

The New Climate 1969–72

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The Arts Council's 1972 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, *The New Art*, was the first museum survey of new art practices by British artists. Anne Seymour, the exhibition organiser, describes how although many of them already had an international reputation, they were little known at home, and so the situation was 'crying out for attention'.¹ *The New Art* occurred at the same time as Documenta 5 in Kassel, and a number of artists were included in both – Art & Language for example, showed *Index 1972* in Documenta and a second version, *Index 2*, in *The New Art*. British artists – Keith Arnatt, Art & Language, Barry Flanagan, John Latham, Richard Long and Bruce McLean, to name a few – were included in group exhibitions in museums in Europe and New York: for instance, *Op Losse Schroeven* 1969 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle, Bern also 1969; *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* at the Galleria Civica D'Arte Moderna, Turin 1970, and *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* 1970 at the New York Cultural Center, just before *Information*, MOMA's broader exhibition of new practices. And so, by the time 'the new art' had received official backing it was part of the territory of recognisable art practices; the paradigm shift had already occurred during the previous few years in Britain, Europe and the USA.

The role played by art magazines in the distribution of information and ideas, as well as the circulation of photographs of new work, cannot be underestimated. *Studio International* was key. It presented new practices and ideas, helped establish many

¹ Anne Seymour, 'Introduction', *The New Art*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London 1972, p.5

artists' reputations and had a reach that extended beyond the UK. In providing a platform for artists, the magazine became as significant a venue as the gallery or museum. This was particularly notable with conceptual art practices, with work made specifically for distribution through publication. The magazine was also a vehicle for exhibition catalogues, and this multiple and innovative use made it a collaborator with artists, as well as fulfilling its conventional role of providing critical commentary. The assistant editor Charles Harrison taught part-time at St Martins, and the magazine commissioned artists' pages, which could be used as the artist wished. Gilbert & George's 'magazine sculpture' formed part of their contribution in May 1970.² The double-page spread featured a black-and-white portrait photograph of George on the left, Gilbert on the right, with paper cut-outs of letters spelling 'George the cunt' and 'Gilbert the shit' pinned to their respective clothing.³ The offending words were crudely censored deliberately by editor Peter Townsend, and the magazine sculpture had been first shown at Robert Fraser Gallery in 1969 for just half an hour to avoid the censor.⁴

International networks

Billed retrospectively as Germany's first conceptual art exhibition,⁵ the very brief show *19:45-21:55 September 9 1967*, organised by Paul Maenz in Frankfurt, was an important precursor to the establishment of artistic networks and brought together

² Gilbert & George, *Studio International*, vol.197 no.922, May 1970, pp.218-21.

³ Gilbert & George, *ibid.*, pp.220-1.

⁴ Gilbert & George, invitation sent to Harrison (TGA 20101/25). Townsend also received a phone call to alert him to attend.

⁵ Paul Maenz, letter to Georg Jappe on Galerie Loehr notepaper, 20 October 1969. Maenz's event in September 1967 was held in Dorothea Loehr's property near Frankfurt, from where she ran a gallery. The letter is in the catalogue, 7 September 1967, collection of the author.

artists from Holland, the UK and Germany.⁶ Both Barry Flanagan and Richard Long sent handwritten instructions for their contributions. Also included was Konrad Fischer, who used his mother's name, Lueg. The following month he opened Konrad Fischer gallery in Dusseldorf with the first exhibition of Carl Andre in Europe. Fischer's gallery hosted the first solo exhibitions of a roster of conceptual artists, including Richard Long, Hanne Darboven, On Kawara and Lawrence Weiner, as well as Sol LeWitt's first solo show in Europe. Fischer also organised *Prospect*, a series of exhibitions that started in 1968 in the Kuntshalle Düsseldorf, where international galleries showed new and experimental art practices for a week.⁷ Nigel Greenwood, who had started showing work from his home in Chelsea, presented Keith Milow and John Walker. When Harrison reviewed *Prospect 68* he remarked 'how very cosmopolitan [in comparison with the UK] the continental galleries have become and how much is shown by American artists, that is unlikely to be shown in London for some time, particularly Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Walter De Maria et al.'⁸ He was impressed with Fischer, remarking on his 'small but extremely enterprising Düsseldorf gallery where the young English sculptor Richard Long staged a strange and poetic first one man show.'

Maenz and Fischer were crucial in helping to locate a market and critical following for conceptual art, and were part of the growing network of key galleries. Maenz opened his gallery in Cologne in January 1970. In the preceding months he had

⁶ Paul Maenz had set up the Kineticism Press in 1966 in New York with Willoughby Sharp, artist and exhibition organiser who founded and edited *Avalanche* magazine with Liza Bear. For more information on this exhibition see: Suzaan Boettger, 'The Lost Contingent: Paul Maenz's Prophetic 1967 Event and the Ambiguities of Historical Priority', *Art Journal*, vol.62 no.1, Spring 2003, pp.33-47.

⁷ *Prospect* was held in Düsseldorf in 1968, 1969, 1971, 1973 and 1976.

⁸ Charles Harrison, Düsseldorf Commentary *Studio International* November 1968, vol.176 no.905, p.204.

approached a range of artists, including Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, John Latham, Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, for advice on strategies.⁹ Some other interconnected dealers were Yvon Lambert in Paris, Wide White Space in Antwerp (both founded in 1966), Art & Project in Amsterdam (1968), Sperone in Turin (1964), Seth Siegelau as ‘curator at large’¹⁰ (he operated without a gallery space from 1966), Dwan and Paula Cooper galleries in New York (1965 and 1968 respectively) and Eugenia Butler in Los Angeles (1968). Art & Project gallery, directed by Adriaan van Ravensteijn and Geert van Beijeren, published the *Art & Project Bulletin*, which combined the exhibition announcement and catalogue for each exhibition. The *Bulletin*’s mail-out demonstrated the network of artists, galleries and others involved in the emerging practices, which was utilised by Jan Dibbets when he requested the recipients of the *Bulletin* participate in the production of his exhibition by mailing their copy back to the gallery. The mail-out was configured as four maps: of Amsterdam, Benelux, Europe and the world. It designated the gallery’s circulation and noted the location of the responses, the numbered list of names corresponding to their numbered copy of the bulletin. The work was later re-situated in Siegelau’s exhibition in *Studio International* in July/August 1970.

The key London galleries in the international network – Nicholas Logsdail’s Lisson Gallery (opened in 1967), Nigel Greenwood Inc, (1968) and Jack Wendler Gallery (1971) – were slightly behind Europe and the US in foregrounding the new practices. Wendler had previously collaborated with Siegelau in 1968 in the publication of *The*

⁹ Correspondence files, Series 1, Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, Getty Archives and Special collections, J. Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles Ca., Paul Maenz Gallery papers, **Getty**.

¹⁰ Seth Siegelau, Contributor’s notes, *Studio International*, vol.178, December 1969, p.202.

Xerox Book, for which seven artists were commissioned to make art for the page.¹¹

Wendler opened the gallery with an exhibition of Lawrence Weiner and continued to show conceptual artists from the US and Europe.

In 1969 Siegelaub presented *One Month*, an exhibition that existed solely as a publication. He allocated thirty-one artists a specific date in March 1969 and asked each to submit publishable work for their date. The exhibition was circulated through his mailing list, was available in specialist art bookshops and was advertised for purchase a year later in *Studio International*. Four British artists were included: Art & Language (listed individually as Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin), Barry Flanagan and Richard Long. Each responded tautologically in ways that reflected on the exhibition situation. For instance, Atkinson had received 3 March and Baldwin 4 March. Atkinson's statement reads: 'Both Michael Baldwin and myself accept the day we have each been allocated. The work will be sent to you within the next two weeks. It will comprise three or four sheets of typewritten "work" from each of us.'

Baldwin's identical statement substitutes Atkinson's name instead of his. The Art & Language contribution to Siegelaub's exhibition is paradigmatic of conceptual art.

The work is an idea to come, in three or four sheets, within the next two weeks, which never in fact arrived. It suggests a relationship with time pending, of immanence, and plays mind games with perception. It addresses how we think about the evolution of ideas from a terse promise with specific parameters to possible **realisation**. Their contribution resonates particularly with the idea of a work's conception, instigation, enactment and **realisation**. Flanagan's response was to annotate Siegelaub's instructions. Long filled his 24 hours, from midnight of 20th/21st, with a factual

¹¹ *Xerox Book*, Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris Lawrence Weiner, offset litho, published by Seth Siegelaub and Jack Wendler, New York 1968.

description of four photographs (not reproduced on the page) that document the tide level of the River Avon. There was only one woman, Christine Kozlov, among the 31 artist – an imbalance that is apparent again and again in exhibitions of conceptual art, in New York and in Europe.

Siegelaub's resourceful application of distribution networks helped foreground conceptual art practices. Occurring simultaneously with his *July/August* exhibition in *Studio International* (pp. XX) was *Idea Structures*, organised by Harrison, at Camden Arts Centre, London, and which showed work by Arnatt, Victor Burgin, Ed Herring, Joseph Kosuth, Atkinson, Baldwin, Bainbridge & Hurrell.¹² Arnatt's *Is it possible for me to do nothing as my contribution to this exhibition?*, produced in the exhibition catalogue, might appear whimsical as well as provocative. He subtly references the contemporaneous preoccupation with definitions and wordplay, presenting an answer to his question via the title's rhetorical proposition. It is a double negative and exposes the ambiguity of artistic assertions and decision-making processes. His work *Countdown*, a digital counter on the wall that clicked away the seconds of the exhibition's duration: 2188800-0000000, was described by Lucy Lippard in an unpublished review for *Studio International* as 'a pretty simple idea that has a mesmerizing physical effect, a terrifying associational effect, and a dramatic ending'.¹³ The duration of the exhibition could be sold in one-second units, through a sliding scale of value, the first and last unit being 'incredibly expensive'.¹⁴ Arnatt specified that 'The sale of "time" is to be restricted to "present or future time". Past time would be considered "lost" and therefore unsaleable. The gallery would

¹² *Studio International*, vol.180, July/August1970, as announced inside back cover, (24 June – 19 July 1970).

¹³ Lucy Lippard Papers, Folder 3, Box 9, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.

¹⁴ Keith Arnatt card instructions, 'An exhibition proposal given to Barry Flanagan', 1971. Barry Flanagan archive, (JBF/7/12.1), London.

determine the cost per unit. Upon purchase of “exhibition time”, the buyer will receive a date- and time-stamped contract with photograph(s) of the appropriate digital counter number(s).¹⁵ This work was exhibited in Arnatt’s solo exhibition in Art & Project, Amsterdam, in 1970 and also featured in *The British Avant Garde* at the New York Cultural Center in 1971.

The catalogue for *Idea Structures* was designed by Malcolm Lauder, also the designer for *Studio International*. Its neat unassuming elegance gives the exhibition a refined dignity. This importance of catalogue design with artist input was a natural consequence of artist-designed publications, as well as of artwork made specifically for the page. Logsdail responded to this, taking care with the design and format of Lisson Gallery catalogues and announcements. *Wall Show*, which opened on 31 December 1970, reversed the publication-as-exhibition back into site specificity with a twist, treating the architecture of the space as a series of pages.¹⁶ The exhibition has become synonymous with the catalogue publication in which the artists present their proposals for the wall as drawings and/or statements. There were 20 artists: Lawrence Weiner and Sol LeWitt from New York; Blinky Palermo and Klaus Rinke from Germany, the rest from the UK. Sue Arrowsmith was the only woman included, and was the only woman in *The British Avant Garde* and *Art as Idea from England*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, both organised by Harrison and opening in May 1971. For *Wall Show*, Arrowsmith proposed a series of reversals involving a white frame being painted black. The exhibition was the first occasion a LeWitt wall drawing was shown in the UK, and James Faure Walker followed the instructions for its realisation. Walker’s statement to the catalogue (in place of LeWitt’s, which had not arrived ‘in

¹⁵ Keith Arnatt four instruction cards, Barry Flanagan archive, (JBF/7/12.1), London.

¹⁶ *Wall Show*, 31 December 1970 – 30 January 1971

time for publication’) describes his mystification regarding the gossip about idea art, and explains that the drawing was not his idea, he had simply followed instructions to make the drawing.¹⁷ The separation between the artist’s conception of the drawing and the transferred actions required to make it are at the core of much of the work in the exhibition, and characterise much conceptual art. Bob Law’s *I to 1,000,000 – Drawing – Art for All* 1970 present his instructions for participation and a set of drawing machine construction plans. He invited the gallery goer to ‘join in on a number piece [...] executed by anyone who wished to participate. The piece will be on a continuous cartridge paper roll 5 FT wide [...] numbers in felt tipped pen, any colours.’ He estimated the work ‘will take a year to complete’ and be taken up by galleries. His extravagant conclusion was that the ‘the world over should be invited to take the work.’¹⁸ The project was a conceptually driven artist-led participation piece concerned with a shared exchange of activity, and was re-installed at the Tate Gallery’s *Seven Exhibitions* in 1972.

In May 1971 *The British Avant Garde* opened in the NYCC. The venue was directed by Donald Karshan, who had also been responsible for *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, which had opened the previous summer, although Karshan’s role was as figurehead, the show being organised by Ian Burn and Joseph Kosuth. *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* showed thirty-one artists who were engaging in conceptual art practices and included Art & Language, listed by name. When Harrison was in New York during this exhibition, Kosuth introduced him to Karshan, who was looking for new ideas for shows. He offered Harrison the possibility of showcasing British artists engaged in new art practices. The exhibition was a joint

¹⁷ James Faure Walker, *Wall Show*, Lisson Gallery, London 1971, non-pag.

¹⁸ Bob Law, *Wall Show*.

venture with *Studio International*, an issue of the magazine served as its catalogue as well as a separate catalogue publication as with the July/August 1970 summer exhibition issue. The exhibition included Bruce McLean's *King For a Day and 999 other pieces/works/things etc. proposal for a retrospective at the Tate, Hayward or Whitechapel Galleries* 1970, as well as David Tremlett's *Tap piece* [1970], a sound work based on a dance collaboration. The instructions were for the loop 'to be repeated according to the demands of whoever controls the situation in which the work is presented'.¹⁹ The recommended duration was three and a half hours. Gilbert & George's film *The nature of our looking* was also included. In a review of *The British Avant Garde* for *The New York Times*, Peter Schjeldahl described Gilbert & George as 'the most unheard of thing Harrison brought with him – the life sculpture of two gentle young artist-poets'. Bored by repetitions of 'the end of art as we know it', he welcomed the opportunity to see the new British art. Most of the artists were unknown in New York, with the exception of Flanagan and Long, who he remarked were not conceptual artists.²⁰

The British Avant Garde provided the basis for *The New Art* at the Hayward Gallery, London, and included many of the same artists.²¹ Six months previously the Tate Gallery had put on the quickly organised show *Seven Exhibitions*, in February 1972, also clearly influenced by *Studio International*. Michael Compton, the gallery keeper responsible for curating it, wanted to show the 'scope of the crystallising Conceptual and performance art'.²² The seven artists were given sequential solo exhibitions in the

¹⁹ David Tremlett, 'British Avant Garde', *Studio International*, 1971, pp.12-13.

²⁰ Peter Schjeldahl, *New York Times*, 27 June 1971. Charles Harrison papers (1950-79), (TGA 839/1/5/1/19).

²¹ In addition to the artists in *The British Avant Garde* were Keith Milow, Michael Craig-Martin, John Stezaker and John Hilliard.

²² Email from Michael Compton to the author, March 2009.

time slot vacated by the postponement of a solo exhibition of the abstract painter Robyn Denny. The gallery assistants, who included Compton and Richard Morphet, had a policy of keeping files on young artists,²³ which formed the basis of the project and enabled Compton to persuade the director, Norman Reid, of its relevance. The introductory note for the exhibition observes that information provided by the artists was there to document or to ‘amplify’ the presentation. The gallery did not interpret this material, observing ‘it is no new thing for an artist to be concerned with his materials, with landscape, people, philosophy, politics or ethics, with perception, with the relationship of the viewer to the work of art and with the history, role and definition of art itself’.²⁴ These artists were building on twentieth-century radical engagement with materials by introducing a self-critical reflection on their usage, as well as considering the definition of ‘artist’ and what it is to make art. The seven artists included were Keith Arnatt, Michael Craig-Martin, Bob Law, Joseph Beuys, Hamish Fulton, Bruce McLean and David Tremlett, five of who had already been invited to participate in *The New Art*. Arnatt’s exhibition addressed the processes involved in decision-making and the paradoxes of being an artist, for instance in *I have decided to visit the Tate Gallery next Friday* 1971, where he raises a number of conundrums regarding time and intention.²⁵ However, his more contentious work comprised the gallery staff enrolment cards, including their identity photographs.²⁶ This was removed from the exhibition because of complaints from security staff over exposure of records without permission. For *The New Art* a few month’s later, Arnatt developed this idea with *An Institutional Fact* 1972 – a sequence of photographs of all

²³ *Seven Exhibitions*, Tate Gallery, 23 February – 23 March 1972, Tate Public Records, London.

²⁴ *Seven Exhibitions* introductory note, Tate exhibition files 1972.

²⁵ Arnatt’s work was first sited as magazine art in *Studio International*, May 1971, vol.181 no.933, and the accompanying exhibition publication for *The British Avant Garde* exhibition, *Studio International*, pp.8-9.

²⁶ This work was installed as a replacement for *Countdown*, which could not be displayed because of national power strikes.

the warders working at the Hayward Gallery, photographed in their uniform and standing in front of the same exterior wall of the gallery.

Exposing institutional infrastructure is often contentious. Art & Language sought to achieve this with *Index*, presented at Documenta 5. Organised by Harald Szeemann, with a section managed by Fischer, it is often regarded as marking the end of fluidity and exchange, as the moment when conceptual art entered the cultural milieu of critical discourse and became acceptable. It seems appropriate to conclude with the observation made to situation the index devised to denote the connections (or not) of their discussions: 'Indexing problems are quite interesting. They are coincident with the difficulties encountered in mapping the space in which our conversation takes place.'²⁷

²⁷ Art & Language, memorandum Documenta 5, 1972.