

Preface

Postscript: Writing after Conceptual Art originated as an exhibition that opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver on 12 October 2012. This publication advances many ideas raised by the installation and introduces several new questions about the rich terrain occupied by the writers and artists discussed. The exhibition aimed at eroding the entrenched disciplinary boundaries that for years have kept the two fields of art and literature separate – and the ambition of this publication is to ensure that such an argument is strengthened and endures well past the physical presentation.

The exhibition emerged from a close study of contemporary art and poetry that evinced a shared preoccupation with found language. Identifying these works from competing disciplines collectively as Conceptual writing disabled the binary system that for too long has governed the presentation of these works.

That *Postscript* stands as the first such exhibition in North America to acknowledge both literature and visual art as mutually informing creative engines of Conceptual writing – privileging neither discipline's history – reveals how urgently this collective endeavour needed formulation and advocacy within the contemporary art world.¹ Though keenly articulated and defended within the literary field,² Conceptual writing had yet to receive a full, comprehensive, and critical treatment from the visual arts. While some exhibitions³ had ably demonstrated how artists utilized found language as source material or as the subject of their inquiries, none had put forward the argument that both writers and artists deployed similar strategies, that they shared the same historical precedents, and that their works looked remarkably similar, despite wildly different intentions and significations.

I am indebted to Andrea Andersson for introducing me to this immensely creative and intellectually rigorous body of work and for posing serious questions about Conceptual writing as treated by today's practitioners. She and

I conceived *Postscript* out of two strangely related goals: both to identify the primary strategies and approaches with which Conceptual writing emerges, and also to confuse or undermine any type of categorization that might limit how these works are understood. Ultimately, the ambition of the exhibition was to identify both the shared formal vocabulary of these artists and writers and to enable museum-goers to grasp not only *how* text can function materially, but also *why* the use of found language is such a meaningful, relevant, and contemporary approach to art making. That is, the exhibition sought to make clear just how much there was to say with what has already been said.

My great thanks goes to Adam Lerner, director and chief animator at MCA Denver, for his unending support for this exhibition and publication. He has championed this project from its infancy and we could not have arrived at the final realization without his staunch belief in its merit and relevance. Lastly, I am immensely grateful to the artists and writers featured in the exhibition for sharing their work with our audience. They are Mark Amerika and Chad Mossholder, Carl Andre, Fiona Banner, Erica Baum, Derek Beaulieu, Caroline Bergvall, Jen Bervin, Christian Bök, Marcel Broodthaers, Pavel Büchler, Luis Camnitzer, Ricardo Cuevas, Monica de la Torre, Dexter Sinister, Craig Dworkin, Tim Etchells, Robert Fitterman and Tim Davis, Ryan Gander, Michelle Gay, Kenneth Goldsmith, Dan Graham, Alexandra Grant, James Hoff, Seth Kim-Cohen, Sol LeWitt, Glenn Ligon, Tan Lin, Gareth Long and Derek Sullivan, Michael Maranda, Helen Mirra, Jonathan Monk, Simon Morris, João Onofre, Michalis Pichler, Paolo Piscitelli, Vanessa Place, Kristina Lee Podesva, Seth Price, Kay Rosen, Joe Scanlan, Lytle Shaw and Jimbo Blachly, Frances Stark, Joel Swanson, Nick Thurston, Andy Warhol, Darren Wershler, and Eric Zboya.

Notes

- 1 Two important precedents in the UK include the exhibitions "The Perverse Library" organized by Simon Morris at Shandy Hall (2010) and "Sentences" organized by Tony Trehy at Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre (2011).
- 2 See, for example, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, eds., *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).
- 3 See, for example, *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* at The Museum of Modern Art (6 May – 27 August 2012), which focused exclusively on the roots of Conceptual Writing in the field of the visual arts, notably with the Futurists, the Dadaists, and the subsequent generation of neo-Dada artists, and how this legacy comes to bear on contemporary visual artists. Though it alluded to a formal vocabulary shared with the literary avant-garde, the exhibition did not present any examples from the field of literature.