

Morrocchi, more conventional, composes coherent verbal texts by clipping words from newspapers and periodicals and arranging them in tasteful patterns. He exploits the similarity of political pronouncements and advertising slogans, thereby producing mild satire, based more on serendipity than on the burning indignation that inspired his forerunners, the radical dadaists of the 1920's.

References

1. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970).
2. Emmett Williams, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967).

Conceptual Art. Ursula Meyer. Dutton, New York, 1972. 227 pp., illus. Paper. \$3.45. Reviewed by **Donald Brook***

The apologetics of conceptual art constitute an intellectual morass in which everything lucid and articulate crumbles. It is as if the very word 'conceptual' had the power to strip its users of literacy and to rot all natural languages down to instant compost.

Meyer's compendium of about 40 artists is destined, inevitably, for the reading list of college courses on recent art, simply because it collects together quite a lot of it in one small, cheap, portable museum. But the introductory essay does not succeed (it does not even try) to say what is the principle of selection; nor does it develop any intelligible thesis about conceptual art. There are innumerable theses—roughly one to each successive declarative sentence—but nothing is sustained or argued. The author begins with Joseph Kosuth's assertion that conceptual art does not need critics and ends with his claim that it does not need an audience either. But in between there is no connective intellectual tissue, only the steady hail of sentences falling with an inexorable even clatter as if they came off a teleprinter driven by a computer on Planet X that has *almost* learnt to speak English.

Occasionally, oddly, a phrase from the wrong vocabulary creeps in. 'Daniel Buren's stripes applied to walls, doors and billboards . . .' are not 'ideational' or 'conceptual' or even (worse than death) 'morphological'. They have, it seems, the dispositional property of creating 'a focussed tension within the environment'. That sounds very like the bad old days, before 'the treasured assumptions of traditional aesthetics proved inadequate', when focussed tensions were the very stuff of criticism. The earthship wrecked on Planet X must have carried an old copy of *Artforum* as well as *The Best of Merleau-Ponty* and *Gems from Barthes*.

The anthologised writings of the artists themselves are not vulnerable to the same charge, for they did not address themselves to Meyer's problem. They range from the lucid David Bainbridge to the turgid Kosuth and surely include a few of the best flights of imagination, and some of the most egregious absurdities, of the last few years. As a pocket museum of post-object art it is an innocent lucky dip. As an elucidation of conceptual art it is a non-starter.

Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972. Lucy R. Lippard, ed. Studio Vista, London, 1973. 272 pp., illus. £4.60. Reviewed by **Clive Phillipot****

The concern of this book is with 'so-called conceptual or information or idea art' and it is 'basically a bibliography and list of events' but the full title, which consists of some 80 words, explains that into this bibliography 'are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews and symposia'.

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The bibliography is arranged chronologically first by year and within this framework by month, one of the purposes of the book being to document 'ideas changing over a period of time'. The author states that the book 'reflects chaos rather than imposing order' and that she enjoys 'the prospect of forcing the reader to make up his or her own mind when confronted with such a curious mass of information'. These statements would seem to suggest that the reader was being exposed to random information, albeit pertaining to conceptual art but this cannot be so when the author also states that 'personal prejudice and an idiosyncratic method of categorization' were factors in the selection of material. Thus we are presented not with a neutral record of activity in an area of the art world but with the changing view of one person closely involved with some of the activities documented, and with judgements about which events were significant and with personal evaluations of the worth of the work of particular artists.

The value of the book lies, first, in the showing of art history unfolding from the vantage point of one Lucy Lippard (sometimes only she and a particular artist were privy to pieces now anthologized) and, second, in having between one pair of covers a great deal of information and, more particularly, actual texts (sometimes revised by the artists since first publication), from sources widely scattered and difficult of access, plus some previously unpublished material.

Having read the book right through (contrary to the expectation of the author), I think it is best used as an anthology that one can dip into; very few of the texts included are more than two or three pages long and most are much shorter, so there is little progression or continuity. The bibliographical character of the content also works against linear intake, since the inclusion of references to other texts constantly encourages one to seek out other sources.

The book contains many photographs; some of these are duplications of images used in the presentation of artworks, while others are conventional reproductions of artworks. This dichotomy of function of the illustrations is also echoed in the publication of texts and commentary; since artworks can now comprise photographs and/or words, it is possible to anthologize actual artworks, as one can anthologize verse, without affecting the content of the piece, or even the form (many artists are indifferent as to typeface, layout etc.). Thus, another aspect of this book is its role as a carrier of primary art information, almost as a travelling exhibition.

In view of what has been said above concerning the nature of the book, the index takes on an extra significance. I think that the method adopted, of indexing the names of individuals and groups, is the best approach but that, in view of the proliferation of small particles of information, every mention of a name should have been indexed. As it is, only insertions in bibliographies have been indexed. Thus, one cannot use the index for locating a reference to an artist in an exhibition catalogue or periodical. If one does not know the year of publication, one is obliged to go through the book in order to locate it. Allowing for the begrudging attitude of many publishers towards providing indexes, in order to conserve space, the simplest solution would have been to index every mention of a name and to print only the page number of the location, using boldface for texts or photographs and roman for bibliographical citations.

American Art of the 20th Century. Sam Hunter. Abrams, New York, 1972. 487 pp., illus. \$17.50. Reviewed by **Donna M. Stein‡**

Surveys by their very nature connote a generalized and superficial treatment of subject matter without much in-depth study. Yet, within the constraints of this form,

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