

“Seeing, of Course, Is also an Art”:  
Writing-Reading  
as an Aesthetic Labor of Mediation—  
on Hanne Darboven’s Work with Writing

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“A man always writes absolutely well whenever he writes in his own manner”: with these words, Hanne Darboven quotes Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, a mathematician and professor of experimental physics, in a “Happy New Telegram” addressed to Roy Colmer, a photographer and a close friend of Darboven’s; the quotation recurs in fragmentary form in *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* (Cultural History 1880–1983) (1980–1983; pp. 230ff.).<sup>1</sup> Lichtenberg formulated the sentence in an aphorism that explicitly denounces an artificial, imitative manner of writing, as well as mere learning—that is, the appropriation of pure factual knowledge. In a sorrowful but nonetheless critical tone, he observes that “we . . . are not compelled to become individua [sic] in thought.”<sup>2</sup> In his understanding, an adequate self-education becomes possible through the interconnection between writing, thought, and existential experience. For it is not a question of thinking “what the ancients thought, but instead of thinking the way they thought.” Accordingly, one writes well when “he writes (to) *himself*” (“wenn er *sich* schreibt”),<sup>3</sup> that is to say, when he does not copy an established author or style or employ a recognized schema.

Manifestly, Hanne Darboven appropriated Lichtenberg’s observation in a variety of ways. Her writing certainly does not correspond to any naïve or unmediated form of expression, nor does it follow the polarity between the natural and the artificial, as is the case for Lichtenberg, who writes: “Why does the connoisseur of beauty delight so often in the Lower Saxon peasant, with his Plattdeutsch naïveté, but not in the young theologian, with his gloomy voice, who wants to lead us *through the visible darkness to Golgotha, where we can gaze upon Christ on the cross.*”<sup>4</sup>

Hanne Darboven worked out a suitable writing praxis which, as I will show below, can be defined as individuation in thought, and which makes becoming as a dimension of being<sup>5</sup> recognizable, while at the same time calling into question the representability of objective reality. In Darboven’s work, writing as an activity, as autobiographical writing, and as a labor of the presentation of (cultural) history become inseparable.<sup>6</sup> Writing becomes a mode of self-reflection and of self-education in Lichtenberg’s sense: “I rewrote by hand in order to be mediated myself by the mediated experience.”<sup>7</sup>

## Conceptions of Communication and Information

Darboven shaped her artistic praxis of writing in relation to two central questions and problematizations of Minimalism and Conceptual Art. In the “wake of Minimalism, [she sought] a form . . . that would be neither painting nor sculpture, and in which her art would speak a public language.”<sup>8</sup> Fundamental to her in the search was writing and the “theoretical art”<sup>9</sup> she proclaimed Conceptual Art to be. In the context of these debates and problematizations, she developed an artistic praxis<sup>10</sup> that would join production and presentation and interlock the sequentality of writing with the spatial structure of visual media, thereby provoking new modes of seeing and reading both image and text.<sup>11</sup>

In her contribution to the exhibition *Konzeption–Conception*, she characterizes her technique of “notation” (fig. 1), whose potential and innovativeness for art becomes evident in the context of the catalogue. For Conceptual Art not only accorded primacy to the design, the concept, in relation to its execution; it enacted “a transformation of art, and hence of the concept



Fig. 1  
Contribution by Hanne Darboven for the exhibition *Konzeption – Conception*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, 1969

of art.”<sup>12</sup> The exhibition’s subtitle draws attention to the radicality of that transformation: *Dokumentation einer heutigen Kunstrichtung: documentation of a today’s art tendency*. In this context, “documentation” does not mean the illustration of the exhibition in the form of installation views of the exhibited works; instead, it is conveyed through reproductions of concepts, sketches, diagrams, and photographs.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, it becomes clear: Conceptual Art is based not on the sensuous appearance of works, but is far more a question of the methodological possibilities of its concepts. Accordingly, these designs are not—as for example in Land Art—“still oriented formally toward objects that are to be defined,”<sup>14</sup> toward things, but instead toward procedures and processes of communication, documentation, and information.

Until the late 1960s, Darboven refined this interest in the form of graphic-geometric number constructions; beginning in the following decade, she turned toward concrete (cultural) historical themes, thereby accommodating her pressing need for communication. In a letter addressed to her parents,<sup>15</sup> she still expressed uncertainty concerning this intention. By linking her calendar notations to the transcription of texts, it became possible to turn toward cultural-historical, historical, and political themes, yet without abandoning the “independency”<sup>16</sup> of art, which she regarded as a necessity, and which must be delimited decidedly from any depicted or representational function.<sup>17</sup>

Darboven is an enlightener whose “aim is enlightenment,” according to Ernst Busche. She has “us . . . sitting detention mercilessly in her upper-middle-class village school” because she believes “in enlightenment, in reason, in knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> This characterization—which seems common for the reception of her work during the 1980s—associates her encyclopedic approach to writing with punitive labor. Implicitly, the desire for knowledge, the conviction and trust in enlightenment and reason, is suspect-



Fig. 2  
Page with U-waves from: *Hanne Darboven: Information*  
(Milan: Flash Art Edizioni, 1973), n.p.

ed of being an anachronistic attitude, one that is hostile to pleasure. For some time now, certainly, any notion of the Enlightenment as “a belief in the autonomous subject of knowledge or of history, the search for the ideal society, for the idea of freedom,” along with any “identification of the Enlightenment and the theory of progress”<sup>19</sup> has been regarded as a “disqualifying simplification”<sup>20</sup> in contemporary criticism. Already during the mid-1980s, Michel Foucault revised the conventional image of the Enlightenment, characterizing it in his confrontation with Immanuel Kant’s little text “What Is Enlightenment?”<sup>21</sup> as inaugurating a modern attitude that formulates the demand of reflecting on “today”: “It is in the reflection on ‘today’ as difference in history and as motive for a particular

philosophical task” that Foucault regards as the “novelty” of Kant’s text, as a “point of departure: the outline of what one might call the attitude of modernity.”<sup>22</sup> Like Baudelaire, Foucault conceives of modernity not only as a “relation to the present,” but also as the “mode of a relationship that has to be established with oneself. The deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism. To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as [the] object of a complex and difficult elaboration.”<sup>23</sup>

Darboven’s writing, which she practiced in a disciplined way to the rhythm of an eight-hour day, can be regarded as an “attitude of modernity” whose inception is traceable to the Enlightenment. The repeatedly asserted “enormous expenditure and self-will”<sup>24</sup> of her labor of writing suggests not (conven-

tional or established) notions of the creative process, but rather processes of appropriation and reflection that are tied to a rigorous self-education. This labor/activity of writing<sup>25</sup> recapitulates the modern claim of the Enlightenment under the conditions of a “crisis of the possibility of (universal) representation.”<sup>26</sup> As a temporal index, the word “today,” which recurs in many of Darboven’s works, can be read as a vanitas emblem, as referring to the respective “today” of the beholder and as marking the time of writing as absent. In this sense, Darboven’s visualization praxis poses the unheard-of challenge of depicting the reality and liveliness of a process only in order to simultaneously dismantle it. Accordingly, her writing activity conveys itself as de-representation. Fundamental in this context are the Constructivist drawings and constructions produced in New York, which Darboven ultimately realized as number systems and which she transferred into a systematic, seemingly endless activity consisting of the calculation of the checksums of dates, that is to say “daily computations,” which are presented in the form of columns of numbers, boxes, word-numbers, and U-waves (figs. 2 and 3). These graphic formal inventions were constitutive for the transformation of the sequential, successive form of the text into a spatiotemporal juxtaposition.

### The Becoming Space-Time of the Text

In her search for a new mode of presentation that would be neither painting nor sculpture, Darboven not only drew on visual genres and their characteristics, but also reflected on practices of the presentation of image and text (and in this respect, her praxis corresponded to an analytical art that would integrate theory, as demanded by Conceptual Art).<sup>27</sup> She invokes transformations of the image in the history of art, upon which she reflects in relation to space, time, and writing. Fundamental in this context is *El Lissitzky [Kunst und Pangeometrie]* (El Lissitzky [Art and Pangeometry]) (fig. 4). Printed on the cover of the catalogue that appeared in conjunction with the exhibition of 1973 are statements by Lissitzky from the texts *1924 – √ – + ∞ = Nasci* (1924)<sup>28</sup> and *A. and Pangeometry* (1925).<sup>29</sup> The text *A. and Pangeometry* is central to Lissitzky’s theory, which attempts to transfer the abstract spiritual utopia of Suprematism “into the concrete utopia of an emancipatory transformation of social and material reality using the resources of artistic perception and spatial organization,”<sup>30</sup> and which corresponds to Darboven’s interrogation of the societal function of art.

Darboven appropriates Lissitzky’s motto “Seeing, of course, is also an art,” with which he prefaced the essay *A. and Pangeometry*.<sup>31</sup> She positions her artistic production in this tradition. With statements such as “Every form is the frozen image of the instant of a process. The work, then, is a station of becoming, not a frozen goal”<sup>32</sup> and: “We acknowledge works that contain the system, but a system that becomes self-aware not prior to, but through the work,”<sup>33</sup> Darboven reflects upon her understanding of the work of art as one that is implicitly processual, referring to the work as a momentary figuration, claiming that her system of date calculations has emerged from the work itself.

In *El Lissitzky [Kunst und Pangeometrie]*, she joins two possibilities for presenting time that are mutually exclusive in any conventional sense: the dates are registered in a chronological, consecutive tabular form and at the same time in reduced fashion in a nonlinear juxtaposition of checksums and tables of numbers, thereby asserting their simultaneity (fig. 5). Her drawings convert form into content, so that time is not simply indicated by Darboven, but instead is registered in a performative fashion.

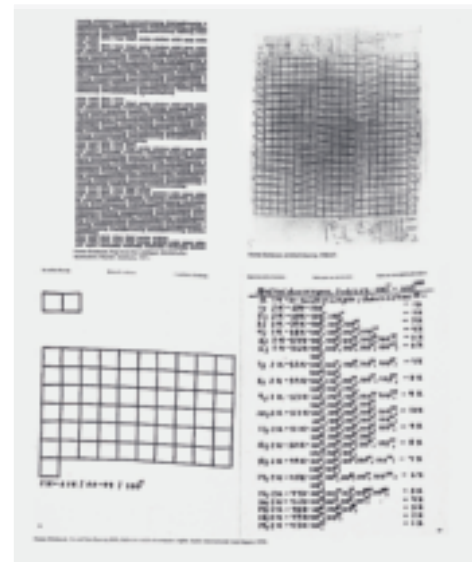


Fig. 3  
Compilation of Hanne Darboven’s techniques of graphic presentation. From Lucy Lippard, “Hanne Darboven: Deep in Numbers,” *Artforum* 12 (October 1973), pp. 35–39, here p. 38.

Various historical eras are evoked through textual citations and—corresponding with the individual framed paginated sheets—joined together in a linear succession. A spatial simultaneity is evoked by means of the tabular hanging of the frames. This facilitates a variety of reading directions, while also

making possible connections between frames and even provoking these through graphic similarities.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Darboven's labor/activity of writing establishes a space that prescribes no specific reading direction, but instead presents itself as a shapable, heterogeneous space that is open to a variety of modes of perception, one that renounces the authoritarian character of a predetermined interpretation.

Methodologically inherent to this repetitive, constellation-style textual procedure is the possibility of generating a meaning beyond the familiar. The staging or presentation of writing in all of the modes performed by Darboven has the effect of preventing the familiar, legible text from becoming transparent in terms of content; on the contrary, it confronts us in all of its materiality<sup>35</sup> and affective force, and can now become a medium of thought.<sup>36</sup> If one opens oneself up to the unfamiliar, then a modified grasp becomes possible, a meaning beyond the familiar.

Darboven's manner of presentation is linked to processes and techniques of interruption, to leaps through which we take leave of the familiar in thought, detach ourselves from continuous progress, make detours or even take wrong turns which alienate us. In this context, the artist wrote to her parents: "I'm making a lot of sketches, proceeding to some extent logically

from construction to construction; now and then, at the same time, I take leaps, that is to say, now and then I abandon rigor, engage in experimentation."<sup>37</sup> The space-shaping mode of presenting a simultaneity of succession and juxtaposition allows looking to become an art (not to become art), that is to say: a technique, or more precisely a performative reading praxis.

Reading proceeds processually through a penetration into concrete material which implicates the beholder<sup>38</sup> in a process of simultaneous seeing and reading, involving her in a specific spatiotemporal situation. Resorting to a term common during the 1960s, we can say that such reading "in-forms"<sup>39</sup> that which is presented. The praxis of writing-reading finds its counterpart in seeing-reading. In other words: the praxis of writing-reading applies as much to production as it does to so-called reception.<sup>40</sup>

The "work"<sup>41</sup> is not a self-enclosed form, but is instead processual, concretely related to seeing-reading. The beholder is accorded a role that was characterized by Rolf Wedewer in 1969 in relation to Conceptual Art: "Now, the artist supplies only an indication, and the beholder is no longer tied to the perception and interpretation of that which is perceived. Instead, he is exposed to necessity and at the same time to the possibility of reflecting on the indications provided by the design in relation to his own notions and associations. With conceptual art, the creative act does not culminate in a finished formation, but instead consistently remains open, a processual form."<sup>42</sup>

### Writing as Autopoietic Self-Portraiture

Hanne Darboven understood her "doing" as continuing the work of James Joyce, who in her view had brought traditional literature to the point of unreadability.<sup>43</sup> Her writing activity began with the transcription of Homer's *Odyssey*. In 1971, she abandoned this purely reproductive activity<sup>44</sup> in favor of an autopoiesis through which she interwove her chosen texts, drawn from a literary canon that was well-

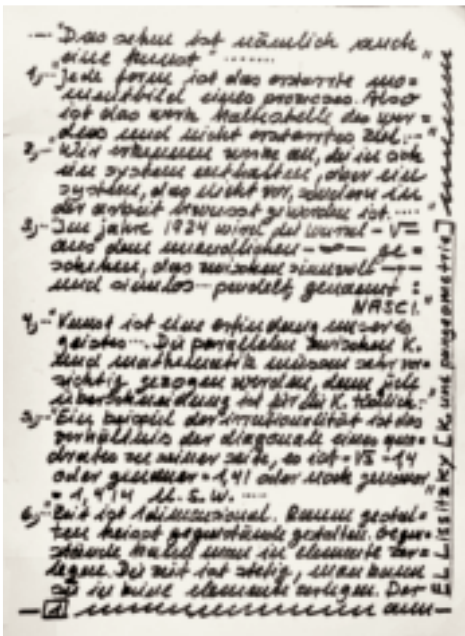


Fig. 4  
El Lissitzky [K. und Pangeometrie] (El Lissitzky  
[A. and Pangeometry]), 1972, Front cover



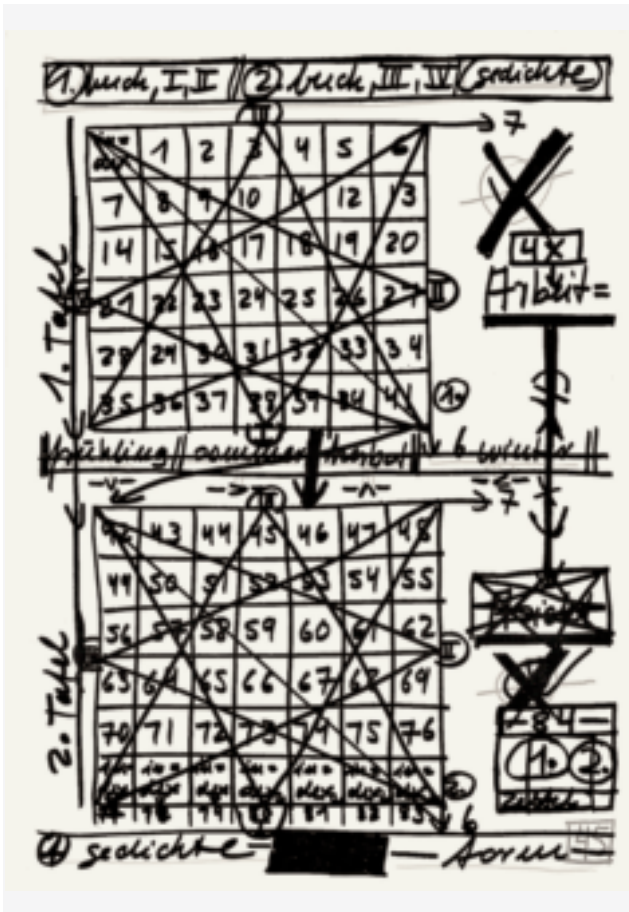


Fig. 5

El Lissitzky (K. und Pangeometrie)  
(El Lissitzky (A. and Pangeometry)), 1972



Fig. 6

Spiegel article: "I Must Have Been Very Depressed:  
Jean-Paul Sartre's Self-Portrait at 70"

established during the 1960s, with her calendar notations. In this way, she created an (auto)biography that was articulated in relation to her bourgeois-business background, to (cultural) history, in particular that of Germany and Europe, and to a conception that was conditioned by the US-American art scene.<sup>45</sup>

Darboven gave form to her thinking about autopoietic writing in—among other works—*Für Jean-Paul Sartre* (For Jean-Paul Sartre), which dates from 1975. This work opens up the time span between Sartre's birth year (1905) and the year of his seventieth birthday. Darboven transcribed excerpts from Sartre's *The Words*<sup>46</sup> and collaged these autobiographical text passages—which cover the years from 1905 to around 1917—with an interview with Sartre conducted in 1975 by Michel Contat, a colleague at his review *Les Temps modernes*,<sup>47</sup> parts of which were published in German translation by *Der Spiegel* (fig. 6). This published version, in turn, was entitled “Self-Portrait at 70.”<sup>48</sup>

In this dialogue, Sartre—whose vision during this period was extremely limited—says that the most important thing to him is writing, and that this activity involves thinking and reading: “I still think, but because writing has become impossible for me, the real activity of thought has in some way been suppressed. . . . I think there is an enormous difference between speaking and writing. One rereads what one rewrites. But one can read slowly or quickly: in other words, you do not know how long you will have to take deliberating over a sentence.”<sup>49</sup> In *The Words*, the relationship between reading and writing plays a central role. Using these two terms, Sartre divided his autobiographical text—which can be regarded as an investigation into the hardships and the pleasures of writing—into two parts. Like the autobiographical texts of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Georges Perec, Nathalie Sarraute, and Philippe Sollers, Sartre's self-analysis of his childhood years regenerated twentieth-century autobiography in fundamental ways. What is remarkable about this new autobiographical writing is the way in which the authors disappear between the lines of their texts and reflect on the genre as the wreckage of a convention, rejuvenating it as a linguistic game.<sup>50</sup>

In ways comparable to these authors, Darboven—working in the visual realm—renewed the genre of the self-portrait through the visibility of script. By means of visualizing the text as writing, she interrupts the flow of an identificatory seeing and reading, deploying and interpreting writing as a process that involves both hand and thought, thereby conveying the existential dimension of writing without the representational image. The regularized addition of notations displays the in-formation of the (writing) process, eluding any notion of a living, spontaneous act and dismantling the concept of an immediate access to sensuous experience, to emotion, of the kind that is ascribed to the aesthetic of art. Through the interlocking of image and text media, which are characterized as dichotomous, and of manual-productive graphic drawing and reproductive writing, the text image is conveyed in its reality,<sup>51</sup> historicity, and contingency. Appearing in almost deconstructive fashion in “space . . . as an *image* is that which emerges as writing through time, and becomes readable in time.”<sup>52</sup> Through the becoming-image of the text and the becoming-text of the image, the claim to a depiction of reality, of liveliness, as something unheard-of becomes perceptible. As de-representation, the (auto)biography of the artist is conveyed as a text-image corpus, one that—as formulated so tellingly by Paul de Man in his reflections on “Autobiography as Defacement”—poses the question of whether perhaps it is autobiographical procedures that generate a life and determine it, in contrast to the conventional wisdom according to which “life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, Darboven rejects a self-portraiture that is putatively derived from a model in favor of a corporeal counter-image that no longer holds up a mirror, “because it must be read indirectly and in various directions.”<sup>54</sup> Here, in contrast to a self-portrait in the medium of referential painting, the “likeness comes to appearance”<sup>55</sup> in the form of text. Darboven's de-representation of (cultural) history and of the self-portrait transforms aesthetic experience into an aesthetic process of thought.

- 1 Darboven also integrated photographs dating from 1975/76 of Roy Colmer's New York front door into *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983*. On this work, see *Hanne Darboven: "Histoire de la Culture, 1980/1983," "24 chants,"* ed. Suzanne Pagé, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1986).
- 2 See Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Aphorismen, Schriften, Briefe*, ed. Wolfgang Promies and Barbara Promies (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1974), cited from <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-6445/3>, chapter 3, headed "Grabschrift" (accessed May 30, 2015).
- 3 Ibid. (emphasis added). [A shortened English version of this aphorism appears in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *The Waste Books*, trans. and with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), p. 20. The German uses the reflexive form of the verb "to write" (*sich schreiben*), so a more accurate if odder rendering than the published version would be: "A man always writes absolutely well whenever he writes (to) himself."—Trans.] The complete citation reads: "Der Mensch schreibt absolute gut wenn er sich schreibt, aber der Perüquenmacher der wie Gellert schreiben will, . . . der den Winckelmann im Stil affektiert, und in die Chrie zu gehen kommt, schreibt schlecht."
- 4 Ibid. [English version by the present translator.]
- 5 In his *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique Genèse*, originally published in 1964, Gilbert Simondon attempted to theorize the individual through individuation instead of theorizing the process of individuation through the individual. In this work, he questions the opposition between being and becoming; see Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 297–319.
- 6 In a conversation with Ortrud Westheider and the present author on January 12, 2002, Hanne Darboven said: "You cannot exclude the personality, nor would I want to, although things often arrive at the borderline of the impersonal." See Elke Bippus and Ortrud Westheider, *Hanne Darboven: Kommentiertes Werkverzeichnis der Bücher* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), p. 12.
- 7 Hanne Darboven, cited from Brigid Doherty, "Hanne Darbovens 'Real Writing' der Geschichte," in *Hanne Darboven: Menschen und Landschaften*, ed. Kira van Lil, exh. cat., Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), pp. 31–46, here p. 40.
- 8 Ibid., p. 33; fundamental for the debate concerning painting and sculpture in Minimalism is Donald Judd's "Specific Objects (1965)," in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon, 2000), pp. 207–210.
- 9 Rolf Wedewer, "Vorwort," in *Konzeption – Conception: Dokumentation einer heutigen Kunstrichtung / documentation of a to-day's art tendency*, ed. Wedewer and Konrad Fischer, exh. cat., Städtisches Museum Leverkusen and Schloss Morsbroich, Leverkusen (Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1969), n.p.
- 10 In New York, with geometric constructions as a point of departure, Darboven developed a number system based on calendar dates. She calculated the checksums of the dates, using them to form productive and progressive movements that visualize time. See for example *Hanne Darboven*, ed. Klaus Honnef, exh. cat. (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1971), pp. 43–52; Evelyn Weiss, "Ein Monat, ein Jahr, ein Jahrhundert: Zu den Arbeiten von Hanne Darboven," in *Hanne Darboven*, exh. cat., XII Bienal de São Paulo (Cologne: Druckhaus Deutz, 1973), n.p.
- 11 Cf. Elke Bippus, "Zwischen Fläche und Raum: Hanne Darbovens verflochtene Bild-Räume," in *Im Blickfeld: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle*, vol. 2: *Ausstieg aus dem Bild* (Hamburg, 1997), pp. 83–96.
- 12 Wedewer, *Konzeption – Conception*, n.p.
- 13 Darboven retained this type of documentation to the extent that up until the mid-1980s, her exhibition catalogues barely contain any installation views, instead primarily depicting reproductions of sheets from the exhibited works themselves. As a result, the catalogue volumes almost become collections of source texts, and make it possible to reread the work in excerpts.
- 14 Wedewer, *Konzeption – Conception*, n.p.
- 15 "In fact this 'Art' has become highly subjective. One is no longer bound to anything, one has nothing on behalf of which to convey a message; art no longer mediates, as once, for example, history painting did . . . A change for the better or perhaps not—yes, I suppose, a change for the better; autonomy has been won, as it was earlier in music, in literature." Hanne Darboven, *Briefe aus New York 1966–68 an zu Hause* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1997), letter dated November 23, 1967, n.p., cited from Doherty, "Hanne Darbovens 'Real Writing,'" p. 33.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Brigid Doherty understands Darboven's ambivalence in relation to artistic autonomy, and the resultant renunciation by art of its communicative function, as an expression of an "awareness of crisis in relation to the societal function of art . . . in relation to its capacity to reach out toward a public and to communicate something more than its own value, its message of virtuosity and originality." Doherty, "Hanne Darbovens 'Real Writing,'" p. 34.



- 18 Ernst A. Busche, "Hanne Darboven: Zeit & Stunde," *Art: Das Kunstmagazin*, no. 5 (1986), pp. 62–69, here p. 69.
- 19 Jochen Schlobach, "Aufklärung und Kultur im Geschichtsdenken des 18. Jahrhunderts," in *Nach der Aufklärung?: Beiträge zum Diskurs der Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Wolfgang Klein and Waltraud Naumann-Beyer (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1995), pp. 3–11, here p. 3.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment*, (London: Penguin Great Ideas, 2009).
- 22 Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 32–50, here p. 38.
- 23 Ibid., p. 41.
- 24 Bernhard Jussen, "Geschichte schreiben als Formproblem: Zur Edition der *Schreibzeit*," in *Hanne Darboven: Schreibzeit*, ed. Jussen, Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek 15, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2000), pp. 2–42, here p. 15.
- 25 This term is intended to signal the intimate union of activity and work.
- 26 Johan Frederik Hartle, *Der geöffnete Raum: Zur Politik der ästhetischen Form* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), p. 252. Hartle asks what consequences can be inferred from the "spatial turn" in cultural studies for an understanding of the visual arts—the spatial arts after Lessing's Laokoon essay.
- 27 Cf. Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, who write, "In short, is there some chance, in treating the context or category itself, of changing and expanding this context to take in new modes of conduct outside of a strict notion of practice—possibly expanding it until it can take in some notion of theory?" Burn and Ramsden, "Some Notes on Practice and Theory / Einige Bemerkungen über Praxis und Theorie," in *On Art: Artists' Writings on the Changed Notion of Art After 1965 / Über Kunst: Künstlertexte zum veränderten Kunstverständnis nach 1965*, ed. Gerd de Vries (Cologne: DuMont, 1974), pp. 96–102, here pp. 97–98.
- 28 El Lissitzky, *1924 – √ – + ∞ = Nasci*, 1924. This text appeared for the first time in the magazine *Merz* 8/9, April / July 1924.
- 29 El Lissitzky, "K. und Pangeometrie," in *Europa Almanach: Malerei, Literatur, Musik, Architektur, Plastik, Bühne, Film, Mode: Außerdem nicht unwichtige Nebenbemerkungen*, ed. Carl Einstein and Paul Westheim (1925; repr., Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1984), pp. 103–113.
- 30 Hubertus Gaßner, "Utopisches im russischen Konstruktivismus," in *Die Konstruktion der Utopie: Ästhetische Avantgarde und politische Utopie in den 20er Jahren*, Schriftenreihe des documenta Archivs, ed. Gaßner, Karlheinz Kopanski, and Karin Stengel (Marburg 1992), pp. 48–68, here p. 53. An English translation of Lissitzky's text is available at <http://thedetachedgaze.com/2014/03/15/105/> (accessed July 10, 2015).
- 31 In Lissitzky's text, we read: "seeing, of course, is also an A.," with A. being identified in a footnote as an abbreviation for "art."
- 32 *Hanne Darboven: El Lissitzky [K. und Pangeometrie]*, exh. cat., Société des Expositions, Palais des Beaux-Arts, (Brussels: Daled and Société des Expositions, Hamburg: Hossmann, 1974), front cover.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Cf. the present author's analysis of *Bismarckzeit* (1978): Elke Bippus, *Serielle Verfahren: Pop Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art und Postminimalism* (Berlin: Reimer, 2003), pp. 145–153.
- 35 Her writing is not reduced to familiar script, but instead also written—as mentioned above—in Roman and Arabic numerals, U-waves, and much more. Walter Benjamin, another author read and transcribed by Darboven, refers to the corporeality of writing when he says: "But there is nothing subordinate about written script, it is not cast away in reading like dross, it is absorbed along with what is read, like a pattern ["figure" in the original]." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 209. Benjamin's text "Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (familiar in English as "On Language As Such and on the Language of Man") is found in vol. VI of *Schreibzeit 1975–1981*, pp. 448–497.
- 36 Martin Heidegger has referred to the mediality of thinking, describing it as a praxis that cannot be appropriated theoretically or by reading a treatise *about* something. One does not learn to swim "by reading a treatise on swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming. Only in this way do we familiarize ourselves with the element within which swimming takes place." Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 21. [The final sentence of this passage does not appear in the published English version, and is supplied here by the present translator.]
- 37 Darboven, *Briefe aus New York*, letter dated July 21, 1966, n.p.
- 38 On this process of addressing and implicating the beholder, see Thomas Wagner, "Schreibe hinauf und schreibe hinunter, schreibe nach wie vor: Bewegung durch Schrift in der *Schreibzeit*," in Jussen, *Hanne Darboven: Schreibzeit*, pp. 85–98.

- 39 Dan Graham has defined the term as follows: "My writing does not have a point-of-view (mine or a priori determined by the form), instead its 'point-of-view' is continually shifting, contingent of the actual contingency of place (time and context) and its relationship to the readership who individually and collectively in-form its 'menning' [sic] and structure." Graham, cited in Wedewer, *Konzeption – Conception*, n.p. Jacques Derrida, too, has emphasized the shaping of information: "Information does not inform merely by delivering an information content, it gives form, 'in-formiert,' 'formiert zugleich.' It installs man in a form that permits him to ensure his mastery on earth and beyond." Derrida: *The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils*, trans. Catherine Porter and Edward P. Morris, *Diacritics* 13, no. 3 (autumn 1983), pp. 2–20.
- 40 Cf. Wagner, "Schreibe hinauf," p. 93. The assignment of the terms "production" and "reception" to artist and beholder respectively is inadequate to a confrontation with Darboven's work, since here, through her conception of writing-reading, production and reception coincide.
- 41 In the German version of this text, the author follows Darboven in lowercasing the term "Werk" (werk) in order to emphasize the processual conception of the work, which finds itself in a state of becoming.
- 42 Wedewer, *Konzeption – Conception*, n.p.
- 43 Hanne Darboven in conversation with Ortrud Westheider and the present author on January 12, 2002. The unreadability of Joyce means that the reader is confronted not with a novelistic action in any conventional sense, one that is unified and refers to the subject, but instead with onomatopoeia, associations, and modified or deformed words.
- 44 For her *Odyssey* project, Darboven reproduced five hundred pages, adopting the pagination of the densely printed paperback edition; see Doherty, "Hanne Darbovens 'Real Writing,'" pp. 38–39.
- 45 During her time in New York, Hanne Darboven found herself confronted with her German heritage, with German history, and with the mass murder of the Jews (Darboven in conversation with the present author, 2000). On Darboven's background, her artistic positioning in New York, and her confrontation with history, see Busche, "Hanne Darboven: Zeit & Stunde."
- 46 These transcriptions are added to the work in the form of reproductions. The originals are found in Darboven's *Schreibzeit 1975–1981*, vol. II, pp. 85–97. Parallel to this, she published the transcriptions in artist's books.
- 47 *Les Temps modernes* is a literary and political review founded by Sartre in October of 1945.
- 48 The caption above the article reads "I Must Have Been Very Depressed: Jean-Paul Sartre's Self-Portrait at 70," *Der Spiegel*, no. 27 (June 30, 1975), pp. 85–87. For an English version, see Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Contat, "Sartre at Seventy: An Interview," transl. by Paul Auster and Lydia Davis, *New York Review of Books*, August 7, 1975.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Cf. Manfred Schneider, *Die erkaltete Herzensschrift: Der autobiographische Text im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1986). Accordingly, Sartre entitled his memoirs not *Ma Vie*, but *Les Mots*.
- 51 With her critical attitude toward representation, Darboven stands in the tradition of the paradigm change that emerged beginning in the late 1950s. E. C. Goossen surveyed this change in the exhibition *The Art of the Real: USA 1948–1968* with works of gestural painting (Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still), all the way to the "nonhierarchical," "crystalline," and "objective-real" structures of recent abstraction and Minimalism: "This 'art of the real,' however, does not strive to be *realistic* – i.e. *like* the real – but to be as real in itself as the things we experience every day: the things we see, feel, knock against, and apprehend in normal physical ways. . . . The spectator is not given symbols, but facts, to make of them what he can." Goossen, "Preface and Acknowledgements," in *The Art of the Real: USA 1948–1968*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), pp. 7–11, here p. 9.
- 52 Wagner "Schreibe hinauf," p. 93 (emphasis added).
- 53 Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67–82, here p. 69.
- 54 Eva Meyer, "Autopoesie," in Meyer, *Autobiographie der Schrift* (Basel and Frankfurt: Stroemfeld and Roter Stern, 1989), pp. 7–40, here p. 16.
- 55 Ibid.