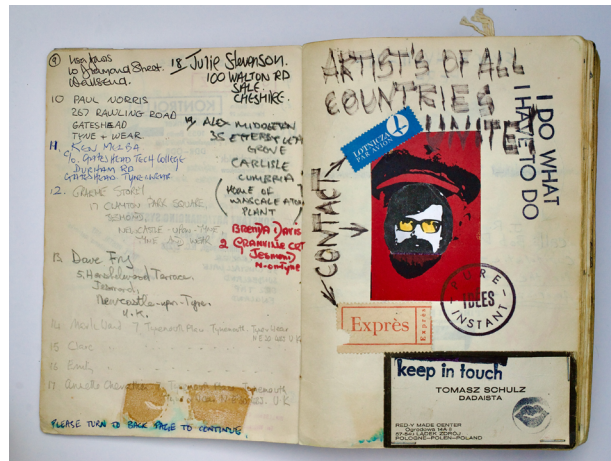
— Thus, *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* circulated in the network along with every contribution it accumulated. Each entry, along with the contact list, was added directly to the book, which now contains over 50 contributions. This process materializes a continuous process of collaborative artistic work, where the transition from one artist to the next—when the book is mobile—can be experienced by turning its pages. Unlike the conglomerates of loose postcards typically produced by mail art projects, the entries were made directly on the pages. This resulted in a linear collection of works that only encountered the small audience of Schulz and its contributors. Contrary to mail art projects designed to reach a wider audience through exhibitions and the distribution of documentary material among participants, the *COOP-Book* was seen only by those who encountered it in the homes or studios of its contributors. Even among this limited group, only readers near the end of the book's journey could view most of the works it contained. In this sense,

5)

Schulz did not add this image himself and does not know its author (email from Tomasz Schulz to Marie Egger, June 27, 2024).

6)

For now, I do not link this attempt to the *Solidarność* movement, as Schulz initiated the book in 1979, a year before the strikes of summer 1980. Aside from its reference to national artists' unions in Soviet bloc states, however, the *COOP-Books* could also be connected to the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR*). Founded by 14 intellectuals after the June 1976 protests in Poland, KOR sparked the circulation of *Samizdat* publications and bulletins during the late 1970s, enabling the Polish political opposition to rapidly grow (Sontag 2004: 6–7).



// Figure 1

Tomasz Schulz, *COOP-Book "Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters"* (p. 10–11), 1979–ca. 1986, ca. 30 × 21 cm

Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters is a particularly intimate object. This intimacy and the fact that mail art—executed as a shared epistolary practice of postal correspondence—was primarily created in the privacy of one's home or studio (James 2021: 33–41; Lemmrich 2002; Saber 2001) prompt the question of what “important matters” the contributors addressed here.

IMPORTANT MATTERS I: POLITICAL ACTIVISM (OR: ROBERT REHFELDT'S AND RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT'S *CONTART*) — In *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters*, personal and politically engaged entries mix. The book's first stop in East Berlin in 1979 reveals how these concerns typically blend in mail art, precisely because the practice often extended into the domestic sphere. Winnes's entry (Schulz 1979: 12–13) features nine colorful solidarity stamps, with the bottom right one devalued by a circular “Mail Art” stamp. The stamps were initially intended to promote the GDR's solidarity with its so-called brother states. Here, they also highlight the parallels between socialist solidarity and the ideal of mail art as a global artist community.⁷⁾ Robert Rehfeldt, who likely received the book personally from Winnes in East Berlin, then displays a broad spectrum of his artistic practice over 21 pages. His entries include his signature slogans—“ART TIME IN EUROPA,” “MAKE A CREATIVE WORLD NOW,” and “pour COLLECTIF D'ART CRÉATIF”—as well as the neologism *CONTART*, which he and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt coined to describe their vision of mail art as a potentially counteractive practice of international artists in contact (Rehfeldt 1977; Kemp-Welch 2018: 300; James 2022: 221–318). Rehfeldt also includes a note from El Salvadorian artist Jesus Romeo Galdámez Escobar (Schulz 1979: 30–31), who consolidates their mutual artistic contact with the phrase “keep in touch.” Next to it, Rehfeldt, like Schulz, calls for the world's “popular artists” to unite. His next spread ([Fig. 2]; Schulz 1979: 32–33) contains an illegible black-and-white photo with a felt tip sketch of a human head that resembles George Washington's, a comic featuring the U.S. superhero *The Flash* being hit in the face, and ten appeals to free Indigenous people.⁸⁾ Two signatures on the page attribute this work to Rehfeldt and MP Anker. Anker, in turn, adopts the slogan “Nature is Life” from his East German mail art colleague Joseph W. Huber, overlaying it on a photo collage of a crowd and a trash bin (Schulz 1979: 34–35), calling attention to environmental issues (see Barentsen 2023: 165–177).

7)

The page next to it was added later when the book was almost full, and people began using empty pages at the front. On global socialist solidarity and its practice by the GDR regime, see three recent exhibitions in Germany: *Re-Connect. Art and Conflict in Brotherland* (18/05/2023–10/09/2023, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig), *Revolutionary Romances* (11/04/2023–06/02/2024, Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden), and *Echoes of the Brother Countries* (03/01/2024–05/20/2024, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin).

8)

This spread can be read as a critical take on the outdated and inaccurate English term “Indians” used to refer to Indigenous Americans, since to the left of this drawing someone added a clipping from a Portuguese article on the yogi Maharishi, born in India, who gained popularity in the U.S. through his association with the hippie movement.



// Figure 2

Tomasz Schulz, COOP-Book “Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters” (p. 32–33), 1979–ca. 1986, ca. 30 × 21 cm

— These entries underscore a typical characteristic of mail art, where working together—often across national borders—was central.⁹⁾ Anker's series of chain letters titled *Mail Art New's*, for example, saw contributions from Rehfeldt and Wolf-Rehfeldt from the GDR, Robin Crozier from the UK, and Robin Cohen from El Salvador in 1979 (Anker 1979), as well as Guillermo Deisler, Huber, Karla Sachse, and Winnes, all based in the GDR, in 1980 ([Fig. 3], Anker 1980). These politically engaged entries—along with motifs such as caged birds (Crozier), appeals to “save the birds” (Sachse), and concerns about the “artmosphere” (Wolf-Rehfeldt)—show that mail art was deeply concerned with how to coexist in a shared public sphere. They reflect Rehfeldt's and Wolf-Rehfeldt's belief that mail art could help cultivate personal connections worldwide and “intensify the influences of arts on [the] environment and to overcome the barriers between artists and society” (Rehfeldt 1977). This philosophy aligned with their artistic idea(l) of *CONTACT*, in which mail art was meant to foster a global union of art workers who could actively promote socialist innovation and improve society.¹⁰⁾ In other words, it was about artistically engaging with the important political matters of the time. This artistic utopia was rooted in both Leninist and avant-garde ideas of art to rebel against present social conditions and abolish the distinction between art and life (Egger 2022: 41, 44–45). Schulz's and Rehfeldt's call for the artists of all countries to unite, Winnes's reflection on the GDR's solidarity politics, Anker's politically engaged entries, and Jesch's pacifist anti-war campaign can all be interpreted as contributions to this ideal of changing the sociopolitical and environmental circumstances of their time through mail art.

IMPORTANT MATTERS II: PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE (OR: GRACIELA GUTIÉRREZ MARX'S *ARTE ÍNTIMO*)

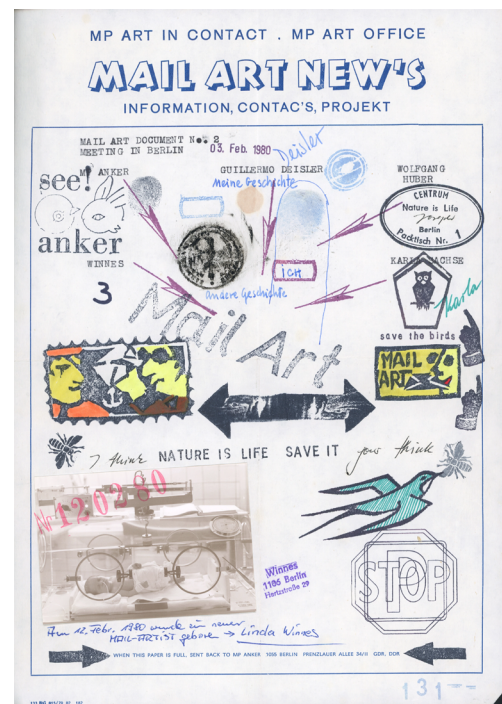
— Like several entries in *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters*, the GDR network also reflects a facet of mail art that has been only poorly investigated: its involvement of friends, lovers, or family members. Schulz did not specifically intend for this, and such topics were not addressed in Winnes's, Rehfeldt's, and Anker's entries, but private or intimate contributions, as well as those made by family members, were a recurring *important matter* in the COOP-Book. Robin Crozier and Rosie G. Thompson's entry ([Fig. 4–5]; Schulz 38–39), the first one following those of the East Berlin artists, features a per-

9)

These contributions may have been made in Rehfeldt's studio, where artists from the mail art network often visited and met in person (Mrotzek/Röder 1996: 126).

10)

This refers to the conclusion that both were “committed socialists” (Kemp-Welch 2018: 300). I have elsewhere elaborated on why this should be read carefully, considering the seemingly contradictory assertion that they were both “dissidents” (Thurmann-Jajes 2013; see Egger 2022: 11–18).



// Figure 3

MP Anker with Guillermo Deisler, Wolfgang Huber, Karla Sachse and Friedrich Winnes, *Mail Art New's* Nr. 131, 1980, collaborative collage, ca. 21 × 27.9 cm

sonal calendar sheet and an imprint of Thompson's lips. Soon after, the book gained even more diary-like contributions, such as self-proclaimed "poor groty [sic] art-student" Paul Norris's opinion that "this book is stupid" (Schulz 1979: 64–64) or children's drawings like Mark and Clare Ward's family tree and cat by the fireplace (Schulz 72–73). A brief digression to the GDR network demonstrates that family members were an integral part of their mail art, too: In the 1980s, as their children were born, friendly correspondences began to include images of them: Anker's *Mail Art New's* (Fig. 3, Anker 1980) contains a photo of Winnes's newborn daughter Linda, labeled "On February 12, 1980, a new MAIL ARTIST was born." Two years later, Winnes sent a silhouette of Linda's hand to Wolf-Rehfeldt, who was recovering in a Berlin hospital (Winnes 1981); and Jesch sent a photo of his son Moritz doing "action painting" (Jesch 1981c), after having shared drawings by Moritz with the Rehfeldts earlier that year (Jesch 1981a; Jesch 1981b). The fact that, for some, mail art was a family practice, is crowned by Martina and Steffen Giersch who, since the birth of their son Ludwig, signed with "MLS" (Giersch 1982) and announced their son's "art breakthrough" on a photo postcard to the Rehfeldts in 1983 (Giersch 1983). In 1984, the Gierschs even called for a mail art project to celebrate Ludwig's second birthday, noting that they now knew all GDR mail artists "personally and face to face," but that postal mail was "clearly not working properly anymore" (Giersch 1984), which potentially implied they were under state surveillance.

— At around the same time, this approach to mail art surfaces in an Argentine project: Schulz submitted a portrait of him and his wife Anna, drawn by his daughter Paulina, and the note "May, 25; 1978 was born in Poland the new great Dadaist PAWEL OLAF SCHULZ," as well as a collage of three portraits of Paulina, labeled "KEEP BABY" ([Fig. 6]; Gutiérrez Marx 1980b), to mail artist Graciela Gutiérrez Marx's mail art project *Grupo de familia* (1980). Gutiérrez Marx approached the topic of family much more conceptually as she attempted to artistically engage with the domestic sphere through her idea of *arte íntimo* (Rivière 2021). She initiated *Grupo de familia* for her mother's birthday to "seek shelter in the 'intimacy' of a commu-



// Figure 4 & 5

Robin Crozier and Rosie Thompson, contribution to: Tomasz Schulz, COOP-Book "Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters" (p. 38–39), 1979–ca. 1986, ca. 30 × 21 cm

nication almost clandestine” (Gutiérrez Marx 1980a) and proposed retreating home to “rescue the myth of family,” which, according to her, had gotten lost between the ideologies of “‘proletariat’ and ‘high developed culture’” (ibid.). Gutiérrez Marx found mail art to be a suitable channel to realize this endeavor intimately and in marginality, with “a noiseless attitude” in the “silence of communication” from “mouth to mouth [or] hand to hand” (Gutiérrez Marx 1978). *Grupo de familia* gathered 138 postcards, many of which show family photos or children’s drawings. Among them is a found family portrait from Huber,¹¹⁾ a shooting target from Jesch, and—alongside the family portraits—a depiction of a socialist fraternal kiss from Schulz, who resonated strongly with the project (Gutiérrez Marx 1980b).

— *Grupo de familia* is somewhat paradoxical: its proposal to return to the sphere of one’s family contradicts its request to openly share a visual result of this and distribute it among the participants, who had mostly never met in person. As Henar Rivière pointed out, this needs to be understood in the context of the Argentine military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983 (Rivière 2021; see also Kozal 2023). Gutiérrez Marx conceived *Grupo de familia* as a poetic resistance to the state’s concept of family. With a “domestic show” (Gutiérrez Marx 1980b) among family members and friends at her mother’s birthday party in her mother’s house, she replicated the safe space her mother provided her with, a place where she (and others) could creatively express themselves during a time when Argentina suffered from the violent oppression of intellectuals, creatives, journalists, and anyone who did not conform to state ideology.¹²⁾ Gutiérrez Marx assumed that, at a glance, the children’s drawings and family photos would appear innocent to potential censors, as they seemed to address solely domestic issues (instead of political ones) and hardly differed visually from common personal correspondence. Considering this, *Grupo de familia* is a meaningful example of how—especially, but not exclusively, in authoritarian regimes—mail art productively entangled the private and the political with an idealist agenda. Or, as Gutiérrez Marx would say, how it made use of the “(dis)-order of the International Postal Systems” to create “con-fusion” (Gutiérrez Marx 1980b).

— It would be overstated to suggest that *Artist’s Contact Book About Important Matters* conceptually intertwines the domestic and the public realm in the same way as *Grupo de familia* does.

11)

I thank Karla Sachse for clarifying that this image does not show Huber’s or her family. It is most likely a found private photograph from albums Sachse collected from trash containers during the 1980s (email from Karla Sachse to Marie Egger, November 30, 2024).

12)

On the antimodern and anti-Semitic Argentine state ideology during the military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, see the report of ex-prisoner Jacobo Timerman, a Soviet-born, Jewish-Argentine journalist, who stated: “Argentina has three main enemies: Karl Marx, because he tried to destroy the Christian concept of society; Sigmund Freud, because he tried to destroy the Christian concept of the family; and Albert Einstein because he tried to destroy the Christian concept of time and space” (Lewis 1981).



// Figure 6

Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, Los códigos marginales de Mama Blanca (The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca), Buenos Aires: 1980, n.p

However, the fact that certain contributors used the book—or mail art in general—for private, family-related, or children’s artistic expressions, as well as the point that mail art typically embraced these seemingly conventional types of postal correspondences from an angle of institutional critique, demonstrate how seamlessly the private and the public, the political and the personal, art and everyday life, as well as professional and amateur expression, merged in this genre. The artistic program of cooperation of *Artist’s Contact Book About Important Matters* resonates with this *modus operandi* of the network by providing a semi-public and/or semi-private platform for artistic exchange, where, for example, both *CONTART* and *arte íntimo* could be expressed. In this way, with the contributions discussed here, much like in today’s social media, the book served as a pre-digital platform through which personal utterings were shared with an initially unknown international group of individuals in the era of analog globalization.

IMPORTANT MATTERS III: TACTILITY AND THE PRESENCE OF THE BODY (OR: EVA PARTUM’S TAUTOLOGICAL ART)

— One reason why mail art objects from the Cold War period effectively sustained decentralized, transnational artist networks lies in their materiality—specifically, in their tactility and the traces authors left on them. Cristina Freire described the mail art network as producing a “fondly tactile collective memory” of physical objects that captured “intermediary moment[s] between manual force and machinery.” (Freire 2017: 54–55) This is evident in works like Thompson’s typewritten texts (**Fig. 5**, Schulz 1979: 39) or Wolf-Rehfeldt’s *Typewritings* (Anker 1979), and the countless stamps used in mail art. The connection between mail art and the human body was further explored by Katalin Cseh-Varga, who proposed viewing mail art as a performative practice, exemplified by the 1982 performance *TRANS-IDEA* by Iosif Király and Calin Dan, where the artists attempted to mail themselves in an oversized envelope (Cseh-Varga 2021). Similarly, media and communication scholar Esther Milne examined the transfer of physical presence in analog and digital epistolary practices as a socio-technical phenomenon (Milne 2012). These discussions resonate with the dual meaning of *contact*, which refers to both interpersonal communication (as in written correspondence) and physical connection (as in touch). For many artists during the Cold War, the latter was difficult to achieve. As a result, transferring their physical presence via the postal system—leaving tangible traces of their bodies in written correspondence—became a compelling method of producing mail art.

— The joint entry by British artist Robin Crozier and U.S. artist

Rosie G. Thompson (Schulz 1979: 38–41) delves into this duality of immaterial and physical contact in mail art. Thompson inserted a green paper pocket into the COOP-Book to which she added a round yellow sticker, three pink intersecting lines resembling rays of light, three scattered ‘stamps’ (one featuring her portrait), and a typewritten note. The collage also included a page from her 1979 calendar and a postcard from Yugoslav mail artist Balinth Szombathy. At the top, an imprint of Thompson’s lips is partially concealed by the green pocket. Crozier added a postcard by MP Anker and an introductory label to the calendar sheet, obscuring Thompson’s note on how sunlight touching her skin grounded her—a nod to the relationship between time and space in the analog, globalized world of 1979. More conspicuous is Crozier’s outline of Thompson’s lip imprint on the back of the page, beneath which he wrote: “thinking about Rosie’s lips / inking out Rosie’s lips → but—the most important thing at the moment is to give the book to Jan Ostrowski.” Crozier’s logbook-style entry then details his transfer of the COOP-Book to Ostrowski at Sunderland University, where Crozier taught at the art department. Thompson and Crozier’s entry illuminates the interplay between the immaterial networks of this era and their underpinning artistic concepts that considered the whole earth, yet were tied to the physical sensations and/or perceptions of one’s own body.

Following this, Irene Reddish, another Sunderland University affiliate, added five black-and-white photos of a female singer to the book ([Fig. 7]; Schulz 1979: 51–58). Each of them includes a strand of vibrantly colored hair—possibly hers or the singer’s—affixed with transparent tape and Reddish’s address stamp. Like Thompson’s and Crozier’s entry, Reddish’s contribution underscores the COOP-Book’s dual role as a *Contact Book*. First, its add-and-pass method echoes early modern poetry albums or friendship books, where owners collected visual or written contributions from friends, colleagues, or acquaintances. The COOP-Book’s journey from the GDR to art schools in Sunderland and Cleveland reflects its integration into subcultures like the UK punk scene of the 1980s, beyond Schulz’s immediate reach. Although Schulz never met many contributors personally, the book connected him to like-minded peers, facilitating potential collaborations. Much like an *album amicorum* (a collection book of friends), *Artist’s Contact Book About Important Matters* features a variety of artistic autographs from Schulz’s network, documenting his activ-



// Figure 7

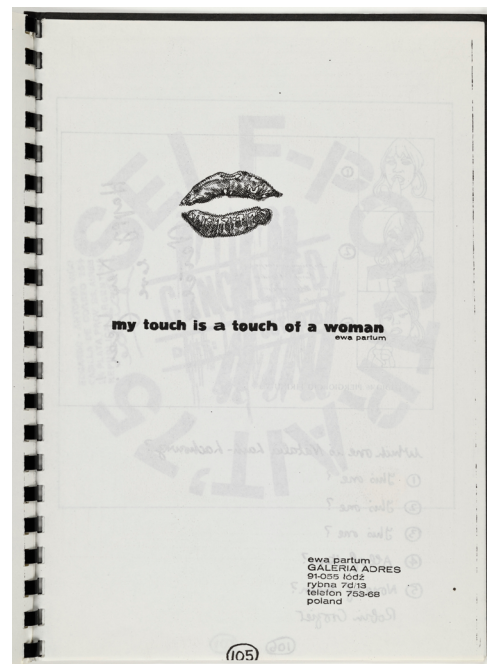
Irene Reddish, contribution to: Tomasz Schulz, COOP-Book “Artist’s Contact Book About Important Matters” (p. 52–53), 1979–ca. 1986, ca. 30 × 21 cm

ities in the cultural field. Schulz later leveraged this network in his career as a research assistant at the German Cultural Forum for Eastern Europe in Potsdam. Second, Reddish's (and Thompson's) entry draws on the epistolary tradition of including bodily parts or imprints in letters or poetry albums—such as locks of hair, fingerprints, or other physical traces—to express affection and devotion, often examined from a feminist perspective (Weaver 2023). In doing so, Thompson's lip imprint and Reddish's hair simulate a physical touch or an in-person encounter. Thompson's imprint leaves a literal trace of her skin's touch on the page, while Reddish affixes a part of her body to the book.

— Ewa Partum, a fellow Polish mail artist, likely inspired these contributions. Partum's *poems by ewa*, distributed through the network, included a pink lip imprint labeled "my touch is a touch of a woman" (1971, [Fig. 8]; Crozier 1976), a collage of dispersed hairs on paper (1981, Partum 1981), or an *alphabet* (1975; Partum 1975) depicting her lip shapes while enunciating letters. These intimate works serve as "indexical marks of the subject," registering "sheer physical presence" and reducing the "sign to a trace" (Majewska-Güde 2021: 151–152), through which Partum introduced the notion of touch to the registers of text and performance, creating a tactile language that balances the senses of sight and touch (Majewska-Güde 2021: 155). Crozier referenced Partum's work by outlining Thompson's lip imprint in the COOP-Book. He knew Partum's work well, having reproduced her contribution of five lip imprints spelling his name to his mail art project *Portrait of Robin Crozier* in 1975 ([Fig. 9]; Crozier 1975; Crozier 1979). His longing note regarding Thompson's lips amplifies the sexual implications that her and Partum's imprints introduced to the network and overshadows the way in which these imprints may be read as visual references to both the communicative and the physical aspects of *contact* in the era of analog globalization. In 1979, due to such patriarchal gestures, Partum acknowledged the impossibility of a non-gendered reading of her work and deliberately embraced feminist critique (Gajowy 2021: 468; Majewska-Güde 2021: 174). She later described herself as a "tautological feminist sign" (Majewska 2014), meaning that her works inherently expressed the marginalized perspective of a female artist in Cold War Central Eastern Europe. This also raises questions about how mail artists included female colleagues, partners, or family members in the network and whether they perpetuated or challenged gender inequalities.¹³⁾

13)

This paper can only touch on these issues. Since October 2025, Marie van Bömmel and I are co-leading the research group *Is Mail Art a "Male Art"? Gender as a Condition and Product of International Mail Art in the 1980s*, funded by the Berlin University Alliance, to further explore these topics. The results of our research will be published in a special issue of [kunsttexte.de](https://www.kunsttexte.de), edited by both of us, in December 2026.

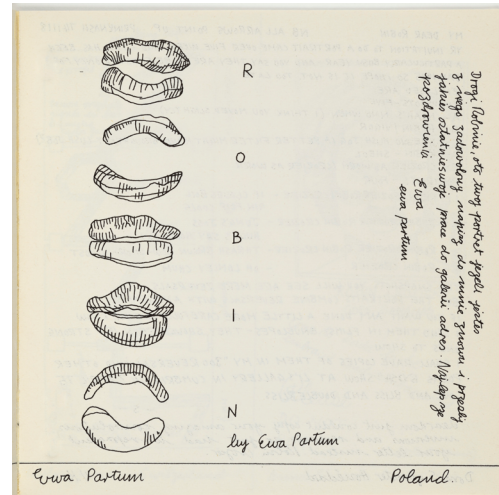


// Figure 8

Ewa Partum, contribution to: Robin Crozier, *Portrait of...* (xerox reproduction of Ewa Partum, poem by ewa – "my touch is a touch of a woman"), ca. 1976, p. 105

Beyond its feminist implications, Partum's notion of artistic tautology also resonates with the COOP-Book and mail art practices more broadly, particularly in how artists managed to overcome spatial distances between each other on a global scale through conceptual works that emphasized their own materiality. This is grounded in the tautological concept that an artwork is a mere "presentation of the artist's intention" (Kosuth 1969: 20; see Majewska-Güde 2021: 136), as well as in Dick Higgins's notion of *intermedia*, which describes the liminal state of an artwork existing *between* different media or material and immaterial forms (Neumark 2005: 13; see Majewska-Güde 2021: 137). In this context, mail art—be it as *CONTART* or *arte íntimo*—viewed *contact* as such as art. Majewska-Güde contrasts Partum's approach with these "anti-visual" traditions in Conceptual art, arguing that her tautology decidedly operates within "the regime of visibility" (Majewska-Güde 2021: 141), a principle that also becomes evident in the COOP-Book: its entries and the spaces between them capture 'intermediary moments' of spatial and temporal in-betweenness, evoking what—regarding Partum's early work—Majewska-Güde describes as an "uncertainty concerning the presence and absence of the subject" (Majewska-Güde 2021: 149). Minding this, the contributors to *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* are virtually connected in absence through the physical presence of their entries on the notebook's bound pages, while turning the pages reproduces the liminality between them.

CONCLUSION — In the context of mail art, *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* exemplifies the idea of a true *Contact Book*: it combines subjective glimpses into personal lives with conceptual and political reflections on the role of mail art in the globalized world of the 1970s and 1980s, while, at the same time, materializing how these networked practices revolved around the concept of contact as an art form. The book's motto, "keep in touch," functions as both an artistic and a political program, realized through person-to-person correspondence during a period when, spurred by feminist movements in the West, the private was increasingly viewed as political. Since, metaphorically, everyone who held the COOP-Book in their hands shared a form of physical contact, *Artist's Contact Book About Important Matters* facilitated a sensually enhanced exchange of contacts as social relationships forming a network of like-minded peers. In this way, the book serves as a prime example of mail art as an "imaginary community of artists"



// Figure 9

Robin Crozier after Ewa Partum, contribution to: Robin Crozier, *Portrait of Robin Crozier* (xerox copy of manual reproduction of Ewa Partum, poem by ewa – "Robin"), ca. 1975

who never met in person, but who collaborated in projects that fostered “transnational, professional and affective networks [. . .] based on solidarity and trust” to constitute a “shared utopia [. . .] that enabled a free-flowing society [. . .] in spite of the Cold War political climate” (Freire 2017: 50–51). Schulz initiated the COOP-Books to contribute to these utopian visions of a global artists’ union where everyone—at least potentially—was connected, authorship was freely shared, and national borders were transcended. For this ideal, he, too, was usually willing to give his last hair ([Fig. 10], Schulz 1978).



// Figure 10

Tomasz Schulz, COOP-Book “Contact Non Stop. Make Art Daily” (p. 10–11), 1984–1988, ca. 30 × 21 cm

// Archival Materials

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MAIL ART ACTIVITIES AS ARTISTIC TACTICS: EWA PARTUM'S AND RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT'S INFRASTRUCTURES WITHIN THE MAIL ART NETWORK

ABSTRACT — The article examines how Ewa Partum in Poland and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt in the GDR used the Mail Art network from the 1970s onward as an artistic tactic in the sense of Michel de Certeau. Focusing on Partum's Galeria Adres as well as on both artists' correspondence practices and Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewriter graphics, the essay analyzes how they employed existing postal infrastructures to create alternative spaces of communication, exchange, and visibility beyond official art institutions. Their activities circumvented institutional and geopolitical restrictions while enabling transnational artistic connections across the Iron Curtain. The article argues that Mail Art functioned not only as a communication system but also as an experimental infrastructure through which both artists negotiated gendered roles, authorship, mobility, and participation within predominantly male neo-avant-garde networks.

— Through international networks existing since the 1960s, such as Fluxus and Mail Art, Eastern European artists were not cut off from the artistic production of Western Europe and the United States, despite the Iron Curtain. Both the Fluxus network and the Mail Art network functioned primarily via the postal service. The exchange of letters enabled artists in Eastern Europe (as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean), who were isolated by the Cold War and its restrictions, to establish and maintain international contacts, especially with the so-called West, and to connect with artistic theories and concepts there. For some artists like the Hungarian Endre Tót, the connections allowed them to break out of their self-imposed 'inner emigration,' in Tót's case in Budapest, and exchange ideas with the international avant-garde by mail (Kühn 2020: 19).

— While male artists were numerous and well-connected within the Mail Art communication system, this was less true for the female artists who were active in these neo-avant-garde circles. The situation was different in the performance art scene, where women joined together to form collectives and groups of female artists, creating networks and communities. There are also examples of such associations in Eastern Central Europe, like the group of female artists around Gabriele Stötzer in Erfurt in the GDR (German Democratic

Republic), which later called itself Exterra XX (Wagner/Altmann 2019: 154–155). However, even though there were no such purely female collectives in the field of artist publications (and Mail Art) at that time, there were a number of women who practiced Mail Art and dealt with feminist issues, among other things, and who have not yet been given the same consideration by researchers as their male counterparts. Zanna Gilbert wrote in an essay on Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt in 2016: “Mail art was an artistic and social sphere largely dominated by male artists. [. . .] I have often pondered the lack of women artists. There are a few notable exceptions such as Anna Banana, Irene Dogmatic, Pauline Smith and GG Marx.” (Gilbert 2016: 28)¹⁾ But as was noted in a series of workshops entitled “Women and Mail Art. Gendered Perspectives on Marginal Artistic Practices” in 2024, women and Mail Art were/are not separate entities. Women were indeed important, active participants in the network.²⁾ However, these workshops did not further pursue the interpretation of Mail Art as an articulation of artistic tactics. Here, the term “artistic tactics” is used in the sense of Michel de Certeau, who distinguishes tactics—actions performed by those without institutional power—from strategies, which are organized by power (De Certeau 1984: xix; 34–39). Nevertheless, feminist themes, such as reproductive and invisible labor, family and care work, intimacy and body politics, were identified as valuable areas for future research.

— This article will focus on the activities of two artists, Ewa Partum from Poland and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt from the former GDR, who, as I argue, are exemplary of implicit feminist work within the Mail Art infrastructures and who touched on precisely these topics in their work and disseminated them. Following Michel de Certeau, their activities can be seen as artistic tactics. Unlike strategy, which is “organized by the postulation of power” (De Certeau 1984: 38), tactics are “determined by the *absence of power*” (ibid.). A tactic “takes advantage on ‘opportunities’ and depends on them [. . .]. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. [. . .] It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.” (ibid.: 37) Partum and Wolf-Rehfeldt began to distribute their visual poetry in the form of letters or postcards via Mail Art. Ewa Partum even founded a platform and built up a network of her own. I will focus on their roles as multipliers and examine the significance of the different networks and what they offered that was missing elsewhere. To what extent were conventional infrastructures like exhibitions, museums, galleries, art fairs, art magazines, or the established art discourse criticized, questioned, or circumvented? And which new,

1)

Benjamin Rux also notes that remarkably few women participated in the Mail Art network (Rux 2021: 16).

2)

See Marie Egger: [Conference report on:] Women and Mail Art. Gendered Perspectives on Marginal Artistic Practices (online (Bern/Warsaw), October 11–25, 2024). In: [Arthist.net](https://arthist.net), December 20, 2024. Online: <https://arthist.net/reviews/43612> (accessed November 10, 2025).

alternative spaces were established or opened up through their own newly created networks? Of course, the different geopolitical contexts must be taken into account: each state in the Soviet zone of influence experienced so-called thaw phases, i.e., phases of liberalization and opening towards Western Europe and the United States, in which art and culture were able to develop relatively freely. The alternating phases of either liberalization or tighter restrictions on freedom varied from country to country (Piotrowski 2009: 9). In 1970s Poland, there was a political ‘thaw’ and the cultural climate was relatively open. This meant greater freedom, including international contacts, the possibility of travelling abroad, and the opportunity to experiment artistically and perform in public spaces. It also meant that people could express their opinions to a certain degree. In the GDR, the situation was far more restrictive, and experimental artistic work was only possible on a small and mostly private scale. Artistic activities must therefore be evaluated and categorized differently against the respective political background (Majewska-Güde 2019; Kühn 2020: 24–29).

Ewa Partum is primarily known for her feminist performances. Here, however, I focus on her visual poetry and the authors’ gallery³⁾ Galeria Adres (Address Gallery), which she founded in Łódź in 1972 and which became a field of experimentation for testing the boundaries of an institution. The first time she performatively pushed institutional limitations was a year earlier, in 1971, in the studio apartment of her first husband, the neo-Dadaist poet Andrzej Partum, who had set up a *Bureau of Poetry* in his tiny Warsaw apartment on the sixth floor of a residential building. This is where Ewa Partum realized her first performative installation, *Poezia Aktywna* (Active Poetry). At the vernissage, she scattered the 24 letters of the alphabet made of white cardboard on the parquet floor, “signs of language and yet without words, signs of an international script that requires no translations” (Stepken 2001: 17). [Fig. 1] As Nabakowski describes it, “the threshold of the space was covered with glue” (Nabakowski 2001: 130). The visitors carried the letters sticking to the soles of their shoes with them. What remained was the literary “poetry of an empty space and the awareness of the linguistic impulses fueling a ‘collective game’” (ibid.) that unfolded according to the rules of uncontrolled exchange—and not according to the prescribed laws of socialism (ibid.).⁴⁾

3)

For the term ‘author’s gallery,’ see Dziamski 1992.

4)

Exchange—especially international exchange—was viewed with suspicion in the socialist state and, if not completely prohibited, it was heavily controlled.



// Figure 1 a/b

Ewa Partum, *Poezia Aktywna* (Active Poetry), performance, Warsaw, 1971, photographic documentation of the performance, black-and-white photograph on paper, 18 × 16,5 cm

Between 1972 and 1977, Ewa Partum then ran Galeria Adres—initially in a cramped four-square-meter space under the stairs of the Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, short: ZPAP (Association of Visual Artists' Club), in Łódź (Ronduda 2009: 140; Jankowska 2001: 168; Jarecka 2006: 10). Nabakowski writes that the founding of the gallery “was based on a mix of personal and political goals” (Nabakowski 2001: 130). Turning to the international art scene was intended to offer neo-avant-garde art in Poland an experimental stage and overcome the artists' own sense of isolation (ibid.). Partum initiated the gallery's activities by sending out a manifesto, double-sided on a large invitation card, which explained the philosophy and aims of this alternative platform and was mailed in French and Polish to 150 people at home and abroad [Fig. 2]:

[I]t exists as a place / a situation / an opportunity / a range of / information / proposition / documentation / speculation / provocation / and exposition / of every form present in art / and the motifs of its nondisclosure (Ronduda 2009: 142)

The manifesto also invited artists to submit artistic proposals, and in response Partum received letters, projects, photographs, documentations, and books (Jarecka 2006: 8). The gallery primarily presented Conceptual Art (Toniak 2011: 60).⁵⁾ In order to establish contact with Conceptual Artists from all over the world, Partum became intensively involved in Mail Art exchange and collaborated with artists including Krzysztof Wodiczko, Endre Tót, Włodzimir Borowski, Andrzej Kostołowski, Richard Kostelanetz, John Cage, Dick Higgins, Daniel Spoerri, and Wolf Vostell (Ronduda 2009: 142).⁶⁾ As can be seen, there were above all male contacts here. Mail Art, which made up a large part of the gallery's activities, enabled expanding the concept of art and facilitating the selfless exchange of ideas between artists. Over time, the gallery thus gradually developed “its own information system, which included a network of around 3,000 addresses of artists from around the world” (Jankowska 2001: 167). Partum showed documentations of Fluxus events as well as her own Conceptual artworks realized at various locations, but female artists or even feminist positions were not very visible or well represented in her gallery.

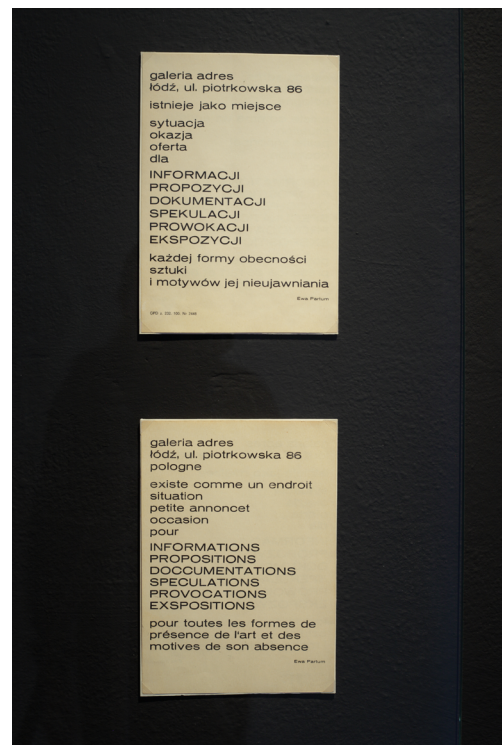
Through the establishment and management of Galeria Adres, Partum proved to be one of the first artists in Poland to practice

5)

When Ewa Partum founded Galeria Adres, she wanted to be first of all a Conceptual artist (Toniak 2011: 6). Toniak refers here to Jakubowska. The website of the Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej in Warsaw features a short film in Polish that presents and documents the activities of Galeria Adres: Ewa Partum, *Adres Gallery Documentation* (1972, 3:24, Polish, 8 mm). Online: <https://archiwum.artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/partum-ewa-dokumentacja-galerii-adres> (accessed June 19, 2026).

6)

Jankowska also mentions Klaus Groh and Jochen Gerz as well as numerous Fluxus artists as contacts of the gallery (Jankowska 2001: 168). Dziamski also mentions Timm Ulrichs (Dziamski 2001: 156).



// Figure 2

Ewa Partum, *Manifest Galeria Adres* (Manifest of Gallery Adres), 1971, offset print on paper, 21 × 14.8 cm

institutional critique (Tatar 2011: 343).⁷⁾ The alternative platform that the gallery offered questioned the way conventional institutions in the field of art operated and explored the exhibitability of alternative (ephemeral) art forms. To explain this in more detail, I would like to refer to one of her performances that Partum staged in her gallery in 1972. The performance was also an exhibition entitled *Obecność* (Presence): the gallery was only open during the presence of the artist, who sat passively on a chair in the empty gallery (Ronduda 2009: 142). This meant that not only the exhibition, but also the gallery itself existed solely in the form of artistic presence, in the form of physical presence. In this way, the show and the institution themselves became concepts and were simultaneously activated only through performativity. The performance was both presentation and gallery, thereby questioning their function and *raison d'être* outside of artistic presence. The exhibition and the institution can also be understood here as heterotopias in the sense of Foucault, who described them as “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Foucault 1967/Noble 2009: 62–62). At the moment of Partum’s performance, a non-place emerged, a different place where the usual rules of conventional exhibitions and galleries did not apply. As Foucault noted, heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (ibid.: 66). Access to this place in the work of Partum was gained through the presence of the artist. Dorota Monkiewicz mentions that Partum was interested in overcoming an object’s physical, spatial, and material limitations (Monkiewicz 2015: 57).

— Galeria Adres became increasingly mobile over time. After less than a year, Partum left the Association of Visual Artists’ Club on Piotrkowska Street⁸⁾ and organized the gallery’s subsequent exhibitions at changing locations within the city. In this way, the gallery materialized suddenly and for a short time in different urban and private spaces that were not primarily associated with contemporary art, only to disappear again afterwards (Ronduda 2009: 140ff). From 1973, Partum moved the gallery to her mother’s apartment, where she lived with her daughter Berenika (from 1974, the year her daughter was born). According to Nabakowski, Ewa Partum “sent all the gallery mail from her mother’s place” (Nabakowski 2011:

7)

Jankowska writes that in the 1970s, Galeria Adres, the PERMAFO and Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej in Wrocław and the Remont gallery in Warsaw were among the most important venues for ephemeral, conceptual and other “alternative” art positions (Jankowska 2001: 167).

8)

Ewa Partum says that the ZPAP showed an increasingly intolerant attitude, because she exhibited works that were neither paintings nor sculptures. In 1973, the ZPAP banned her from the exhibition space, forcing her to move the gallery to her own apartment (Jarecka 2006: 8).

130). The card index containing 3,000 addresses was also located here. A map of the world hung on the wall, on which the artist used a felt-tip pen to mark all the places and information points to which she made contact. She drew lines to connect them with the gallery in Łódź, a place in Eastern Central Europe that, from a Eurocentric perspective, was located on the periphery and now suddenly attracted attention. From here, the lines spread globally, creating “a conceptual network, a topography of interconnected lines and paths of communication” (ibid.).⁹⁾ In Foucault’s sense, this map can be read as an “other place” and, at the same time, as a utopia. Foucault describes utopias as “sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault 1967/Noble 2009: 62). By linking artistic positions on the map, Partum created an international exchange that was in flux. Contacts gradually appeared on the map and then existed simultaneously, simulating a connection between all points, even if there never was or will never be direct contact between every single point. Similar maps were created by Fluxus artist Mieko Shiomi. She also used Mail Art to maintain contact with other artists after returning to Japan from the United States in 1965, when she was unable to travel due to care commitments¹⁰⁾ (Friebe 2024: 129). Perhaps the use of the Mail Art infrastructure could even be described as a particularly suitable opportunity for female artists in isolated situations with limited financial resources and time to connect with an artistic community and develop professionally until new opportunities for face-to-face contact arise.

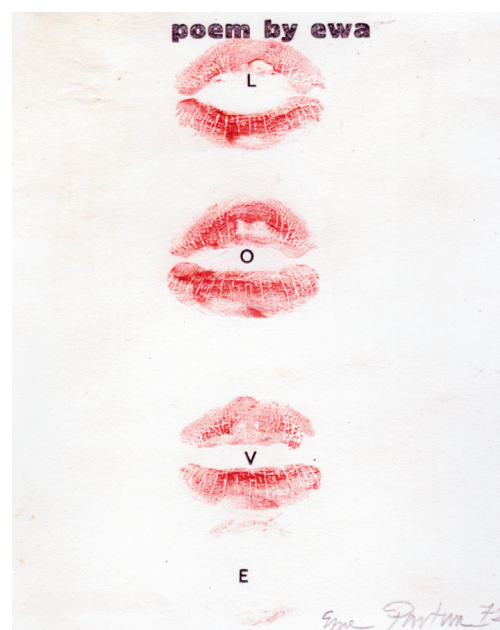
— Nabakowski notes, however, that female artists were in the minority in the exhibitions that Partum curated from 1972 to 1977 (Nabakowski 2011: 130). This is interesting, as she later turned increasingly to feminism and is now considered one of the most important representatives of feminist art in Poland in the 1970s. Questions addressing the role of women (and female artists) in society and their limited scope for action already appeared in her early work. **[Fig. 3]** An action recorded as a film in 1973 shows her individually inserting the letters “L.o.v.e.” into an envelope, then writing in English on it: “I am happy when I make love to the envelope,” and finally stamping the back of the envelope with her red lips. A multilayered response to the artist and father of her soon-to-be-born daughter Berenika, the Hungarian

9)

Unfortunately, two-thirds of the gallery archive were lost during a move from Łódź to Warsaw, while about one-third has been preserved (Tieze 2024: 17).

10)

An example of this group of works is *Spatial Poem No. 1* (1965).



// Figure 3

Ewa Partum, *Poem by Ewa LOVE*, 1972, ink and lipstick print on paper, 15.5 × 12.5 cm

Conceptual artist Endre Tót, who had asked “when she would speak of love.”¹¹⁾ The artist explained that she and Tót hardly had any common linguistic ground: “His command of English was pretty poor—and mine was just as limited.” (Nabakowski 2011: 117) In her performances, Partum was particularly interested in symbols that were considered distinctly feminine, such as high heels and red lipstick. In an interview with Dorota Jarecka in 2006, Partum talks about the omnipresence of red lipstick in the 1970s: “In the 1970s, red lipstick became fashionable. And it left traces everywhere: on the coffee cup, on the spoon, on the napkin after wiping the lips. I noticed that I was leaving these traces myself.”¹²⁾ (Jarecka 2006: 11) The artist thus embarked on a search for traces of (a presumed feminine or female) identity, which later culminated in expressive feminist performances, for example, *Zmiana. Mój problem jest problemem kobiety* (*Change. My Problem Is a Problem of a Woman*) (1979), *Samoidentyfikacja* (*Self-Identification*) (1980)¹³⁾, *Kobiety, małżeństwo jest przeciwko wam!* (*Women, marriage is against you!*) (1980), or *Pirouette* (1984).

—As mentioned above, Partum realized her first performative installation at her husband’s *Bureau of Poetry* and later made use of the ZPAP’s infrastructure. Yet she remained mobile while establishing Galeria Adres. Like many artists in Central Eastern Europe, she used private places to create her art, thereby circumventing or challenging the conventions of the (state-funded) established art world in the process. Similarly, in the GDR, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt began working more intensively with Mail Art. Initially introduced by her husband Robert Rehfeldt, she used the Mail Art network for her own artistic purposes.

—Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt was born in Wurzen in Saxony in 1932. After training as an industrial clerk, she moved to East Berlin in 1950, where she met the artist Robert Rehfeldt in 1954 and married him the following year. Wolf-Rehfeldt worked for the exhibitions department at the Akademie der Künste (Academy of the Arts), made drawings in her spare time, and was interested in semiotics and concrete poetry (Reinhardt 2019: 121). [Fig. 4] A few years later, she began making her typewriter graphics and actively participated in the Mail Art network from 1974 onward (Rux 2021: 16). Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt founded a studio-archive on Mendelstraße in the East Berlin district of Pankow, which became a hub for the local and international art scene from the 1970s to the 1990s. The couple’s apart-

11)

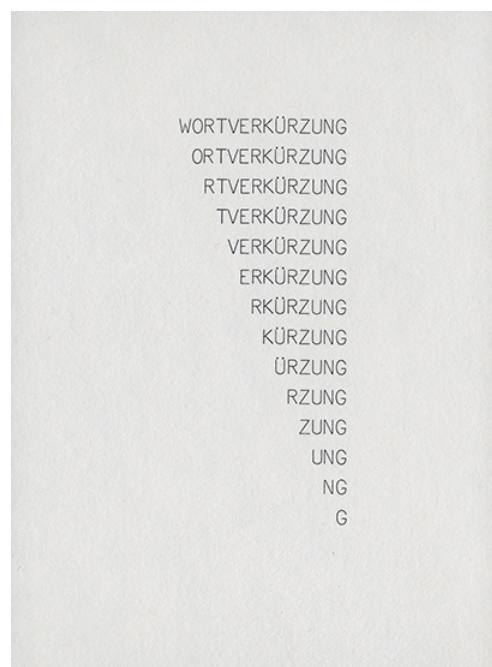
Nabakowski quotes Endre Tót here, but does not give a precise source. This statement probably comes from a conversation with Ewa Partum. The quotation only appears in the German version of the text. Translation by the author (Nabakowski 2011: 117).

12)

Quote by Ewa Partum. Translation by the author.

13)

A description of “Samoidentyfikacja” can be found here, for example: Maria Engelskirchen / Corinna Kühn (2021), *Flexen in der Stadt*, in: Lillian Haberer / Karina Nimmerfall (eds.), *Movement/Mouvement. Festschrift für Prof. Dr. Ursula Frohne*, Munich, 2021, pp. 165–171.



// Figure 4

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Wortverkürzung* (Wörter series), mid 1970s, original typewriting, 10.5 × 15 cm

ment and the studio both served as meeting points for a small, lively scene of East German artists, moving back and forth between the official and unofficial art world of the GDR, as well as the first stop for many international artists who traveled to East Berlin (Reinhardt 2019: 121). When Wolf-Rehfeldt began participating in the Mail Art network, she realized that her small-format works were easy to send. Gradually, she became an active part of the network, and her works traveled the world as postcards. Mail Art offered scope for the display of art, for exchange and personal correspondence. [Fig. 5] In the work *To / From* (1974), she found a telling image. [Fig. 6 a/b] Form and message merge on the front and back of the envelope. Who is the sender, who is the recipient? Like many other Mail Artists, she used the English language to be internationally understood. In 1978, she was accepted as a full member of the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR (Association of Visual Artists of the GDR), which allowed her to accept public commissions and to print or reproduce a limited number of “miniature graphic” (Reinhardt 2021: 120) works (*Kleingrafik*). Her so-called *Typewritings* were created in the 1970s and 1980s until the fall of communism in 1989 and belong to her best-known works. [Fig. 7] In the context of Mail Art, she concentrated on maintaining contact with the world outside the GDR. After reunification, she no longer saw the need to make art herself¹⁴⁾ (Chert 2016: 10).

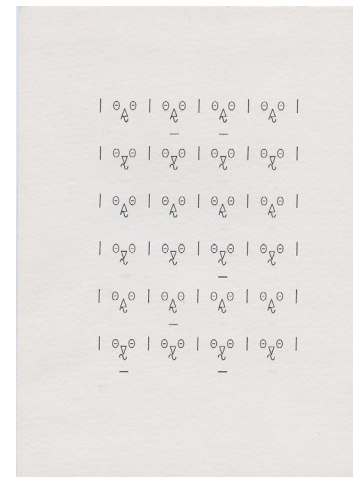
— In her works, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt explores “the limits of a closed system of predefined signs and meanings. The miniscule constructs of typed letters concretize space on a paper page. Indeed, they bring this space into being in the first place” (Reinhardt 2021: 25), as Kathleen Reinhardt describes it. [Fig. 8] In addition to individual sheets, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt usually worked in series in which an idea once found was varied and further pursued, for example, *Figurationen* or *Zeichenräume* (Rux 2021: 12). [Fig. 9] Jennifer Chert, the co-owner of the gallery ChertLüdde in Berlin who represents Wolf-Rehfeldt, recounts that Wolf-Rehfeldt often used “carbon copy paper in order to produce more copies of the original sample. She then made zincographic copies (zinc lithographs) of the motifs (never more than 50 copies of each, the maximum she was allowed to produce in the GDR)” (Chert 2016: 9),¹⁵⁾ mostly A4 to A6 (Spieker 2021: 32). However, the formats were always small enough to be sent by mail and distributed in the Mail Art network. She also began to produce her own printing stamps, worked with collages, screen prints, photocopies, and participated in Mail Art collaborations. For example, she sent sheets of paper “to other artists which, upon her request, would be ‘interfered’ with and sent

14)

Wolf-Rehfeldt recounts this very impressively in the short film produced in 2015 by the publishing house Lutz Wohlrab and Jennifer Chert: “Zeichen aus Zeichen. Ein Filmportrait über Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt” (2015, directed by Jennifer Chert, 13 min.); online: <https://vimeo.com/764516478> (accessed June 19, 2026).

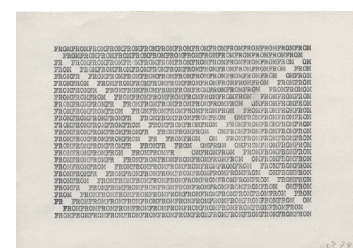
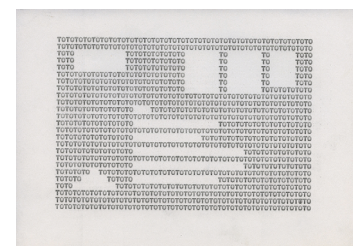
15)

Spieker writes that 100 copies were allowed—Rux and James also state 50 copies (Spieker 2021: 33; Rux 2021: 16; James 2022: 223).



// Figure 5

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Faces*, mid 1970s, original typewriting, 15 × 10.5 cm



// Figure 6 a/b

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *To / From*, 1974, carbon copies of typewriting, two parts, 14 × 21 cm

back to her” (Chert 2016: 9–10).¹⁶⁾ Wolf-Rehfeldt’s *Zeichenräume* (Sign rooms) can also be viewed here as utopian spaces. The rooms, made up of typewritten signs, open up spaces for thought and are meeting places for the exchange of ideas that travel around the world, almost like a futuristic time capsule. Sarah E. James writes: “If the internationalism of concrete poetry was well matched with the borderless nature of Wolf-Rehfeldt’s and Rehfeldt’s Contart, the other distinctive characteristics of concrete poetry so central to Wolf-Rehfeldt’s practice were not shared by her husband’s work, or by the majority of the mail artists with whom they corresponded. As her notes make abundantly clear, Wolf-Rehfeldt was unique in the GDR in self-consciously aligning her practice with mail art, concrete art and poetry, and also conceptual art.” (James 2022: 251)

As Zanna Gilbert notes, typists were almost invariably young women at the time and becoming one was a way of earning an independent income. She refers to the media theorist Friedrich Kittler, who emphasizes the gendered nature of the typewriter: “He remarks that before its invention, tissue was woven by women and pens were the intellectual instruments of men, touching on the relationship between textile and text.” (Gilbert 2016: 20) Rux also notes that there is a certain irony in the fact that Wolf-Rehfeldt achieved her artistic and emancipatory breakthrough employing this medium, which was disproportionately used by women in their role as “typists” (Rux 2021: 12). As James reports, “by the 1970s, 99.8 per cent of all typist-stenographers were women” (James 2022: 289). According to Gilbert, a typewriter also stands “between the manual age and the age of mass reproduction. [...] [It] is an autonomous technology that needs no outside intervention to complete a project.” (Gilbert 2016: 29)

Wolf-Rehfeldt’s inspiration to develop her own understanding of visual poetry came by post or from Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, where she was able to travel. In the 1970s, she sent works to an art symposium in Wrocław,¹⁷⁾ which dealt with language and the linguistic (Rux 2021: 12) and which, in retrospect, is regarded as the center and starting point of Conceptual Art in Poland. In 1975, she took part in a Mail Art exhibition in Warsaw with Robert Rehfeldt. Several years earlier, in Prague in 1967, she had met Jiří Kolář and Jiří Valoch, among others, had seen their works and kept in touch (Gilbert 2016: 22–3). Wolf-Rehfeldt said: “I was as ambitious as a spider in a web, trying to spin my threads to every place on earth.”¹⁸⁾ (Gilbert 2016: 28; Röder 1996: 133) In this way, despite the Iron Curtain, she reached Poland, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, Mexico, Czechoslovakia,

16)

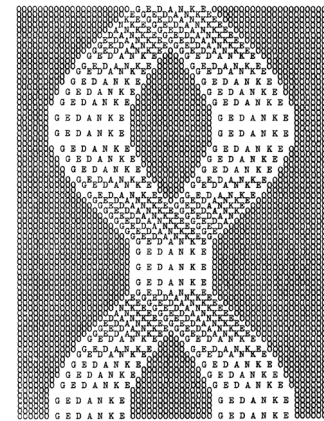
This practice was very common in the Mail Art scene. See, for example, the questionnaires by Endre Tót (Kühn 2020: 126).

17)

Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70 / Wrocław Art Symposium '70

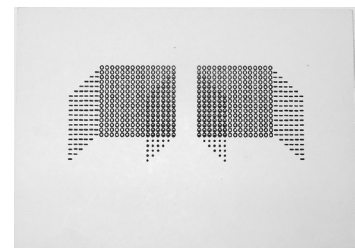
18)

Gilbert after Röder 1996, p. 133.



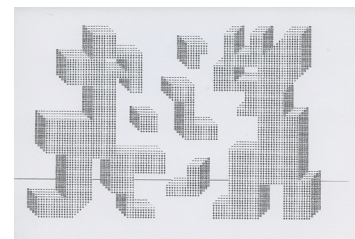
// Figure 7

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Gedankenverbindung* (Connection of thoughts), 1976, zincography, 10 x 15 cm



// Figure 8

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Zeichenräume* (cases and cages), 1970s, zincography, 10.5 x 14.5 cm



// Figure 9

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Concrete Men in Concrete Talk*, late 1980s, photocopy on paper, 15 x 20 cm

Bulgaria, Denmark, Sweden, El Salvador, Yugoslavia, Venezuela, Belgium, and Brazil, and had contact with Horacio Zabala, Pawel Petasz, César Espinosa, Manuel Marín, David Zack, Edgardo Antonio Vigo, Guillermo Deisler, Anna Banana, Dick Higgins, Jiří Valoch, among others (Gilbert 2016: 29).

— Gilbert sees Mail Art in Eastern Europe as an antidote to cultural isolation. Piotr Piotrowski notes that “[t]he awareness that the police was intercepting and reading letters and postcards, and copying, archiving them, and using them for further infiltration, sometimes caused self-censorship” (Piotrowski 2009: 269). Robert Rehfeldt, for example, inspected the files after reunification and his “suspicions that his mail was monitored were [. . .] confirmed: photographs of his intercepted mail were found in the State Security (*Stasi*) files” (Gilbert 2016: 30). Kornelia Röder and Sarah E. James also report that the *Stasi* had a big Mail Art “collection” (Röder 2023: 96; James 2022: 279). “Many postcards were retained and never reached their recipients,” Röder explained in an interview (Röder 2023: 96). And James points out that the *Stasi* not only confiscated works, but also copied the originals before resealing the envelopes and delivering them to their intended recipients. In some cases, they even “interfered in works, so as to sabotage friendships and relationships” (James 2022: 279). As Röder specifies, “Mail Artists developed creative strategies and played a game of hide-and-seek with the secret services” (Röder 2023: 97). Wolf-Rehfeldt remembers: “At the beginning I was very cautious, I sometimes distributed my works in part in several mailboxes, because I thought that it would be conspicuous if a lot of objects were found in one mailbox. But it turned out somebody at the post office was employed to reunite the posted Mail Art and control it.” (Gilbert 2016: 30)¹⁹⁾ According to Gilbert, the state can be seen as an unwitting carrier of Wolf-Rehfeldt’s freedom of expression. Thus, the “usual role of controlling the fluxes and flows of information” (ibid.) was reversed. In an interview, Wolf-Rehfeldt explains that Mail Art enabled her to “travel” the world in her imagination: “[Mail Art] was a kind of safety valve, and, too, a certain satisfaction. I was never able to travel, but I was glad that I had contacts throughout the world that all the others who were allowed to travel sometimes didn’t have.” (ibid)²⁰⁾ In another interview, she states that she never really expected an answer. Some would say that she did not create Mail Art, as Mail Art always requires a response from the recipient. However, this was not always the case with Wolf-Rehfeldt, and in this instance, her postcards with visual poetry could also be described as “Mail Outs.” However, the artist simply had a broader understanding of

19)

Gilbert after Röder 1996, p. 86.

20)

Gilbert after Röder 1996, p. 90.

it: “For me, mail art can be anything. [. . .] I wanted to travel when I was young, but we couldn’t do that in the GDR, so mail art was a substitute. When I started, I didn’t distinguish between originals and copies. I also sent out originals. [. . .] If I sent a piece of mail art, I didn’t really want an answer.” (Gilbert/Reinhardt 2021: 101) Wolf-Rehfeldt continues: “At first I sent the originals of the typewritings. Then I started making a carbon copy so that I knew what I had sent away. And then printing became very important.” (ibid.: 113) Her relationship with the original therefore changed over time. Despite the adverse circumstances, Wolf-Rehfeldt was a convinced socialist who had made a conscious decision to remain in the East—even if she sometimes criticized the socialism that currently existed and mourned the utopian project of socialism and its early potential (James 2022: 279–80).

— Wolf-Rehfeldt subscribed to the democratic understanding of art that was widespread in the network. She said that “potentially everyone is capable of producing something that could be called art.” (Chert 2016: 30) In her text *Signs Fiction* from around 1972 she writes: “The most positive peculiarity of this type of art may be the chance to take up any problem of interest by any person in question immediately (as far as a typewriter is at hand).” (ibid.: 14) And she goes even further by issuing a call to action: “‘Type your own art’ is my special invitation to people wanting to express themselves in an artistic mode for the purpose of becoming, living and altering facts more consciously.” (ibid.)²¹ [Fig. 10]

The idea that everyone is an artist circulated in the Mail Art network and several artists referred directly to Joseph Beuys. Robert Rehfeldt, for example, produced an artist’s stamp with the inscription: *Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler. „Mach mit!“* (Everyone is an artist. “Join in!”).²²

Wolf-Rehfeldt also made a reference to Beuys: one of her best-known sheets, *Homage to Joseph Beuys* (n.d.), which was often sent as a postcard, shows Beuys’ famous hat. [Fig. 11]

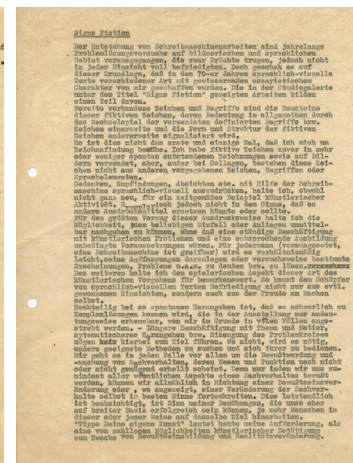
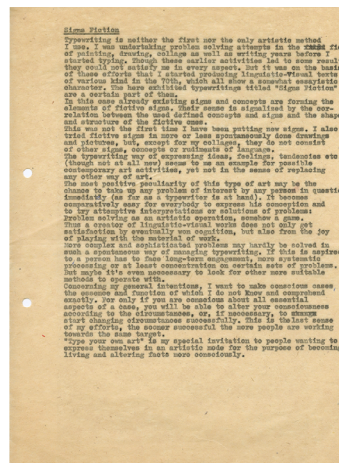
— Although I was only able to discuss the activities of two female artists in the Mail Art network briefly, I demonstrated the following: Partum and Wolf-Rehfeldt did more than just use the network to communicate and expand their contacts. Their early activities in and with the network can be understood as attempts to make the best possible use of existing infrastructures, to strengthen their role

21)

Wolf-Rehfeldt’s German version differs slightly from the English version. It seems as if she did not translate the two versions 1:1, but made two versions. The German version reads as follows: “For anyone (provided a typewriter is at hand) it becomes relatively easy to express one’s views or to try to interpret or solve certain phenomena, problems, etc.” And continues: “‘Type your own art’ is my invitation today, as one of countless possibilities of artistic activity for the purpose of raising awareness and changing reality.” See the text *Signs Fiction* by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, English and German version (Chert 2016: 14–15).

22)

Exhibition catalog. Joseph Beuys und die Mail Art in der DDR. Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland Bedburg-Hau, 2019/20. Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, Sammlung van der Grinten, Joseph-Beuys-Archiv des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (eds.), Bedburg-Hau, Berlin, Wohlrab.



// Figure 10 a/b

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Signs Fiction* (Artist’s Text English and German), around 1972, carbon copy of typewriting text, German and English translation, 30 x 20 cm

as female artists within otherwise predominantly male-oriented surroundings, to change, circumvent, and subvert structures imposed by socialist cultural policies from within, and to question the institution as such. Partum built her own structure within a structure, in which action and communication were central and in which she sent out her first feminist signals. Karolina Majewska-Güde refers to these as “infrastructures-in-the-making” (Majewska-Güde 2021: 82), a term coined by Irit Rogoff.²³⁾ Majewska-Güde states that Partum’s and Rehfeldt’s infrastructures were “constituted through conversations and exchanges of ideas and materials that became more important for the process of art production than the actual physical parameters, such as venues or technical support” (ibid.). As well as the real spaces that the two artists explored and activated, they also claimed new (utopian) spaces within visual and concrete poetry. However, neither Partum nor Wolf-Rehfeldt formed communication systems exclusively with other female artists or founded female artists’ groups, but they did reflect on and accentuate the gendered role of the artist to varying degrees in their work. As mentioned above, within the Mail Art network, networking between women only took place on the fringes. The reasons for this are still to be investigated; perhaps we simply do not yet know enough about what actually took place. However, the network did disseminate the ideas of women, making them accessible worldwide. The Mail Art network can perhaps be seen as a catalyst that multiplied and thus reinforced these statements. The typewritten sheets or L.o.v.e. letters may be small and inconspicuous, but today they can be found in artists’ archives all over the world. It is interesting to observe the current reception of the two artists. While their husbands were more successful at the beginning of their careers and opened up opportunities for their partners, today the focus is on the works of Ewa Partum and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt. Partum won the Lovis Corinth Prize in 2024, and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt won the Hannah Höch Prize in 2022. Both awards were accompanied by major solo exhibitions.²⁴⁾ Fortunately there is a general growing interest in female artists within the Mail Art network—which has to be closely and critically watched.

23)

Majewska-Güde applies Irit Rogoff’s theories on “infrastructure” very convincingly to the work of Ewa Partum (Majewska-Güde 2021).

24)

Links: <https://www.kunstforum.net/ausstellungen/rueckblick/ewa-partum-lovis-corinth-preis-2024>; <https://www.smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/hannah-hoech-preis-2022> (accessed May 19, 2025).



// Figure 11

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, *Homage to Joseph Beuys*, original typewriting, 15 x 10.5 cm

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DOUBLE, INVISIBLE, HAND-MADE, EXPERIMENTAL: BOOKS AND MAGAZINES AS WORKS OF CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

ABSTRACT — Examining artists' publications is one of the rare ways of learning about the almost invisible conceptual practice that developed from the end of the 1960s to the early 1980s in former Yugoslavia. Recently, the value of the preserved remaining copies has increased. At the time of their creation, however, magazines and books as works of artists were distributed to friends and fellow artists, while the public seldom knew about them. Limited runs, manual production, and/or photocopying all contributed to the fragility of this material, which nonetheless bears important knowledge about one of the most interesting periods of postwar contemporary art in Yugoslavia. From the anti-magazine *Gorgona*, a medium for the exchange of thoughts distributed to a very limited audience, to the principles of appropriation, collage, and other neo-avant-garde procedures that stem from ethical attitudes and the deconstruction of reality presented in the artists' magazine *May 75*, these authors produced their books and magazines by hand, pasting original works onto sheets or treating them as a ground on which they directly intervened in different ways.

INTRODUCTION — The position of Yugoslavia, located at the crossroads between the politically rigid East and the influences of the West, was rather unique, particularly when compared to other countries of the Eastern Bloc. After World War II, Yugoslavia was the site of various political, social, and cultural changes. The brief dominance of social realism was soon replaced by a reconfiguration of modernist paradigms; links were established to the avant-garde movements of the interwar period, while as early as the start of the 1950s, geometric abstraction revealed the existence of individual (as well as creative) freedom as a kind of symbol of the free world. In Yugoslavia, this decade would witness a reconstitution of modernism, running parallel to existentialism, and abstraction, while ties with the Western world would be much freer and more intense than was the case with other Eastern European countries.

— After the revival of interwar avant-garde movements, such as a renewed interest in the aesthetics of New Objectivity along with influences originating in Russian and German avant-garde tendencies, the 1970s in Yugoslavia were particularly notable for new and

innovative artistic practices. In contrast to the dominance of high modernism which marked the 1950s and most of the 1960s, in the local history of contemporary art, the term *New Art Practice*¹⁾ refers to the expansion of the field of interest, the direction of activity, and the modality in which contemporary art was manifested in the period from 1966 to 1978. It was characterized by post-painting and post-object phenomena, whereby new practices were grounded in focusing primarily on ideas rather than producing a physical object. In addition to the three dominant art centers—Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade—these practices concurrently appeared in Split (Croatia) as well as Subotica and Novi Sad (Serbia). Although a specific modernist tradition was present in all of these cities, which partly enabled the development of new tendencies, what soon followed was the recognition and unification of trends that led to a change in the language of art and the context in which art operates. Along with photography, video, performance, body art, behavior art, art of doing, art of mental representation,²⁾ and other artistic strategies challenging traditional art forms and their institutions, this new art practice was also characterized by books and magazines as works of artists. These procedures heralded a change of the concept of a work of art and a specific social engagement, mostly owing to the non-institutional expansion of artistic activity into public space and the simultaneous criticism of institutions.

— Examining artists' publications is one of the ways of learning about the almost invisible conceptual practice that developed from the end of the 1960s to the early 1980s across former Yugoslavia. Recently, the value of the preserved remaining copies has increased. At the time they were created, however, books and magazines as works of artists were distributed to friends and fellow artists, while the public seldom knew about them. Small editions, manual production, and/or photocopying all contributed to the fragility of this material, which nonetheless reveals important knowledge about one of the most interesting periods of postwar contemporary art in Yugoslavia.

— My interest in this topic was driven by the process of research and digitization of Ed Ruscha's *Sunset Boulevard*, carried out by the Getty Research Institute.³⁾ Despite impressive technical support provided in that case, noticing the difference between the digitized version and the printed original was crucial. Digitization is evidently a vital method for ensuring long-term, sustainable public access to information about works. However, the simple and modest artists' books and specialized magazines presented in this paper are best appreciated in person, if possible. Neither the basic type of

1)

This term is simultaneously employed by art historians and curators Davor Matičević and Marijan Susovski from the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb and Ješa Denegri from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade to describe the diverse post-painterly and post-objective phenomena in contemporary Yugoslav art between 1966 and 1978. In the catalogue's introductory text, Denegri mentions the changes that started happening on the European scene as early as the second half of the 1950s. Referencing, among others, the experiences of Germano Celant, Lucy Lippard, John Chandler, and Harald Szeemann, Yugoslav curators opened themselves up to new and different phenomena that enabled the formation of specific constitutive elements so that such a practice was able to achieve its own problem identity. More in: Susovski, Marijan (ed.), *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*. Exhibition catalogue, Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978.

2)

The art of doing is a term used for something created with an effect (but not as an event or performance), while art as mental representation designates works (diagrams, series of photographs, texts) in which the processes of imagining or conceiving are presented. Both terms belong to conceptual tendencies and are common in the local critical writings.

3)

The video of this process was presented at the CAA 109th Annual Conference, New York, 2021 (online).

paper nor the simple ways in which the artists managed to produce books—using scotch tape, tearing pages by hand, making holes in them with nails, gluing analog film tape onto ordinary sheets of paper, using a stapler to bind several pages together, etc.—can be fully experienced by observing it on a screen. The fact that they were produced with cheap materials and without the use of expensive printing services or special finishes, which would be the result of carefully selected materials, also gave rise to the idea of the ecological aspect of these works. At the time they were created, the artists in Yugoslavia were not as thoroughly aware of environmental problems, nor was this a topic of concern of art criticism. However, the above-mentioned aspects of manual production and selection of cheap materials, as well as the avoidance of institutional frameworks, suggest a departure from mass production and a preference for an individualistic approach—which could be interpreted along the lines of ecological awareness.⁴⁾ But foremost, the artists found it necessary to work quickly, managing with what they had on hand, reacting in the moment and without too much preparation. They did not think about economic growth or market value.

FROM THE PROTO-CONCEPTUAL MAGAZINE *GORGONA*, TO *SPOT* AND *MAY 75*

The publication of magazines as works of artists was initiated by the Gorgona Group (1959–1966), which can be characterized as an alternative spiritual phenomenon whose unique artistic approach was for a long time known to only a limited circle of people. Spirituality was predominantly advocated by Josip Vaništa, considered the initiator and leader of the group, whereby this notion is interpreted primarily on the basis of activity inside the mind, through the implementation of mental artistic procedures, invisible to the audience, which transpired exclusively among the members of the group. Many of these “works” were only discovered later, through conversations with Vaništa, who was the only one able to describe the specifics of the “thought protocol.” Sometimes the activity occurred only inside his mind, and sometimes through an exchange between members of the group. It is impossible to subsume this immaterial practice under fixed terms, and we should also take into account the fact that Vaništa himself was prone to mystifying some of his thoughts, which he would return to after some time had passed and interpret anew. Gorgona was a proto-Conceptual group that anticipated the artistic practices of the 1970s, including books as works of artists, behavior art,⁵⁾ language as medium, and art as idea (Gattin 2009: 21). In the words of Josip Vaništa, “Gorgona perhaps deserves to remain in the shadows. If we start

4)

In Yugoslavia, a particular attitude towards ecology is primarily linked to the activities of the Slovenian artistic groups *Družina v Šempas* and *OHO*, dedicated to, among other things, “healing the earth” and complex research activities on global ecological systems. More in: Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, Zagreb: Horetzky, and Ghent: Vlees & Beton, 2005, 157–158; Marko Pogačnik, *Zmajeve črte, ekologija in umetnost*, Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1986.

5)

The term *behavior art* is often associated with new artistic practices and Conceptual art, to some extent being close to performance art. In the local context, it is primarily associated with the activities of the Gorgona Group, whose procedures may be described precisely as a specific mode of behavior and immaterial artistic practice, such as going on joint walks or performances that actually veer more towards a specific kind of behavior than performance or happening.

talking about these things, they wither.”⁶⁾ The group was hermetic, prone to irony and maintaining privacy, inclined to imperceptible artistic actions and exchanging information about them, mostly between the members themselves.⁷⁾ Among other things, the actions consisted in sending postcards and personal correspondence as well as the occasional publication of the *Gorgona* magazine, the individual issues of which were designed by members of the group, by artists, and/or by authors Victor Vasarely, Harold Pinter, or Dieter Roth. There were also proposals by Piero Manzoni and Enzo Mari, although they were never realized and exist only as ideas exchanged in correspondences with members of the group.⁸⁾ The magazine was created in the ideologized environment of the 1960s, within the community of authors “engaged in the magazine on the margins, into which we introduced a touch of darkness, some absurdity, and emptiness.”⁹⁾

—— It is considered an anti-magazine in order to emphasize its difference to the standard concept of a magazine (Stipančić 2007: 164), imagined and created as a book as a work of an artist.

—— The first issue of the magazine, published in 1961, today has an almost mythical status. It featured nine photographs, each printed on a separate page, taken according to the instructions that Josip Vaništa had given to photojournalist Pavao Cajzek. Thanks to the artist’s statements (in a conversation with the author), it is possible to reconstruct what caught his attention: “A spatial structure without function, offered for sale.” (Vaništa 2001: 293) For Vaništa, the first issue of *Gorgona* was an empty stage, realized as a series of nine identical black-and-white images of an empty shelf in a Zagreb shop window noted during a stroll. We might interpret it as a critique of the practices oriented towards the production of artworks. This photograph is a sample of unique Gorgonian photography resulting from a procedure of processual, critical, and ironic “compensation”¹⁰⁾ for something that was both ridiculed and longed for. These Gorgonian photographs convey phenomena “that often had something strange and unfamiliar about them,” in Vaništa’s words,¹¹⁾ and depict scenes that exceeded the limits of the standard notion of what an image is, relying on emptiness and meaninglessness.

—— The photography of Miljenko Horvat, an architect and another member of the group, adheres to the *Gorgona* group’s inclinations and the need to perceive something different and uncanny. [Fig. 1] Two photographs taken on the shores of Skagen on Jutland are vernacular, grainy, and cropped to fit into the magazine format. These photographs, published in *Gorgona*’s issue no. 7 in 1965,

6)

From the letter addressed to me by Josip Vaništa, dated January 8, 2013.

7)

It consisted of painters Josip Vaništa, Marijan Jevšovar, Julije Knifer, Đuro Seder, sculptor Ivan Kožarić, theoreticians and critics Dimitrije Bašičević, Radoslav Putar, Matko Meštrović, and architect Miljenko Horvat.

8)

A total of 11 issues were published in the period from 1961 to 1966. We learned about Piero Manzoni’s and Enzo Mari’s proposals from preserved documentation. In 1961, Manzoni sent three proposals, with a fingerprint motif, while Enzo Mari sent his proposal that same year, accompanied by a letter and samples of colored paper, of which he intended to make cut-outs. He planned to publish the magazine without the use of printing. None of the issues were realized, most likely due to financial constraints. For documentation and photographs, see: Marija Gattin, *Gorgona / Protokol dostavljanja misli*, Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002.

9)

From Vaništa’s text “Gorgona, what is it?” in the form of a letter, dated January 8, 2013.

10)

A play on words; I am referring to their procedure of compensation which they applied in some of their works.

11)

Josip Vaništa, “O crtežima, odlascima, filmovima, pričama, inteligenciji. . .” (Josip Vaništa on Miljenko Horvat), comment expressed in the letter dated January 8, 2013.

consider the medium outside of the categories of general accessibility and reproducibility. The limited circulation and unbound original photographs by Horvat, which can be regarded both as independent objects and as an integral part of the magazine, enabled a more direct and intimate relationship with the viewer. This example also prompted a change in the standard meaning and function of the magazine, which thus became a loose framework of photographs ready to be displayed. The concept of some of the issues of the *Gorgona* magazine is distilled down to a representation of emptiness, such as the tautological photographing of the magazine's cover, which is then inserted as a separate piece and the issue's only content (*Gorgona*, no. 11, 1966). The understanding of the specificity of the medium is expressed by an analytical attitude towards the elements that determine the nature of the magazine: the format, name, number, and year are always displayed, while the magazine was distributed by mail and even advertised in the Dutch magazine *Nul* (Stipančić 2007: 169, 171).

— The magazine *spot* was crucial to ensuring the visibility of the changes in photography marking the 1970s. In the context of magazines as works of artists, it stands out primarily for the fact that it is a publication of the Gallery of Contemporary Art from Zagreb, edited by its curators, photographers and theoreticians, as well from several Slovenian and Serbian museums and galleries. From an institutional point of view, this publication is important because it promoted new and experimental photographic works and visual research, simultaneously striving to contextualize them with similar phenomena in other European countries.

— In a certain way, it is possible to interpret *spot* as a kind of enhancement of the particular artistic language initiated by *Gorgona*; a continuation of conceptual thought that began with *Gorgona*, and continues with *spot*. This connection between the two magazines is visible from today's vantage point, in historical continuity, while in the early 1970s it was most likely not perceived that way. Unfortunately, it is not possible to verify this with the original witnesses/participants.

— The 11 issues of *spot* published between 1972 and 1978 heralded an era of significant changes in art, especially its mode of operation, the expansion of the field of interest, and the ways in which artistic content was manifested and mediated, reflecting the effects of political and social circumstances from the late 1960s onwards. The incentive for the publication of the only magazine devoted to photography in the second half of the 20th century in Croatia

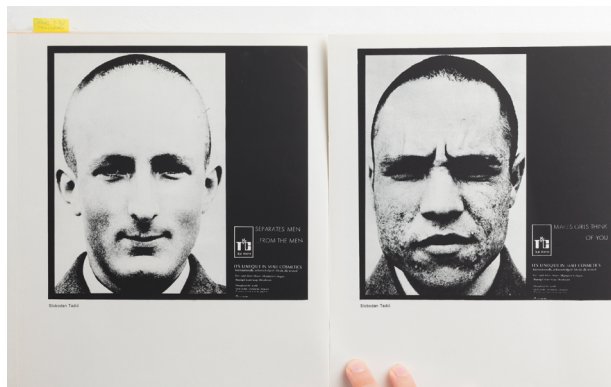


// Figure 1

Miljenko Horvat, *Skagen*, 1963, Anti-magazine *Gorgona* no. 7, 1965, 21 × 20.5 cm, two silver gelatine prints, 20.5 × 20.5 cm each, inserted in folded paper cover, unbound

was expressed by the need for the development of both a general and specific culture of visual communication, whereby photography was interpreted as a unique means of expression, documentation, and communication through images. Photography as a medium helping to define the general cultural milieu and a medium which the artists employed to visually shape their research ideas—here I am referring to photographers and artists active in the medium of photography—was presented in the magazine through a selection of current, innovative, and experimental works. The way in which the photographs communicated with the readership suggests that the aim was to stimulate new possibilities of employing and re-examining the medium. It was used, among other things, to attempt to critically observe the environment as well as the circumstances of the creation and survival of progressive photography.

One of the instances that deserve mentioning is Slobodan Tadić's untitled series of photographs published in issue no. 3 in 1973. **[Fig. 2]** It is unique in the Croatian and Yugoslav context in that it raises questions about the way the communication channel that transmits information to the viewers is conceptualized. These photographs are included in the magazine in the form of a leporello. In this case, *spot* both remains a "professional" photography magazine and functions as a magazine as a work of art. The artist intervenes by incorporating his work in between the pages, which requires careful production. The series consists of five black-and-white photographs and the accompanying "advertisement" in the same format. The visual language is reminiscent of images from concentration camps or police mugshots, whose specific "aesthetic" automatically generates the representation of a "deviant" appearance from police files. There is a logo of a fictitious brand (*TeC for men*), based on the author's nickname. Intriguing and ironic, the ad slogans about the unique male cosmetics are paired with dramatic portraits conveying a message that makes a striking impression on the viewer. The photographs were taken during the author's military service; however, no detailed explanation is provided. In the local context, this example is unique because the visual language of the photograph becomes dependent on the advertising text that, albeit, does not explain it. Both the visual and the textual level, inserted into a photographic magazine, enable a variety of individual interpretations and multifaceted meanings. That is, leafing through the magazine, the reader remains deprived of the artist's personal context related



// Figure 2

Slobodan Tadić, *Untitled*, 1973, *spot*, issue 3, 1973, leporello integrated within the magazine, 30 x 23 cm (sheet), 18 x 21 cm (b/w photographs)

to the creation of this work. The specific and powerful visual impression is retained at the level of surprise and uncertainty of meaning, contingent on the knowledge and interpretative skill of the viewer, whom the artist's humor may not even reach.

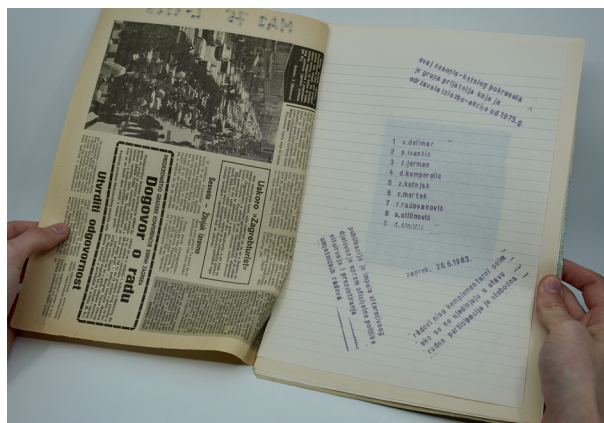
Between 1978 and 1984, 17 issues of the hand-made artists' magazine-catalogue *Maj 75* (May 75) were produced by the Group of Six Artists.¹²⁾ The name of the magazine indicates the year in which the group initiated its public activity, organizing actions and other manifestations outside of the standard institutional framework, mostly in public spaces (squares, streets, along the seashore, and in yards) but also in private homes (Šimičić 2003: 324).

The individual positions of the artists are reflected in the organization of the content of *May 75*, in which each artist is presented as a distinct entity—much like a series of independent exhibitions or statements about their work. Each section reflects the artist's unique practice, using materials that are characteristic of their style. The issues were made out of a wide variety of materials: sometimes daily newspapers were used for the covers, while photos, photocopies, pencil drawings, or films were pasted on the pages. Each artist understood one of the working principles that was stated in the magazine: "The publication is the impulse of alternative action against the official policy of situating and presenting works of art." [Fig. 3] Published in uniform A4 format, in cheap—economical—hand-made runs of 100 to 200 copies, the issues of *May 75* were marked by a letter of the alphabet instead of an issue number (from "A" in 1975 to "LJ" in 1984). What is indicative of the political context in which the artists operated are manifestos, quotations, and other forms of artistic expression, the magazine masthead written by hand or using simple, hand-formed typography, as well as the use of pages of daily newspapers instead of covers. While the covers were often uncommunicative to the wider public, the magazine retained the format of an exhibition space of sorts, enabling the artists to communicate directly with the audience.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE BOOKS? A book as a work of an artist is a concept of the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, and post-avant-garde, realized in the medium and shape of a book. These artwork-books function as a means of formulating, communicating, and embodying the ideas of artists who shifted away from traditional creative processes. We can differentiate between a book-as-an-object, book-

12)

The activities of the group, which was never formalized, began on May 11, 1975, with an exhibition-action at the city bathing area on the Sava River in Zagreb. The loose, informal community of individuals, whose artistic strategies were largely shaped by the attitudes of 1968, including greater civil and artistic freedom to comment and participate in public life and especially in public space, consisted of Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Boris Demur, Fedor Vučemilović, and Željko Jerman. Their attitude towards art and the deconstruction of reality stemmed primarily from ethical viewpoints and needs to be regarded in the context of the phenomena recognized as spearheading the neo-avant-garde, which also included the Working Community of Artists Podroom (1978–1980) and the Expanded Media Gallery (PM), founded in 1981. The PM functioned as a kind of training ground, a place for meeting and socializing, presenting works and workshops. It was a place open to experimentation and based on the principle of self-organization.



// Figure 3

May 75 (L-1983), A4 format, different kinds of papers, news-paper as cover, content: "This magazine-catalogue. . ." in rubber stamps

as-a-work, book-as-a-document, and book-as-a-theoretical object (Šuvaković 2005: 300–301). The majority of examples created by several artists in the 1970s are considered books-as-works of artists. Mladen Stilinović, Vlado Martek, and Željko Jerman, among others, produced their bookworks in a tautological manner, preserving the essential semantic characteristics of the book as their core elements. In addition, the books by Stilinović and Martek sometimes feature interventions in the body of the book, most visibly when they work with previously printed editions of other authors, or simultaneously create and destroy them (for instance, by drilling, cutting up and/or tearing them). Sometimes the artists confront the formal aspects of the book-as-an-object with the formal aspects of the book-as-a-medium, incorporating political messages that simultaneously deconstruct everyday language and assume a critical stance in relation to ideological discourses (Šuvaković 2005: 300).

— One of the earliest examples of a book-object is the second issue of the magazine *Gorgona* from 1961, realized by Julije Knifer (Stipančić 1995: 117). The artist folded the motif of a meander—to which he devoted his painterly oeuvre—down to the size of the magazine, into a leporello, creating the “endless flow” of the sign, i.e., an object that requires space. In the 1970s, Vlado Martek realized several books-as-theoretical-objects, in which, by means of shape and function as well as through visual and written content, he contributed to the problematization of nature, language, and mental presentation in art. All of these are hand-made, created in small print runs, sometimes even one-of-a-kind or having only a handful of copies, often produced using photocopying as a printing technique or cheap offset printing.

— In the local context and during the period covered by this research, the only exhibition of artists’ books was organized in 1980 in Zagreb. [Fig. 4] The exhibition review asserted that a *bookwork* (*knjigarad*), as it was called and written as one word, is typically the work of an individual who is committed to its realization through labor and process, who does not depend on institutions, whereby the whole process is assembled and realized according to the wishes of one person (Ivandić 1980: 10). It was the concentration on individual effort that most often determined the morphology, structure, and content of an artist’s book. At the same time, the decision not to depend on an institution—as a producer and intermediary in distribution—limited and oriented the artist to modest material



// Figure 4

Vlado Martek, Marijan Stilinović, *knjigarad* (bookwork), book-catalogue, Student Centre Gallery, Zagreb, 1980, pencil, pastel, silkscreen, collage, eraser and pencil on paper, stapled, 21.2 × 29.7 cm

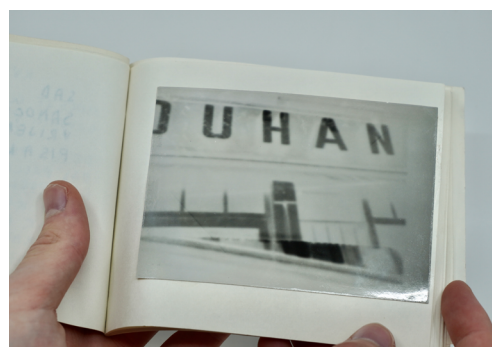
investments for the realization. Consequently, the choice of material became wide and varied, while the format of the book as a work of an artist was completely arbitrary, retaining only the most elementary features of a printed publication, such as content cohesion, folding, a smaller or larger number of pages connected to one body. The material did not even have to be paper, because the artists also intervened in the body of already published editions (e.g., Vlado Martek with nails in the poetic object *Just tell me, please, on which shelf should I put the heart* (1973)), [Fig. 5] or sometimes used plastic foil for pages, as done by Mladen Stilinović. — *Unique Book. Consciousness* (1978) by Željko Jerman consists of four folded A3 sheets of paper, on which the artist typewrote short lines of text, similar to visual poetry. The book even contains the artist's biography and a colophon. A similar procedure could be seen in the publication *Books* (1976) by Mladen Stilinović, who produced 30 hand-made copies of a small-format book-catalogue connected to the exhibition *Books*, which presented only his books, at the Student Centre Gallery in Belgrade in 1976. The introduction was co-written by the artist and his partner, art historian Branka Stipančić. Inside, there is a short introduction and the table of contents, while each book is presented in the form of an individual artwork consisting of a fingermark, torn pages which were glued back together, and original photographs. He also included a colophon. [Fig. 6]

— Several hand-made, unique leporello (or concertina) books by Željko Jerman belong to his autobiographical concept of recording one's own existence in space and time and the belief that the existential and artistic realities are one and the same. His most famous example, *My Year 1977* (1997), is an artist's book with a simple concept. [Fig. 7] In order to create it, Jerman took photographs of himself every day throughout the year while doing completely ordinary, everyday things: drinking coffee, sitting at a table, hanging out with friends, often in his own backyard or somewhere in Zagreb. The locations are not indicated with the photos. The resulting material is 365 pages of A4 paper with one, rarely two or more, standard 7 × 10 cm black-and-white photograph(s). Each page is dated and includes a short piece of text written by the artist in felt-tip pen. Some of his statements, "I exist—I leave a mark," "Intimate pain," "I read a lot," "Elementary methods," function as a kind of instruction manual which he wrote for himself,



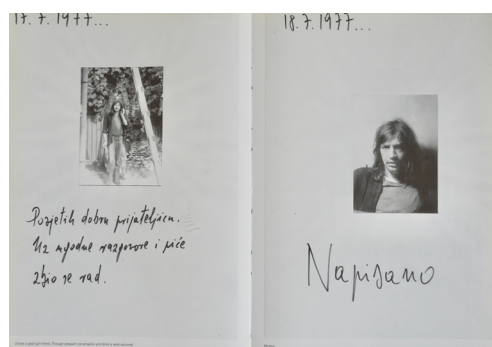
// Figure 5

Vlado Martek, *Samo mi recite molim vas na koju policu da stavim srce / Just tell me, please, on which shelf should I put the heart*, book-as-a-poetical-object, prepared books, paper, nails, 19 × 14 × 9 cm



// Figure 6

Mladen Stilinović, *Knjige / Books*, 1976, publication from the solo exhibition at the Student Cultural Centre Gallery, Belgrade, text: Branka Stipančić, Mladen Stilinović, felt-tip pen, pastel, blood, rubber stamp, collage (photographs, printed paper, xerox), 19 sheets, stapled, 10.5 × 13.5 cm



// Figure 7

Željko Jerman, *Moja godina 1977. / My Year 1977*, A4 format, bound, Zagreb, SCCA, 1997

while at the same time explaining to potential observers¹³⁾ what he was thinking about or how he felt on a given day; it appears as if he wanted to clarify some of his thoughts. At the same time, it is a type of diary, similar to his other works, in which he often indicates the date, time of shooting, and even some technical details, alongside his personal notes.

— In the same period during which he made *My Year*, Jerman documented his life in a series of other works, for instance, in *Untitled (One Day / New Year's Eve)* (1977). **[Fig. 8]** He did not do it analytically, instead openly displaying his own emotional and physical intimacy, private space, and daily life, like sitting at a table, drinking coffee, or taking a bath, carefully recording the chronology of events with notes around the photographs. The recordings are connected to a leporello book, which artists could easily produce themselves. Although the choice of the recorded moments seems arbitrary, it is evident that, in this work, Jerman's artistic procedures (inscribing text on the surface, doing collages, setting up the work, posing in front of his work) occupy most of the recorded time. The artist simultaneously stages himself as the creative subject and the object of the work. This type of book is based on the consideration of analytical and procedural processes which are the cornerstone of Jerman's artistic work. At the same time, they raise the question of the capacity of photography to mediate the complex emotional and mental states of the artist, who mainly reaches for the non-representational properties of photography, making the interpretation of what is expressed by the medium all the more difficult. Furthermore, the artist allows the camera to "think for itself," exacerbating the understanding of the image, which most of the viewers would deem to be closely related to realism. Many of the short comments and notes that he wrote next to the photographs, even when they consist of only the date, are borrowed from the idiom of the diary, whereby Jerman uses everyday language, without abiding by any (linguistic, ethical, or political) rules. He uses this strategy of supposedly honest literature when writing his diary-like notes about his everyday life, which today might reveal elements of the context on which the artist focused.

— The majority of books as works of an artist created by Mladen Stilinović in the 1970s and 1980s serve as evidence that the book in particular and text in general are the central media of his artistic practice. His overall practice has an aura of poverty, a term the artist often used with regard to (cheap, easily accessible) material, size, and language (meaning could often be "squeezed into" only a

13)

This series was published as a book 20 years after its creation, while the originals today form part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb.



// Figure 8

Željko Jerman, 31. XII 1977, leporello (11 black-and-white square photographs on cardboard, segments connected with fabric strip), 107 × 11 cm

few words). Although these practices could be connected to a kind of mental ecology, it remains unknown whether he thought about this during the creation process. Ecology is therefore primarily associated with the economy of language and the number of words he used in his artistic expression, which was often reduced to (seemingly) terse statements. The modest materials he used to create his works included various objects of everyday use, such as textiles, dishes, notebooks, cardboard pieces, daily newspapers, and plain sheets of paper. **[Fig. 9]** He often appropriated photographs from mass media or obtained them at flea markets. He took some pictures himself, while the rest were taken by others following his instructions, for instance, art historian and curator Branka Stipančić, who was his partner, or his brother Sven, a photographer. Photographs were elements which helped him to build specific compositions, grafting onto them statements based on language as artistic material, as well as drawings and objects. This allowed him to explore the main themes of his oeuvre: political ideology, ideology of art, manipulation of language, position of power, economy and money.

Stilinović published his books in very small runs, using them as a medium for realizing and distributing his ideas, despite the limited audience. Occasionally he would create a leporello, which in a certain way simulates a photographic sequence (as a potential substitute for film), while at the same time serving as performance documentation. In such an instance, he is the performer of an action, a performer, for example, who kicks a loaf of bread with his foot, simultaneously acting as object and subject—“an artist in the first person,” as they used to say in the 1970s (Stipančić 2008: 12). He was attracted to printed material, its simplicity and functionality, immediacy and democratic character. Page sequencing was necessary for the textual and photographic works, which were often created in series, united by the topic in his focus—work, colors, disorder, condition—which were some of the titles he gave them. He created the first books on plastic bags, consisting of only a few pages, each a unique piece composed of collages with elements of poetry that Stilinović was still writing in the early 1970s. In them, he combined photographs, small objects, and drawings in felt-tip pen, and thanks to their transparent sides, the entire content could be glimpsed simultaneously. When turning the pages, the content of the book grew smaller and smaller.

In many of his more than 130 different hand-made books which were created in several versions, in different sizes, and



// Figure 9

Marijan Stilinović, *Govorili su mi su ti / They Told Me Told You*, 1973, cover binded in jute, felt-tip pen, pastel, polycolor, letraset, collage: photograph, photogram, matches, sugar, comic, tobacco, scotch tape, envelope, newspaper, tram ticket on paper, different materials and objects on textile, on plastic foil, on sandpaper, 34 sheets, 21.2 × 30.7 cm

with varying number of pages, it is noticeable that each page is visually arranged in a different way, except when he works with photographic leporello editions connecting photos in a series. He describes the procedure as follows:

I made the books by hand, because I don't think anyone would print them, and even if they did, I would spend more time looking for and convincing a publisher than I need to make such a book. I make as many individual copies of the book as I sell. The books are mostly made [...] with simple means and minimal forms, so I can easily repeat them. (Stipančić 1976: 16)

Although he gave away many of his works, especially in the 1970s when there was little interest in buying the works of conceptual artists, he did sell the books. He felt that he had to sell them, because if they were merely given as a gift, people would not perceive their artistic value.¹⁴⁾ However, it is worth mentioning that the price of one such book was equal to a pack of cigarettes. Today, the situation is starkly different.¹⁵⁾

One of his most impressive works, for which he decomposed the Oxford English Dictionary (and we may therefore consider it a book-as-a-decomposed-object), is *Dictionary—Pain* (2000–2003), an unbound book consisting of 523 pages. [Fig. 10] In this work, the original alphabetical order in English is still visible, but the explanations of the words are concealed under several layers of white paint. Next to each entry, Stilinović wrote “PAIN,” a term that was the focus of several of his works. By means of this simple procedure carried out in solitude, he was able to question the meaning of each word in terms of pain. The theme of pain appeared earlier in Stilinović's works as well. In addition, he believes that “during the time of socialism, in the seventies, questions of power and lack of power were important. This lack of power is a constant pain.” (Milovac 2003: 15). He started with the *Pain Game* (1977), throwing a die with the word pain written on all sides. Later, pain became connected with the war on an emotional level, while globalization caused him pain that was more abstract.

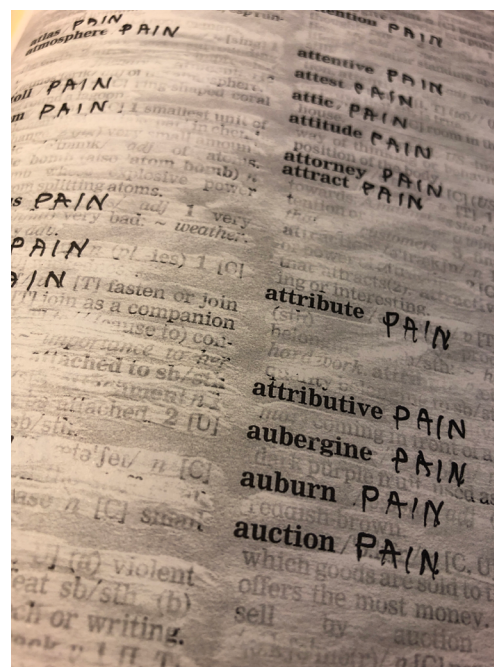
CONCLUSION The widest use of what is termed a book and/or magazine as a work of an artist in former Yugoslavia—its pages regarded as an alternative exhibition space, especially for the

14)

I thank Darko Šimičić for this information.

15)

Even though I am not close to the local art market circles, I have noticed that, for instance, one issue of the *Gorgona* magazine sold for around €1,500. It is difficult to find out how much someone paid for a hand-made book and magazine issue, and collectors are not inclined to share this information. In Croatia, there are only a few places where it is possible to buy original items, and buyers mostly purchase them directly from the artists and/or their relatives and friends.



// Figure 10

Marijan Stilinović, *Dictionary—Pain*, 2000–2003, tempera on paper, 523 × 18 × 13 cm, fragments A, B, C (114 pages)

“dematerialized practices of conceptual art” (Allen 2011: 1)—can be traced to the 1970s and conceptual artists. During that period, the artists’ books and magazines were created in the context of changing artistic tendencies, whereby the focus shifted from the physicality of the artwork to its semantic aspect. From today’s perspective, we could partially attribute such publications to a special kind of activism—the principle of non-surrender and operating outside of the conditions designed and implemented by art institutions. The recent canonization of such objects speaks to the market’s interest in this segment of artistic activity, which was underappreciated for a long time and survived in rare preserved copies thanks to the individuals who, recognizing their importance, privately collected them during the events. The fact that in many instances the artists provided precise information about each individual edition, numbering and signing them, suggests they were aware of their value. During the 1970s, the Student Centre Gallery in Zagreb enabled the printing of a certain number of publications, although most of them were published as individual editions. Unique works made by hand, such as the books by Stilinović, Martek, Jerman, as well as editions by Goran Trbuljak, Vladimir Dodig Trokut, Ivan Ladislav Galeta, Josip Stošić, and others, some realized in miniature format, but mostly in the standard A4, are cited in rare critical reviews published in the domestic press as a sort of extension of the space of artistic activity. This aligns with the views of the well-known Swiss curator Harald Szeemann and his curatorial team in the context of *documenta 5*, which refer to “mixed media and inexpensive editioned multiples and explorations into language,” as well as the idea of “engaged spectatorship” (Arnar 2017), which was only partially realized in the 1972 edition of the exhibition.

— An important shift on the European scene would take place at the next edition, *documenta 6* in 1977, where the presented conceptual artists’ books to a great extent corresponded to those created in Yugoslavia at the same time. Although artists’ books and magazines were largely an unknown concept in the local context, and the first (and, for a long time, only) *knjigarad* (bookwork) exhibition was held as late as in 1980 at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb, the exploration of and encroachment on typical book conventions as one of the focuses of *documenta 6* undoubtedly affected the activities in Yugoslavia as well. From today’s perspective, it is not easy to reconstruct the routes of how (and if at all) the information about the Kassel exhibition reached Zagreb, but the possibility of reading “as a personal act,” in the words of Rolf Dittmar (Sigríður 2017), and the artistic procedures that re-examine the limitations of the book

as a medium, reveal an important shift in which the mentioned artists participated. In this regard, the artistic research they performed revealed that the common denominator of many of them was the complex examination of the book/magazine as a medium and a critical understanding of the term book/magazine itself. In doing so, most of them engaged in the creation of unique publications that explore the possibilities and limitations of the printed medium, sometimes creating unique copies, such as in the case of Željko Jerman's *Unique Book*, limited in content and expression, designed for a single reader lucky enough to end up possessing such a rare copy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT — During my research, I had access to the collections and documentation owned by Darko Šimičić and Petar Smiljanić, whom I thank for their hospitality. Earlier I had the opportunity to consult individual works of Josip Vaništa, Vlado Martek, and Željko Jerman, during encounters with these artists and with Bojana Švertasek, Jerman's partner, to whom I am also very grateful.

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Figures 4, 5, 6, 9: Collection Darko Šimičić, photo by Nenad Roban.

Figure 7: Photo by Nenad Roban.

Figure 8: Private collection, photo by Marko Ercegović.

Figure 10: Published in: Milovac, Tihomir, Stipančić, Branka (eds.) (2003): *Mladen Stilinović. Pain*. Zagreb, Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo by Sandra Križić Roban.

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Sandra Križić Roban holds a PhD in art history and is a critic, curator, lecturer, PhD mentor, and writer, who focuses on contemporary art, the history and theory of photography, post-war architecture, and the politics of public space and cultural memory. Križić Roban is a senior scientific advisor in tenure at the Institute of Art History (Zagreb) and Assistant Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Zagreb. She is the head of the Office for Photography, a non-profit association dedicated to contemporary photography (Zagreb).

Križić Roban authored a number of books, scientific articles, and book chapters, published on photography, especially women's, cultural migration and conceptual photography, trauma and alternative ways of memorization, most recently in the edited volumes *Formats of (Non)Seeing*, Institute of Art History, Zagreb, 2024, and *W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies: Memory, Word and Image*, Amsterdam University Press, 2023. Together with Ana Šverko, she edited the volume *Watching, Waiting: The Photographic Representation of Empty Places*, Leuven University Press, 2023. She hosted a number of retrospective exhibitions, as well as extensive thematic exhibitions, recently focusing on women's photography and conceptual photography.

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“THINKING IS A REVOLUTIONARY ACT”: ARTIST’S PUBLICATIONS BY MARIE ORENSANZ

ABSTRACT — After beginning her career as a painter in the 1960s, Argentine artist Marie Orensanz published various artist’s publications in the 1970s and 1980s, in parallel to her sculptural and painterly work, which remain relatively unknown. This essay examines a selection of these artworks that formally consist of printed matter. Against the backdrop of oppression and political violence by a dictatorial government in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a strong need in Argentine art to address communication and its systems as one of the fields of art. Orensanz shared this desire, and her publications, which range from manifestos to posters and brochures to books, sometimes appearing in editions and sometimes as original works, draw on this impulse, enriched by diverse influences from her long stays in various European cities.

“In 1977 I put on an exhibition with flowers,
all of them poisonous;
only a few people noticed.”
Marie Orensanz¹⁾

— Marie²⁾ Orensanz was born in Mar del Plata in 1936, the third of four children of a Spaniard and an Argentine of Italian and British descent.³⁾ Her father was in the real estate business but took an interest in art history and culture. In the early 1950s, the whole family spent nine months on a cultural tour through several European countries. It was the exposure to the history of Western art in their many visits to museums during that trip that triggered in Orensanz, who was seventeen years old at the time and planning to pursue a career in law, the desire to devote herself to art instead. For as she discovered then, art had the potential to become a transformative element in the world. Back in Argentina, the Orensanz family moved to Buenos Aires, where she began to learn painting in the studio of the painter Emilio Pettoruti. She studied with Pettoruti for five years, after which she felt very confident of her technical mastery, but at the same time thought that she had not yet found her own artistic language. For this reason, she moved on to join the studio of painter and sculptor Antonio Seguí, who had just returned to Argentina after a long stay in Mexico. According to Orensanz, it was in Seguí’s studio where she learned that freedom was “an indispensable condition for action” in art. (Buccellato 2007: 20)

1)
Marie Orensanz, ca. 2002, handwritten notes reproduced in *Marie Orensanz. El fluir del pensamiento*. Buenos Aires: EDUNREF Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, 2023, 55. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author. This essay is a lightly revised version of a text previously published in Spanish in *Umática: revista sobre creación y análisis de la imagen*, no. 8, devoted to “The Arts at the Intersection: Hybridizations and Intermedia Approaches in Contemporary Art”, 2025. Online: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/revista/26457/A/2025>, last accessed May 19, 2026.

2)
Originally, “Mari,” diminutive of “María” in Spanish. Orensanz added a final “e” to her first name when in 1972, shortly after settling in Milan, when the buyer of one of the paintings with which she was participating in a gallery exhibition decided to return it when he realized that the author was not a man but a woman.

3)
I am extremely grateful to Marie Orensanz for sharing with me in conversation these and many other biographical details, as well as numerous aspects of her work. Unless otherwise stated, the information contained in this essay draws on her generous comments during our personal encounters in 2024 and 2025.

— Orensanz's artistic training continued with a stay in Paris in 1964, during which one of her works—an expressionist painting titled *¿Dónde estoy?* (Where do I stand?), showing a woman prostrate on the ground being trampled on by a male figure—was awarded the first prize at the Union of Women Painters and Sculptors competition in the foreign artists category. Shortly after receiving the prize, Orensanz returned to Argentina with her partner, the French salesman Patrick Audras, with whom she went on to have three daughters. Long-distance moves with her family were far from over with this change of setting: moving between different cities and countries on either side of the Atlantic has remained a constant throughout her life, helping her to forge a nomadic condition that, in her own words, continues to be one of her most characteristic personal traits.

— In parallel to her family project, Marie Orensanz began to exhibit her paintings in Buenos Aires in the first half of the 1960s, while making progress in her search for her own visual language. At the end of the decade, this search led her to gradually abandon figuration and focus on abstraction, in an evolution that sought to simplify images until they were reduced to the mere expression of ideas. The series *Primary Structures*, which Orensanz produced and exhibited at the Buenos Aires gallery El Taller in 1968, was the result of this shift: her own personal variant of geometric abstraction, which unfolded in drawings, paintings, and her first three-dimensional works. During those years, the Argentine art scene was undergoing a deep change in conjunction with the expansion of the conceptual regime that had begun to transform artistic practices from the 1960s onwards, bringing about an enormous interest in the artistic exploration of language, its potential, and its limits, not only on the visual level but also in terms of its semantic and expressive possibilities. American artist Adrian Piper recently recalled how in the 1960s many artists felt “drunk with the unlimited possibilities of language and other conventional symbol systems” (Osborne and Piper 2025: 12). This “drunkenness,” indeed, was not exclusive to a particular country or geographical area, but rather cut across the different conceptual drifts that occurred in the same period of time and in different places, with specific nuances in Europe, North America, and Latin America.

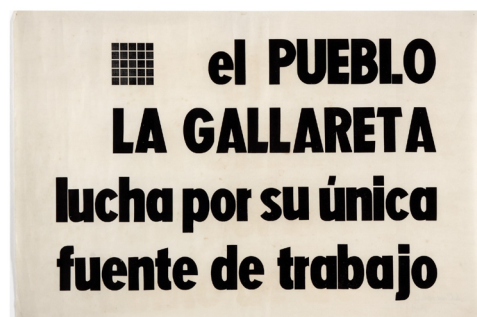
— In Latin America, the Brazilian precedent of Concrete poetry in the 1950s had placed language at the center of a research model that would prove particularly fertile and unfold in very diverse ways over the next two decades, at least. Language and, by extension, any system of symbols or communication, offered multiple creative pos-

sibilities that numerous Latin American artists did not hesitate to exploit, in exercises that often combined poetic and political intentions. The asemic writings of Argentine artists Mirtha Dermisache and Leon Ferrari, or the digressions on the fringes of visual poetry by Brazilian artists Regina Vater and Lenora de Barros, are just some of the many examples that illustrate this trend. The desire to address communication and its systems as a territory of art is explicitly reflected in the full name of one of the initiatives that, from the city of Buenos Aires, had the greatest impact on the dissemination and consolidation of conceptual practices in the Latin American region, namely, Centro de Arte y Comunicación – CAyC (Center for Art and Communication).⁴⁾ It is no coincidence, therefore, that one of the first exhibitions organized by CAyC, which was presented in Buenos Aires at the Museo de Arte Moderno in 1971, was entitled precisely *Arte de sistemas* (System Art).

— Among the artists who exhibited in *Arte de sistemas*—and at the various venues of this show that followed—was Marie Orensanz, whose practice, by then, had moved far away from her first painterly stage. In the gradual change that she had undergone as an artist, it was not only the evolution of the intellectual context in which she found herself that had an impact; so too did the violent political repression and conservative turn that Argentina was going through under the dictatorial government of Juan Carlos Onganía, who was in power between 1966 and 1969. A particular incident, which took place in 1969, illustrates the artist's clash with political censorship. Marie Orensanz and fellow artist Mercedes Esteves had been invited to exhibit at the Primera Plana gallery in Mar del Plata. Shortly before the installation of the exhibition, Orensanz witnessed a neighborhood protest during a trip: the small town of La Gallareta in the province of Santa Fe, in northern Argentina, had risen up against plans to reroute the railroad that ran through the town and guaranteed the subsistence of its inhabitants. So Orensanz decided that her project for the gallery would consist of covering the walls of the exhibition room with fifty copies of a protest poster, which she composed with a single typographic message that took up the demand of La Gallareta's residents: "El pueblo de La Gallareta lucha por su única fuente de trabajo" (The people of La Gallareta are fighting for their only source of work). [Fig. 1] The installation was completed with a few bags of sand and cement that Mercedes Esteves placed in the center of the space, symbolically alluding to the urban transformation that the city of Mar del Plata was undergoing, with old single-family homes

4)

Centro de Arte y Comunicación, founded in 1969 in Buenos Aires by the author, artist, and professor Jorge Glusberg, was an extremely active organization whose impact would radiate far beyond the borders of Argentina. CAyC supported and disseminated Latin American Conceptualism, promoted the use of new technologies in art, and encouraged debate on the identity of contemporary Latin American art.



// Figure 1

Marie Orensanz, *El pueblo La Gallareta*. . . , 1969

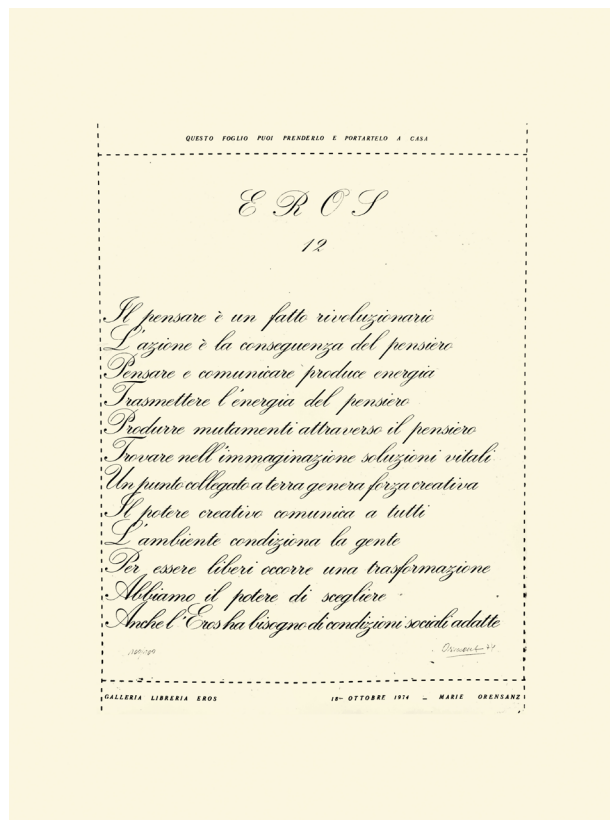
097

being demolished to make room for new apartment buildings. The exhibition opened as planned, but was suddenly closed the following day. As Orensanz recalls, it was obvious that the gallery management was dissatisfied with the fact that her installation showed explicit support to a popular protest, but they justified the closure with an excuse that bore obscure patriarchal overtones, stating that, since the artists were two women, the expectation had been that they would both exhibit flowers rather than pieces with a political content.

Marie Orensanz herself acknowledges how important that personal collision with censorship and patriarchal structures was for her. The abrupt closure of the exhibition allowed her to assess the direct connection between art and life (politics, in this specific case), while consolidating her interest in language as a creative element and, by extension, in print media as a support for art. The seed that the incident left in her creative consciousness would germinate in different ways from then on, as can be appreciated in her decision to add verbal language to her plastic work, almost always in expressions of a poetic but also somewhat vindictive nature; in her persevering feminist militancy; and in her adoption of forms of writing, such as the manifesto, and printed formats, such as posters, brochures, and books.

Thanks to the awarding of the Francisco Romero Lahoja grant in 1972, the entire Orensanz family moved first to Rome and then to Milan. In Italy, Orensanz's artistic stance would continue to evolve, in a process in which the relationship between *thinking* and *doing* became increasingly close and inseparable for her, while the writing of aphorisms and, in general, the desire to appropriate signs and symbols from other types of languages—including scientific ones—so as to incorporate them into her plastic work, consolidated.

In 1974, in response to an invitation from the Italian art historian Lea Vergine to participate in a group exhibition entitled *Eros come linguaggio* (Eros as language) at the Eros bookshop and gallery in Milan, Orensanz contributed an artwork created especially for this occasion: the *Eros* manifesto. [Fig. 2] This was a poster measuring approximately 60 × 50 cm on which the artist printed, in a delicate italic typeface, a manifesto consisting of twelve postulates



// Figure 2
Marie Orensanz, *Eros* manifesto, 1974

in the form of short sentences, for example, “Transmitir la energía del pensamiento” (Transmitting the energy of thought), “La acción es la consecuencia del pensamiento” (Action is the consequence of thought), or “Incluso Eros necesita las condiciones sociales adecuadas” (Even Eros also needs the right social conditions).

— In its first presentation in Milan, the *Eros* manifesto was printed in an edition of one hundred copies which were hung on the gallery walls. By inviting the public to tear the posters off the wall and take them along, not only were the aphorisms written by the artist put into circulation, but the classic rules of behavior in a gallery were also challenged. [Fig. 3] Since then, Orensanz has reprinted this manifesto on numerous occasions in order to present it in other exhibition contexts.⁵⁾ The constant reactivation of this piece in the form of a multiplied work and in an unlimited number of copies underlines the relevance that the potential of the manifesto as an element of communication—similar to a pamphlet or a flyer—has for Orensanz, a potential that is rekindled with each reissue.

— This is not, however, the only way in which the *Eros* manifesto has continued to “live,” so to speak, in Orensanz’s work: some components and features of this piece were to become constant elements in the artist’s work over the next two decades. The same cursive typography in which the manifesto is composed would reappear time and again in her drawings, sculptures, and publications; likewise, some of the postulates of the *Eros* manifesto would be taken up again on numerous occasions so as to form part of other pieces, in particular in the sculptures conceived by Orensanz for public spaces.⁶⁾ The first of these postulates, specifically, has periodically emerged in various works, becoming something of a motto that reflects and defines Orensanz’s vital and creative attitude: “Pensar es un acto revolucionario” (Thinking is a revolutionary act).

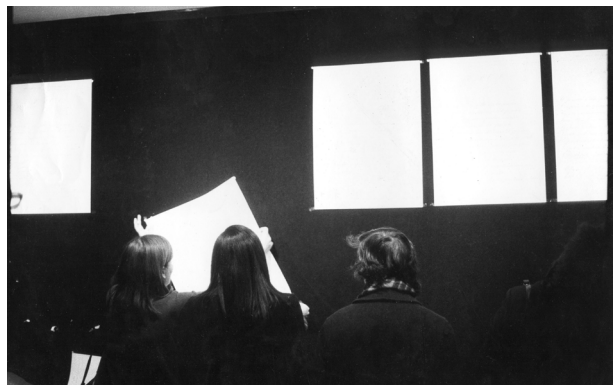
— The reuse of elements that are articulated over and over again, in different combinations and on different media, is closely related to the artist’s thinking. On the one hand, as already mentioned, she is deeply interested in verbal language understood as a system of symbols, a system to which Orensanz would gradually add other symbols taken from mathematics or the natural sciences. All of these systems are composed of pieces—the fragments into which each of these codes are broken down—that can be combined with each other in infinite ways, opening up new nuances of meaning in each new configuration. On the other hand, and as an extension

5)

For example, at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires, in September 2007; at the Caraffa Museum in Córdoba, Argentina, in May 2008; at the Maison de l’Amérique Latine in Paris, in May 2010; at the Sicardi Gallery in Houston, in April 2015.

6)

Such as, for instance, *Pensar es un hecho revolucionario*, conceived in 1999 and installed in 2010 in Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires.



// Figure 3

Marie Orensanz and Lea Vergine (from behind) taking down one of the *Eros* posters at the gallery and bookstore Eros, Milan, during the opening of the exhibition *Eros comme linguaggio*, 1974.

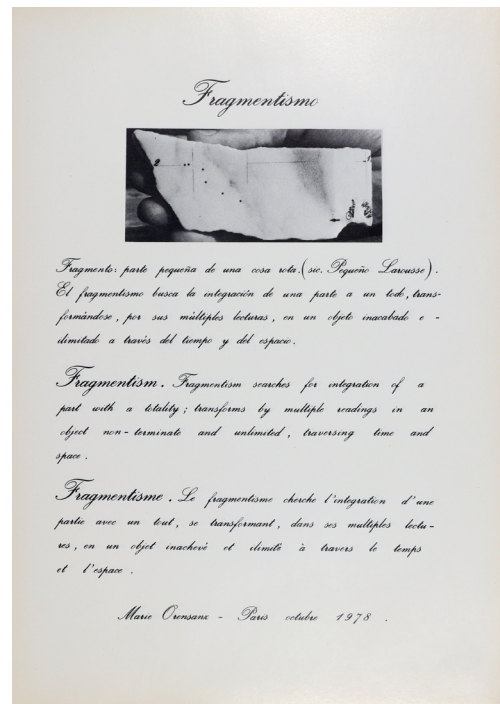
of her conceptualization of the world as a set of systems, Orensanz considers that any element whatsoever can be taken as a part, or fragment, of a greater whole. This conviction led, in 1978, to the publication of a new, very brief manifesto, descriptively entitled *Fragmentismo* [Fig. 4]:

El fragmentismo busca la integración de una parte a un todo; transformándose, por sus múltiples lecturas, en un objeto inacabado e ilimitado a través del tiempo y del espacio.

Fragmentism searches for integration of a part with a totality; [it] transforms by multiple readings in a non-terminate and unlimited object, traversing time and space.

Conceptually, this work condenses ideas that are at the basis of Orensanz's work, such as the integration of the parts into a whole, a system, the processes of transformation implicit—and necessary—in art, and the multiplicity of readings to which artistic objects are open. Formally, *Fragmentismo* is similar to *Eros*: a sheet printed on one side only, designed to be reproduced in an unlimited number of copies, with the text set in cursive typeface as well, the only difference being that, on this occasion, the text appears in Spanish, English, and French, the three languages in which the artist's daily life takes place.

Contrary to *Eros*, however, the *Fragmentismo* manifesto is illustrated: above the text, a photograph shows a piece of white marble held by the fingers of a hand, on whose surface a series of lines and arrows have been drawn, suggesting a plan or diagram of sorts. Shortly before the publication of this manifesto, Orensanz had had the opportunity to visit the marble quarries of Carrara, which aroused her interest in discarded pieces of marble, which, from then on, would become a recurring motif in her drawings, paintings, sculptures, and publications. The artist later declared: "My idea was to respect the material in its current state and transform it by using only thought. I did not sculpt it or treat it, I only drew and painted on those fragments of marble. [. . .] They are like found pages of a book" (Meisel 2022: 47). The pieces of marble that she found in the Carrara quarries offered the artist the potential to bring countless contrasts into play in her work: between intentional formal configuration and the unpredictability of readymades, between the hardness of marble and the softness of paper, between sculptural



// Figure 4

Marie Orensanz, *Fragmentismo* manifesto, 1978

monumentality and the modesty of residues, between the durability of stone and the ephemeral fragility of images printed on paper. And also, of course, between the three-dimensionality of marble and the two-dimensionality of printed media.

—A poignant feature of Orensanz's work is the constant flow of ideas and motifs between one work and another, one format and another, giving rise to atypical series that often share a title and a conceptual genesis, but consist of quite different materializations. Different *Fragmentismo* works attest to this: the postcard *Fragmentismo* [Fig. 5], published in 1981 by Orensanz, is illustrated with a black-and-white photograph of a piece of marble on which the artist has written several enigmatic textual messages, such as “acumulador” (accumulator), “la fuerza de la naturaleza prepara” (the form of nature prepares), together with a series of variously thick and differently positioned lines. The book *Fragmentismo*, in turn, published shortly afterwards in 1982 by Galerie des femmes in Paris, shows no references to marble: here, combinations of aphorisms and mixtures of words and symbols of all kinds are displayed on the pages.

—The syntagm “Fragments de pages trouvées” can be read, printed on a piece of marble in Orensanz's unmistakable cursive Letraset, in the image that appears on the cover of *Libro de mármol* (Marble Book) [Fig. 6] made by Orensanz in 1981. This book, of which the artist produced twenty copies by hand, consists of five sheets of stiff black cardboard, bound with a simple cord tied on the back cover. On the first four sheets, Orensanz glued black-and-white photographs of as many “sheets” made of fragments of marble polished on both sides, also bound to each other with a cord. In a way, therefore, the *Libro de mármol* reproduces itself, multiplying by twenty an original book made of stone, on the surface of whose pages are inscribed a number of words, lines, and certain signs—some real, others imaginary—whose meaning can only be speculated upon.

—Referring to her systems of symbols, the artist stated that “there are many, sometimes taken from the symbology used in Physics or Mathematics. I use them as artistic elements: they are graphic representations of thought” (Meisel 2022: 50). Orensanz has maintained the suggestive presence of these invented alphabets, often combined with legible language, in all the formats in which she has worked, including her sculptures for public spaces.⁷⁾ In the booklet *Transmitir la energía del pensamiento. Una conversación*

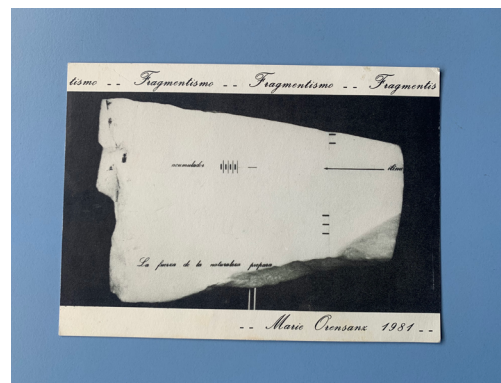
7)

Such as, for instance, *Untitled*, installed on the outside wall of l'Archevêché en la cour Saint-Jean, Besançon, in 1990.



// Figure 5

Marie Orensanz, *Libro de mármol*, 1981



// Figure 6

Marie Orensanz, *Fragmentismo*, 1981

entre Lea Vergine, Marie Orensanz y Gilo Dorfles, designed and illustrated by the artist, the Italian historian Dorfles noted that these signs “can enter into a discourse of ‘polysemic efficacy.’ [...] Their efficacy comes precisely from their polysemic charge and their semantic ambiguity” (Orensanz 1975). These enigmatic compositions build up a space which is always open to the interpretation of the viewer, a feature which is, according to the artist’s perspective, an inalienable part of her work: “I do not believe that art is, nor should it be, the vision of one person, the expression of one person. It should, instead, offer points of reference so that everyone can develop their own ideas” (quoted in Meisel 2022: 68).

— In 1990, the Belgian editor Guy Schraenen invited Orensanz to take part in his series *In Octavo*, consisting of ten publications conceived by different artists including, among others, Gianni Bertini, Henri Chopin, Peter Downsborough, Jiří Kolář, and Bernard Villers. Orensanz—the only woman on the initial list⁸⁾—accepted the invitation and conceived a booklet entitled *Communiquer. . .* [Fig. 7], in which, provocatively, textual information is completely absent, except for the title on the cover and the edition details on the inside of the back cover. The spreads of this book are illustrated only on the right-hand page, with different compositions of straight and curved lines, arrows and dots, with one peculiarity: each sheet is crossed by two horizontal sections at different heights, in such a way that the resulting fragments—and the illustrations printed on them—can be combined in countless arrangements that multiply the visual configuration and possible readings of the pages.

— Grasping the scope of these readings, or rather—which would be the same thing—elucidating the multiple levels of meaning contained in Orensanz’s published artworks, requires a certain effort and, at the same time, an attitude of curiosity and openness that does not conform to remaining on their—often delicate—aesthetic surface. An example illustrates what such an exercise in interpretation may unearth: Sometime after the cancellation of her exhibition on the La Gallareta neighborhood protest, in a kind of belated response to the offensive excuse with which the closure of the exhibition had been justified at the time, Orensanz produced a series of

8)

Later, Schraenen decided to expand the series beyond the ten books originally planned and invited German artist Nanne Meyer, among others, to participate.



// Figure 7

Marie Orensanz, *Communiquer. . .*, 1990

drawings solely depicting beautiful, delicate flowers, accompanied by their Latin names written in the same cursive typeface that the artist has consistently used throughout her career. The peculiarity of this series, entitled *Poisonous Flowers* (1977), lay in the fact that all the botanical species represented in the drawings are poisonous, a detail that only few observers realized, since it was not made explicit in the information given whenever they were shown. Similarly, most of Orensanz's publications can be searched for underlying messages or intentional, biting meanings which are not always obvious, not always univocal, and not always the same. But they are always there, even if, sometimes, they cannot be appreciated at first glance.

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- Figures 1–2:** Courtesy of the artist.
- Figures 3–4:** Courtesy of the artist. Photographer unknown.
- Figures 5–7:** Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mela Dávila Freire.

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MATERIALIZING ABSENCE, ABSENT MATERIALS: MIRTHA DERMISACHE, ROLAND BARTHES, AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT — This article reexamines Mirtha Dermisache's (1940–2012) art by shifting the focus beyond her widely discussed asemic writing to her engagement with the materials and political dimensions of publishing. Working at the intersection of literature and visual art, Dermisache used media-reflexive strategies to interrogate the conventions of both fields, emphasizing the material and formal aspects of communication. Drawing on unpublished archival materials, including her correspondence with Roland Barthes (1971–1978), the article reconstructs their plans for a collaborative publication. By analyzing her publishing activities—particularly the under-explored beginnings of her practice—within the socio-political constraints of her time, it highlights how Dermisache negotiated the tension between artistic ambition and the practical realities of dissemination, offering a nuanced understanding of her contributions to Conceptualism and the challenges faced by female artists in the Latin America of the time.

— The Argentinian Conceptual artist Mirtha Dermisache is known for her illegible or asemic writing, consisting of marks that resemble writing yet remain devoid of semantic content. In Peter Schwenger's words, asemic writing "does not attempt to communicate any message other than its own nature as writing" and is, fundamentally, something "we are seeing—not reading" (Schwenger 2019: 7). Dermisache was adamant that her work should be presented in the form of publications—books, newspapers, magazine inserts—or other familiar media of communication, such as letters, postcards, and posters. By employing these already codified formats, she ensured that her works would be immediately recognizable as textual objects, encouraging an act of "reading," even as their lack of legible content redirected engagement toward a primarily visual experience.¹⁾ As she emphasized on multiple occasions, her aim was never to create precious art objects to be collected and displayed, "to [be] put on the walls" like "painting[s]" (cit. in: Rimmaudo/Lamoni 2011: n.p). Instead, from the very beginning of her practice, she sought to have her manuscripts published and circulated in larger editions—an expanded distribution that, in her view, constituted the "true way of showing them: in the form of the book" (Dermisache

1)

For an in-depth discussion on the positioning of Mirtha Dermisache's artist's publications with asemic writing at the intersection of reading and viewing, see Ehleiter (2025: 6–24). The research for the present article was partly funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy in the context of the Cluster of Excellence Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective – EXC 2020 – Project ID 390608380.

1971: n.p.) in order for her work “to be read” (Rimmaudo/Lamoni 2011: n.p.).

NEGOTIATING VISION AND LIMITATION: *LIBRO N° 1*, 1967 — Between her first artist’s book in 1967 and her temporary move away from bookmaking, in 1978, to focus on pedagogical work,²⁾ Dermisache produced a rich and varied body of over 40 artist’s publications (Dermisache n.d., c. 1981). Despite her ambition to publish and widely disseminate these works, many of her artist’s books remain unica to this day, existing only *in potentia* as publications with a wider print run. This tension between aspiration and material limitation underscores a central paradox in her practice: while her works critique the conventions of communication and publishing, their limited circulation often confined them to the very institutional and economic constraints she sought to transcend. This contradiction is most evident in her first artist’s book [Fig. 1], whose history is difficult to reconstruct due to the scattered and sometimes conflicting information about it that has survived. Rather than working on loose sheets, which would be subsequently compiled into book form, Dermisache deliberately began work on the pages of a bound blank book. Given the unavailability of industrially produced blank books in Argentina at the time, she approached a local printing company to bind 500 blank pages, which she then filled with her graphisms. As she later recalled:

I started with books, at a time when books with blank pages were not available. They practically did not exist. Thanks to an acquaintance of a Fine Arts classmate, I found a printing company that would bind my 500-page book with blank pages. It was the only book I had. (Dermisache. In: Rimmaudo/Lamoni 2011, n.p.)

— In another context, Dermisache explained that she started to work with asemic writing during a period of travel and initially experimented on loose sheets of brown paper. She soon realized that “it was necessary to have this book bound: an arbitrary size and volume but consciously chosen” (cit. in: Cozarinsky 1970, n.p.). This reflection shows her early prioritization of the book form as an essential conceptual framework, and its significance in her artistic practice from the outset.

2)

In 1971, Dermisache founded the *taller de Acciones Creativas* (tAC), a workshop aimed at fostering creativity and free graphic expression in adults through diverse artistic techniques. The sessions, held weekly without fixed schedules, emphasized process over outcome, creating a space for exploration rather than professional training. This pedagogical focus continued with her *Jornadas del Color y de la Forma*, public events she ran from 1975 to 1981. During this period, Dermisache paused her publishing activities, resuming them only in the 1990s. Later in her career, she collaborated with French librarian and curator Florent Fajole, exploring the form of the unbound book in a series of exhibitions.



// Figure 1

Mirtha Dermisache with *Libro N° 1* (1967), Buenos Aires, 1967

— If her working in a blank book imposed certain limitations and constraints, binding her to a fixed sequence, with no possibility of revision, replacement and reordering of the pages, it also imposed a narrative structure onto her working process. Rather than approaching each page in isolation, she remained in dialogue with the preceding ones, allowing each page to shape the next in an evolving sequence of marks and gestures. Through the sequence, she could create rhythms by oscillating between more conventional and experimental organizations of her graphisms.

— The first pages of what is now known as *Libro N° 1* [Fig. 2–4], 1967, exemplify this approach. The book begins with paragraph-style “writing” in purple ink on the right-hand page, its last line resembling a final salutation. The next spread continues the sequence in ochre ink, followed by another in bright yellow, with broader, firmer strokes concentrated in the lower two-thirds of the page. Shifting to orange, Dermisache now breaks with conventional page composition and introduces a more experimental spatial organization, in which the direction of her marks seems defined by the position of the reader’s hands when holding the book. One line extends vertically from the lower margin, positioned where a reader’s thumb could rest, before branching into a wavy double line that reaches the right edge, again aligning with the reader’s hand movement when turning the page.

— Throughout this composition, Dermisache draws attention to the structure of the book and the act of reading, exemplifying what Johanna Drucker has described as the “self-reflexivity in book form” characteristic of artists’ books—a concept she explicitly links to Dermisache’s work (Drucker 1995: 164).³⁾ Despite their illegibility and the unconventional placement on the page, the more experimental graphisms—such as one reminiscent of a brushstroke, self-ironically bringing to mind the crucial question of whether this is painting or writing—are still perceived as text when paging through the book, having been introduced as such on earlier, more conventionally composed pages.

3)

Drucker: “Mertha [sic] Dermisache’s *Diario No. 1* (Guy Schraenen, ed., 1975), like Carrion’s piece, ‘interprets’ a newspaper layout with an invented sign language of glyphs.”



// Figures 2–4

Mirtha Dermisache, spreads from *Libro N° 1*, 1967. Video: MALBA

DECONSTRUCTION AND THE OPEN WORK: DERMISACHE'S FRAGMENTED BOOK

— In April 1970, upon encountering Dermisache's 500-page book, the artist Edgardo Cozarinsky remarked on the sequencing of her pages: "[S]tarting from the page as a conventional space, from the successive lines as an equally conventional arrangement, the signs inscribed on them move away from writing and refuse to approach the fine arts" (1970: 51). He identified the central tension in her work—its oscillation between literature and visual art. The interplay between textuality (graphisms imitating text) and visuality (increasingly abstract forms) that she introduced through the arrangement of the book's pages would lose its temporal dimension if presented as individual sheets on the walls of a gallery rather than within the sequential structure of a book. As Dermisache explained to Cozarinsky:

There were people who suggested that I present a folder, with an introduction and, let's say, twenty reproductions. But that would give these pages the category of engravings, of objects whose meaning and use are different. I wanted them to be pages of a book, of an object with front and back cover, bound on one side and open on the other. If someone wanted to stick one of these pages to the wall, they would have to break it, to perform the act of tearing a page out of a book and putting it elsewhere. (Cit. in: Ibid., transl.: cit. Mezza 2017: 261)

— The statement reflects on her experience of submitting her book to Paidós, a renowned Buenos Aires publishing house, to which the art critic Jorge Romero Brest had introduced her in 1967.⁴⁾ The publisher deemed the work unsuitable for publication due to its length, thwarting her ambition for a larger print run, and disregarding the book's fixed form as essential to its meaning. Cozarinsky, in his 1970 article "Un grado cero de la escritura" (A Zero Degree of Writing)—a title echoing Roland Barthes' (1953) seminal work on semiology—affirmed Dermisache's insistence on the book form.⁵⁾ He described the original 500-page volume, bound in "a hard, red cover," which, although intact at the time of his writing, no longer exists in its original form. Contrary to her initial vision, Dermisache eventually yielded to practical considerations, dividing the work into parts in order to facilitate publication and improve accessibility, thereby necessitating the very act she had initially resisted: extracting pages from the bound volume.

— This act of destruction/deconstruction—both a literal dismantling of the book's structure and a conceptual disruption of its

4)

Jorge Romero Brest played a key role as an advisor and curator for the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella's Centro de Artes Visuales and was a strong advocate for emerging experimental practices in Buenos Aires at the time.

5)

Cozarinsky: "Que sea un libro importa." (Whether it is a book matters. [Author's translation.])

narrative continuity—resonates with contemporaneous semiological theories that emphasized the fluidity, instability, and relativistic nature of meaning. French thinkers such as Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, who were associated with the concept of literary deconstruction, explored how a text's meaning is shaped by its contextualization within the culture out of which it emerges rather than by its intrinsic qualities. Dermisache's work seems capable of exploring these ideas. Her illegible writing, by definition, demands a consideration of the broader context in which it was situated and by which it was influenced. As she explained in her 1971 Guggenheim Fellowship application: "I write (inscribe) my books, which are perfectly illegible and that tenuous structure of *voids* is filled as soon as it reaches the *reader*, and only then could it be said that what I write becomes a message and the empty signifiers become signs" (transl. cit. Freire 2023: 46).

— Dermisache's insistence that it is the reader who completes the creative act and gives meaning to her publications recalls Barthes' concept of the instability and relativity of the sign, and his re-definition of the author as a compiler of intertextual meanings and relations. With reference to the form of the book, her fragmented 500-page volume evokes Umberto Eco's 1962 *Opera Aperta* (*The Open Work*), in which he illustrates his ideas by describing the "open" and "dynamic structure" (1989: 13) of Stéphane Mallarmé's project *Le Livre* (*The Book*). Mallarmé, as he recounts, envisioned it as a "mobile apparatus" (ibid.) which would invite the reader to arrange its pages for themselves in a variety of different sequences, thereby creating a deliberately ambiguous reading experience. While there is no evidence that Dermisache engaged with Eco's work,⁶⁾ or with Mallarmé's *Le Livre*, her decision to divide her book, beyond pragmatism, aligns with the conceptual spirit of the time, favoring deconstruction over finished products and reader participation over grand authorial statements.

FROM BOOK TO MANUSCRIPT TO MANUSCRIPT BOOK: LOCATING ABSENCE

— The historical details of when and how Dermisache divided her original 500-page book remain elusive, leaving room for speculation that is akin to the open-endedness of "reading" her illegible writing. While most archival documents suggest that she split the book into three parts—*Libro manuscrito N° 1, 2 and 3*—a handwritten annotation in an early curriculum vitae and inventory, held at Archivo Espigas in Buenos Aires, indicates a further subdivision (Dermisache, undated, c. 1978). According to this source, the first book was divided into a 116-page volume (*Libro manuscrito*

6)

The book was translated into Spanish only in 1979.

Nº 1–1) and a 96-page volume (Nº 1–2). Combined with the 78-page *Libro manuscrito* Nº 2 and the 85-page *Libro manuscrito* Nº 3, these four sections total 375 pages—significantly fewer than the original 500-page volume. The fate of the additional 125 pages remains unknown.

— *Libro manuscrito* Nº 1–1 appears only once in her records. In other versions of her inventory, Dermisache omitted any reference to the additional subdivision, effectively erasing its existence.⁷⁾ The reasons for this omission are unclear: she may have discarded the 116-page volume, deeming it still too unwieldy, or given it away, possibly in exchange for printing or binding services, as she did with the original title page of her newspaper *Diario 1: Año 1* [Fig. 5], Pérez Rubio 2017a: 67).⁸⁾ Another possible explanation is that she sought to streamline her CV, aligning her early works with the systematic titling convention she adopted later, in which each work's title included its medium, full (unsubdivided) number, and year of production.

— The specifics of her disassembling of the book and its partial reassembly remain difficult to reconstruct. The posthumously published catalogue for her 2017 MALBA exhibition, supported by her estate, describes *Libro Nº 1*, 1967, as comprising 108 pages (Pérez Rubio 2017b: 291), yet Dermisache's own records initially note 78 pages for *Libro manuscrito* Nº 1, later revising this to 96 pages. These discrepancies highlight the challenges of collating her indeterminate archival documentation and reconciling it with posthumous interpretations, underscoring how the question of “readability” extends to the complexities of her legacy. The gaps and contradictions in her archive correspond to the themes of absence and fragmentation that define her work.

— Dermisache's fragmentation of her first book, which contributed to the lack of a coherent archival record and historical narrative of her earliest practice, reflects both the circumstances that necessitated her actions and, ironically, the thematic core of her work: the exploration of absence—of sense, reason, facts, even that of bodies, evoking the thousands who were forcibly “disappeared” during Argentina's military dictatorship.⁹⁾ The illegibility of her artistic trajectory, marked by gaps and modifications, must be understood within this broader political context, where state violence systematically silenced voices and erased histories. Her struggle to secure institutional support in an oppressive environment was further

7)

Curiously, the other half—*Libro manuscrito* Nº 1–2—consistently reappears, titled *Libro manuscrito* Nº 2. The 78-page book (originally labeled Nº 2 in her handwritten note) is later consistently recorded as *Libro manuscrito* Nº 1.

8)

Pérez Rubio: “[S]he sometimes sacrificed original works so that they could be printed. [Add. explanation in fn.:] This was the case, for instance, with her famous *Diario* [Newspaper], which Mirtha gave to a printer in exchange for an edition; the original cover was lost.”

9)

The individuals who vanished are referred to as “los desaparecidos,” meaning “the missing ones” or “the disappeared.”



// Figure 5

Mirtha Dermisache, first and last page of *Diario 1: Año 1*, 1972/1995, fifth edition, 47 × 36.6 cm, offset print on paper. A second edition was published by the artist herself (Buenos Aires, 1973); a third edition by Guy Schraenen (Antwerp, 1975); a fourth edition (a four-page facsimile) by Silvia de Ambrosini, published in *Artinf* journal (Buenos Aires, 1995); and a fifth edition by Mirtha Dermisache (Buenos Aires, 1995).

compounded by her position as a woman in a male-dominated art scene, facing, as did many others, “discrimination by gender and by geographical origin” (Freire 2023: 26). These intersecting challenges underscore how Dermisache’s practice and legacy are inextricably tied to the socio-political and gendered realities of her time.

“MY WORK NEEDS A PRINTER”: REDEFINING CONCEPTUALIST PUBLISHING STRATEGIES

— In his study *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, art historian Alexander Alberro (2003) explored how Conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s critically engaged with mass media, consumer culture, and institutional frameworks, focusing on the innovative curatorial and publishing practices of New York-based curator and dealer Seth Siegelaub whose “catalogue exhibitions” featured Conceptual art commissioned for display on the pages of publications. Siegelaub’s projects emerged around the same time as Dermisache began to produce her books in Argentina. However, their contexts and motivations diverged significantly. While Siegelaub and his contemporaries aimed to critique the commodification of art by shifting the object status from the physical work to the catalogue, Dermisache operated in a context largely devoid of a functioning art market. Her approach was shaped by the socio-political realities in Argentina, where the absence of financial support and an oppressive political climate necessitated alternative strategies for publication and display.

— Unlike her New York counterparts, who sought to circumvent institutional frameworks, Dermisache actively engaged with local institutions such as the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC), a prominent exhibition space for contemporary art in Buenos Aires, founded in 1968 by Jorge Glusberg. It played a crucial role in attempts to foster international cultural exchange and promote the dissemination of Conceptual art by Argentinian artists abroad (Herrera/Marchesi n.d.). CAyC published the first edition of her artist’s publication *Diario 1: Año 1* in 1972, following her participation in their seminal 1971 exhibition *Arte de sistemas* at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (Mezza 2017: 261).¹⁰⁾ Reflecting a common strategy of the time, the exhibition catalogue featured works created specifically for its pages, rather than merely documenting the museum exhibits. Dermisache’s contribution [Fig. 6] appropriated the design of CAyC’s internationally distributed newsletters¹¹⁾ by presenting a grid-like composition with a statement in ten languages: “I use this space to say: my work needs a printer,”¹²⁾ followed by her name and address. Rather than showcasing a sample of her work, she repurposed her catalogue contribution as a direct

10)

Dermisache participated in several exhibitions organized by CAyC, often showing artists’ books, for instance in the 1971 exhibition *De la figuración al arte de sistemas* at the Camden Arts Centre in London. For *Arte de sistemas I*, held at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in the same year, she exhibited books dating from 1967 to 1970 and fourteen letters. Based on Egidio Marzona’s collection of CAyC publications, I verified Dermisache’s involvement in the following seven publications, dating between 1971 and 1976: (1) Exh. cat. *Arte de Sistemas. Centro de Arte y Comunicación en el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, 1971; (2) Exh. cat. *Center of Art and Communication in Camden Arts Centre – London*, 1971; (3) Exh. cat. *Arte e Ideología. CAyC al Aire Libre. Arte de Sistemas II*, 1972; (4) Mirtha Dermisache, *Dermisache*, edited by Jorge Glusberg in Buenos Aires for CAyC, December 1973; (5) Exh. cat. *Kunstsystemen in Latijns-Amerika*, Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp, 1974; (6) Exh. cat. *Art Systems in Latin America*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, December 1974; (7) Exh. cat. *América Latina 76*, Fundació Joan Miró, Parc de Montjuïc, Barcelona, 1976.

11)

The CAyC newsletter had an exceptional design: with its lower left and upper right corners cut off, it created the illusion of a three-dimensional volume on a flat page. Printed in 900-plus editions on thin paper to fit several newsletters in a single envelope, it contained programme announcements as well as reviews and artists’ texts. It was sent, sometimes on a weekly basis, to international artists and institutions around the world.

12)

It seems that “printer” here was a poor English translation of “publisher”, given the other interpretations of the word as “Verleger” (German), “editeur” (French) and “editor” (Spanish).

appeal for a publisher, highlighting the challenge of simply getting a book published in a context where such opportunities were scarce. Her pragmatic, tongue-in-cheek approach not only illustrates the starkly different realities faced by a female artist in Argentina, struggling for visibility and dissemination, but also reveals her wit in taking Conceptual art's promises of internationalism and participation at face value.

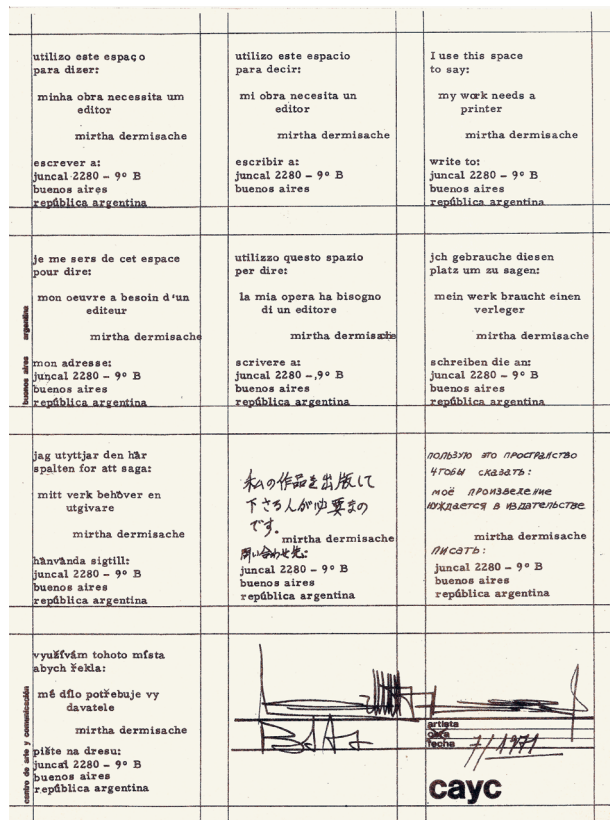
— With the rise of Conceptualism in the late 1960s, artists' publications seemed perfectly suited to a shift in artistic practices from object to language, operating—particularly in the case of works distributed by mail—partially outside of established channels. As Louis Camnitzer (1999: xiii) observed: “Dematerialization broke the stranglehold of the state in relation to the display of art.” Martha Wilson’s (2013) assertion that Dermisache’s *Diario 1: Año 1* (see **Fig. 5**) likely “made it past the censors” because they failed to recognize she “was drawing a portrait of the nonsense that passed for news in government-controlled newspapers” seems apt. In line with Argentina’s “arte de los medios” (mass-mediatic art), which embedded artistic production within mass media itself (Ramírez 1999: 96), Dermisache’s work exposed the mechanisms of the publishing industry. By voiding her publications of legible content—as in her “empty” newspaper *Diario 1: Año 1*—she mirrored the vacuity of state propaganda, stripping it of its disinformation and subverting its coercive mechanisms from within.¹³ In doing so, Dermisache not only challenged the conventional modes of communication but also positioned her practice as a subtle yet potent form of resistance within the socio-political landscape of her time.

THE ELUSIVE PREFACE: DERMISACHE AND BARTHES' UNREALIZED BOOK

— Dermisache’s artists’ publications closely align with the structuralist, semiotic, and communicational theories of her time, particularly through her use of asemic writing. Freed from functionality, its illegibility invites reflection on the nature of communication itself—a point Roland Barthes (2006) articulated in his 1973 essay “Variations sur l’écriture,” where he argued that “[a] piece of writing need not be legible to be a piece of writing in the full sense of the term” (78), explicitly referencing “Dermisache’s notebooks

13)

I discuss this work in detail in my essay: “Between reading and viewing: The asemic writing of Mirtha Dermisache’s artists’ publications.”



// Figure 6

Mirtha Dermisache, artist's page in the catalogue for the exhibition *Arte de sistemas*, 1971, 21 × 16.5 cm

with graphisms” (76).¹⁴ Barthes, who had initiated an epistolary exchange with Dermisache in March 1971 after encountering her work through intermediaries, praised the “extreme intelligence of the theoretical problems related to writing” in her practice, suggesting that her work conveyed “the idea, the essence of writing” (Barthes 2004: 11; transl. cit. Mezza 2017: 264).¹⁵ Their correspondence, which spanned several years, largely revolved around a planned book of Dermisache’s graphisms, for which she asked him to write a text—eager to hear his interpretation of her work and hoping his participation would secure a publisher and wider dissemination. Following her publication of *Diario 1: Año 1* (1972), she wrote to him:

Despite the unprecedented interest aroused by this journal of illegible writing, no one has dared to write a single word about it. I’ve always thought that these motives weren’t sufficiently important enough to allow me the right to ask for your help. But now I beg you to consider the possibility of writing about my work.¹⁶ (Dermisache 1972a: n.p.)

Barthes (1973a) offered to “write a text of two or three pages” on her work, but made his contribution contingent on a publisher having consented to publishing it, asserting that “the destination influences the writing” (ibid.). This created an impasse: Dermisache needed Barthes’s text to secure a publisher for the book (1973a; 1973b), while Barthes, in turn, demanded that a publisher had confirmed its acceptance of the text before writing it.

To advance the project, Dermisache compromised on the publication’s format as a book and obtained a commitment from the cultural supplement of *La Opinión* to publish Barthes’ text in a 12-page section alongside her work (Dermisache 1973c). However, overwhelmed by other commitments, Barthes (1973b) submitted only a brief text referencing his original 1971 letter, which the editor ultimately deemed unsuitable for the planned publication (Dermisache 1974). Following a two-year silence, both Barthes and Dermisache contributed graphisms to the experimental magazine *Luna-Park* in a themed issue titled “Graphies” [Fig. 7].¹⁷ Between 1971 and 1978, Barthes produced approximately 700 works, including his own experiments in asemic writing (Benincasa 1981: 10), reflecting his notion of writing as an “object of pleasure” (Barthes 1973).

14)

“Une écriture n’a pas besoin d’être ‘lisible’ pour être pleinement une écriture.”; “[T]els que les cahiers de graphismes de Mirtha Dermisache.”

15)

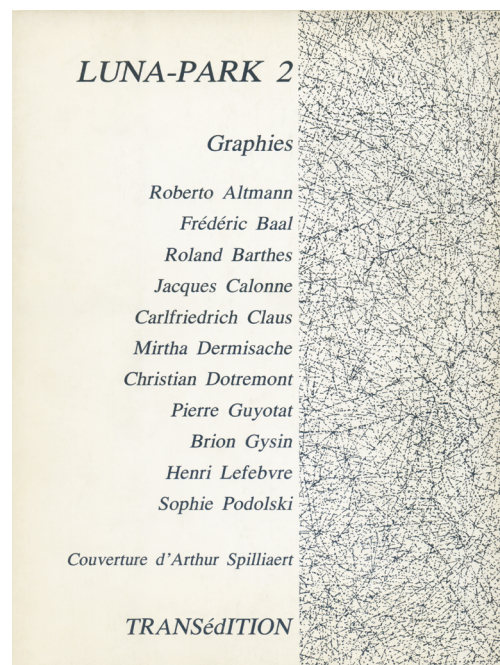
Barthes had been shown one of her books through an Argentinian friend of Dermisache’s, Hugo Santiago, a filmmaker who had moved from Buenos Aires to Paris.

16)

“Malgré l’interêt inuslé que ce journal d’écriture illisible a éveillé, personne n’a osé écrire un seul mot à propos de lui. J’ai toujours pensé que ces motifs n’étaient pas suffisamment importants pour me permettre le droit de vous faire cette demande d’aide. Mais, maintenant je vous prie de considérer la possibilité d’écrire de mon travail.”

17)

The Brussels-based artists’ periodical existed from 1974 to 1985 and published experimental art and literature. It was edited by the Belgian art critic and curator Marc Dachy.



// Figure 7

Cover of *Luna-Park 2* (“Graphies”), edited by Marc Dachy in April 1976

— In 1976, at the apex of his creative practice, Barthes famously wrote about another artist's work, Cy Twombly, in his essay "Non Multa Sed Multum," which first appeared in 1979 in the sixth volume of Yvon Lambert's catalogue raisonné of Twombly's works on paper, along with his second essay, "The Wisdom of Art." During this period, Dermisache wrote to Barthes again, inviting him one last time to contribute to a planned book with the Belgian publisher Guy Schraenen, who had previously published *Diario 1: Año 1* (1972) and *Cahier n° 1* (1975). In her letter, Dermisache (1978) expressed her confidence in Schraenen's involvement, stating: "I trust him." However, Barthes—likely preoccupied with personal matters following his mother's death that year—did not commit to the project. That same year, he ceased his interventions in the realm of visual art, and Dermisache's publishing activities also came to a halt, marking the end of their epistolary exchange.

— The collaborative publication they had discussed over a seven-year period therefore never materialized. This unrealized potential, frustrating as it seems, can be seen as conforming to the overall thrust of the work of both Dermisache and Barthes. It recalls Barthes' (1971, cit. 1985: 57f.) distinction between the "work" as a "fragment of substance"—a tangible object found in bookstores or libraries—and the "text" as "a system without end and center," "experienced only in an activity, in a production" and "held in language." Similarly, Dermisache's unsignifying mark-making, suggesting the conveyance of semantic meaning but ultimately withholding it, offers what seems to be a functional form, only for it to turn out to be its representation. In the hands of these two 'writers,' an accident of circumstances—that the planned publication failed to be realized—doubles as a reflection on the nature of language itself: its projection of a reality it can neither establish nor prove.

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MATERIALITY AND SONORITY IN THE WORK OF GIULIA NICCOLAI AND PATRIZIA VICINELLI

ABSTRACT — This paper examines the interplay between materiality and sonority in the neo-avant-garde work of Italian artists Giulia Niccolai (1934–2021) and Patrizia Vicinelli (1943–1991). Focusing on Niccolai's plaquettes *Humpty Dumpty* and *Poema & Oggetto* (Poem & Object), and Vicinelli's performances and video works at the 1978 Venice Biennale's *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (Materialization of Language), it highlights how both artists foreground the phonetic and performative dimensions of concrete and visual poetry. By exploring the fusion of visual form, objects, and sound, the study argues that their work challenges conventional literary and curatorial hierarchies, emphasizing the essential role of voice, gesture, and auditory experience in the reception of poetic material. This analysis contributes to the reassessment of women's contributions to (Italian) experimental poetry between 1960 and 1980, revealing the performative, multisensory nature of their art.

— This paper investigates the interrelationship between materiality and sonority in the neo-avant-garde experimental work of artists Giulia Niccolai (Milan, 1934–2021) and Patrizia Vicinelli (Bologna, 1943–1991).

— To begin, I will introduce Giulia Niccolai's *Weltanschauung*, intertwining her life with her work and stressing the relationship between word and sound in her oeuvre. To do so, I will mainly focus on her plaquettes *Humpty Dumpty* and *Poema & Oggetto* (Poem & Object), two examples of her concrete and visual compositions of the years 1969–1980.¹⁾ Linger on a few considerations on *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (Materialization of Language), the all-women exhibition which took place at the 1978 Venice Biennale in which Niccolai and Vicinelli both participated, exhibiting and performing their work, allows me to introduce and expand on Vicinelli's practice. I will concentrate on the artworks that she presented in Venice, stressing the magnetic energy she was able to create through her voice (and physical presence).

— The visual dimension of concrete (and visual) poetry has been preponderant within the art historical debate on the subject.²⁾ This paper aims at highlighting the often-neglected role of sound and voice in the appreciation and reception of concrete poetry. It thus contributes to the recent renewed scholarly interest in these two

1)

Plaquette is a French editorial term for a small-format poetry booklet, typically comprising a modest number of pages; in concrete/visual poetry it became especially common, as this format suited graphic experimentation and independent publishing.

2)

See, e.g., Gazzotti 2009; Zanchetti and Ferrari 2010; Ferrari 2011; Gazzotti 2013; Scotini and Perna 2019.

artists and, more broadly, in women's contributions to the field between 1960 and 1980.³⁾ By underscoring the importance of the interrelation of materiality and sonority in the work of Niccolai and Vicinelli, I emphasize the performative nature of concrete and visual poetry. Unlike linear poetry, which organizes text in traditional lines to emphasize rhythm, syntax, and narrative flow, concrete poetry foregrounds the typographical arrangement of words or letters. Visual poetry combines layout with imagery, blurring the boundary between text and visual arts.

— A precocious frequenter of the Milanese bohemian scene, Giulia Niccolai came to art through photography. Having spent her childhood in Italy during fascism,⁴⁾ the daughter of a Bostonian Anglo-Saxon Protestant mother and an Italian engineer, she was a cosmopolitan high school student fluent in Italian, English, German, and French when, in the early 1950s, she began frequenting Bar Jamaica, a well-known gathering place for artists, intellectuals, and photographers near the city's fine arts academy. Bar Jamaica was the eccentric, visionary, and open-to-novelty world where she met a number of artists (e.g., Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni) but above all many young photographers (Jacqueline Vodoz, Alfa Castaldi, Mario Dondero, Carlo Bavagnoli, Ugo Mulas, to name but a few): photojournalism was booming in post-fascism Italy and they all wanted to contribute to a new way of seeing.

— From 1953 onward, Niccolai worked intensely as a photographer, traveling around the world to produce reportages for national and international magazines such as *Life*, *Paris Match*, and *Der Spiegel*. Behind the camera, she also attended the first congresses of *Gruppo 63*, where she met the writer Giorgio Manganelli, who would later become a fervent supporter of her work (see, e.g., Manganelli 1981). *Gruppo 63*—also known as the Neoavanguardia—was an Italian avant-garde literary movement founded in Palermo in 1963, dedicated to radical experimentation with language and the arts. Among its members were Nanni Balestrini, Amelia Rosselli, Edoardo Sanguineti, Patrizia Vicinelli, and Umberto Eco.⁵⁾

— Dissatisfied with the tendency of the magazines for which she worked to use her photographs in ways that distorted the reality they documented, Niccolai left photography and turned to narrative writing.⁶⁾ *Il grande angolo* (Wide Angle), her first and only novel—a novel very much in line with the French *école du regard*—was published in 1966 (Niccolai 1966; Niccolai 2014a).⁷⁾ *Il grande angolo* was written in Rome, on the terrace of the apartment she shared with her friend, the painter Giosetta Fioroni. Rome was the city where Niccolai had moved to start working as the editorial secretary of *Quindici*,

3)

See, e.g., Scotini and Perna 2019; Balgiu and de la Torre 2020; Giammei et al. 2023; Perrella et al. 2024; Vicinelli 2024. See also the exhibitions: *Patrizia Vicinelli. Who Is Afraid of Patrizia Vicinelli?* curated by Luca Lo Pinto with Lisa Andreani (Rome, MACRO, November 11, 2021 – March 16, 2022); *Because I Do It Because. The Poetic Life of Giulia Niccolai*, curated by Allison Grimaldi Donahue and Caterina Molteni (Bologna, Padiglione de l'Esprit Nouveau, May 7 – June 5, 2022).

4)

Until June 2, 1946, Italy was a constitutional monarchy and from 1922 to 1943 it was governed by the National Fascist Party.

5)

Composer Luigi Nono suggested the group name inspired by the German Gruppe 47, a collective formed to rebuild literary traditions destroyed by Nazism and war. The members of Gruppo 63 admired the German model, as it mirrored their need for renewal, constant dialogue, and self-reflection. Having emerged from fascism and the war into a booming post-war democracy, they were confronting a cultural system in Italy that was outdated and resistant to change.

6)

See Niccolai 2023.

7)

This descriptive tendency within the *Nouveau Roman*—often referred to as the *école du regard*—emerged in France in the 1960s with authors such as Alain Robbe-Grillet. It is characterized by the focus on the meticulous description of objects, spaces, and perceptions.

the monthly magazine of the Gruppo 63.⁸⁾ At *Quindici*, Niccolai met the total poet Adriano Spatola and began an intellectual and loving partnership with him that would last throughout the next decade (see Spatola 1969; Rossi 2010). Spatola had just founded Geiger, at that time a Turin-based experimental publishing house which he animated with his brothers. Niccolai's first plaque, *Humpty Dumpty*, was published by Geiger in December 1969. The book was printed by a small Roman printing press in pocket format (11 × 15 cm, 40 pages). All the poems—29, one per page—were composed with Letraset on paper with a sans serif typography and then photo-reproduced for publication. The plaque is a mix of linear and concrete poetry in which the latter prevails.

— In line with what would become one of the most ingenious features of much of her future production, Niccolai selected passages and words from a source text, in this case Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll 1856) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (Carroll 1871),⁹⁾ rearranging them on the page in different constellations and thus materializing their enigmatic and apparently nonsensical semantic potential. The plaque takes its title from Humpty Dumpty, the character of a traditional English nursery rhyme, whom Lewis Carroll reimagines in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In the text, Humpty Dumpty engages Alice in a discussion of language, famously asserting that “when I use a word [. . .] it means just what I choose it to mean [. . .]” (Carroll 1871/1902:117).

— *Humpty Dumpty* begins on page seven with an epigraph drawn from the explanatory notes of the 1961 edition of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: “A term whose meaning is recorded under the entry of some other term is (if it seems to require separate entry at its own alphabetical place) entered thus: Desdemona, n. See Othello” (Niccolai 1967: 7). The following page presents a quote by the Red Queen, a character in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* who embodies the logic and rules of the fantastical world Alice navigates, rearranged by Niccolai to form a poem “The Red Queen shook her head. / ‘You may call it nonsense / if you like,’ she said / ‘but I’ve heard nonsense, / compared with which / that would be as sensible / as a dictionary!’”¹⁰⁾ (Niccolai 1969: 8) [Fig. 1].

— The word *dictionary* is deconstructed in a concrete composition on the opposite page [Fig. 1]. Here, only the four final letters of the word dictionary find their place again on the bottom of this composition, and they do so near the term “a word” (Niccolai

8)

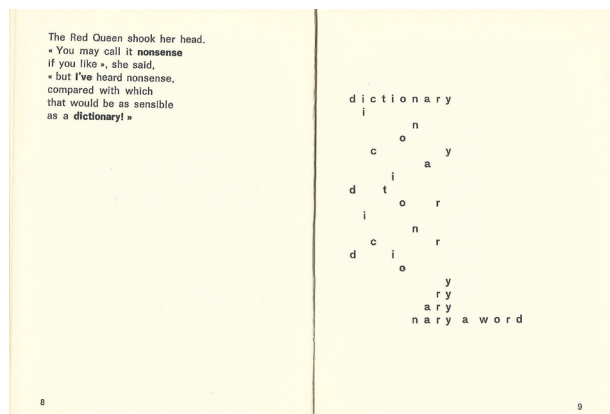
Quindici was a very successful monthly magazine (it reached a print run of 25,000) published between June 1967 and August 1969. Within its *pages* cultural discourse and current political affairs were closely discussed. The first 12 issues of the magazine were printed on a single large, folded sheet; then the format changed due to the increased number of pages.

9)

Niccolai read and worked with the 1965 edition of the book (see Carroll 1965).

10)

Bold in the original.



// Figure 1

Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty*, 1969, 11 × 15 cm

1969: 9). In formulating the equation “dictionary” equals “nary a word,” i.e., never a word, Niccolai warns us about the arbitrary and therefore possibly nonsensical quality of any textual object, even of the dictionary which is consensually considered the most wise and reasonable text of all (Niccolai 1969: 9; see Graffi 2012: 16; Giammei 2017).¹¹ This conclusion is poetically reiterated on the following double spread [Fig. 2]. On the left page, Niccolai visually plays with the word “nonsense” to suggest that when there is *no sense*, the sense(s) should be switched on. On the right page, a quote by another character, the Duchess, is transformed into a linear poem to warn the readers: “The Duchess: ‘Take care of the sense / and the words / will take care / of themselves.’” (Niccolai 1969: 11). Here (and only here!) does Niccolai slightly modify Carroll’s text, replacing the word “sounds” in the original with “words”.¹² The meaning of this literary freedom can be found on the following page, where we meet the cross message “senses do sound!” (Niccolai 1969: 12) [Fig. 3].

— This sequence exemplifies Niccolai’s remarkable ability to juggle the ambivalences between sound and sense in language. The phonetic aspect of a word is never entirely divorced from its meaning; rather, it maintains a relation to it, even when such a relation is ambiguous. Carroll’s *Alice* vividly illustrates this principle in its nonsensical passages, whether employing extreme literalism or instances of homophony, which reveal the phonetic variability of language. The union of sound and meaning within a word allows for slippages of either sense or sound. If one focuses solely on meanings while neglecting sounds, puns will remain unintelligible. Only by reading aloud, attending to the materiality of the word—oscillating between the plasticity of the graphic sign, which embodies sonorous shifts, and the conceptual cues embedded in the linear verses—can one apprehend the equivalences Niccolai proposes throughout the sequence and fully appreciate the role of sonority in the enjoyment of her poetic and concrete work.

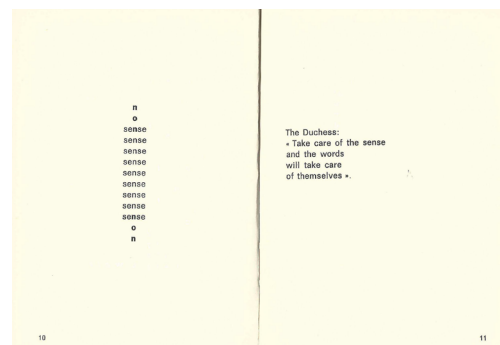
— Reading *Humpty Dumpty*, one can retrace the influence of what Niccolai herself called the “new music (from [John] Cage to [Giuseppe] Chiari)” and the artistic work around “unconventional scores that can or should be interpreted in a graphic sense” (Niccolai 1975: n.p.), which enjoyed wide circulation in Italy—and beyond—during the 1960s. The material- and sound-based poetic operations in the work, in many ways the matrix of her later production, succeed because Niccolai lets the word go, allowing the word *sense(s)* to refer not only to meanings but also to the five (or

11)

This interpretation is phonetically reinforced by the words in bold in the aforementioned quote from the Red Queen.

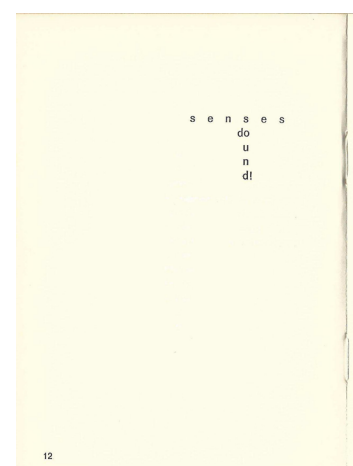
12)

Note that Carroll’s sentence is already a pun on the British proverb *take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves*. In his analysis of Niccolai’s *Humpty Dumpty*, literary historian Alessandro Giammei refers to a text by Americanist Marisa Bulgheroni to underline the consonance between the Victorian nonsense, based on the undermining of literary formulas learned blindly by heart and repeated without really questioning their meaning, and the wear and tear on the eye in the society of images and consumption (see Giammei 2017).



// Figure 2

Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty*, 1969, 11 × 15 cm



// Figure 3

Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty*, 1969, 11 × 15 cm

perhaps six?!) senses through which we experience the world, with the ear taking the lead in a full appreciation of her poetry and of the bodily sensations elicited by sound, as exemplified by the visual and haptic breadth in *Poema & Oggetto* (Niccolai 1974/2014b) [Fig. 4].

— *Poema & Oggetto* gathers 37 concrete and visual poems, 14 of which contain a real object (a button, a sheet, a pin) to show tautologically that “every single, small, everyday object has within itself the aspiration and the will to transform itself into a poem: the alphabet, a phone book, a battered typewriter, a light bulb, etc.” (Niccolai 2015: n.p.). Here, “the image that refers to the thing coincides with the material convocation of the thing. The poem, in fact, coincides with its object.” (Niccolai 2015: n.p.; see Kotz 2005).

— *Poema & Oggetto* is undoubtedly one of her best known and most exhibited works.¹³⁾ Niccolai never showed individual plates from the book but similar works that could be described as variations on the theme.¹⁴⁾ Among the works in the plaquette one finds *Typewriter-Object* [Fig. 4]. An elegant black-and-white illustration of an Olivetti typewriter appears on the page, its flat surface literally disrupted by a small sheet of paper emerging from a slit at the level of the typewriter’s carriage. On this sheet, the word *poema* (*poem*) is (type)written in red letters, as if it were a compelling and resounding message. *Poema* (1973), a variation of this poem-cum-object, was exhibited in *Materializzazione del linguaggio*, the exhibition organized by artist and cultural propeller Mirella Bentivoglio as part of the 1978 Venice Biennale, exploring “the relationship between women and language” (Bentivoglio, 1974/2022: 3).¹⁵⁾

— *Materializzazione del linguaggio* presented the work of 80 national and international artists within the context of the 38th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia. The exhibition was organized in a remarkably short time—well after the official opening of the 1978 Venice Biennale—and in relatively peripheral spaces (the Magazzini del Sale, near Punta della Dogana). It was primarily intended to counterbalance the patriarchal orientation of the official exhibition and of the institution at large, which, under the presidency of Carlo Ripa di Meana, was undergoing a process of renewal during what would later be remembered as the Years of Lead, a period of intense social and political turmoil in Italy.¹⁶⁾

— The 80 women invited to show their work(s) in Venice were all presenting “poetic operations” (Bentivoglio 1978: 3) that implied a subversive use of the language in which the work was conceived. In their artistic practices, they considered and articulated language as an object “returned to the materiality of the body, as a performative element [. . .], as a concrete fragment of narratives (dominant,

13)

Poema & Oggetto has been interpreted as a vivid testimony of the subordination to which Niccolai was subjected as a woman (albeit polyglot, financially and intellectually very independent) in those years (see Giammei 2017). This plaquette closes the phase of Niccolai’s concrete and visual poetry. From here on she would devote herself to linear poetry, with an exception made for the intermedia experimentation represented by *Facsimile: Fotografie concettuali* (Facsimile: Conceptual Photographs) (see Niccolai 1979), a pamphlet in which Niccolai explores the conceptual matrix of photography through words and black-and-white images. After the closure of the magazine *Quindici* in 1969, the artist and her research and life companion, Adriano Spatola, left Rome, a city they felt to be much too politicized to allow one to pursue authentic inquiry in the field of literature, and moved to the Mulino di Bazzano (a former watermill in the countryside between Parma and Reggio Emilia) (see Rossi 2010). During the 1970s, under the aegis of Niccolai, Spatola, and fellow poet Corrado Costa, this rural house would become one of the most important poetic experimentation laboratories of the national and international neo-avant-garde, a laboratory that Niccolai left at the end of the 1970s to start a new phase of her kaleidoscopic life—a phase in which she became a Buddhist nun (1990), always challenging the borders of what we call *poetry* through her *Frisbees* (1982–2012), or poems born to be thrown to the public—relational poems through which the artist puts the epiphanic moments of her life in verses, hoping to elicit similar emotions and cognitive uprisings in those who receive her literary compositions (see Niccolai 2012b). With her *Frisbees*, one often has *aha moments*: sudden realizations, inspirations, comprehensions—one feels free to be free.

14)

Niccolai, telephone conversation with the author, April 25, 2020.



// Figure 4

Left: Giulia Niccolai, *Poema & Oggetto*, 1974/2014, front cover. Right: Giulia Niccolai, *Typewriter-Object*, in *Poema & Oggetto*, 1974/2014, 22.5 × 16 cm

masculine, patriarchal, symbolic or idealistic) to be overthrown” (Subrizi 2017: 67).

— Bentivoglio did not question the unfavorable conditions in which she was forced to work, but called together the 80 artists, with whom she had been in contact for years, to shed light on the quality of their work. She even managed to borrow from the artist Emilio Vedova a space adjacent to the exhibition galleries to host a program of readings, performances, and projections, which, taking place in close temporal and spatial proximity to the opening, further gave concrete form to the artists’ work.

— During the opening days of *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (September 20–23, 1978), 11 artists engaged a live audience performing their work. Patrizia Vicinelli—the other key figure of this paper, to be introduced shortly—and Niccolai presented their work on September 22. Niccolai, 44 years old at the time, read poems from *Harry’s Bar e altre poesie* (Harry’s Bar and Other Poems), a collection she had been compiling since 1969, which was eventually published in 1981 (see Niccolai 1981).¹⁷ Niccolai’s poems were materialized through her voice and exhibited through *Poema*, an artwork which sums up very well the artist’s operational practice.

— Niccolai was a poet who used the typewriter (an instrument very familiar to any writer of the time, especially to a woman who has worked as an editorial secretary for years) to create poems that are also three-dimensional objects, piercing the paper and manifesting their will to live, their need to inscribe themselves in space-time in all their materiality through the voice and the sound they produce. An indication of the importance of the role of the voice in Niccolai’s way of thinking about poetry can also be found in her active participation in *Baobab–Informazioni fonetiche di poesia* (Phonetic Information on Poetry) (1978–1989), the first audio magazine of sound poetry published in Italy on music cassettes, which began in 1978 around her kitchen table in Bazzano (near Parma).

— As mentioned before, like Giulia Niccolai, Patrizia Vicinelli also took part in the opening days of *Materializzazione del linguaggio*, screening her video *Fragmentation d’une vie d’héroïne* (Fragmentation of a Heroine’s Life) (Subrizi 2019; Perrella et al 2024) and performing the first draft of *Proiettare il samurai* (To Project the Samurai), the fourth part of her epic poem *Non sempre ricordano* (They Do Not Always Remember) (Vicinelli 1985). *Fragmentation d’une vie d’héroïne* is a radically experimental work in which Patrizia Vicinelli disassembles the imagined biography of a heroine into fragments, exposing the patriarchal structures of language while articulating a fluid and resistant female subjectivity.

15)

See Bentivoglio 1978. This publication does not present a list of the exhibited works. I was not able to retrieve this list, neither at the Venice Biennale Historical Archive of Contemporary Art (ASAC) nor in the Fondo Mirella Bentivoglio at the Biblioteca Nazionale (National Library) in Rome. As of today, I have not been able to trace either the existence or the exact whereabouts of Niccolai’s work exhibited in Venice. Note that *Corps Orbite*, one of the historical capsules within Cecilia Alemani’s exhibition *The Milk of Dreams* (59th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, April 23 – November 27, 2022) was partly conceived as a response to the 1978 exhibition *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (the catalogue of which was reprinted in facsimile for the occasion). *Corps Orbite* brought together 19th- and 20th-century artists and writers who use(d) expanded forms of textual production as tools of emancipation and practices of difference. The verbo-visual writing and concrete poems of Mirella Bentivoglio, Tomaso Binga, Ilse Garnier, Giovanna Sandri, and Mary Ellen Solt were placed in a dialogue with the experiments in automatism and mediumistic writing of figures such as Eusapia Palladino, Georgiana Houghton, and Josefa Tolrà, as well as other forms of what was

16)

The show has recently been studied and re-actualized in the context of the exhibition *Re-Materialization of Language 1978–2022* (Bolzano, Fondazione Antonio dalle Nogare, October 2, 2022 – June 10, 2023) and of its accompanying trilingual publication (see Perrella and others 2024).

17)

The reading performance was characterized by the participation of fellow artists Anna Oberto, Giovanna Sandri, and Conni Trobaiolo. It was videotaped, but given the low-quality conservation of the tape, one cannot exactly identify the performed poems (see Perrella et al. 2024: 12–13).

The orthography of the word “*héroïne*” in the title is noteworthy, as it simultaneously points to the name of the drug and, through phonetic identity, conjures the figure of a female protagonist.

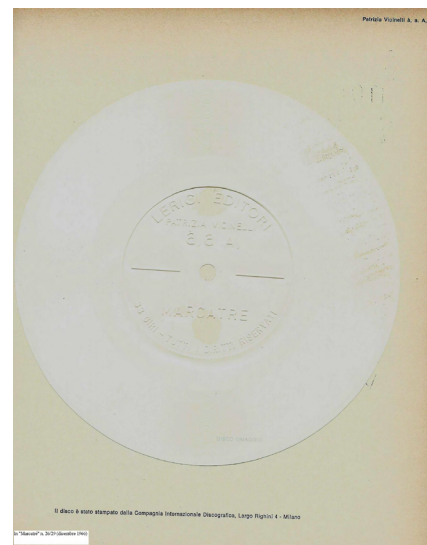
— In September 1978, at the time of the Venetian opening, Vicinelli was a 35-year-old poet who had been engaging with concrete, visual, and linear poetry for nearly two decades. She had just regained her liberty after six months in prison in Rome. Back in 1968 she was condemned to two years in prison because she was found in possession of two grams of hashish (see Magazzeni 2015). As she underlines on the screen, in the text which introduces her *Fragmentation d'une vie d'héroïne*, she had spent almost a decade in hiding (mainly in Morocco), making serious use of drugs as a way to come to terms with her distressed condition. Sharing William Burroughs' thoughts, whom she quotes at the very beginning of her video, during the troubled years of her absconding, doing drugs had become a way of life (see Burroughs 1953/1962).

— In *Fragmentation d'une vie d'héroïne*, Vicinelli's face, heavily scarred by the aftermath of fleeing, the use of drugs, and of a car accident (in which she did not protect her face to instead protect her second-born daughter), is captured in the foreground, in the act of performing phonetic experiments, smoking (heroin?), talking on the phone. These fragments show no signs of heroism, but convey, beyond the pun on the title, the tenacity of a heroine intent on expressing her personal and poetic epic, as audiences at the time could experience by attending the reading of *Proiettare il samurai*, the fourth part of her epic poem *Non sempre ricordano*.

— *Non sempre ricordano* was written in hiding between 1975 and 1976 and rewritten before publication in 1985. It is structured in ten chapters of ten sections each and explores the themes of myth, guilt, and innocence. Its narrative employs experimental and visual language, including drawings and verbal-visual devices that enhance the work's sonic and phonetic dimensions. Originally designed as a colorful dazebao¹⁸⁾ to be performed loudly, it could be described as a “external monologue” (Guglielmi 1992, 59 qtd. in Lorenzini 2009, XV) or, in Vicinelli's words, as a “meditation voiced through a persona” (Vicinelli 1985, VIII). *Non sempre ricordano* is a linguistic pastiche of literary quotations (Homer, García Lorca, Dante, Zola), rhythms, and expressions reminiscent of the protests of the 1970s in Italy, while also drawing on everyday language and the broader countercultural milieu. The poem is traversed by the idea of radical contestation and communicates the need for collective commitment as well as that of an alternative spiritual search (see Sciarrino 2014). The disorder of Vicinelli's

18)

Dazebaos were mural newspapers typical of the Maoist revolution which were later adopted in the student protests in the West.



// Figure 5

Patrizia Vicinelli, à, a. A, in *Marcatré* 26–29, 20.5 × 19.55 cm. Vinyl

passionate, troubled existential experience is rendered here by the mobility of meaning and sign, by the friction caused by disconnected syntactic modules, by asymmetry, and by shouted contrasts which are visualized, implied, and magnified in the structure of the verses as well as in the alternation of upper- and lower-case writing (see Lorenzini 2009). The intensity of Vicinelli's poetry was amplified and put into action by the magnetic energy she was able to create through her voice, gestures, and movement in space.¹⁹⁾

As she stated in her introductory text to *à, a. A*, her first published plaquette of concrete poetry, which was exhibited within *Materializzazione del linguaggio*, Vicinelli conceived her concrete and visual poems with "an ideal reading" already in mind—one that, according to her, is "devised in the very creative act" of composing her poetry (Vicinelli 1967, n.p.). Vicinelli's poems are inseparable from their sonic dimensions because they are born simultaneously. Indeed, Vicinelli's *à, a. A* was published on vinyl (December 1966; [Fig. 5]) and in print (January 1967) (see Vicinelli 1966; Vicinelli 1967).²⁰⁾ The print version of *à, a. A* is composed with Letraset, stamps, pen, and typewriter and then photo reproduced to be printed (25 × 20.5 cm, 40 pages) [Fig. 6]. It is inhabited by abstract and semantic calligrams, typed texts as well as handwritten indications. The urgency of communication led her to change the tenses and focus on iterations and alliterations by shattering verses, syntax, and words. In the most audacious works in the plaquette, words, reduced to phonemes, acquire value as sounds that inhabit space: sounds to be pronounced and listened to, to be felt with the body, which speaks even when one is silent.

The energy and the subversive power of the work presented within *Materializzazione del linguaggio* could not go unnoticed by the audience of the Venetian performance days. A few photographs conserved in the Venice Biennale Historical Archive of Contemporary Art (ASAC) document the presence of a large, hypnotized audience that included, for example, national and international fellow artists, e.g., Anna Oberto and Paula Claire, and art professionals, e.g., exhibition maker Harald Szeemann [Fig. 7].²¹⁾

In the materiality of Niccolai's and Vicinelli's poetry, sound

19)

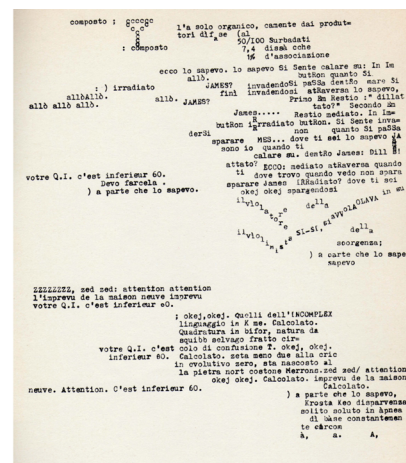
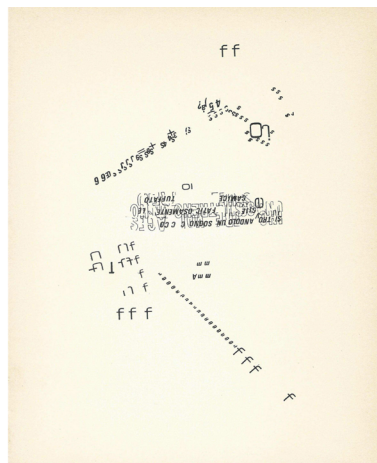
One can get an idea of Vicinelli's poetic stamina watching the recording of one of her performances of *Non sempre ricordano* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBm-WewjNfXA&t=9s>; accessed March 30, 2026). Note, however, that this video dates from 1987, about ten years after Vicinelli's performance in Venice and portrays Vicinelli in her mid-40s, just a few years before her premature death from HIV-related causes.

20)

In June of that year, Vicinelli, a young bourgeois writer born in 1943 and active from a very young age in the field of literature, theater, and experimental cinema between Bologna and Rome, was invited to the fourth conference of Gruppo 63 held in La Spezia, where she captivated the audience and caused a stir by performing some passages from *à, a. A*.

21)

The scope and art-historical significance of this exhibition, with its three-day program of readings, screenings, and performances, clearly merit a separate, in-depth study. Only a handful of documents remain at ASAC, but judging from the distinguished participants in the event, above all the celebrated Harald Szeemann, an in-depth examination could be made of how and why well-informed fathers were the first to defend and perpetuate patriarchy.



// Figure 6

Left: Patrizia Vicinelli, *à, a. A*, 1967, front cover. Right: Patrizia Vicinelli, *à, a. A*, 1967, 25 × 20.5 cm

plays an important and inescapable role in the poems being and becoming artworks. Alliteration, repetition, homophony are key elements in the semantic shifts that occur in the oeuvre of both artists. The sound of the voice in the reading of their compositions, whether purely concrete, verbo-visual or linear, is a fundamental element and materializes in the space of the discourse behind their conceptual and poetic production. Moreover, for Vicinelli, the characterization of her voice takes on a materiality, a fundamental presence. Close to avant-garde theater and underground cinema circles, Vicinelli liked to describe herself as the “reader of her own texts [. . .] [, as] a woman of great charm [. . .] [, a] performer-actress with an extraordinary ability to involve the audience.” (Vicinelli 1989: 357). Not surprisingly, her poems were published on paper and vinyl as early as Winter 1966–67: the two dimensions, the concrete-material and the constitutive but seemingly ephemeral sonic one, were perceived very early on as inseparable.

— The visual aspect of concrete and visual poetry has dominated discussions within the art historical debate (see footnote 3). This brief contribution—part of a recent effort to rediscover and reassess the work of these two artists, alongside other women practitioners of concrete and visual poetry between 1960 and 1980—aims instead to highlight the centrality of sound, thereby emphasizing the inherently performative dimension of their work. The mode of poetry fruition, traditionally linked to print and bibliographic culture but also to widespread norms in curatorial practices and exhibition studies, has profoundly influenced the way these works have been received. Compared to the diffusion and reception of these works in the 1960s and 1970s, the spatialization of sound, the reading aloud, and the performance of the works have been too often confined to the space of the page, to the sheet. An aesthetic, (art) historical, and critical re-evaluation of these works, of their material and sonic dimension, is fundamental and still ongoing.²²⁾

22)

In this context, I would like to pay tribute to the work done as part of the retrospective exhibitions *Patrizia Vicinelli. Who Is Afraid of Patrizia Vicinelli?* and *Because I Do It Because. The Poetic Life of Giulia Niccolai* (see footnote 4). No exhibition catalogue was conceived as part of these exhibitions, but following a tradition dear to the artist, a vinyl was produced in the larger framework of Vicinelli's exhibition (see Filipponi, 2023). Moreover, I would like to mention the research on Vicinelli by artist and poet Jonida Pfriti (see Pfriti 2014). The recent exhibition dedicated to Tomaso Binga (the artistic pseudonym of Bianca Pucciarelli Menna), *Euforia, Tomaso Binga* (curated by Eva Fabbris with Daria Khan, Naples, Museo Madre, April 18–October 6, 2025), deserves mention in this context (see Fabbris et al. 2025), as does the vinyl produced in 2025 exploring the sonic dimension of Binga's poetry (Binga 2025).



// Figure 7

Gisela Frankenberg, *Nommology*, image from proof sheet depicting the performance at Magazzini del Sale, 1978. Harald Szeemann is recognizable among the audience (third person from the right), just behind Mirella Bentivoglio, who holds the microphone. Photography by ASAC. Courtesy Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia, ASAC.

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Francesca Valentini holds a PhD in the History of Art and Philosophy (2017, Cologne/Venice). Her book on the historical and epistemological significance of artists' publications is in preparation. Her research interests include the history and ecology of international exhibitions and art-education practices. As a researcher and curator, she has collaborated with leading international art institutions, including the Venice Biennale, documenta 14, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and FLAT Art Book Fair, Turin. She has taught as a visiting lecturer at the University of Cologne and the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, and is currently a lecturer in the History of the Arts at École Supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc Liège and in the History of Photography at École Supérieure des Arts de l'Image LE 75 in Brussels, where she also oversees academic quality and sustainability.

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PRAYER TO ARTEMIS

EDITION VON DORIS WEINBERGER FÜR *FKW* NR. 77



// Doris Weinberger
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Doris weinberger works as an interdisciplinary and collaborative artist at the intersection of various media formats, including installation, interaction and performance in (semi-) public spaces. Her main focus is on the deconstruction and redesign of representation and projection mechanisms in the production of hegemonic imagery and (linguistic) structures in the (partially) private and (semi-)public spheres. Doris weinberger is a founding member of the artists' collectives mark and ANTZ! and the transdisciplinary platform RAUMFINDER. She teaches performative methods and participatory strategies, gives lectures, and advises organisations.

Exhibitions/performance/interactions in Austria, Canada, Czechia, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Pakistan, USA.

dorisweinberger.com // markcollective.com

Prayer to Artemis and Proserpina

We call upon and greet you,
dear Artemis and dear Proserpina.
Sharp-witted allies!

I ask you to accompany me
so that I may recognise (my) path.
I ask you to strengthen me
so that I may walk it with humour.

Inspire my judgement
so that I set worthy goals.
Sharpen my instincts
so that I seize good opportunities.

Nourish my patience
so that I complete worthwhile endeavours.

Comfort my soul
when I am abandoned by courage and manhood.
Welcome, independent Artemis, golden dragon rider.
Welcome, serpentine Proserpina, queen of witches.
We honour and thank you!

by *



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BOOKS AND GUTS AT COLOGNE UNIVERSITY: AN ARTISTS' REVIEW OF THE INSTITUTIONAL LIFE OF THE KATHY ACKER READING ROOM AS EXPERIENCED BY IAN CLEWE & CAMILLE PARKER

We were invited to review the Kathy Acker Reading Room at the University of Cologne and approached the task with hesitation, aware that any scholarly account of it could only inadequately describe what is at stake. The reading room operates as a structural insertion: a formerly private, intensely used working library formative for the countercultural literary practice of Kathy Acker, translated into the administrative and architectural framework of a German academic institution. — yet laughter emerges for insertion suggests enclosure and proportion and what gathers here exceeds that scale it feels closer to a body opened and dispersed across shelves a body of writing shaped by textual disobedience erotic charge and excessive appropriation fitted into the disciplined torso of the university an institutional shell that attempts to frame and to regulate encounter a personal library with volumes once bought by and given to acker moved through apartments cities climates pressed into bags carried against hips worked through at kitchen tables or annotated in bed moved with drawn from entrusted kept together acquired packed into boxes shipped across continents molding in transit through oceans cured now resting within cataloguing systems to be handed to visitors friends and strangers alike this passage reads like a bureaucratic romance its translation is neither neutral nor merely logistical it constitutes the primary condition under which the room must be read — So let's start over and begin, as expected, with description. The Kathy Acker Reading Room houses 6,054 books, magazines, and pamphlets alongside letters, postcards, and personal items that once circulated through her daily life. Many volumes bear Acker's annotations, underlinings, and handwritten notes, making visible the material operations of her reading and compositional practice. The collection was gifted in 2015 to the University of Cologne's English Department by Matias Viegner, a close friend of Acker's and the literary executor of her estate. The room is accessible to visitors with research interests; study visits must be arranged in advance through the American Studies department (american-studies@uni-koeln.de), at least two weeks prior to the intended date. The term *reading room*, by the way, seems insufficient but serviceable: Even within its dedicated

*(almost on the edge of not being
able to write)*



// Figure 1

Detail of handwritten marginal notes by Kathy Acker on the title page of her personal copy of Genet, Jean (1962): *The Screens*. A play in seventeen scenes. New York: Grove Press (top); Check marks found in: O'Brien, John (1984): *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Volume IV, Number 1, Spring 1984 ("William S. Burroughs Number"). Elmwood Park, IL. (bottom); Kathy Acker Reading Room, University of Cologne.

space the institutional frame stays explicit. Bluish-grey carpet absorbs sound. Modular black shelving lines the walls. The shelves are orderly. The lighting is neutral. Access is regulated: State your research purpose. Schedule your appointment in advance. Sign in. Request. The room performs legibility. Materials are catalogued. Everything can be found again. And yes, preservation enables access. It also marks a shift in metabolism. What circulated as excess is stabilized as heritage. The unruly corpus becomes governable. Everything has a place. The university knows how to hold things still. But what is being held here? Feminist theory pressed against pulp fiction. Philosophy beside pornography. Canon beside trash. Acker's reading was never pure. It was parasitic, promiscuous, tactical. She stole plots, copied passages, rewrote them until they became hers. The arrangement foregrounds a practice that historically contested hierarchies of value and genre. The reading room therefore embodies a structural paradox: it preserves a body of work that persistently attacked the regimes of authorship, originality, and cultural legitimacy that the university conventionally secures.

_____ its bluish grey carpet stretched along wall to wall interrupts mid-sentence it holds dust fibres skin absorbs sound softening footsteps under black bookshelves with plastic feel that signal budgetary restraint rather than pleasure with glass doors that reflect us back at ourselves shelves that hold their lines along the walls, books in tight adjacency lean into one another like conspirators implicating readers a gathering made of pages people characters a textual universe expanding and between shelves and selves more institutional furniture a conference table centred an office desk crammed into a corner steel legs chairs aligned inviting sitting not sinking in¹⁾ bodies calibrated for work upright attentive clean lines white walls tiled ceiling breaking the space into grids the light clinical flat unflattering to skin and paper alike a light insisting on visibility and legibility as if to make all visible accountable _____ And indeed, nothing in this arrangement seems to advertise intimacy. Volumes stand in close adjacency, spines aligned, each dependent on the support of its neighbors. Removal of a single book produces a temporary disturbance: adjacent volumes tilt before settling again. The movement is slight but perceptible, a shiver traveling along the row like a rumor. Arrangement here is not neutral storage but enforced intimacy. Once a book is removed from the shelf, it cannot be returned directly by the reader. It must be placed on the central table, where staff later inspect insertions, verify loose fragments, and restore the volume to its designated position. Regulation thus materializes as choreography. _____ the shelf opens like a small wound the table

1)

The people at the university hate us; they don't notice us, We're in disguise, they talk solely about us when we can barely hear them. We sneak out of the reading room to the edge of the doorway of our parents' bedroom. We're supposed to be asleep our father's telling our mother we're bad and worthless children. We can barely hear what our parents are saying.



// Figure 2

Check marks by Kathy Acker found in her personal copy of: O'Brien, John (1984): *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Volume IV, Number 1, Spring 1984 ("William S. Burroughs Number"). Elmwood Park, IL.; Kathy Acker Reading Room, University of Cologne.

130

swells with displaced volumes awaiting authorization to reenter the order we've lost track of everything we face the blank page — Behind us the shelves watch. Bodies of volumes pressed together. When we pull one free, the others lean inward, adjusting to absence. They know how to close ranks. — the proximity here is of books is physical before it is intellectual spines pressed to spines pages rubbing shoulders books in their own sociality leaning into one another for support some pulled forward others pushed back layers of depth that invite us to reach shift move things aside us stacking unstacking rereaching as if the shelf were a bed as if theory and smut had always belonged in the same sentence as if the university were only another body to enter rearrange inhabit from the inside from under — The carpet is bluish grey—the color of institutional bruising—, the shelves rise in rows, not like walls but like ribs forced outward to make space for breath. Between them: aisles narrow enough to require negotiation. We turn sideways. Our shoulders graze theory. Our hips brush pornography. No clear distinction holds. On the table: we stack books into temporary constellations creating our own minor canon²⁾ only to dismantle it minutes later. Hard covers, stiff paperbacks, slightly split at the spine, photocopied pamphlets clouded with toner, personal envelopes sweating old glue. We lay our palms flat on a stack and feel heat that does not belong to the institute's climate. We take a book. Try to open it. The spine resists. We press harder. The crack is small but decisive. A page faintly sighs, it feels like a negotiation between violence and permission, so we stop. Queer readers have long known that the book is a body and that bodies remember. We put the book back on the table and pull one from the shelf. The adjacent volumes lean into the vacancy, closing the gap like lips after speaking about absence. We reach. We shift stacks aside. We restack and unstack. Our bodies adjust to the narrow gap between shelf and table. The books offer resistance and yield. Their covers brush our wrists. Paper edges graze skin. The distance between her touch and ours collapses through material continuity. — many of her books are marked annotated written in but they are not relics they are workshops they are pre-texts her writing starts in those margins where influence becomes a form of republishing of dispersion into citations but to read these traces as confession would reinstall the very romantic authorship she dismantled her marginal notes are technique not soul but they certainly intensify the sense of contact while handling — Fingers rest where her fingers once pressed; thumbs fit into the hollow of pages forced open by her decades earlier. Spines bear the memory of having been bent too far and never fully

2)

How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe that we can. What have we to contribute, to give? Our own expectations condition us. Does not our class, our culture, tell us writing is not for people such as us?

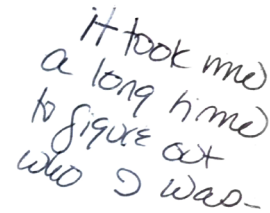
recovering. Such traces invite the fantasy of access to an authorial interiority, the desire to collapse distance through touch. Reading is not solitary here. It is a choreography of approach and contact. It is bodily before it is sentimental. We sit down with the book. Our backs straighten in response to the furniture's demand. The grid of ceiling tiles repeats above us, modular and divisible. The architecture proposes clarity. Yet beneath the table our knees brush the underside of wood. Our feet slide out of our shoes. Contact shifts from sanctioned posture to minor deviation. Even here, the body negotiates its own lines of comfort and exposure. The books on the table lean into one another, temporarily displaced from their shelf positions. They form a small pile, edges misaligned without the stabilizing pressure of neighboring volumes. Between pages, plastic sleeves hold what once moved freely: postcards, scraps, notes, a check written for an impossible amount, tokens of lovers, teachers, enemies, accomplices. Each fragment is catalogued, sealed, reinserted. We slide a sleeve from between pages. The plastic crackles. Our fingers trace the outline of a folded note through its barrier. Touch is mediated but not eliminated. The barrier heightens awareness. _____ to touch what she touched might feel intimate in the sentimental sense since it is contact across time through paper through pressure through residue the distance does not collapse the rules of access hover discreetly in the background opening hours staff supervision the quiet reminder that this is a university space and therefore accountable to procedure and yet the books exceed procedure they carry sweat and oil of fingers and the faint warping of having traveled across climates they have known apartments and suitcases and freight containers they have known neglect and repair and now they stand stabilized but not neutralized their histories pressing outward against the present arrangement the room continues to appear modest almost austere no plush chairs no dramatic lighting no theatrical display and this restraint produces its own kind of charge because the erotic register emerges not from spectacle but from proximity from the way our shoulders nearly brush the shelf as we lean in from the way our breath warms the open page from the faint resistance of a spine bending again under our insistence and in this choreography of small contacts the analytic voice loosens becomes porous begins to admit that it too is shaped by what it touches and we are touched by her and she keeps whispering _____ HELLO, I'M KATHY ACKER THE BLACK TARANTULA. I'M A REAL NOVELIST _____ a sentence as corridor and she laughs from within as its interior echo the breath that turns I into we into something even more porous _____ And yet the body does not

WRITING SHOULD BE
EXPERIMENT NOT EXPRESSION

// Figure 3

Detail of handwritten marginal notes by Kathy Acker on the title page of her personal copy of Genet, Jean (1962): *The Screens*. A play in seventeen scenes. New York: Grove Press; Kathy Acker Reading Room, University of Cologne.

remain outside these claims. To retrieve a book requires bending, reaching, adjusting the angle of the spine against the bracket that holds it in place. Books press into one another. Some lean as if for support. The act of reading becomes spatial before it becomes interpretive. Knees meet carpet. Fingers slide along paper edges. But caution falters at the point of contact. — we came to describe the graft of a personal library into an academic institution and now our own sentences bend toward hers our vocabulary contaminated by adjacency it took us a long time to figure out who i was—we find her sentence in a margin the fragment repeats in our heads without completion and our authorship thins into technique into recombination into the realization that our lover followed us to the reading room the bookshelves' glass doors reflect us as we move our image overlays the spines for a moment her face appears superimposed on titles the reflection stages an argument: a reader is never outside their library she puts her arms around the upper part of our bodies while we are trying to read "where are you going i'll take care of you i love you i am the only one who can take care of you without me you are nothing" her hand swings down the side of our bodies into the waist the broad spread of our asses we don't know what we look like skin separates from skin we sit at the table until the edges of our vision blur we put the book down below our navels a hand curves around the edges of the soft skin — We slide another volume from its place. The slight drag of cover against cover registers as friction. Our fingers enter the split of pages. The spine yields, then holds. We copy a sentence into our notebook like to infect it. She took what she needed. She cut existing texts open, reassembling them without concealment, pressed foreign sentences into new contexts. Writing for and with her becomes a cut-and-paste surgery. — in the shelves her books grind against one another feminist theory biting into pulp philosophy sweating on pornography punk rubs against structuralism the erotic dimension of this practice is not metaphorical but material: margins open texts penetrate and are penetrated positions of activity and passivity shift — We were never able to possess the softness of your touch, the roughness of your words. . . your text seeped into our bodies like a beautiful toxin, handling your volumes produces a thrill, the fantasy that touch collapses time, fingers resting where your fingers pressed. We tighten our hands around the volume, our knees imprison its spine. Within the book your method becomes materially legible. — the margins carry your writing that enters the printed argument occupies title pages interrupts the authority of type handwriting dominates the surface and through these gestures the books operate as laboratory



// Figure 4

Handwritten marginal note by Kathy Acker on the title page of her personal copy of Nabokov, Vladimir V. (1982): *Lolita*. New York: Greenwich House; Kathy Acker Reading Room, University of Cologne.

as sites of grafting authorship circulating as arrangement cutting suturing republishing as a method of survival a way to build a body from borrowed tissue texts entering one another until origin disperses into relation by dedicating the space to ackers library the university participates in cementing her position within literary history the library becomes evidence proof of influence proof of genealogy proof that even that punk girl can be historicized conservation here becomes canon formation but such evidentiary framing risks consolidating her as a coherent authorial figure even though her literary method persistently undermined the regimes of authorship and singular origin the question is not whether any counter-cultural practice can survive this institutional incorporation unchanged—it cannot — So to review this place is to admit that something is still happening there. The institution does not finish her. It distributes her. Each act of reading becomes a minor incision, each return to the shelf creates a suture that never completely seals. Books and guts inside a building devoted to clean lines and straight arguments. The friction persists. — something keeps pressing against the frame not loudly not dramatically but a reminder that writing can be an act of cutting into what is given and refusing to close the wound too quickly as we leave the table and glance once more at the shelves we sense how our posture has shifted how our bodies feel slightly rearranged by the hours spent here shoulders carrying a new tension fingers remembering the feeling of paper we leave the room altered³⁾

3)

Inside the carpeted quiet, her margins still shout.

limitations
of cut-up
no way out of
power, no
way out of
control 7-95

// Figure 5

Detail of handwritten marginal notes by Kathy Acker on the title page of her personal copy of O'Brien, John (1984): *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Volume IV, Number 1, Spring 1984 ("William S. Burroughs Number"). Elmwood Park, IL.; Kathy Acker Reading Room, University of Cologne.

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// About the Authors

Ian Clewe and Camille Parker work across artistic disciplines, genres, genders, and timelines. They are interested in marginal publishing practices, bibliographic intimacy, and discursive contamination. At present they write pornographic, free-of-charge reading room reviews and book reports for whoever wishes to read them and for those who don't (only their mothers mustn't see what they're up to. Oh, no, they would not be happy about 'em being published scholars).

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**BUCHHOLZ, AMREI / FUENTES VEGA, ALICIA / KLOSS-WEBER, JULIA
(EDS.) (2025): TURNING THE MIRROR. GENDERED ART HISTORIES OF
IBERO-AMERICA AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA,
BERLIN AND BOSTON, DE GRUYTER**

Mirrors have long been a popular element in art employed in a variety of ways. Among other things, they can make certain aspects—which would otherwise remain hidden from view from a conventional perspective—explicitly visible, thereby highlighting them. Furthermore, they can draw attention to the viewer of the work of art. The editors of the anthology *Turning the Mirror: Gendered Art Histories of Ibero-America and the Iberian Peninsula* also find both the title and the thematic framework for their work in the mirror with its multifaceted symbolism. In doing so, they refer to Velázquez's *Venus del espejo*, as well as to contemporary responses to this artwork, such as that of the Spanish performance artist La Ribot, who literally rearranges the mirror and, through the explicit reflection of her (formerly tabooed) genitals, presents her own body as an act of resistance (and no longer as an object defined by the male gaze). What hidden aspects or blind spots—as the editors ask—become visible when we shift the focus of the academic mirror?

— Specifically, this anthology—which is distinguished by its high-quality printing, layout, and typesetting—aims to challenge established research traditions in art history through feminist, post- and decolonial approaches, to reexamine dominant narratives and adopt alternative perspectives. To this end, it focuses on women who, in the 19th and 20th centuries, were active on the Iberian Peninsula or in Latin America as artists, creative professionals, art historians, or other key figures in the art world. As the insightful introduction emphasizes, the case studies are not intended to simply add further examples to existing art history, but rather to highlight feminist research questions as central components of art history. The editors also situate their volume within post- and decolonial research traditions: they pose the overarching question of the extent to which the external perception of the cultural spaces of the Iberian Peninsula and Ibero-America as cultural *peripheries*—and, at the same time, their historically conditioned, distinct positioning within colonial history—influenced these dynamics. All in all, this anthology has two goals: first, to bring to light the largely systematically excluded stories of female artists, and second, to challenge existing narratives

that are closely intertwined with patriarchal power structures and have simultaneously emerged from them.

— The anthology resulted from the 2022 annual conference of the Carl Justi-Association for the Support of Art-historical Cooperation with Spain, Portugal and Ibero-America (Carl Justi-Vereinigung zur Förderung der kunstwissenschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit mit Spanien, Portugal und Iberoamerika). In addition to a detailed introduction, it brings together contributions from nine female scholars. As the editors point out, only women submitted papers for the conference in response to their call for papers. This—along with the all-female editorial team—demonstrates, on a structural level, that the integration of gender perspectives into art history academia is not yet a given.

— Depending on their respective focus, the articles explore artistic positions through which female artists reflect on and challenge existing power structures, examine the institutional and socio-political frameworks and conventions within which they operated, or discuss various strategies for engaging with the existing order, such as self-empowerment or networking. The editors deliberately chose not to arrange the contributions chronologically or geographically. Instead, they selected four thematic areas that also highlight the breadth of the anthology's content.

— The first section focuses on *political and institutional contexts*. It addresses not only the constraints faced by female artists within a patriarchal system of art education, but also the diverse, often creative ways in which they navigated these constraints—and thus their agency. Saray Espinosa demonstrates how the activities of female artists in the political context of the Franco dictatorship in Spain and the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal at the end of the 20th century can be interpreted as a dual act of resistance against a repressive regime, on the one hand, and patriarchal structures, on the other. Using the example of the *Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes* in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Lucía Laumann illustrates the strategies women employed to circumvent restrictions on access to art education. Esther Romero Sáez takes a different approach, examining representations of nudity—and specifically the depiction of genitalia—in 19th- and 20th-century Spain, demonstrating that women had more creative agency in the traditionally male-dominated field of nude painting than is commonly assumed.

— The second thematic section examines *transnational networks* as a specific strategy for the self-empowerment of female artists. Drawing on post- and decolonial approaches, the editors ask whether conditions of intersectional *subalternity*—such as being

women, but also being artists in the periphery—have given rise to specific strategies of self-empowerment, such as communities of female artists or transatlantic networks. Henar Rivière focuses on a transnational solidarity network in which the Argentine artist Graciela Gutiérrez Marx explores the theme of motherhood during the Argentine dictatorship, addressing its particularly ambivalent connotations at that time. Sol Izquierdo de la Viña investigates the complexity as well as the ambivalence in the work of the Austrian-born Jewish artist Lene Schneider-Kainer, who went into exile in Ibiza in the 1930s and ran a guesthouse there for the international intellectual elite. By interpreting Schneider-Kainer's activities as both an act of emancipation and a cultural endeavor, she not only restores visibility to a disregarded artist but also challenges traditional categories of art-historical discourse.

— In the third section, the focus shifts explicitly to the discipline itself. Much like the book's title suggests, it aims at *gendering the narratives of art history*. This is achieved, on the one hand, by specifically addressing female positions, but also, on a broader level, by scrutinizing the discipline's methods to determine whether they contribute to the marginalization of female artists and their work. Mercedes Valdivieso turns her attention to Margarita Nelken, a largely unknown art historian, and aims to demonstrate how Nelken's internalized patriarchal mindset actually reinforced prejudices against female artists. Maria Llüisa Faxedas Brujats's essay analyzes abstract art from a feminist perspective and, by exploring the intertwining of the physical presence of the body and abstraction, opens up a research perspective that has thus far been largely neglected.

— The final section, *Revisiting Female Art Stories*, presents two case studies that highlight the imbalance in art-historical analyses of works by male versus female artists. In contrast to the analysis of artworks by their male colleagues, the analysis of artworks created by women often focuses on the artist rather than on the artwork. With her essay on Frida Kahlo, Julia Kloss-Weber contributes to a paradigm shift in this area by focusing not on the artist's biography but on her artistic concept of *autopoiesis*, which has received little attention to date. Fernanda Pequeno examines how the Brazilian artist Lygia Pape provocatively highlighted the commercialization of the female body in three different works from the 1970s. As Pequeno demonstrates, Lygia Pape succeeds in challenging both political and gender-specific mechanisms of oppression through the use of complex communicative strategies. Pape, too, worked under a dictatorial regime. This raises the question of whether a different

structure for the contributions—one more closely aligned with the (partially overlapping) political contexts—might have been more enlightening: for example, by combining Pequeno's contribution with that of Saray Espinosa on the Spanish/Portuguese dictatorship, or also by linking political and feminist resistance.

— Overall, this anthology succeeds in illustrating, through a variety of thematic approaches, the diverse and multifaceted ways in which female artists were able to navigate the power structures they faced: from artistic engagement to concrete strategies for gaining access to the academic world or specific artistic fields, to strengthening their own positions through the formation of networks. In this context, it seems worthwhile to deliberately adopt a broad definition of the term *artist* because—as Sol Izquierdo de la Viña's contribution in particular demonstrates—it is sometimes only through a new interpretation of artistic expression (in this case, the operation of a guesthouse as a cultural practice) that a nearly forgotten artist can be rehabilitated.

— The editors thus fully live up to their claim to challenge the traditions, the canon, and the dominant narratives of art history. The post- and decolonial lens, however, remains somewhat underdeveloped, as none of the contributions addresses the question posed at the outset—namely, the influence of the external perception of the Iberian and Ibero-American world as a cultural *periphery* and the simultaneous division by the *colonial wound*—with the desired depth. Here, at least some initial observations would have been useful—or, alternatively, a (perhaps ultimately more stringent) limitation to the feminist lens applied in all the contributions, which is in itself sufficiently illuminating.

— It may be due to this underdeveloped theoretical strand that the specific nature of the topic as it pertains to the cultural sphere of Ibero-America and the Iberian Peninsula remains only partially apparent. While it is certainly compelling that the editors aim to diversify feminist art histories beyond the English-language canon through this geographical focus, and the publication undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to research in this regard, the potentially distinctive manifestations of artistic feminism within this cultural sphere remain vague.

— In a certain respect, the editors do not entirely escape their own critical approach: while they designed the conference proceedings to be multilingual as a critical response to the dominance of Anglo-centric feminist studies, the English-language contributions in fact predominate. In addition to five English articles, three are in Spanish and—surprisingly—one is in German. This highlights both

the dominant position of English as a language of science and that of Spanish within the Iberian world. At least one article in Portuguese would have been highly desirable. A similar imbalance is reflected in the local focus of the topics: only one of the articles deals with Portugal, and another with Brazil.

— Despite these minor shortcomings, the anthology is well worth reading and enriches art history with vivid case studies, new perspectives, and critical questions. It is to be hoped that art history will now, in a similarly ambitious manner, open itself up to questions that move beyond the binary gender perspective, and, not least, that other disciplines will also dare to turn the mirror around in such a stimulating and intelligent way. Publications such as these—owing especially to international collaborations among researchers—could bring about a truly new reorientation of (not only art-historical) research.

// About the Author

Leonie Schuster studied Latin American Studies, Spanish Language, and Modern History in Berlin and Porto Alegre, Brazil. She earned her Ph.D. in 2017 from the Department of History and Cultural Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. She has been a lecturer at the Department of Romance Languages at Kiel University since 2019, and has also been teaching at Leuphana University Lüneburg since 2025. In addition, she works as a freelance trainer in education for sustainable development and global learning. Her research interests focus on Latin America and on cultural and global historical approaches. Publications: Representations of the first South Atlantic air crossing by the Portuguese Sacadura Cabral and Gago Coutinho in the Brazilian press: between colonial continuities and national self-assertion (1922), in: Dominique Faria / Alan Dobson / António Monteiro / Luís Nuno Rodrigues (eds.): *L'aviation et son impact sur le temps et l'espace*, Paris 2019, pp. 161–188; *Brasilianische Höhenflüge. Luftfahrtpioniere und Imaginationen von Nation und Welt in Brasilien, 1900–1922*, Stuttgart 2019.

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ANSTELLE EINES NACHRUFES. REFLEXIONEN ANLÄSSLICH DES TODES VON PROF. DR. DANIELA HAMMER-TUGENDHAT (2. AUGUST 1946 IN CARACAS – 17. SEPTEMBER 2025 IN WIEN)

In der Festschrift zu Ehren Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats, die anlässlich ihres 60. Geburtstags 2008 herausgegeben wurde¹⁾, erschienen Beiträge von 18 Kolleg_Innen und Weggefährt_Innen, welche von der Wertschätzung von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats Beitrag seit den 1980^{er} Jahren für die Öffnung des Fachs Kunstgeschichte für sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Fragen und deren Implikationen für eine feministische Kunstgeschichte zeugen.²⁾

Die Arbeit an der Transformation des Faches begann für sie wie für die meisten Kunsthistoriker_innen nach 1968 mit Infragestellungen sozialer Lebensverhältnisse, vorgegebener Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Rollenzuweisungen innerhalb der westlichen Gesellschaften in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, deren scheinbare Normalität sich auch in der Art manifestierten, wie und welche Kunst vermittelt und wie Kunstgeschichte betrieben wurde (teilweise immer noch wird). Diese hatte sich im Nationalsozialismus selbst diskreditiert, ihre kritischen Vertreter_Innen waren verfolgt worden oder emigriert. Die Generation Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats war während des Studiums in den 1960^{ern} und folgende mit sich bekämpfenden „Schulen“ konfrontiert (Kunstlergeschichte als Heroengeschichte, Stil- und Formgeschichte als Kennerschaft von Eingeweihten oder Einfühlungsästhetik; Sozialgeschichte, Ikonografie und Ikonologie wurden kaum thematisiert oder abgelehnt). Zeitgenössische Kunst, Methodenreflexion und Wissenschaftsgeschichte oder -kritik und Kunstvermittlung³⁾ waren blinde Flecken. Frauen als Lehrende und/oder in leitenden Positionen gab es nicht oder nur als Ausnahme, das Studium der Kunstgeschichte schien immer noch als Bildung für höhere Töchter gedacht zu sein.⁴⁾

Wenn ich hier von *einer* Generation spreche, ist das sicher unpräzise. Verschiedene Ausgangspositionen, zeitlich verschobene Effekte politischer Ereignisse oder Debatten sowie geographische Unterschiede lassen diese „Generation“ nicht sehr homogen erscheinen. Es ist heute kaum noch vorstellbar, dass zwischen kunsthistorischen Instituten, Universitäten und studentischen Kulturen an verschiedenen Orten und Ländern Welten lagen, Informationen über Lehr- und Forschungsschwerpunkte schwer zugänglich und die Wahl des Studienortes meist zufällig waren. Aber es ist dieser heterogenen Gruppe in den letzten 50 Jahren gelungen, im

deutschsprachigen Raum ein breites Netzwerk zur feministischen Kunstgeschichte und Gender Studies zu bilden, und damit die Ausrichtung des Faches Kunstgeschichte und berufliche Perspektiven für Frauen zu verändern.⁵⁾

—— Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat galt als eine der wichtigen Kooperationspartnerinnen im feministischen Netzwerk innerhalb des Faches Kunstgeschichte, an dessen Aufbau und Vielfalt sie in Österreich und im deutschsprachigen Raum beteiligt war.

—— Wir beklagen ihren Verlust in einer Zeit, in der das Vermächtnis dieser Generation (noch immer) nicht garantiert, ja, angesichts des allgemeinen Rollbacks sogar bedroht ist. Es sind bereits einige informative Nachrufe und Laudationes erschienen.⁶⁾

—— Der folgende Rückblick auf Leben, Arbeit von und Kooperationen mit Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat hat nicht den Anspruch, umfassend zu sein. Ich beziehe mich u.a. auf den von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat noch zu Lebzeiten selbst verfassten Rückblick auf ihren wissenschaftlichen Werdegang, der Ende 2026 erscheinen wird.⁷⁾ Bei der Lektüre dieses Textes machten mir Parallelen und Unterschiede zu meinem eigenen Werdegang nachträglich bewusst, dass und wie wir von einem noch engeren Austausch hätten profitieren können. Dies ist ab nun bedauerlicherweise nur mehr über die Lektüre von Danielas wissenschaftlichen Veröffentlichungen und das Anhören ihrer auf YouTube gestellten Vorlesungen möglich.

—— Daniela, 1946 als Kind der vor den Nationalsozialisten geflohenen jüdischen Familie Tugendhat aus Brünn (heute Brno, Tschechien) in Caracas geboren, begann nach der Rückkehr der Familie in die Schweiz und der Schulzeit in St. Gallen 1964/65 mit dem Studium der Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Bern. Sie beschreibt ihre Enttäuschung über das Lehrangebot, nachdem sie zuvor mit ihrer Mutter Grete Tugendhat⁸⁾ zahlreiche Reisen innerhalb Europas unternommen hatte, um „Kunst in Kirchen, Tempeln und Museen“ zu besichtigen. Diese emotional geprägte Beziehung zur Kunst, die sie Zeit ihres Lebens beibehielt, habe keine Möglichkeit gefunden, sich im Rahmen des Studiums zu artikulieren. 1967/68 ging sie nach Wien, um Kunstgeschichte bei Otto Pächt zu studieren. Sie beschreibt sich als Person, die sich – ohne politische Bildung und Diskussionen aufgewachsen – gemeinsam mit zumeist ausländischen Kommiliton_Innen, darunter ihr späterer Mann Ivo Hammer-Tugendhat⁹⁾, gesellschaftskritischen Fragen stellte und diese in die Auseinandersetzungen mit einem äußerst konservativen Milieu in Österreich

(auch unter den Studierenden) einbrachte.¹⁰⁾ Otto Pächts Lehre beschreibt Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat als Strukturanalyse und Historisierung von Gestaltungsprinzipien. Seine Ablehnung außer-künstlerischer Kontextualisierungen (und auch der politischen Aktivitäten seiner Studierenden) liest sie rückblickend als Kampf gegen eine politische Instrumentalisierung von Kunst, wie sie im NS geschehen war. Pächt war für sie wie für viele andere ein inspirierender Lehrer, der genaues Hinsehen, die Thematisierung des Blicks und die historische Einordnung in die Bildtradition einforderte. Nachträglich konstatiert sie die Anschlussmöglichkeit von Fragen nach dem diskursiven und gesellschaftlichen Kontext der Bilder und sieht ihn als Vorläufer einer kritischen Kunstgeschichte aus der Perspektive des Wiener kunsthistorischen Instituts.¹¹⁾ Auch wenn sie für ihre sozialgeschichtliche Kontextualisierung der Künstler_Innen und der Kunst vom Lehrer gewissermaßen exkommuniziert wurde, behielt sie gleichwohl seine Vorbehalte gegen ikonologische Ansätze trotz ihrer späteren Bezugnahme auch auf die Semiotik bei.¹²⁾

—— Sie beschreibt ihre Politisierung im Zuge der 68^{er} Bewegung¹³⁾ und der damit zusammenhängenden Lektüren der Klassiker des historischen Materialismus sowie der Publikationen von Kolleg_Innen des Ulmer Vereins¹⁴⁾ als auch der ehemaligen DDR.¹⁵⁾ Diese werden als wichtige Impulsgeber für die Entfaltung einer sozialgeschichtlich relevanten Kunstgeschichte genannt, die Kunst und Kultur in Relation zu Macht- und Herrschaftsausübung setzte. Gleichwohl konstatiert Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, dass ihre „Liebe zur Kunst“ mit der „Behauptung von ‚Herrschaftskunst‘“ in heftigen Konflikt geriet.¹⁶⁾ Sie schreibt, dieser Konflikt habe dazu geführt, dass sie sich für die „Widerständigkeit von Kunst“ interessierte, und deren „Fähigkeit, Ambivalenzen und Widersprüche zu thematisieren“.¹⁷⁾

—— Nach dem Abschluss ihrer Dissertation über *Hieronymus Bosch und die Bildtradition*¹⁸⁾ und Ivo Hammers Dissertation zu *Typologie und frühbürgerlicher Realismus. Die Biblia Pauperum Weigel-Felix*¹⁹⁾ wurden beide in Wien berufstätig.²⁰⁾ 1975/76 begann Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats jahrzehntelange Lehrtätigkeit an der Universität für angewandte Kunst, später auch an der Universität Wien und anderen renommierten, internationalen Universitäten.²¹⁾ 1978/79 konzipierte sie die zweisemestriges Vorlesung über die „Kunst der ‚Urgesellschaft‘ bis zum 19. Jahrhundert“, in der sie „auf historisch-materialistischer Grundlage Bildtradition und Ästhetik durch Einbeziehung der religiösen, politischen und ökonomischen Verhältnisse etc. kontextualisierte“, eine Vorlesung, die über Jahre hinweg obligatorisch wurde.

— „Der Anstoß zu einer feministischen Kunstgeschichte kam nicht aus der Wissenschaft, sondern aus der (zweiten) Frauenbewegung.“ Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat verweist auf die Verspätung solcher Ansätze in der Kunstgeschichte gegenüber US-amerikanischen Autorinnen wie Linda Nochlin²²⁾, aber auch gegenüber feministischen Historikerinnen, Literaturwissenschaftlerinnen und Philosophinnen im deutschsprachigen Raum, und nicht zuletzt gegenüber einer radikalen und aktiven feministischen Künstlerinnen-Szene gerade in Wien.²³⁾

— Den organisierten Austausch feministischer Perspektiven in der Kunstgeschichte seit den 1980^{er} Jahren verfolgt auch Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat anhand eines Rückblicks auf die Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagungen, an denen sie von Beginn an teilgenommen hatte, und die ihr die Augen für das bislang Ausgeblendete öffnete: „das Fehlen von Künstlerinnen und der misogynen Diskurs der Kunstgeschichte, die asymmetrische Repräsentation von Weiblichkeit und Männlichkeit“. Nachträglich kann man die Initiative der Marburger Kunsthistorikerinnen²⁴⁾ nicht hoch genug einschätzen, 1982 die erste deutsche Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung organisiert zu haben, auf der sich die bislang an den jeweiligen Orten isoliert arbeitenden Protagonistinnen austauschen konnten²⁵⁾, und aus deren Diskussionen sich die folgenden Tagungen²⁶⁾ und deren Veröffentlichungen²⁷⁾ und die Konkretisierung und Verschiebung thematischer Schwerpunkte entwickelten. Die dritte Tagung in Wien 1984 wurde von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat mitkonzipiert und organisiert.²⁸⁾ Es waren stets Angehörige des Mittelbaus, Promovendinnen und Studentinnen, die jeweils Konzeptionen und Organisationen übernahmen. Erst ab den Tagungen in Trier und Tübingen 1996 waren Kunsthistorikerinnen des Netzwerks an Konzeption und Organisation beteiligt, die inzwischen als Professorinnen berufen worden waren. An den Tagungen lässt sich ablesen, inwieweit feministische Themen und Fragestellungen mittlerweile Eingang in die Institute und Institutionen der Kunstgeschichte gefunden hatten.²⁹⁾ Die Tagungsbände verweisen aufeinander, und darauf, wie sich Fragestellungen verändert oder zugespitzt haben.³⁰⁾

— Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat hielt Vorträge auf den ersten drei Tagungen in der BRD und Österreich sowie auf der Tagung in Lehnin.³¹⁾ Sie konstatiert für die Anfangszeit zurecht, dass es *den* Feminismus nicht gegeben habe, sondern feministische Einsprüche in die traditionelle Kunstgeschichtsschreibung, die Künstlerinnen allenfalls als Ausnahme in den Kanon aufnahm, gegenüber der Dominanz „weiblicher“ Körperrepräsentationen in der Kunst und der asymmetrischen Repräsentation von „männlichen“ Körpern

blind war, ebenso wie gegenüber der Tatsache, dass Kunsthistoriker grundsätzlich von der Adressierung des männlichen Blicks profitierten, dies aber systematisch negierten. Die feministische Suchbewegung identifizierte zunächst, womit sie sich nicht mehr identifizieren wollte und konnte,³²⁾ gleichwohl blieb der Wunsch nach (positiven) Identifizierungsmöglichkeiten sehr lebendig und einige der Diskussionen der ersten Tagungen drehten sich um das Problem, wie solche Identifizierungswünsche in eine analytische Perspektive intervenierten und mit dazu beitrugen, essentialistische und biologistische Konzepte von Weiblichkeit fortzuschreiben.³³⁾ Diese Wünsche sind fast unauflöslich mit dem Wunsch verbunden, dass Bilder oder die Kunst unmittelbar verständlich und zeitlos sein mögen.

—— Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat schloss sich in ihrer weiteren Arbeit denjenigen feministischen Kunsthistorikerinnen an, die naturalisierende Zuschreibungen als Angelpunkt der patriarchalen Gesellschaft ablehnten und dafür plädierten, „Weiblichkeit“ und „Männlichkeit“ als kulturelle Konstruktionen zu analysieren.³⁴⁾

—— Ihr Anspruch, die Kunstgeschichte im Kontext transdisziplinärer Kulturwissenschaften zu verorten, war etwa gleich schwerwiegend wie der, die Kunstgeschichte als eigenständige Disziplin zu behaupten und die Kunst weiterhin als autonome Entität zu betrachten, „Kunst immer Kunst sein“ zu lassen.³⁵⁾

—— 2009 erschien ihre umfangreiche Publikation *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare. Zur holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*.³⁶⁾ In diesem vielbeachteten Band zeigt sie auf, wie in der holländischen Malerei Weiblichkeit und Männlichkeit mit Positionen des Sichtbaren und Unsichtbaren, also letztlich An- oder Abwesenheiten von Repräsentationen und/oder Hinweisen im Bild auf Abwesendes im Bild, verknüpft sind. Einerseits zeigt sie auf, wie in der niederländischen Malerei z.B. bei Rembrandt der männliche Protagonist aus dem erotischen Bild, das das begehrte, weibliche Objekt repräsentiert, verschwindet und mit dem Betrachter vor dem Bild identisch wird, andererseits weibliche Protagonisten aus Repräsentationen von Männern als soziale und politisch aktive (machtvolle) Gruppe ausgeschlossen werden.³⁷⁾ In diesem Band fließen Fragestellungen und Kunstwerke ein, die Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat bereits früher behandelt hat, und deren Kennzeichnung vielleicht noch dynamischer als „Das Sichtbare Gemachte und das Unsichtbare Gemachte“ bezeichnet werden könnte. Diese Formulierungen kommen dem Konzept nahe, das Silke Wenk und ich als „Zu-Sehen-Geben“ identifiziert haben (und Nicht-Zu-Sehen geben ist selbstverständlich Bestandteil davon), womit das Hergestellte von Bildern in den Fokus rückt.³⁸⁾

—— Schwerpunkte von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats wichtigsten Beiträgen befassen sich vor allem mit sexualisierten Körperdarstellungen und naturalisierenden Konstruktionen von Körpern und Geschlecht in Bildern und mit Strategien der Adressierung des Blicks – ebenfalls als Teil der Konstruktionen von Geschlecht(ern), nicht zuletzt auch mit der Tabuisierung der traditionellen Kunstgeschichte von Bildern, die männliche Körper als begehrenswerte darstellen.³⁹⁾

—— Ihr Aufsatz „Jan van Eyck. Autonomisierung des Aktbildes und Geschlechterdifferenz“⁴⁰⁾ verhandelt die ästhetische Formulierung, die Repräsentationsfunktion und die Realitätseffekte *der* Bilder, die einen Hauptkorpus der Kunstgeschichte ausmachen: Bilder von menschlichen Körpern. Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat stellt sich folgende Fragen: 1. Was bedeutet die Autonomisierung des Aktbildes im Spätmittelalter, was setzt sie voraus und worin zeigt sie sich? 2. Was sagt die spezifische Gestaltung nackter Körper über das Verhältnis einer Gesellschaft zu Sinnlichkeit, Erotik oder Sexualität aus? Und last not least: Welche Effekte hat die Naturalisierung der Geschlechterdifferenz, wie sie sich am Beispiel Jan van Eyck diskutieren lässt? Die Analyse steht im Zusammenhang einer Auseinandersetzung mit den Thesen von Norbert Elias, die einen gesamtgesellschaftlichen und kulturellen „Zivilisationsprozess“ mit Fragen des Umgangs mit Erotik und Scham verband.

—— Solche Fragestellungen und Argumentationen ermöglichten der Kunstgeschichte wieder Anschluss an ihre eigene Herkunft als Kulturgeschichte und Kulturwissenschaft, die sich über ihre eigenen blinden Flecken oder blind machenden Ideologien selbstreflexiv Rechenschaft ablegt. Diese selbstreflexive theoretische Ebene kann mittlerweile als zentrales Kriterium von Wissenschaftlichkeit überhaupt gelten. Die Erkenntnis und die Anerkennung, dass Körperbilder und Körperwahrnehmungen kulturell und historisch bedingt sind, werden nach wie vor von dominierenden kunsthistorischen Diskursen übergangen und infrage gestellt, von Diskursen, in denen anthropologische Konzeptionen des 19. Jahrhunderts ein Revival erfahren und in denen der Körper (und damit auch Geschlecht) als anthropologische Konstante und Gegenüber der Kultur weiter funktionalisiert wird.

—— Umso wichtiger ist es, die Historisierung und die Differenzierung sowohl in Bezug auf die Gestaltung als auch auf die Wahrnehmung von Körperbildern in einem kulturellen Kontext, zu würdigen, Verfahren, die uns Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat nicht nur in dem hier zitierten Aufsatz vorgeführt hat.

—— Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat war/ist nicht nur als eine Spezialistin für bestimmte historische Epochen, bestimmte Künstler_Innen oder Genres zu würdigen, sondern als eine Zeitgenossin, die zeitgenössisch sein oder werden mit Mut zum Risiko in der Überschreitung von disziplinären Denkverböten bewiesen hat.

—— Die zentrale Funktion, die sie auch in der Mentor- und Vorbildfunktion für den wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchs hatte, ist in den Nachrufen und Laudationes bezeugt, innerhalb eines Netzwerks, als dessen Teil sie sich immer verstanden hat.

Für Gespräche und Anregungen aus Anlass des Todes von Daniela Hammer-Tugend danke ich herzlich folgenden Kolleg_Innen: Maike Christadler, Silvia Eiblmayr, Theresa Georgen, Ivo Hammer-Tugendhat, Monika Leisch-Kiesl, Marianne Koos, Verena Krieger, Angela Lammert, Katharina Sykora und Silke Wenk.

// Endnoten

- 1) *Asymmetrien: Festschrift für Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat*, hrsg. v.d. Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien. Das Symposium fand am 8. Dezember 2006 statt. Idee und Konzept: Gabriele Werner. Der Band umfasst auch ein Schriftenverzeichnis Daniela Hammer-Tugendhats bis 2008, ebd. S. 117–124.
- 2) Ich hatte damals den Kommentar „Kunstgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte“ verfasst, ebd. S. 79–82.
- 3) Kunstvermittlung selbst war und ist bis heute kaum ein Interessengegenstand der Kunstgeschichte. Irene Below war eine der ersten Kunsthistorikerinnen, die sich mit dem Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Vermittlung befasste, vgl. Irene Below (Hrsg.): *Kunstwissenschaft und Kunstvermittlung*, Gießen 1975. Kunstvermittlung war für Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat immer auch von besonderer Relevanz.
- 4) Dies ist eine Zusammenfassung der Beschreibung des Zustands des Fachs Kunstgeschichte Mitte der 1960er Jahren in Wien, die Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat im Rückblick auf ihren eigenen Werdegang gibt. Vgl. Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat: „Etappen kritischer Kunstgeschichte nach 1968. Eine Wiener Perspektive“, in: *Kontext und Form. Kritische Kunstgeschichten seit 1968*, hrsg. v. C. Behrmann und S. Marchal, erscheint im Verlag Walther König, Köln Ende 2026. Ich danke Ivo Hammer für die Zusendung des Manuskripts und Carolin Behrmann für die Angaben zur Veröffentlichung. Die Beschreibung trifft mit Abweichungen und Ausnahmen auch noch den Zustand, in dem ich das Fach an der Universität Tübingen ein paar Jahre später vorfand, als ich 1972/73 mein Studium begann.
- 5) Ich beziehe hier die feministische Kunstgeschichte der ehemaligen DDR ein, auch wenn sie bis zum Mauersturz 1989 von anderen Voraussetzungen ausging – und sich selbst nicht ‚feministisch‘ nannte, aber sehr früh die Effekte gesellschaftlicher Strukturen von Geschlechterrollen auch in der Kunst behandelte. In der DDR war seit ihrer Gründung die Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen selbstverständlich, im Feld der Kunstgeschichte waren angesehene Professorinnen tätig, lange bevor in der BRD, Österreich oder der Schweiz Frauen solche Karrierechancen bekamen. Diese Professorinnen waren von Anfang an Teil des feministischen Netzwerks in der BRD, u.a. Helga Scieurie, Helga Möbius, Hannelore Gärtner, die ins Ausland reisen durften und seit der Marburger Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung 1982 mit Vorträgen beteiligt waren.
- 6) U.a. Verena Krieger: „Das Unsichtbare sichtbar machen, Feministische Pionierin. Zum Tod der Wiener Kunsthistorikerin Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat“, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Wiener Kunsthistorikerin Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Montag, 22. September 2025, S. 12 und Karin Gludowatz, „Nachruf auf Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (1946–2025)“, in: *kritische berichte*, 53, 2025, Nr. 4, S. 120–123, (gekürzte Fassung in: *Texte zur Kunst* 35, 2025, H. 4, Nr. 140). Die Reden anlässlich der von der Familie organisierten Trauerfeier für Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (Abschied von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (10.10.2025)) sind unter dem Link <https://www.ivohammer.at/de/aktuell> zu finden. Darunter auch die Laudatio von Johanna Schwanberg anlässlich der Verleihung des Goldenen Ehrenzeichens des Landes Wien für Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat am 28.6.2024.

- 7) „Etappen kritischer Kunstgeschichte nach 1968. Eine Wiener Perspektive“, wie Anm. 4. Alle im Text folgende Zitate von Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, die nicht anders gekennzeichnet sind, stammen aus diesem Aufsatz.
- 8) Auftraggeberin des Hauses Tugendhat in Brunn von Mies van der Rohe und Lilly Reich. Zum Kampf der Familie um Renovierung und Würdigung des Hauses siehe unter dem Link <https://www.ivohammer.at/de/haus-tugendhat/>, und Ivo Hammer, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat und Wolf Tegethoff: *Haus Tugendhat. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe* (bearbeitete Neuausgabe von 2014), Basel/Berlin/München/Boston 2020.
- 9) Prof. Dr. Ivo Hammer, Kunsthistoriker und Restaurator im Ruhestand, vgl. <https://www.ivohammer.at>.
- 10) Sie wandten sich z.B. 1973/74 institutsintern gegen eine Einladung des Kunsthistorikers Hans Sedlmayr, dessen Werk *Verlust der Mitte* die nationalsozialistische Kennzeichnung der Moderne als „Degeneration“ fortschrieb.
- 11) Die Ableitung der eigenen weiterführenden wissenschaftlichen Fragestellungen aus der Lehre von Otto Pächt ist für mich besonders interessant, als drei Kolleginnen – Maike Christadler, Hilla Frübis und ich, alle drei ehemalige Doktorandinnen bei Konrad Hoffmann an der Universität Tübingen – in unseren Kommentaren zu dessen 2019 online von uns herausgegebenen Schriften die Anschlussfähigkeit für die feministische Kunstgeschichte in seinen methodischen und konzeptuellen Ansätzen herausgearbeitet haben, in: „ZEITLOS: FALSCH“. *Ausgewählte Schriften Konrad Hoffmanns zur kunst- und kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, <https://emono.unibas.ch/emono/catalog/book/57>. Konrad Hoffmann – als einer der wenigen Panofsky- und Warburg-Schüler in Deutschland – repräsentierte damals den methodischen Gegensatz zu Otto Pächt, von mir verkürzt und plakativ hier als Ikonologie versus Formalismus bezeichnet. Feministische Kunstwissenschaftlerinnen stellten Fragen nach den Zusammenhängen zwischen visuellen Kulturen, gesellschaftlichen Kontexten und Geschlechterkonstruktionen und überwand dabei teilweise die Grabenkämpfe der traditionellen Kunstgeschichte.
- 12) Vgl. den Abschnitt „Kunstgeschichte als Kulturwissenschaft“, in: *Etappen kritischer Kunstgeschichte* (wie Anm. 4), wo sie auf die Anregungen eingeht, die sie ab den 1990er Jahren von Fellows des Forschungszentrums Kulturwissenschaften (IFK) in Wien wie Gotthart Wunberg (Gründungsrektor), Horst Wenzel, Ludwig Jäger, Aleida und Jan Assmann, Gertrud Koch u.a. erhielt. Trotz der Anerkennung der Bedeutung der Semiotik für die Kulturwissenschaften, die „davon ausgeht, dass Sprache und Bild unauflöslich miteinander verbunden sind“, ist für Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat klar, dass „beide nicht ineinander übersetzbar sind“. Das IFK (inzwischen in Linz) war vergleichbar mit dem Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, 1981 als Verein gegründet, und dem 1989 gegründeten Kulturwissenschaftlichen Institut Essen (KWI) (an dem ich um 1990 angestellt war). Diese Forschungskollegs waren enorm wichtig für die Entwicklung transdisziplinärer kulturwissenschaftlicher Ansätze in Deutschland und Österreich.
- 13) U.a. Beteiligung an der Gründung des kommunistischen Studentenverbands (KSV), Teilnahme 1971/72 an den Konferenzen des in der BRD 1968 gegründeten Ulmer Vereins und an der Kunsthistorischen Studentenkonferenz (KSK).
- 14) Sie nennt Martin Warnke, Berthold Hinz, Horst Bredekamp, Michael Müller, Franz Verspohl u.a.
- 15) Peter Feist, Helga Möbius, Harald Olbrich, Hannelore Gärtner, Moissej Kagan u.a. Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat schreibt, diese Autor_innen und auch ein marxistischer Historiker wie Frederik Antal seien in der BRD im Gegensatz zu Österreich Tabu oder nicht erhältlich gewesen. Diese Autor_innen waren aber für diejenigen, die sich dafür interessierten, auch in der BRD zugänglich.
- 16) Die Wortwahl lässt vermuten, dass Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat die „Behauptung“, dass „Kunst als Affirmation von Herrschaft“ gelesen werden kann, die sie den Vertretern der kritischen Theorie der Frankfurter Schule zuschreibt, als noch zu verifizieren betrachtete.
- 17) Diese Formulierung weist auf die Frage hin, ob Kunst als Entität und Akteurin gedacht werden kann, oder eher als Konfiguration, in die Widerständigkeiten, Ambivalenzen und Widersprüche der beteiligten Künstler_innen, Auftraggeber_innen, des Kunstmarkts, der Käufer_innen, der Betrachter_innen und der gesamten Gesellschaft eingehen.
- 18) Wien 1975.
- 19) Online verfügbar unter <https://www.ivohammer.at/de/publikationen>.
- 20) Dr. Ivo Hammer wurde zum leitenden Chefrestaurator für Wandmalerei am österreichischen Bundesdenkmalamt berufen.
- 21) Zunächst an der Lehrkanzel für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte, ein Jahr später an der Lehrkanzel für Kunstgeschichte, an die Peter Gorsen 1976 als Professor berufen wurde, laut Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat „ein Glücksfall“. Sie habilitierte sich mit *Studien der Geschlechterbeziehungen in der Kunst* kumulativ 1993 an der Universität Oldenburg und 1994 an der Universität Wien, an der sie seit 1992 auch lehrte. Sie war 1996/97 Gastprofessorin an der Universität Frankfurt, lehnte einen Ruf dorthin aus beamtenrechtlichen Gründen ab, sie lehrte weiter an der Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien.
- 22) Griselda Pollock und Roszika Parker werden nicht erwähnt. Als Pionierinnen in Deutschland werden Irene Below und Renate Berger genannt.
- 23) Erwähnt werden VALIE EXPORT, Friderike Pezold, Birgit Jürgenssen, Renate Bertlmann oder Gerda Fassel. Anmerkung von mir: Künstlerinnen und Filmemacherinnen waren auch mehrheitlich an der

zweibändigen Publikation *Frauen in der Kunst*, die 1980 von Gisind Nabakowski, Helke Sander und Peter Gorsen in der edition suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. herausgegeben worden war, beteiligt. Kunst-historikerinnen sucht man in dieser ersten zu diesem Thema in der BRD veröffentlichten Kompilation noch vergeblich.

24) Die Veranstalterinnen waren Cordula Bischoff, Brigitte Dinger, Irene Ewinkel, Ulla Merle.

25) Vortragende waren u.a. Irene Below, Theresa Georgen, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Irene Nierhaus, Claudia Gabriel Philip, Helga Scieurie, Ellen Spickernagel, Silke Wenk und ich selbst.

26) In Zürich 1984 (leider ohne anschließende Publikation), Wien 1986, Berlin 1988, Lehnin 1989 (von DDR-Kunsthistorikerinnen direkt nach dem Mauersturz organisiert), Hamburg 1991, Tübingen 1996, Trier 1995 und 1996, Berlin 2002 und Lausanne 2005.

27) Die Tagungen in Lehnin und Lausanne werden in Überblicksdarstellungen meist nicht erwähnt. Deshalb seien hier die Publikationen genannt: *Geschichte – Geschlecht – Wirklichkeit: 1. Kunstwissenschaftlerinnen-Tagung der Sektion Kunstwissenschaft des VBK- DDR*, Dezember 1989,

gekürztes Protokoll, Redaktion Ada Raev und Gudrun Urbaniak 1991 und *Inscriptions / Transgressions. Kunstgeschichte und Gender Studies*, Akten der Jahrestagung des VKKS 2005, hrsg. v. Kornelia Imesch, Jennifer John, Daniela Mondini, Sigrid Schade und Nicole Schweizer, Bern 2007. Vgl. dazu auch Sigrid Adorf, zu der Tagung *Inscriptions / Transgressions. Kunstgeschichte und Gender Studies*, Lausanne, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts (14.–15.10.2005) in: *FKW//Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur*, 41, 2006, S. 96–100.

28) Zusammen mit Ilsebill Barta, Zita Breu, Ulrike Jenni, Irene Nierhaus und Judith Schöbel, die auch den Tagungsband herausgegeben haben, *Frauen.Bilder.Männer.Mythen*, Berlin 1987. Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat schreibt, dass sie ab dieser Zeit „regelmäßig Seminare und Vorlesungen zu feministischen Themen“ angeboten habe. Und sie beschreibt sich als Teil des Netzwerks: „So wurde ich unbeabsichtigt Teil einer Bewegung, die ich dann selbst mitgestaltete.“

29) Inzwischen erforscht eine jüngere Kunsthistorikerinnen-Generation die beruflichen Wege, Ein- und Ausschlüsse von Kunsthistorikerinnen in die Disziplin. Siehe Lee Chichester und Brigitte Sölch (Hrsg.): *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910–1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken, Band 1*, Berlin 2021 und *Kunsthistorikerinnen im 20. Jahrhundert: Institutionen, Strukturen, Handlungsräume*, Band 2, hrsg. v. K. Lee Chichester, Annette Dorgerloh, Brigitte Sölch, Jo Ziebritzki, Berlin 2025.

30) Vgl. Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, Silke Wenk (Hrsg.) unter Mitarbeit von Maike Christadler und Sigrid Philipps: *Mythen von Autorschaft und Weiblichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert*, Marburg 1997, Vorwort, S. 7ff.

31) Bis auf den Beitrag für Lehnin sind diese nicht in den Tagungsbänden abgedruckt.

32) Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat zitiert aus dem Band der Marburger Tagung „die Infragestellung einer Wissenschaftlichkeit, mit der wir uns nicht mehr identifizieren können und wollen.“ In: *FrauenKunstGeschichte. Zur Korrektur des herrschenden Blicks*, hrsg. von Cordula Bischoff, Brigitte Dinger u. a., Gießen 1984, S. 8. Ihr eigener Vortrag „Erotik und Inquisition. Zum Garten der Lüste von Hieronymus Bosch“ erschien nicht im Tagungsband, sondern in: Renate Berger, Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat (Hrsg.): *Der Garten der Lüste. Zur Deutung des Erotischen und Sexuellen bei Künstlern und ihren Interpreten*, Köln 1985, S.10–47.

33) Vgl. dazu meine Rezension zur Tagung in Zürich: „Blickwünsche – eine Nachschrift“, in: *kritische berichte*, 1984, Nr. 4, S. 81–88.

34) Die vier Schwerpunkte der 4. Kunsthistorikerinnen-Tagung 1988 in Berlin, die vom eigens gegründeten Lu-Märten Verein zur Förderung von Frauenforschung in Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften organisiert wurde, stellten zur Diskussion, wie die Kunstgeschichte und ihre Institutionen über historische Geschlechterkonstruktionen ihre eigenen Schwerpunkte und Wertungen herstell(e): als Spiegelungsmuster zwischen Künstler und Kunsthistoriker, in der Zuweisung der Kunstvermittlung als Frauenarbeit, in Hierarchien zwischen Kunstgattungen und Medien, sowie in der ästhetischen Organisation von Macht, Sexualität und Gewalt. Vgl. Ines Lindner, Sigrid Schade, Silke Wenk, Gabriele Werner (Hrsg.): *Blick-Wechsel. Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 1989.

35) Johanna Schwanberg in ihrer Trauerrede 2025 (wie Anm. 6)

36) Köln, Weimar, Wien 2009. Vgl. auch die Rezension von Maike Christadler in: *FKW// Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur*, 50, 2010, S. 85–89.

37) Dass Repräsentationen z.B. von Frauen als „Machtfiguren“ wie in Allegorien – zumal im öffentlichen Raum –, keineswegs deren tatsächliche Bedeutung in gesellschaftlichen oder politischen Hierarchien bedeuten müssen, ist ein anderer Schwerpunkt feministischer Forschung geworden. Vgl. Silke Wenk: *Versteinerte Weiblichkeit. Studien zur Allegorie und ihrem Status in der Skulptur der Moderne*, Berlin 1994.

38) Vgl. Sigrid Schade, Silke Wenk: „Strategien des ‚Zu-Sehen-Gebens‘: Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst- und Kunstgeschichte“, in: Hadumod Bussmann, Renate Hof (Hrsg.): *Genus. Geschlechterforschung / Gender Studies in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. Ein Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2005, S.154–184. Das Konzept haben wir wieder aufgegriffen in: Sigrid Schade, Silke Wenk: *Studien zur visuellen Kultur. Einführung in ein transdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld*, Bielefeld 2011, in dem wir die unsere Fragen folgendermaßen zusammenfassen: „Wo wird wem was und wie zu sehen

gegeben, oder wo ist wem was und wie unsichtbar gemacht.“ Ebd. S. 53.

39) Etwa Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat: „Erotik und Geschlechterdifferenz, Aspekte zur Aktmalerei Tizians“, in: Daniela Erlach, Markus Reiseleitner u.a. (Hrsg.): *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der frühen Neuzeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, S.367–446, dazu auch Mechthild Fend, Marianne Koos (Hrsg.): *Männlichkeit im Blick. Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, Köln 2004; Marianne Koos: *Bildnisse des Begehrens. Das lyrische Männerporträt in der venezianischen Malerei des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts – Giorgione, Tizian und ihr Umkreis*, Berlin und Emsdetten 2006.

40) In: Anja Zimmermann (Hrsg.): *Kunstgeschichte und Gender. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2006. Ursprünglich veröffentlicht in: Detlef Hoffmann (Hrsg.): *Der nackte Mensch*, Marburg 1989, gleichzeitig Nr. 17/1989 der *kritischen berichte*, S. 78–99. Dazu mein Kommentar: „Körper- und Körpertheorien in der Kunstgeschichte“, in: Zimmermann, S. 61–72.

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