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Franz Erhard Walther

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Lexicon of Terms and Concepts

Franz Erhard Walther: Concerning the Two-Person Discourse

Erik Verhagen

“Being a two-person discourse,” the semiologist Louis Marin queries, “is the interview possible?”¹ To the extent that the discourse in question “necessarily runs the risk of going off the rails or lapsing into improvisation, since another person is ‘discoursing’ with you and part, if not the whole of it, will take the form of an answer triggered by a question over which neither of you has full control,” Marin’s question is a legitimate one.² All the more so in that, given the strategy espoused by Franz Erhard Walther in the 1950s and reinforced during the following decade, the interview and the issues it raises take on a highly distinctive significance. How are we not to see a parallel between the dialogue aesthetic adopted by the artist at the beginning of the 1960s and the conversational genre he has endlessly submitted to since his work became an enduring presence in the worlds of criticism and art history in both Europe and the United States—a situation that first arose with his participation in the exhibitions *When Attitudes Become Form* at Kunsthalle Bern and *Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, both in 1969.³ The MoMA event gave rise to his first substantial interview, with Ursula Meyer, as if the genre formed an extension both of the participatory dynamic generated by his pieces and of the necessary, even indispensable, explanatory and pedagogical work that accompanied their potential or actual utilization in the public arena.⁴ However, the interview as practiced by Walther is also distinctive in testifying to his conflictual relationship with words and language. Inescapable though these may be, they have always, as he sees it, suffered from an excessively restricted reach. Walther addresses the issue in the New Yorker *Tagebuch* (Diary), which his gallerist, Heiner Friedrich, published a year after the MoMA show.⁵ A diary comprising observations and reflections written during the exhibition, the *Tagebuch* looks into the problematic mediation process the artist tested at MoMA as a way of familiarizing the public with the modus operandi of his pieces—in this case, those making up the *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set, 1963–1969). As Walther writes,

the public was not at all prepared, and definitions and ideas got mixed up. For the process to be activated, the participants had to be given something capable

1 Louis Marin, *De l’entretien* (Paris: Minuit, 1997), 12.

2 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

3 *When Attitudes Become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern, March 22–April 23, 1969; and *Spaces*, MoMA, December 30, 1969–March 8, 1970.

4 Franz Erhard Walther, „Ausschnitte aus einem Gespräch mit Ursula Meyer, New York 1970,” in *Franz Erhard Walther: Werkmonographie*, ed. Götz Adriani (Cologne: Dumont, 1972), 271–80.

5 Franz Erhard Walther, *Tagebuch* (Cologne: Heiner Friedrich, 1971). The exhibition was held at MoMA, December 28, 1969–March 1, 1970.

6 The “limitations” of language that Walther says he must deal with are represented by pictograms in the form of □.

of familiarizing them with the evolution of a concept of utilization. This made it necessary, first of all, to communicate exactly the data specific to the □⁶ in order to make explicit, in relation to the □, their connections with time and distance, their surroundings, their psychic and physical state, their awareness, and movement, dilation, transferences, etc. To the extent that these explanations cannot always be conveyed by language, one must try through activations to make the possibilities and concepts of utilization explicit. The words evolution, engenderment, formation, awareness, process, time and concept recur frequently in the *Tagebuch*. The aim is not to say something about the WORK.⁷

7 Walther, *Tagebuch*, n.p.

8 Ibid.

9 Walther provides an unflinching account of these tensions in the *Tagebuch*, which also contains the uncensored comments of exhibition visitors.

On January 14, 1970, he wrote, again in the *Tagebuch*, of the experience triggered by the pieces: “Too often people try to say what it was, what took place. I rule out this danger by insisting on the fact that the best and the most important—what remains—cannot be expressed through language.”⁸ Walther is referring to language in its oral form and, by extension, to his sometimes sterile, strained, and even acrimonious dialogues with the public.⁹ This same orality is found in the interviews included in this catalogue. While the interview genre in its nonwritten form is marked by an urgency that editorial detachment can counteract and mitigate, we notice at once that, despite his misgivings, Walther handles spoken language with a precision and a (self-)critical acumen that can on occasion suggest he has had the time to prepare and write down his replies. The perspicuity with which he hones his gist and his method—together with the precision and pertinence of the arguments he brings to clarifying and detailing perspectives shaped by an oeuvre that, in the early 1970s, showed little similarity to any other—make him a key player in, and commentator on, practices that radically transformed the artistic landscape of the 1960s. On the page or orally, Walther emerges as uncompromisingly at ease in his handling of language. Even if he does not hesitate to assert its restrictiveness—and thus declare himself at odds with conceptual linguaphilia—he has always remained receptive to the queries of those seeking through language to resolve the

mysteries of a notion that, as he himself acknowledges, defies verbal expression. By way of proof we have the *interview-fleuve* of almost two hundred pages with Michael Lingner, to date Walther's most imposing contribution to the genre.¹⁰

In this book the dialogues are divided into three sections. The first comprises excerpts from interviews given by Walther from 1970 to 2014: more than forty years of conversation with three generations of interlocutors—from Ursula Meyer to Kolja Reichert via Hans Ulrich Obrist and Isabelle Graw—who, according to their own points of view and perspectives, led him down varying paths. Several of the interviewers are familiar with the oeuvre and have had the chance to engage deeply with it. Others adopt the stance of the *Candide* figure seeking, often with simple or even downright naive questions, to immerse themselves in work whose intersubjective dimension can prove baffling for an art lover accustomed to a form of receptive passivity. The chosen extracts are structured around three themes: time and space, “activation,” and language—three themes that have fueled the Walther oeuvre for more or less fifty years.¹¹ Time and space are the two, often inextricably linked, coordinates from which the artist's agenda springs. As fluctuating reference points subject to an extensibility that the bodies and repositionings of the pieces' users can modulate, these aspects contribute *in fine* to their implementation. “What I work with,” Walther said in an interview in 1981, “is very concrete. With real time, with real space, I work with my body.”¹²

The imbrication of these dimensions with the user's body enables achievement of the “transubstantiation” so characteristic of the Walther aesthetic, given that the pieces *as such* lay no claim to the status of work of art. The point he is making is thus totally at variance with the objectal “specificity” sought by some of his fellow artists—first and foremost the minimalist Donald Judd, whose self-reflexive approach is light-years away from Walther's involvement of the spectator.¹³ This involvement takes the form of an invitation to a (potential) “activation.” “The action process,” Walther says in an interview with Barbara Schnierle, “is part of the work. By which I am not referring to an action that results in a work, in its

10 *Zwischen Kern und Mantel: Franz Erhard Walther und Michael Lingner im Gespräch über Kunst* (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1985).

11 The selection does not take into account de facto other important interviews Walther had after 1970.

12 See page 19 of this book.

13 Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965); reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1975), 181–89.

making; say, here action is itself the work. The action that the object invites the beholder to do belongs to the work. ... The moment I make the action part of the work, I go beyond the traditional work concept. The work is no longer the thing that has been made, that stands before you, but what you do, what you do in the action, whether mental or physical.”¹⁴

14 See page 20 of this book.

Numerous passages quoted in this book stress this foundational aspect of Walther’s approach and testify to the enduring character of a thinking that, throughout the artist’s development, has remained faithful to the same basic principles that allowed him to structure and consolidate his concept. To see an artist hold to a line, even in a softer version, throughout his career is rare indeed. As Walther said in an interview with Lingner in 1982, “the aspect of action is *the* central motif in my work. Nothing has emerged that is more important and would have made me want to abandon it, even if it has undergone changes through association with the optical side that are not simply formal. But the aspect of action as a part of the work has been the constant underlying motif in my output—it’s my fate.”¹⁵

15 See page 21 of this book.

Finally the subject of language is omnipresent in Walther’s interviews. The relationship is conflictual, with the artist repeatedly asserting, especially in his *Tagebuch*, the extent to which language’s restrictive range has prevented him from achieving a truly satisfactory “conception of the artwork” (*Werkbegriff*). At the same time—and this is not the least of the contradictions inherent in the corpus—he often makes recourse to the word (or to words) in his work. This has been the case since the late 1950s. Witness the surprising, early *Wortbilder* (Word Pictures), produced (so to speak) *ex nihilo*. These protoconceptual works had no equivalents at the time they were made and so anticipate by several years works by Ed Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner that can tempt us to futile comparisons. Subsequently, words would fuel Walther’s work at regular intervals, with a golden age corresponding to the making of the *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings). Initially seen by the artist as prostheses enabling an emphasis on the polysemy of the *Werksatz* (Work Set) pieces, the *Werkzeichnungen* ultimately achieved semiautonomous status. Produced in

their thousands and overspilling the chronological boundaries of the group in question, they still represent one of his most imposing families of works: because, naturally, they are of a *quantity* that, even only in terms of time consumption, betrays their steadily mounting importance in his trajectory; but also because of their *qualities*, with each drawing opening up multiple perspectives, inducing novel sensations, and giving rise to systematically renewed interpretive and hermeneutic avenues. Not only is the power of language pointed up; its revivifying character is endlessly accentuated by a small group of words able to generate, according to associations reinvented by the artist, pathways that are “openings” brought about by the pieces and their utilizations.

Language and the *Werkzeichnungen* thus allowed Walther to interpret his pieces and to offer to those invited to utilize them an arsenal of signs with which each participant in turn can bring the pieces back to life. Here the notion of interpretation must be understood in the light of the definition given by Luigi Pareyson:

Acceding to a work of art comes down to executing it, in other words to making it live its own life and rendering it in the way it was made, the way it wants to live forever; this is only possible through interpretation, that is to say through an eminently personal, singular activity which, far from adding to the necessary execution of the work something that is foreign to it, on the contrary makes use of the sole effective organ of penetration a human person can have at his disposal: his personality. ... The kingdom of the interpretable is ... the kingdom of multiplicity. ... The ways of acceding to a given thing, of grasping and capturing it in its originary nature, are innumerable; this multiplicity does not signify arbitrariness or skepticism, rather it denotes the inexhaustibility of everything spiritual, of both the form presented for interpretation and capable of sparking and precipitating it ad infinitum, and of the person who indulges in interpretation and sets up a dialogue with the form capable of continuously replenishing itself with ever-new originality and freshness.¹⁶

16 Luigi Pareyson, *Conversations sur l'esthétique* (1966), trans. Gilles Tiberghien (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 128–30.

“When I say ‘language as material,’” Walther said in 1987, “I mean that quite concretely, the way a sculptor uses iron or marble, or a painter canvas and oils. It is first of all a material that I shape. When I construct these *Wortwerke* (Word Works) I have a way of handling it, the same feeling when dealing with this material that I would have when painting or drawing or if I were making a sculpture. I add, I remove, I correct, I build. But this building isn’t construction; it’s a living image, an organism”¹⁷—a way of indicating just how consubstantial language was with his approach from the outset.

17 See page 28 of this book.

The second part of the book revolves around Walther’s brief but dense correspondence with Yve-Alain Bois, most of it dating to the early 1970s. Although only eighteen at the time, the future art historian could claim an immersion in the oeuvre going back to 1967, and during a stay in the United States he got in touch with Walther, then living in New York. Passionate and uninhibited, Bois had no qualms about questioning Walther frankly and “directly” as he sought to fill in the gaps in his knowledge and confirm his intuitions. The cultural and theoretical context of his questions and arguments was unusual. Bois worked with sources, references, and points of comparison unknown in the mainly German reception of Walther’s work in the early 1970s. Bois drew on the network he had built up when he made several trips to Paris—he was living at the time in Toulouse—toward the end of the 1960s, intent on “becoming” an artist and already taken with the participatory aesthetics: photographs in the review *Robho* in 1971 show him in the process of activating his works, and among his friends were the critic Jean Clay, the teacher Eva Eyquem, and the artist Lygia Clark.¹⁸ That these friendships and other encounters would have sparked an interest in Walther’s oeuvre seems hardly surprising in retrospect. Nevertheless, it was surely rare indeed, at that time and outside the German-speaking world and New York, to find anyone who showed Bois’s level of enthusiasm. That such enthusiasm was expressed by a young man who had discovered Walther’s work when he was fifteen is all the more exceptional.

18 *Robho* nos. 5/6 (1971).

The third dialogue section highlights the consubstantiality of language with Walther’s approach by reprinting Walther’s

long, instructive interview with Susanne Richardt, which took place in 1995 and was included in the monograph she published in 1997.¹⁹ Walther's companion at the time of the interview—she became his second wife in 1996—Richardt enjoyed privileged access to the oeuvre and an intimate knowledge of his different families of work. These factors allowed her to pursue an interpretive strategy whose interest principally lies in the “restrictive” line she took by concentrating exclusively on the language issue.

These three sections of the book thus highlight the artist's different, dialogue-inflected dimension, a dimension that would develop in parallel with the shaping of an oeuvre that would make its constant core concern a form of interactivity marked by countless offshoots. Words and language occupy a predominant place here, and the conversations may perhaps again be considered an extension of an oeuvre whose boundaries have always been hard to define. One thing is certain, however: the Walther oeuvre has always been permeated by the notion of sharing. In this it hinges on a dynamic that the “two-person discourse” can accentuate and extend via complementary paths and voices reflecting the inexhaustible potential of their interpretive perspectives. In this border zone between activation and interpretation—each in a way intermingling with the other—the issues inherent in the oeuvre are situated. Whether through interviews or correspondence, Walther has unremittingly enveloped his work in a discursive membrane as complementary as it is supplementary. Given that many aspects of his work have seen their status change in the course of his career,²⁰ the “two-person discourse” will perhaps come up for reassessment one day. Whatever the case, the artist's voice, inextricably linked to that of his interlocutors, asserts itself in all its intersubjectivity. Thus it resonates more markedly, in tune with the aesthetic principles the artist laid down some sixty years ago.

19 Susanne Richardt, *Franz Erhard Walther: Stirn statt Auge: Das Sprachwerk* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997).

20 Consider the *Werkzeichnungen*, *Stardust*, and the *Samples*, (families of) works the artist had not initially endowed with an artistic identity.

Dialogues

1970-2014

1

**Franz Erhard Walther, MoMA interview, New York,
January 1970 (reprinted for Edinburgh International
Festival, summer 1970), interviewer not specified**

QUESTION: Your works must be used; that requires the whole person being involved ...

FEW: That's an impressive sounding way of putting it, but it can easily become a platitude. First of all it must be understood that "use" cannot be an end in itself, one must get away from the unformed "experience-thing," from the notion that it cannot be articulated. The whole business remains a dead letter unless people are successfully enabled to "use." That presupposes quite a lot. First of all practice is necessary so that people are able to grasp the dimensions of the material and its possibilities. Then I must teach them to recognise to what uses the instruments can be put. If I succeed in doing all that, I am still a long way from "using" which after all must be development, extension, illustration, production of designs and processes. The logical next step would be employing the developed capacities for inventions. Ideas can come into being, one can have conceptions which possess enormous power of suggestion. But that's a very long way. First of all I must begin modestly by for instance explaining that it is less a question of physical than mental activity. The conscious mind plays an important part. Established behavioural and mental patterns soon prove to be unsuitable. Realisation of this is an important and necessary step on the way of "using."

QUESTION: Would one be right in saying that time is an important factor in your work?

FEW: Yes. Time is not only necessary for the reception of something, but it is with time that one is working, whether one begins with a temporal conception or not. Often time is determined by the body.

2

Franz Erhard Walther, excerpts from a conversation with Ursula Meyer, New York, 1970, in *Franz Erhard Walther: Arbeiten 1955–1963: Material zum 1. Werksatz 1963–1969, exh. cat.*, ed. Götz Adriani (Cologne: DuMont-Schauberg, 1972), 279

FEW: Very important with all the pieces is that you cannot cover, you cannot perceive, you cannot experience the pieces without a certain time you give yourself to realize the work. “Work” in that sense means what you create in time, while working with the piece. ... One must spend a certain amount of time and during that time the “Work” constitutes itself, something constitutes itself during that time that wasn’t previously there. If I don’t spend this time, if I don’t take the time, then nothing comes of it. That is a major difference to traditional art forms, when the time, the frame of reference is defined and laid down from the outset, so I can always overlook it—whereas I cannot overlook it here because I have to spend a certain amount of time with it, and if I don’t take that time, if I don’t go through this procedure myself, there is nothing there, apart that is from this range of instruments, these pieces and the attendant knowledge, but that’s not what it’s about. The concern is with activity, with becoming active, and that happens in time. The time aspect—as related to historical art, changes radically inasmuch as I can no longer overlook what will be there, what is actually there, I am standing directly in it, I can only then overlook it when I have done something with it, if I have achieved something with it, regardless of what I have developed there. ... The time element becomes active work material, whereas it normally appears as duration for the work’s reception. ... The person always simply came to it as the recipient—whereas here he can no longer be the recipient of something but has rather to produce something, he becomes the producer of temporal moments, of activity in time, of certain distances, certain actions, of determinants regarding self and others, and so on.

3

Franz Erhard Walther, "Interview with Georg Jappe,"
Studio International 192, no. 982 (July–August 1976), 65

GJ: You know the blanket term *performance*. Would you accept it for yourself, or what description would you want to see applied to your own works?

FEW: Ever since the word *performance* was first applied to my work, I've had difficulties with it, because for me it has too many theatrical associations. All sorts of words have been used, but I haven't found one that's absolutely right. Certainly, what goes on in my work has something to do with action—*Handlung* in German. It's thought processes developing. I've seen my work categorized sometimes as process art, sometimes as behaviour art. I should prefer to use the word *Handlung*, if it can be turned into an art word: I like *action art* better than *performance* because it's more neutral. And yet the English word *action*—I'm afraid it has something programmatic about it: it almost amounts to a definition of content. I don't think I really do *actions*. A better way to put it in English would be just *doing*—it's simply an activity.

4

“Interview with Georg Jappe,” in *Franz Erhard Walther:
2. Werksatz. Skulpturen. Zeichnungen, exh. cat.*
(Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 1977), 71, 75

GJ: Working with time must also involve thinking about rhythm.

FEW: Rhythm is very important. When I make temporal decisions, I have to find an inner rhythm, as for instance when I take a step: how large should I make it in relation to the one before. With that one comes up very quickly against the question of where this notion of rhythm comes from. Is it something we get from nature, or is it more from cultural ideas? It might be both at the same time, or the two acting parallel to one another. When I observe for instance the rhythm of the heart, or blood circulation, I have a different determinant than when I develop rhythmic ideas, such as through my experiences with ornament. That is a completely different repetition of the same and a completely different inducement to develop rhythm in the action. The antitheses of order and chaos are part of it. ... It is always helpful to have an idea there of rhythm, of temporal sequences, and also changes of place, of sequences of steps. ...

GJ: You've said that time is a material for you. But place?

FEW: Place has a meaning. The place where I am. The place that I chose. The place from which I extend myself. That has clearly a vital significance. Time cannot have this meaning in any way; it is material that I work with. Meaning only arises when I develop something in this time that has a significance. Place has this significance right from the start, it is an idea that I bring with me. Place can appeal to a fundamental disposition. It is very easy for me to associate place with the notion of quietude. I go from here to there in time, and it is really difficult to connect that with quietness. A museum can be a place. But what is decisive is that one is free to choose the place, because an idea is connected with it. I don't have this freedom then if a place is occupied, not as a rule. I have to come to terms with this contradiction when I am dealing with museum situations.

5

**Conversation with Hajo Kruda and Hans-Georg Wölbern, „Zeit und Handlung
als Material: Franz Erhard Walther in der Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven,“
Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein, no. 21 (1981), n.p.**

FEW: What I work with is very concrete. With real time, with real space, I work with my body. When I say that it is related to time, to space, to the place, to the direction—and the basis is the action—that has another meaning than when I do it on an abstract, pictorial level. ... If the viewer is not “blocked,” if he has retained his openness, he will be able to handle my works, which is also to say understand how space, time, direction, and action relate to one another in the works. What for the one artist is bronze, say, is for me my body, time, and space, which I use to shape.

6

Barbara Schnierle, „Die Grenzgänge des Franz Erhard Walther,”
Tip, no. 7 (1981), 48–49

BS: So your objects are not just there to be looked at but also to be used.

FEW: Yes, the action process is part of the work. By which I am not referring to an action that results in a work, in its making; say, here action is itself the work. The action that the object invites the beholder to do belongs to the work.

BS: The “other work concept,” that is a central idea in your work.

FEW: Yes, I was concerned there with expanding the concept of art. The moment I make the action part of the work, I go beyond the traditional work concept. The work is no longer the thing that has been made, that stands before you, but what you do, what you do in the action, whether mental or physical. One of the reasons why I have devised my art in this way is my experience that people who are involved with art are very limited, really amputated in their imaginations, their ability to experience, their capacity to project. Which is why my art also addresses people’s minds.

BS: What is this action supposed to bring about?

FEW: First of all there must be some idea of what this action is. It is action free of any purpose, and that is by no means easy. We are used to acting purposefully, economically in everyday life. And then the question of meaning appears. If someone comes and asks what it’s supposed to mean, you can forget it. There is no meaning to the thing as such; meaning first comes when the action is performed with the piece. That must be clear. The viewers have to be in a position to develop a meaning with the thing that is there.

7

Franz Erhard Walther, with Michael Lingner, „Die Wiederentdeckung des Optischen,“ in Franz Erhard Walther, *40 Sockel: Schritte seitwärts*, exh. cat. (Munich: Kunstraum München, 1982), 14

ML: I suspect the reason it is so hard to recognise the historical context in which your work is located is because it is obscured by the very thing the public sees as causal for your work concept: the *aspect of action*. And this aspect not only hampers your work being placed in a historical perspective, but also quite evidently in the present-day context. Because none of the terms that are used to characterize contemporary art movements really fit your work. In fact it hampers the very access to your work, because no historical precedents compel a reception that grasps art as action. Against that it facilitates making a connection between your early works and your current ones. Because—if no longer quite so exclusively—the aspect of action is just as decisive for the “objects” in the *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set) as it is for the *Sockel* (Plinths). As an ongoing structure in your entire work, it seems to be able to resolve the antagonism between the claim to divergence and the emphasis on convergence in your older and your more recent works respectively.

FEW: Yes, the aspect of action is *the* central motif in my work. Nothing has emerged that is more important and would have made me want to abandon it, even if it has undergone changes through association with the optical side that are not simply formal. But the aspect of action as a part of the work has been the constant underlying motif in my output—it’s my fate.

8

**Minutes of meeting with students from the University of
Würzburg, in *Künstler zu Besuch: Franz Erhard Walther,
Werkstattgespräch, no. 2* (Würzburg: Fachbereich Gestaltung
der Universität Würzburg, 1984)**

FEW: The underlying premise for this *Werkstück* (Work Piece) is the actual concrete action. Not only action in thought and ideas but, just as equally, a real action that the work helps produce, related to art notions. That has consequences, of course. It is a decisive point. So people won't say: that is some kind of casual activity, a game. That doesn't interest me. I mean it quite strictly as an artform. One can, of course, see it differently. I'm not saying one must always have your mind on art during the process. The point of reference is art, and that means it is form, configuration, image. And this notion of form is decisive. A thing like that needs open rules but also rigor, because the things I embark on in my mind are at first disorganized. Then they develop somehow. So if I don't come up with some formal resistance, they don't prove to be interesting experiences. Eye and brain work toward perception, basically quite wild and disorganized. They are given place and direction through forms, images, set measurements. In these pieces a shift occurs in the information from our vis-à-vis, from the object into the mental world of the person who occupies themselves with it. ...

When I work with time, it may be flowing but also something static. I designate a moment: idea of permanency. I decide to take a step to the right, to the left, to the front. Time and place, combined with a direction. What does that mean? Answers should appear in the art context. We face the time problem everywhere, whether experienced, consummated, depicted, thought. ...

We have been talking about time and space. So, someone should explain to me now what the two of them are. It gets us all in a sweat. It keeps having to be defined anew. They're experiences. I have to construct models from them. If I want, for example, to perceive time, I need an image, such as a cycle. Likewise, I need an image for space. How do I perceive space? I have the walls here. Is it easy to say that that's a space? It is a construction. If you are outside, in "open" space, you can also say: that is a space. That is a claim. At any rate, one has to admit that the "space" must always be defined for the situation at hand. And the models for space that were valid one hundred or five hundred years ago had by necessity to be different. We can actually read that from the paintings and sculptures. It must always be attempted anew.

How is one to envisage time? Artists make it tangible to the senses, if you like. But I also get information from physics. And what they experience as "time" is completely different from forty years ago. That's interesting and clearly has to do with experience—also pictorial—and

with what artists do. I can picture it to myself as something flowing or in layers. Physicists show me today that the former is not enough. Those are particular experiences that completely contradict that. The new picture: for me something almost like the medieval notion of time as being. There the flow is simply an aspect of experience. Artists always knew that. They are in any case the most sensitive. Anyone who regards that as a naive sense of omnipotence does not know the wisdom and lucidity of art. The experience, if it is not to remain abstract, which is to say a sensual understanding that one can taste and smell—who but the artist is supposed to convey that? Which is to say: produce forms, reshape what exists. What I mean by *space* comes from experiences that are immediate. I have, for instance, a pair of linked terms like *inside* and *outside* or *internal* and *external* for designation. So, there is an internal and an external space, and here I am not referring to architecture. What I mean is an inner space: experiential space. I also have a spatial idea that refers outward. If I did not have that, I could not move about in my surroundings. I project “inside” outward and bring “outside” inside.

x: But that is Bergson’s psychological space.

FEW: Could be. What I mean by interior space is plastic, pictorial images of, for instance, movement, these are plastic, pictorial notions of layerings. ...

I created a large complex of works in the early 1970s. What are termed *Stand-Schreitstücke* (Standing-Walking Pieces). They consist of long lengths of cloth, twenty centimeters wide, nine meters, sixteen meters, twenty meters, thirty meters long, with certain referential relationships. I lay them out in an outdoor space. I get inside it, so that at some point I can take a step sideways. I am relating to the space outside, and relating to inner space. Alternately. Simultaneously, not simultaneously, from one end to the other. Also in relation to other people, if the piece requires. ...

The physical posture one assumes toward something, constitutes in some way a “must.” One can kneel, crouch, lie, or stand. The posture I assume in the process is a component; it can be a formal prerequisite for shaping. I am conscious of the posture I must assume. It may be important whether I lie here or walk away from there when I get up, put something down, bring something, take something away. Always in relation to the work component that forms the “plinth.” ...

1 *Landmaß über Zeichnung*
 (Land Measurement by Drawing),
 1. Werksatz (First Work Set),
 element # 6, 1964.

The notion of drawing requires the line. We spoke earlier about temporal and spatial expansion. In principle it is all the same whether I draw a line with a pencil or—1964—mark my kilometer-long *Linie* (*Schnur*) (Line [Cord])¹ with colored powder on a large open area, or Manzoni's one kilometer line in a steel container, or Walter De Maria's chalk line in the desert in 1968. On the one hand, one has to take into account the variability of the dimensions in the drawing; on the other hand, the temporal content. Today we look at it from a greater distance. But it's still always interesting that back then people said: I would have liked to have seen that as a line in space. Or to say: changing the dimension. I have a sheet of paper, hand-size, on which I draw—or, I take an “empty” stretch of land and approach it just like a sheet of paper, as a surface on which I act, act by drawing. ...

What was decisive was that I did not “design” a landscape but visited an “empty” space in the countryside and undertook artistic actions there. Incidentally, that would never have worked in a cultivated landscape. There are spaces in the countryside that are empty, in which I can introduce something by going there, for instance. I have a feeling for this, just as I can “go into” a blank sheet by drawing. The presence of a person in an empty landscape, with the awareness of “body in space,” differs fundamentally from sojourns in a cultivated landscape or in “designed” settings. One might, of course, think now of using the experiences that are gained to design this setting. But why should I? ...

x: And what you do constitutes the tools for that? So, something that is not or cannot be defined?

FEW: Why can't tools be defined? It all depends on what was I mainly meaning by a thing. How does it come about that, for instance, a simple action, a simple gesture can assert itself as art? How, in fact, does one arrive at such a question? That doesn't happen by accident. I cannot simply reach into my pocket and take hold of something like that. It requires prior development. It also is not a theory, because the matter is tangible. Naturally, it seems at first to be an assertion, outside of any comparison—in a vacuum, as it were. Let's take a simple action, which could also be mistaken for an everyday gesture. How do I go about seeing that it assumes shape, structure, form, can assert itself as art. It must be in there somewhere. What happens when I hand over the piece that has been defined, whether a sculpture or a painting, that consists in material, in which the work is there in the shaped object? And I must give it away as soon as I want this public dimension of the assertion in the projective. So when I hand over a finished work idea, the question arises: What do I earn for that? The danger is that the whole thing becomes naturalism, confused with gestures that are to be found everywhere. That, I think, is an argument for the formal rigor of my works. This giving away has, by all means, been done deliberately. It certainly was not easy, because it was, as it were,

an inversion of tradition: I give something away, but for that I also earn myself something. This here is something nonmaterial. A gesture, an action is not material. It simply appears, disappears again. How am I to convey that in any way, how can I build up a work idea on such a basis? And because it is so open, we feel it is another dimension, one that previously had not been there. That is what I gain. What I lose, though, is the notion of the self-contained work. Generally, this notion is a historical one, not only in the history of Western art but in the history of humanity as a whole. Loss—gain.

Interview with Michael Lingner, in *Zwischen Kern und Mantel*
(Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1985), 29, 39–43, 47

ML: Conceptual art ...

FEW: Putting the concept—that is, language—in place of a work shaped from material was really nice as an idea. A notion that had a cleansing effect on the mind and that I found very congenial because I had already worked for years with language. Conceptual art is hard to criticize in immanent terms. ... And yet I personally was unable to accept the way conceptual art decided against the possibilities of a *material* language. I did not want to abandon the sensual, the graphic side, which is to say art as a conveyor of real experiences. My attitude to conceptual art can best be conveyed through a pictorial example that proved a help to me back then. I always said, they're setting up the scaffolding, the skeleton—great, you need the bones otherwise the flesh won't hold. But the flesh has to be added as well. ...

ML: Since it is quite apparent that your feeling for language and your dislocated, reflected relationship to making and doing have not come somehow from without, they must have developed from you, from a certain disposition and from your own practice. As a result of this disposition and as a consequence of the great importance of terminological considerations for your artistic work, it is no surprise that you have also incorporated language *into* the actual works. Why, when, and how did this occur?

FEW: I always had the need to express myself in language and also wrote extensive texts parallel to my works on paper in which I approached language in much the same open and formless way as I did with paper. But language actually appearing in my works, that first happened from 1963 onward in connection with the *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set). Until then I had never really hit the point where language made proper sense to me in artistic terms. Perhaps it was a motif that was hidden from me, pushing the action aspect so far that language would inevitably emerge in the *1. Werksatz*. The necessity came from the fact that the parts in the *Werksatz* were merely supposed to have an instrumental character, so that the action performed with them is the actual work, which has to be pinned down in some way. Since this aim was directed at a purely mental figure, the customary means of depiction in art were not suitable. I tried to find my way with language and a certain kind of drawing. ... The link between signs and concepts has to be done in such a way that forms and concepts are no longer distinguishable: concepts give rise to forms and forms to concepts. Where I succeed in this I am neither descriptive, nor poetic, nor narrative, but use language as an artistic material in the way a sculptor uses iron or stone. The definition of language as a material was already a very touchy matter in the early sixties and wasn't easy to push through. ...

ML: In what way does the active form of reception you aimed at differ from the traditional experiential approach?

FEW: Already the invitation to the actors to include linguistic aspects, not by responding to preset concepts but rather by coming up with their own concepts for their actions, amounts to such a serious deviation from traditional expectations about art that most people do not or cannot accept it. They lack either the knowledge for that or the practice, or they think that such terminological exertions have no place in art. Basically, the problem here is that the traditional role of the art viewer is put absolutely in question by me, so that everyone has to define his role in dealing with the objects anew. ... The responsibility for what comes about “as art” when using the objects is ultimately up to the actor himself and not the artist, because the piece is not the work but the action so that a work can come about. So the significance, the meaning of it all does not “lie” in the pieces—neither the meaning of the usage nor the meanings about the content that arise during the action. Rather everything first receives its meaning through the ways and means in which the individual acts.

Christian Matthiesen, „Ich dachte immer: Das Museum
ist ein wunderbarer Werksatz,“ *Bausteine*, no. 1 (1987), 48

cm: You use language as material, and recently you said in a conversation: concepts give rise to forms, and forms give rise to concepts. So language can be used as material, free of its sense and meaning. The point of reference in the *Wortwerke* (Word Works) always remains then the visual arts.

FEW: Yes, quite directly it remains the visual arts. I don't create literature; I don't write poems the way a writer would, for instance. That doubtlessly is structurally different. And I have seen that certain writers also talk of language as material, but astonishingly enough they mean something quite different. I have great difficulty communicating with people who come purely from language, which is to say writers and poets. When I say "language as material," I mean that quite concretely, the way a sculptor uses iron or marble, or a painter canvas and oils. It is first of all a material that I shape. When I construct these *Wortwerke*, I have a way of handling it, the same feeling when dealing with this material that I would have when painting or drawing or if I were making a sculpture. I add, I remove, I correct, I build. But this building isn't construction; it's a living image, an organism. The basic feeling is similar to when I sit at a drawing. The term *material* also makes sense there. If I draw, my material is a pencil, or if I add color I still use watercolors. I really mean it in this simple sense.

cm: Is language released by this from its meaning function?

FEW: Probably yes, at first, from conventions. I must be able to give a new push to certain agreements about what a word means, set them moving, or otherwise I am caught in conventions. And then I wouldn't have it available for myself as a material. I have certain notions about direction, about field—of place, for instance; of space; of inside/outside—what is simply present in my work context and must appear there.

**Isabelle Graw, „Werkseminar,”
Wolkenkratzer, no. 8 (May–June 1988), 21**

IG: How do you picture this action without which, according to you, no work would even come into being? Should one stand in front of your *Wandformationen* (Wall Formations) and meditate, or contemplate them, or give free rein to one’s associations? What would be the ideal action?

FEW: Ideal would be first of all to manage without such a traditional concept as meditation. Meditation is a definition and entails a directedness that I don’t mean. That which is there must be defined anew. I am concerned with extremely simple things.

IG: The “other work concept” that you have created assumes that space and time and the body can act as materials. What does it mean in concrete terms when, for instance, time is a material?

FEW: Quite concretely that means that at some point in the piece, time is experienced in real terms. I don’t want to define time but instead need a figure to experience it.

IG: If I stand now for ten minutes in a *Wandformation*, have I experienced time in yet another way than when it is shaped by minutes?

FEW: There is measured time, which is not important and only creates the outer framework. I can expand experienced time. Which means time can be experienced in other ways—time is modeled. Societies can grind to a halt if basic figurations like time, space, and proportion are no longer present.

IG: There is also the problem of depicting your work. According to your action principle, a work comes into being only when it is grasped and experienced through the senses. So anyone who looks at your catalogue cannot grasp the action at all!

FEW: Obviously a reproduction can never replace a direct encounter. Only good reproductions with details of the dimensions can represent a work in a proper way. To reconstruct a place is very difficult.

IG: Why do you even depict it then?

FEW: Because otherwise these forms would not get to be known. So one has to contend with these difficulties. Which is also why the *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings) are of such importance. With them I can tell something about the processes in the work actions.

IG: Can one use the *Werkzeichnungen* as instructions at least for actions?

FEW: Never! One could read them that way, but I have never viewed them as such. For me the *Diagramme* (Diagrams) and *Werkzeichnungen* were parallel stories: reports of experiences and an attempt to formulate ideas and projections that came about in the pieces. The *Werkzeichnungen* should not be taken as instructions.

Interview with Hans-Joachim Lenger, *Spuren*, no. 24 (July–August 1988), 51

HJL: In what way can time in any sense be a material? Time is the most impalpable, most inconceivable, puzzling, mysterious ...

FEW: As I did these pieces and when I talked about time as material, I was clear in my mind that this shouldn't be metaphorical or symbolic or even illustrative. This¹ piece consists now of twenty-eight equally large bags made of fabric and all open on one side. I would go and find a place with it, a place as a kind of plinth on which it all happens, a certain setting. Then I roll out the piece, beginning at one end, mostly from left to right. I insert myself into the piece, for which I have to bend down and raise the opening so that I can slip my feet inside, and stand there for a certain time. Then I step out again so that I can get into the next bag. I have to bend down again, raise the opening, and slip my feet inside. I have a direction. I work over a certain length of time. I don't have to talk of time now, it has a *duration*. I stand in it for a certain period of time. When I get out to walk to the next bag, I have to bend again. That is always a kind of cut. I can picture that vividly to myself as time segments, variously sized time segments next to one another. The whole results in something like a space-time ratio. ...

¹ 28 *Standstellen* (28 Standing Places),
1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 35, 1967.

HJL: The sense of time suggested by this work piece is a very solitary time. It is the time of an actor who measures ... his time in a particularly reduced form, reduced to the return of certain movements that are ... suggested by your workers. ...

FEW: This reduction to the motif of time is imperative. If I allow everything to interfere with it, I will never arrive at concentration. That is possible only in this concentration on the stuff of time. ...

HJL: Does this work suggests a time or the time? You say: the experience I have with this piece is created *that way*; another person's experience might well be different, I can't say. The time of the solitary actor is one possible time. Are there also renderings of time in your works that no longer relate to the experience that I have with my time, but with an experience of time that begins with another person's mental horizon? So that an experience of time is determined by another person establishing a relationship with me ...

FEW: You have already described various possible kinds of time that play a role here. By all means there is *this* time, this time *now*; there is *the* time; and there is *a* time, which remains more an idea. It can be an object, but if I am open it can also be alternation and penetration. This time is the awareness of now, that is my experience. I have to say to myself: *this* time, otherwise it is more *the* time. And if I say: *a* time, it is always connected with the dimension of memory. This oscillates in a curious way.

Achim Könneke, "Franz Erhard Walther in Conversation on 29.01.1989,"
in *Franz Erhard Walther: Der Oldenburger Block*, ed. Peter Springer
(Oldenburg: Oldenburger Kunstverein, 1992), 133–36

AK: The visual aspect has a great deal of importance for the *Standstellen* (Standing Places), as does the guidance through the concepts. That is also very static, while what is more important for the *Schreitbahnen* (Walking Tracks) is time, the rhythm of the steps and the movement.

FEW: The change in location certainly is something else. With the *Standstellen*, standing quietly, statically, and a step, means: I go to the next *Standing Place*, where once again I am static. In the case of the *Schreitbahnen*, there is physical movement, even if minimal, which is a difference. So when I say here or there "body" or "time" or "duration," then in each case that is something different, if with a slight shift in emphasis. The one is a specified place that I cannot change, while with the *Schreitbahnen* I give a different weight to the location or the space or the field, in each case depending on what I am referring to. Likewise the concepts become different. The moment I have a concept, I obviously also have a different definition, such as for time, say, than I do with, for instance, the *Schreitbahnen*, where I don't have it in that way. There the concepts are more free-floating; they may appear or they may not. The question, though, is what are these concepts? Is that really guidance? I prefer to see that differently; it has to be freer. I see that more as a form, an idea of form, which is why the concept is surrounded by this cluster of connotations. I wouldn't use any concepts there that do not have such connotations in the sense of image, sculpture, or body. They are never descriptive. With the *Schreitbahnen* there is also, for instance, a direction in view, but in a changeable sense—more of a radius.

AK: The mutual relationship between the actors is also stronger with the *Schreitbahnen* than it is for the *Standstellen*.

FEW: Yes, and one also has to relate that to the proportions of the board. In the case of the *Schreitbahnen*, I form the proportion in my mind. That is a connection. The other is more free of connections: I have to make a connection for myself. If that remains free-floating, neither form nor structure would come into being, so then it is simply some outcome or other. "Making a connection" does not mean acting arbitrarily but being aware of a structure. Whether it is the duration that I set here or the direction of view I choose, the relation to the left, the right that I decide on. That is a very important concept, this "making a connection," underlining something. I distinguish here from situations that cannot be thought of as art. This is a different kind of standing than in an everyday situation, even if the differences are minimal. That is not really underscored. But the possibility of distinguishing must be given. I have to reach this decision, by proxy, yet everyone has to reach it. Quite banally: "It's me

that's standing here," or one can really underline it as an art figure in its own terms. It's an open matter—I don't insist on it being given any greater importance; it can also be amusing, for instance. One can be interested in my work arrangement, my ideas, but also say, "it doesn't interest me." But one won't be able to change it arbitrarily. I don't object if people use it playfully, just that it will have less weight when I need it for my concept of art. They are different approaches. One cannot confuse them. Only if people really want to understand do I insist they devote their minds to the bases of the whole. ...

AK: ... the work cannot be repeated, not even for you.

FEW: It can be repeated. In that moment is the authentic, the identical; there are thousands of individual moments, as one can see from the drawings. I do not have a style in the sense of a schema in which I say something; those are individual figurations and they have a signature. ...

If one does not regard the inner state as of the essence, if one does not consider it significant, one can say: it is repeatable. But for me that plays a major part. Nevertheless there is a continuity to it. I work with time and space. Our feelings change. So how can one hold fast to the notion of repeatability? ... Unless, that is, an idea is supposed to guarantee permanence and repeatability. But that's too abstract for me, too bloodless. It would contradict my fundamental notions of how work is made up—except on the idea level. ... I can envisage a philosophical position, a work definition, that backs up this statement but contradicts the evidence of my senses. The notion of duration. Repeatability. A carved stone, for instance, has no need of that; it is always there as an artwork. It repeats itself forever and ever when I walk round it. My mobile work figure does not have that. But through repeatability it has an equivalence to the stone, and it certainly is interesting, even tempting to think that way, but where have the blood and veins got to? Where's the warmth and heat?

Karlheinz Schmid, „Franz Erhard Walther: Wieder ganz am Anfang,”
Kunstforum 104 (November/December 1989), 318–20

KS: What is the function of language in your overall work? “Words accompany the doing,” as I read. Or is it more than a supporting measure?

FEW: During the 1960s, linguistic language became a major material for me in the *Diagramme* (Diagrams), *Wortwerke* (Work Texts), and drawn formulations of the *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set). Concepts become form, forms become concepts. A more apt depiction of the connections in the work—without linguistic language—no, that wouldn’t have been possible. Language became a modeling mass, became material, as wood and stone are for sculptors working with traditional means.

KS: What is the background to this inquiry into language?

FEW: I began examining script in 1957 while studying. ... And back then I also tried writing poetry, in the style of August Stramm. Around 1974, after the period with the *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings), I started creating my *Wortwerke* (Word Works), in which language is the sole formal material. So, anything but “supporting.”

**Udo Liebelt, „Gespräch mit Franz Erhard Walther über
Werk und Bedeutung,“ in *Mit sieben Stellen und Mantel 1980:
Die Wandformation, Zeichnungen und eine Werkhandlung
des Künstlers* (Hanover: Sprengel Museum, 1994), 14–15**

UL: Somewhere between the linguistic work figure and the *Wandformation* (Wall Formation) as walk-in object comes what you term a “work action.” A work action ... takes place without words. Is this gestural-spatial form of manifestation closer perhaps to the artistic message than is possible with language?

FEW: The work action is silent. Because—even with language—an inner modeling takes place that in that moment requires no linguistic expression. Things happen inside me. I cannot say them in the moment of the action, because they are often only half-formulated. It is more prelinguistic. I observe. It was already that way in the 1960s. In the moment of the occurrence, there are no right words for it. Everything had a kind of fragmentary character to it. The feeling that it belongs to the work and not, perhaps, solely to the memory of it, often came to me a lot later. With the work action a second modeling takes place as well. ...

Spoken language becomes a material that I can mould. I don’t use it to make a poem, or theories—I am not a narrator or a poet. Rather, I attempt to paraphrase with words, with language as my modeling mass, just what happens in the work action. That’s not easy because language has such an endlessly long history and has at the same time become threadbare. I cannot simply invent new concepts. I can only effect a transformation, a differentiation—which has always surprised me. Because one might think: a new art has been devised here using a different work concept, and it also calls for new concepts. To my astonishment, I discovered that that was not so. Nothing had to be added to the handed-down terms. They had to be transmuted, and that resulted in something new. Fashionable terms addressed to the times failed to establish themselves.

Incidentally, my central concepts struck people as fairly alien back then in New York. I felt very close to what the conceptualists were doing, but my language was a different one to theirs. I felt a lot closer, for instance, to what was conveyed by proportion and volumes than to their talk of “shapes.” Saying that the idea, the concept, is the work didn’t say much to me: I considered its realization in space and time to be essentially under the influence of the body, which sometimes was regarded as “sentimental” and “typically European.”

Since this is defined through the actions, the proportions are only hinted at; they are outlined. It can only be a mental idea, an allusion to history. I, of course, must have an idea of what proportions are or could be if that is not to remain an empty concept. Old concepts such as proportion and volume bear up. There was no need to use a contemporary vocabulary, especially not from modern art history.

**Interview with Roselyne Marsaud Perrodin,
Pratiques, Spring 1996, 106–8**

RMP: What place do you attribute to language in your work? Is it explanatory? Must it only designate? When does it appear in relation to form?

FEW: Language is extremely significant in my work. It is at the core of some 5,000 operational diagrams and drawings that I made in connection with the “first series of works,” beginning in 1963 and 1975. I was trying to formulate the ideas, concepts, experiences, and projections that were emerging in the works in progress. This intense work with language was leading me to experiences and perceptions that then found their way into groups of works owing their existence solely to language. In my artistic use of language I did not draw on it as a medium for explaining the artwork. For me language has always been a kind of thinking form, and for my artistic goals that’s the way I used letters, words, and sentences, the “word images” of 1957–1958, and the typed texts and scribbled drawings of 1960–1963. I’ve put these elements to work during all these years—by transforming them in different ways.

Till Krause, „Gespräche mit Franz Erhard Walther zum ‘Blindobjekt’
und zu Landschaftsvorstellungen,“ in *Mitteilungen des Museums
ferner Gegenden*, no. 4 (January 1997), 23, 27

TK: But to return to my question of whether ideas about landscape were also the starting point for certain aspects of your work, or whether it always came from art?

FEW: Actually, it always came from art. I had been helped by this notion of space, but only ever in the background. I never made works for this landscape space. Not once. That always took place in the back of mind, not least because, obviously, I always insisted that these pieces could be used and worked with by anyone who was interested in doing so; it was not solely my material, and naturally that also meant that the person who does so is free to choose the space in which he does it. I should never dictate that. So that meant, of course, that these pieces had to work in any surroundings the person chose. ...

TK: There’s also the possibility of doing something concrete with a location. Ten years ago you said in the book with Michael Lingner that it was absolutely important for you that art remains a model, that you couldn’t envisage doing architecture, for instance, and now in the meantime you’ve actually built a museum.¹

1 The Kunsthalle Ritter in Klagenfurt, Austria, designed 1989.

FEW: Yes, I would never have done so back then simply for sake of the openness of the work concept. The spaces have to be developed on the mental level because that was a challenge precisely to the work concept, that was kind of the upshot of it. You have to see that. ... By which I also mean, of course, these experiences, or the production of space, because when I produce a space in an action I must also be aware of inside and outside. The interior space is always there inside me, but that is a particular awareness—in fact, not simply psychology but when I develop a mental notion that is something quite different, as is the projection outward. The question was also, of course: can’t one use that? So, I did it very consciously, applied to architecture.

interview with Manfred Miersch, in *Skulptur antwortet*
(Berlin: Mies van der Rohe Haus, 2009), 24–25

MM: What essentially typifies your work is the collaboration of the viewer, who contributes through a process of action and reflection to the success of the work. When one says that the actor who participates in the work has a responsibility for the work: is it easier for people today to bear that responsibility, or is the prevailing attitude such that the matter is no longer taken so seriously, that it is easier to join in now because one is used to modern art strategies?

FEW: The impertinence of standing there and taking silent steps and then claiming that was art was an enormous provocation in the early 1960s, and I think it is no longer seen as provocation today. I cannot specifically say why that is, probably there are a whole number of reasons. The action concept didn't first come into being in the 1980s; it was already formulated in the 1950s in, for instance, the *Umrisszeichnungen* (Outline Drawings) and *Wortbilder* (Word Pictures). In the latter I thought of a kind of inner action, of using concepts, proportions, and colors that created an imaginary image when looked at. Even they were enormous provocations. The very idea of regarding actions as part of the work may now be common property—at any rate, the concept no longer seems as alien as it did back then.

MM: Some time ago I did an experiment. I stepped off the *Schreitbahnen* (Walking Tracks) and wondered whether it would also work if I simply stood on the grass. And I noticed then that something was different and no longer worked. It became obvious to me that with the *Schreitbahnen* I have a firm substrate that sets down directions, but the moment I stand on a kind of plinth I comprehend myself as an artwork or as part of the artwork. What role does it play to perceive oneself as an artwork or as an actor or performance artist?

FEW: I have viewed the *Schreitbahnen* as plinths and said that the person standing on them can define his—or herself as a sculpture, nothing else. ... I don't only see the *Schreitbahnen* but also the spaces in between, which are not, of course, set down arbitrarily. Does it only have work character when I stand on the strips and take steps? And what about when I go off somewhere? Is that part of a work idea or not? I can give no clear answer. One has to decide one way or the other. To my mind it is part of the work when I also see the spaces in between. ...

MM: So how would it be if I dispensed with action, if I simply imagined walking along and the movements?

FEW: Obviously, there is no compulsion to act; the action can also be performed in your mind. Which is why the storage form was so important from the beginning of the 1960s onward. I saw both the storage form and the action as forms of work. They are two poles. I have always gone about the action form in such a way that it can be performed in the mind, starting from the storage form. If I had simply made pieces that were solely conceived of for physical actions, that would have been far too much like tools for me, and the formal qualities of the works would have got lost. I had to keep the idea of form up in the air because at some point it was to be included in the *Werkstück* and also had to be built up in the action.

MM: I asked the question about the mental levels in order to follow up with another: If a certain section can take place on the mental level and if a large part of your work manifests in the form of concepts, of words, did you ever think to transform your work completely to the linguistic, conceptual, textual level, in keeping with Lawrence Weiner's postulate: "The work need not be built"?

FEW: At that time my colleagues in New York—not Lawrence Weiner but Joseph Kosuth—accused me, playfully but actually quite seriously, of a lack of clarity because I still needed objects, saying one could transpose them into linguistic terms. I had in fact done that with the *Wortbilder*, which was why I was sure it could be done, but for me that was a thing of the past. I need the physical side as well; with language alone I would have found the definitions of space, time, and body too reduced. But at times I shared very close friendships with the conceptual artists, as there are points of contact there, because large parts of the work are also not visually available, so one has to construct them in one's mind. One concept in my works, though, is that the physical is involved in the piece in the same way as the mental idea. In order to keep my work ideas complex, I did not wish to give up the artisanal side, and that wouldn't have been possible with conceptual ideas reduced to language.

Erik Verhagen, "Des mots-images à la poussière d'étoiles,"
Les cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne, no. 107 (Spring 2009), 106

EV: Your oeuvre has always been based on creating an equilibrium between temporal and spatial data. What's striking in your most recent output, whether "installations" or "images," is that they give the mistaken impression that the work on space or on the gallery wall has sidelined the temporal aspect, which was more evident not only in your early *Werksatz* (Work Set) but in the works that followed, which necessitated participation or a physical change of place by the spectator. These recent works, independently of the fact that they "sideline" the spectator, harbor intertextual links with your youthful oeuvre: ultimately the temporal dimension emerges through this work with memory.

FEW: Obviously, the work on time was thematized in the *Werksatz*. It's been less prominent since the 1980s. The 1960s lent themselves to this kind of questioning. As for the intertextual dimension, it owes a lot to the *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings). I think that through these drawings I established a style of my own and a kind of "formal arsenal" I was able to draw on later; for example, in *Das Neue Alphabet* (The New Alphabet). But other unconscious and recollective elements also come into play. In 2003 I exhibited at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. The curators had wanted to include some of the *Wortbilder* (Word Pictures). Walking through the show and moving from the *Wortbilder* room to *Das Neue Alphabet* one, I realized that I'd returned to the chromatic palette of 1957–1958. I hadn't been aware of that until then.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, „Versuch, eine Skulptur zu sein“ (Attempt to Be a Sculpture),
Mousse, no. 43 (April–May 2014), 88

HUO: I want to come back to this distinction between “performance” and “the performative.” I think it’s very interesting that you made this point very early on, very insistently.

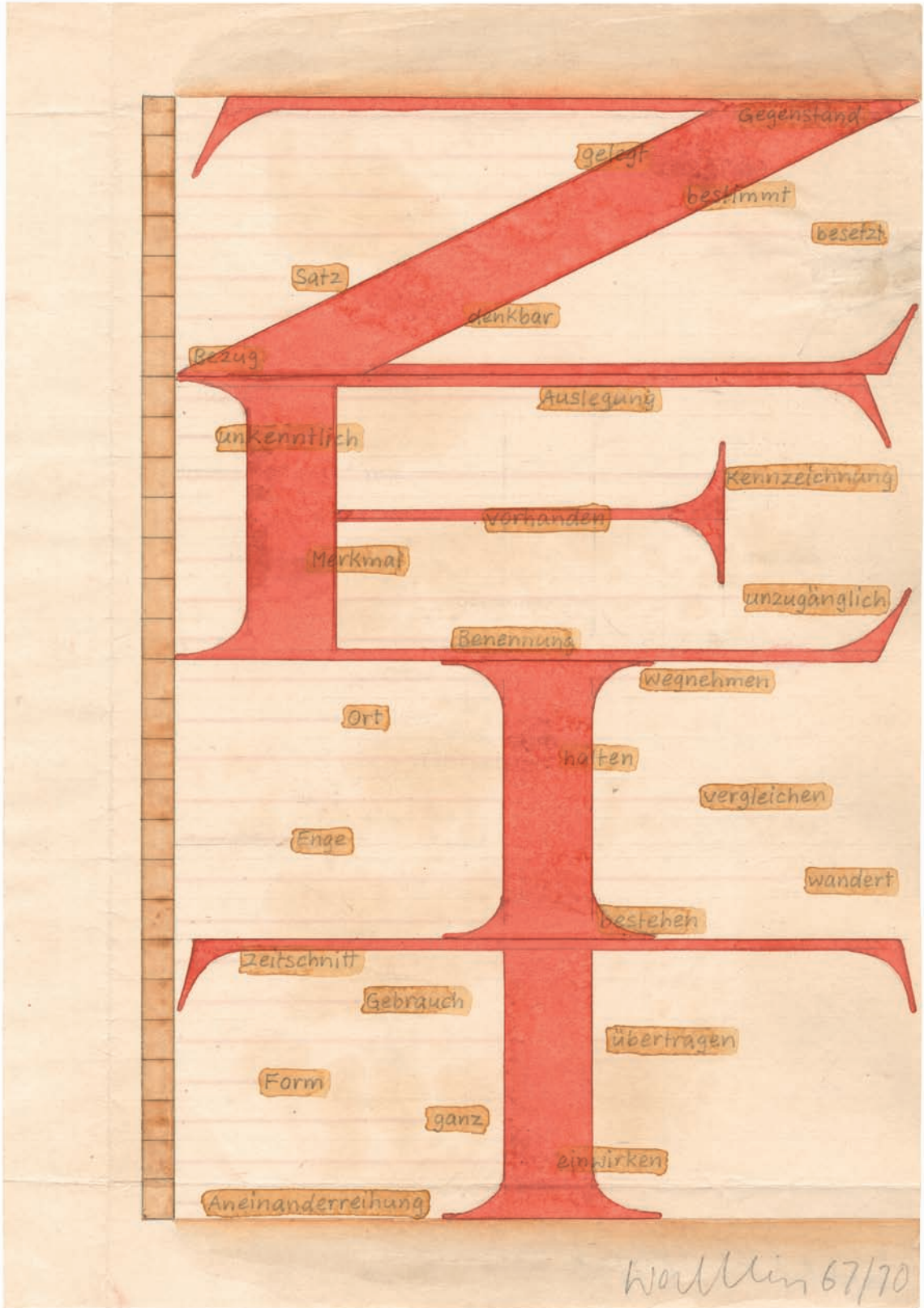
FEW: It is a question of status. A work on the table, on a plinth, on the floor, whatever, can be addressed as a kind of sculpture. But when you take it into your hands, you change its status. You turn *yourself* into a pedestal, into a plinth, by holding the piece. Then, putting it back turns it into a traditional sculpture again. That brought me to the idea of working with the body. I developed works to be used, to be acted with. Not as performances, but as Work Demonstrations. I did a large-scale show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York that lasted from the end of 1969 until March of 1970, and within the show I was doing a kind of demonstration to show how the works functioned. But I always made a distinction between work-action, or work-in-action, versus demonstrating the use of a work. This acting with pieces happened in real space. It was not imagined space, or projected space, or allegoric space. That was important. I had to define space in acting. I also had to think about what the material is. To be an artist, I have to have material. So I started to think about whether it’s plausible to say that when you act with your own body, your body becomes a kind of material. The space you are acting in and with also becomes a material. Also the time you are working in and with becomes a material.

21

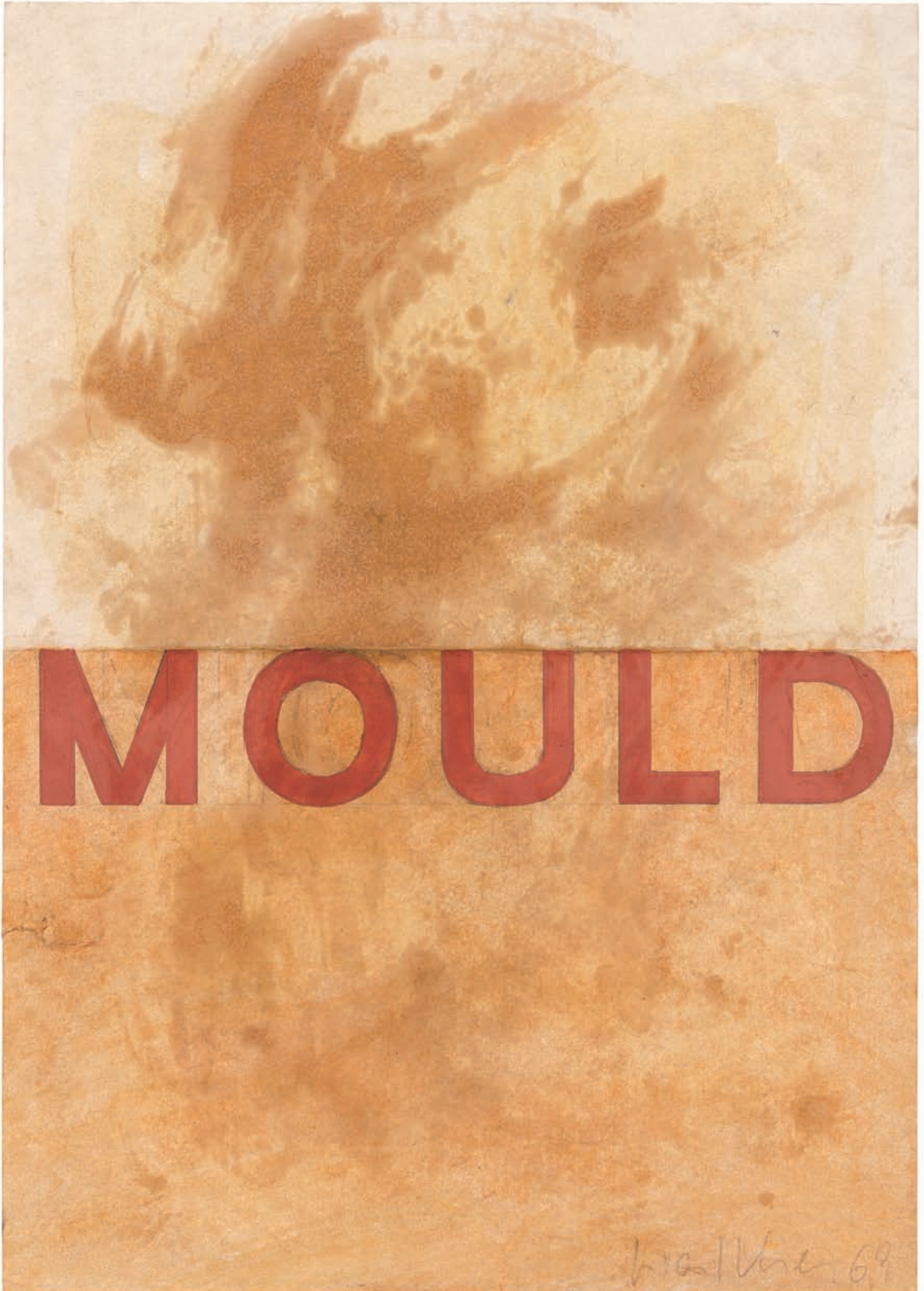
**Kolja Reichert, „Skulpturen ohne Ende: Pleased to Meet You,”
Frieze, no. 16 (September–November 2014), 86**

KR: You had yourself photographed in 1958, when you were nineteen, performing actions—such as spewing water mixed with baking soda and milk. You called the works *Versuch, eine Skulptur zu sein* (Attempt to Be a Sculpture, 1957).

FEW: I had been thinking about whether one could give a tempo to a sculpture. Temporality. Something flowing. Wood and stone were out of the question. Likewise drawing the sculptural actions afterwards; that wasn't it either. So I asked a friend to photograph me in my work space.



ZEITRAUM (Time Space), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 35, 1967/1970
 Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.7 x 20.9 cm



IM GEHEN VERDICHTUNG (Condensation While Walking), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 12, 1969
Pencil, watercolor, oil on paper (double-sided), 27.9 x 21.5 cm

Wallen 70/71

This is ^{the} actually work ~~was~~ instrument only has served ~~was~~ To what piece does that diagram relate? ~~was~~ you remember the canvas strip with ^(a sleeve) on both ends People are lying in front of it having an arm in the sleeve facing each other. While using the piece they will not talk together. It's use lasted for about 3 or 4 month. It covered a ^{considerable} long time period. It's not only being active but working using this material means you ^{are} just doing physical work ~~is~~ ~~was~~ to develop s.th. and I say this s.th. is ^{develop} those diagrams They are my examines what I was able to ^{with} with the piece. And of course I will develop quite different things ~~was~~ ~~was~~ It is really an open structure there is freedom to become active to do s.th. they do not restrict you those pieces do not limit you and as I understand this information room will limit ~~is~~ ~~was~~ you are forced to read things which somebody else has selected for you ~~was~~ I hope I am not too pointy ~~was~~ It's hard to say which one is more limited when you give a person an instrument, this of course is an instrument too. But it is wider open in a physical sense therefore there are no books ~~was~~ for him if there is not even philosophy ~~was~~ offers more freedom it is a question for how you look at things. I wouldn't want to put myself into it to compare between two artists who offers more freedom. ~~was~~ No it is the principle not the artist I think it's the principle ~~was~~ But I mean it hinges on the artist ~~was~~ ~~was~~ Then there are for example the ~~was~~ ~~was~~ a point ~~was~~ the British conceptualists and their treatise on art which is involving very much because ~~was~~ than intellectual work to read some of these things but on the other hand again it is that the structure is very strikly set but it has nothing anymore to do with esthetic ~~was~~ there main object is to abstract art in terms of abstracting the category itself. They would say that this is still an object and no matter how ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~

ORIGIN It's after the chartes

~~was~~ ~~was~~ should have added s.th. before which ^{it} must the necessity to work with the piece you must be free to determine where to use ^{it} ~~was~~ the place the time how long to use it and of course, the time when you use it not to

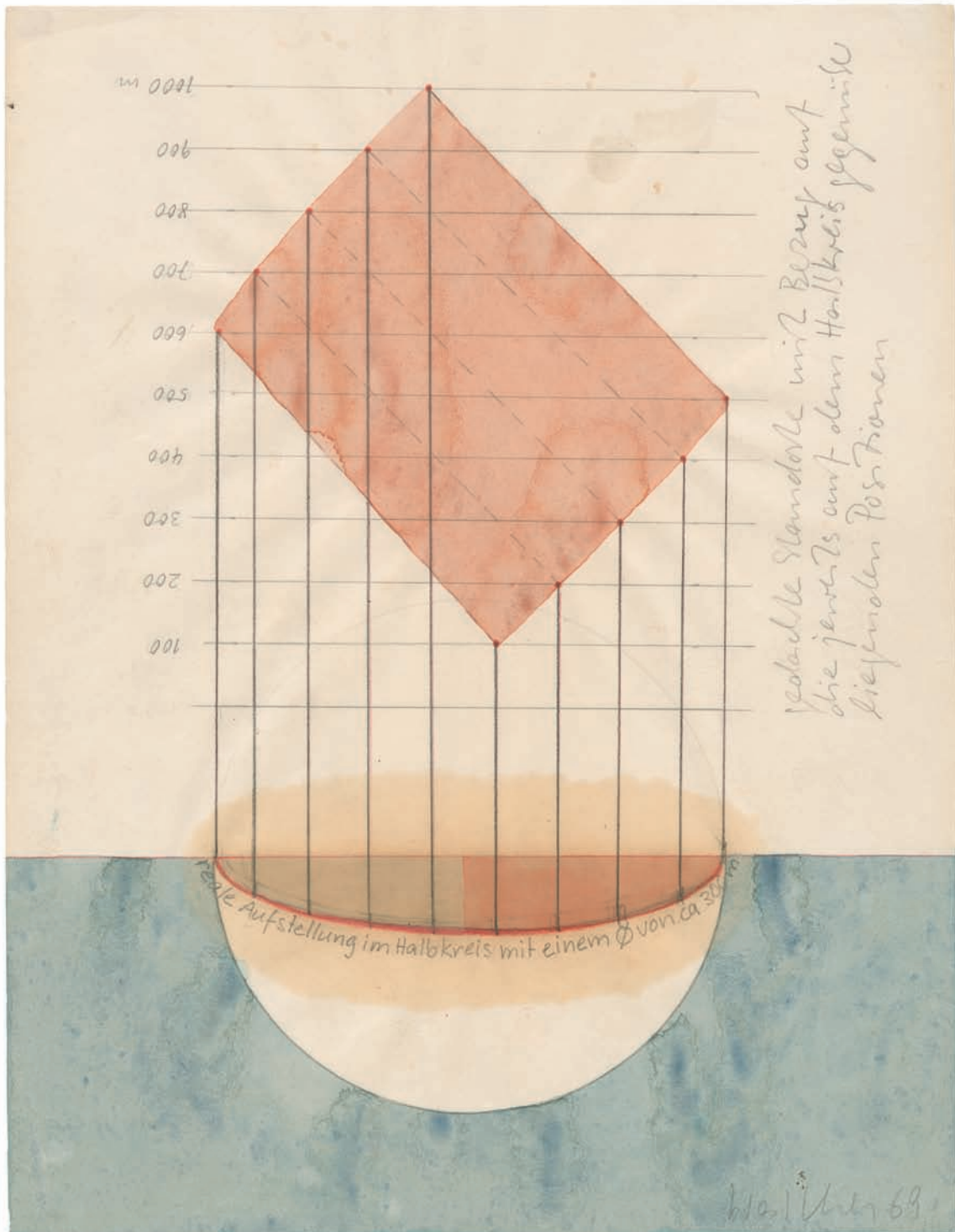
CONTOUR

HANDLUNG IM SPRACHFELD (Action in the Field of Language), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 25, 1970/1971
Typewriter, pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.7 x 20.9 cm

BEWEGUNG IN RICHTUNG ARCHITEKTUR
 GESCHICHTETE BLICKE
 DER RAUM AUSSER HALB
 DER KÖRPER SUCHT SICH SEINEN RHYTHMUS
 DIE ZEICHNUNG BILDET SICH BEI LAUFIG HERAUS
 FÄLLT IN DEN RAUM
 STELLEN DEN KÖRPER T
 ERPROBUNG DER GEGENWART
 LOSCHUNG DER RICHTUNG
 DIE HANDLUNGSSCHNITTE
 SAMMLUNG DER FRAGMENTE VON DEN FÜSSEN AUS
 DIE PROPORTION DER ZEIT
 BEANTWORTUNG
 DAS AUGE ZEICHNET
 AUS DER ERINNERUNG
 INNERHALB DES FELDES
 FLIESENDE ORTE
 PASSAGE HERVORGEHOSEN
 BEFESTIGUNG UND AUFLÖSUNG
 DIE PROJEKTION WILL WEITER
 BEWEGLICHE SOCKEL
 LINIENRAUM
 DER KÖRPER WARTET
 HERAUSGELOSTE RICHTUNG
 DAS FELD WIRD SCHWEBEND GEMACHT

Walther 67/70

SPRACHE ENTWICKELT DAS FELD (Language Develops the Field), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 35, 1967/1970
 Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.6 x 20.8 cm



HANDLUNGSKONZEPT (Action Concept), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 57, 1969
Pencil, watercolor, oil on paper (double-sided), 29.4 x 20.9 cm

SKULPTURMANIFEST (Sculpture Manifesto), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 2, 1965/1969
Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.4 x 20.8 cm >>

WERKMANIFEST

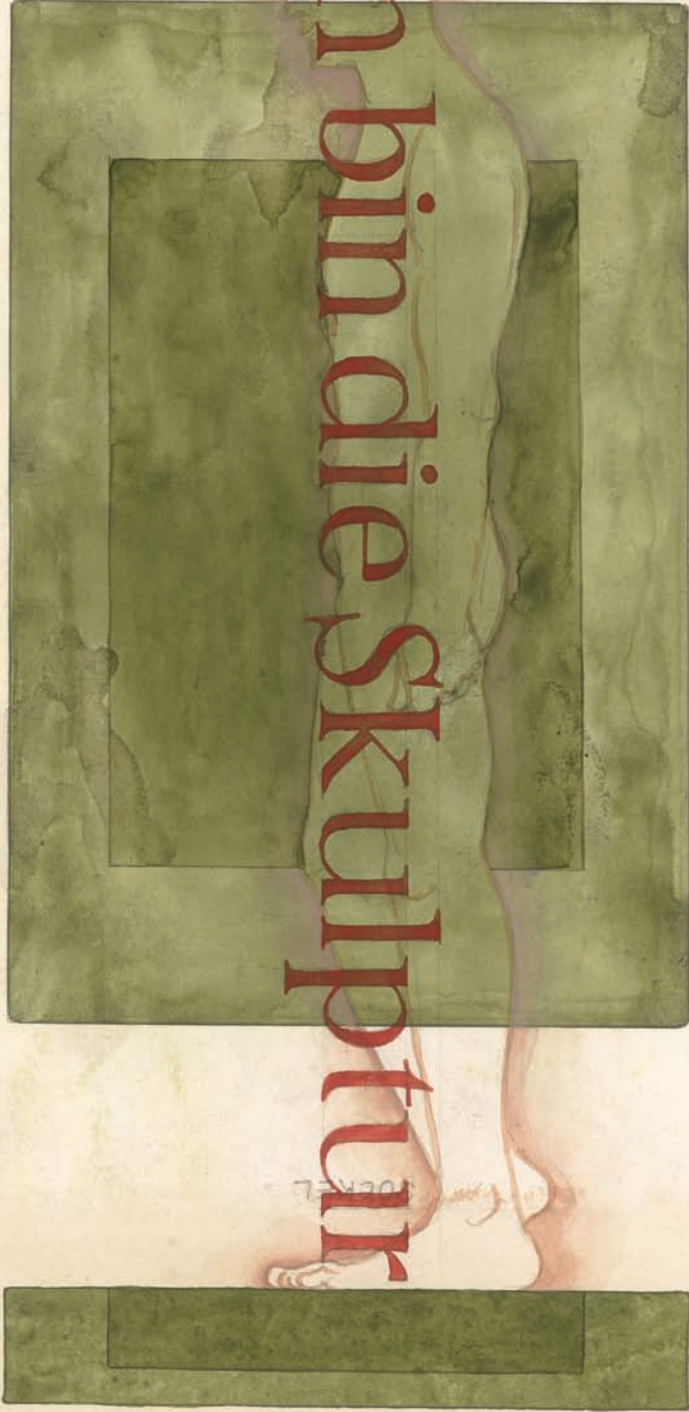
MATERIALIDEE

ENTSTOFFLICHUNG DES PLASTISCHEN

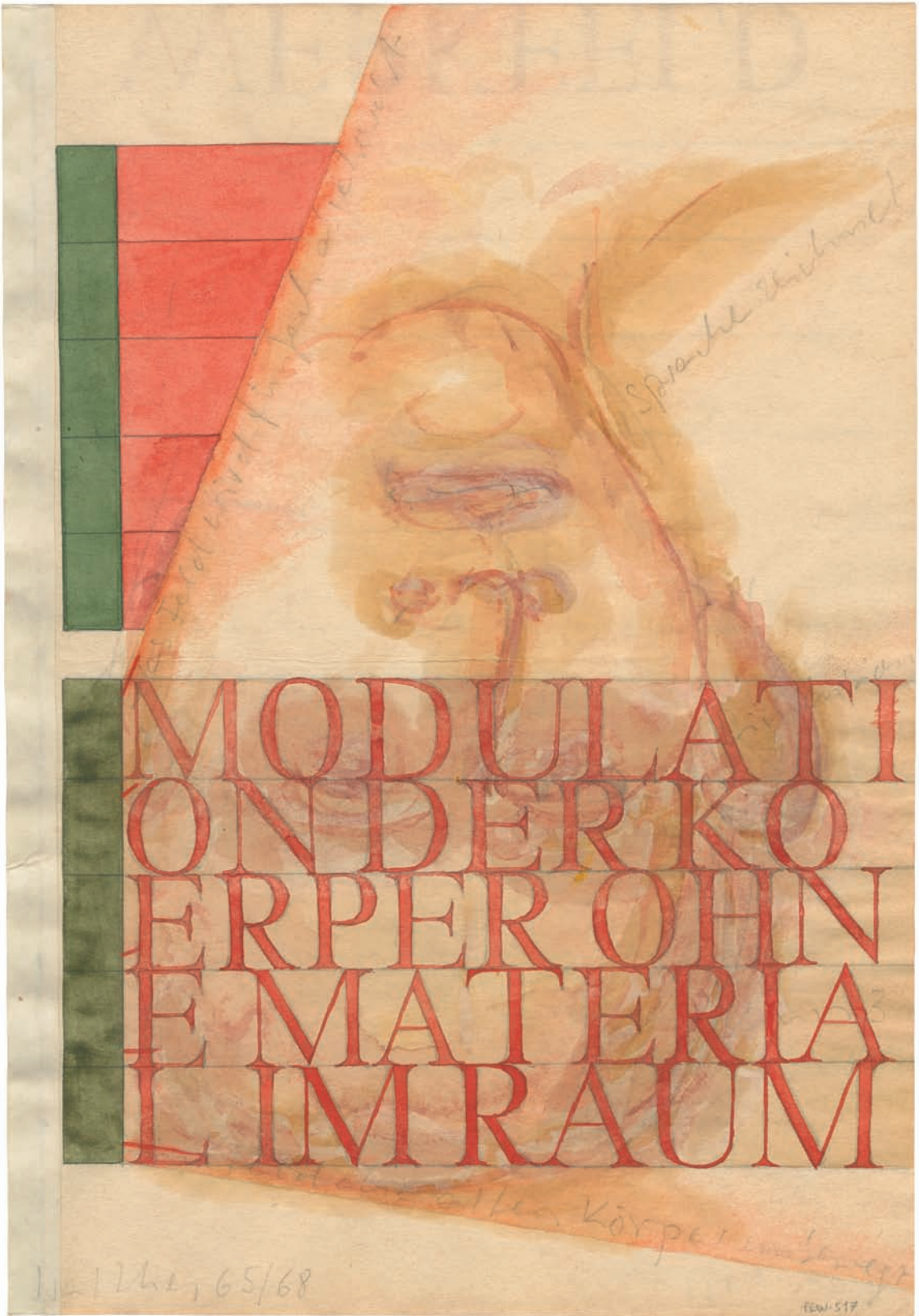
SKULPTUR

KÖRPER

ich bin die Skulptur



Walker 65/69



DOPPELPROJEKTION (Double Projection), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 13, 1965/1968
Pencil, watercolor, oil on paper (double-sided), 29.6 x 20.4 cm

Correspondence

Yve-Alain Bois
Franz Erhard Walther

Yve-Alain Bois

April 13, 1970

1. Franz Erhard Walther's first exhibition at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich in January 1967. Titled *Leihobjekte Benutzen*, the exhibition comprised a selection of pieces from the 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), *Diagramme* (Diagrams), and *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings).

2. Most of the planned articles mentioned by Yve-Alain Bois in his correspondence with Walther were never written. This was also the case of the hypothetical book the future art historian alludes to later. The sole exception was the publication in the French review *Robho*, nos. 5/6 (1971): 14-15, which is doubtless the magazine referred to here, of a translated fragment of an interview from around 1969 with an unknown interlocutor. According to the artist, it might be Jennifer Licht, curator of *Spaces*, an exhibition he contributed to at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1969-1970—together with a summary introduction to Walther's work.

Yve-Alain Bois
RD 1
Hanover Pa., 17331
April 13, 1970

Dear Mr. Walther:

I hope you wont mind my poor english: I am an exchange student from France, and it may get better.

I wanted to write to you since such a long time! But in fact, I think I never dared... Here now, I am living in a little conservative town of Pennsylvania, among the silent majority, and art is absent... So I dare to write to you, to tell you how much what you do is sensual, beautiful, really beautiful.

Although I am still young (18 in a couple days) I know your work since about 3 years (because I visited the Friedrich Gallery in Munich)¹ and always liked it: to me the participation of the spectator, the calm respiration of your work, and the engagement in meditaion were and are wonderful.

As I am disgussed by the chauvinistic attitude of french art people, I am to write something on you and if fact the magazines ask me for...²In fact I dont have to much information on you, but maybe inNY I could find some...Is your book³still availbæ?

I would like to know if you would accept that I come and have a kind of interview with you, so be send in french magazines, and if you would accept that I meet you... I know a lot of artists in France, but so few people in America.

I will be in New York the 17-18-19-20 of April⁴and will phonw to you when I arrive so see if you accept that I come.

Sincerely
with admiration


Yve-Alain Bois

3. Franz Erhard Walther: *Objekte, benutzen* (Cologne: Verlag Gebrüder König, 1968).

4. Bois planned this trip to New York for shortly after the close of *Spaces*, but saw the exhibition on a previous trip in February 1970.

Yve-Alain Bois

May 6, 1970

Yve-Alain Bois
Rd 1
Hanover Pa. 17331
May 6, 1970

Dear Mr. Walther:

I have to apologize to write to you so late.

In fact, I wanted to wait that the prints I sent for duplicates come back before to write to you... And, on the other side, I would prefer to ask you these questions for a written interview with these photographs under my eyes, as I want to do an article going the more perfectly I can with the pieces you show...

It is terrible: I don't find the time to do what I want! Being an exchange student (trip payed and sponsored by different organisation) obliges you to a lot of activity without any importance... Anyway, I think I will do this article more seriously if I do it in France...with all my documentation.

Were you ever influenced by the book of Umberto Eco, "l'oeuvre ouverte" or "the open work",¹ which deals with the participation and the entire recreation of a work of art by its new creator, the public... Mr. Eco goes from Joyce (which is, with Finnegans Wake, the start of the open structure in art) and quote different artists, like of the Group Zero.²

I think this book, which is very hard to read to me, (I mean in the situation I am now, without any free night etc) is published in America by MacMillan publishers...

About the information on these Brazilian artists:³ I am writing to get it, and as soon as I can, will send it to you: but my parents or my friends will have to find it in my files in France, and everything followed in trunks my parents who just moved in another city.

I think more and more that your work is one of the more important of today, and reading different material on you (the MOMa interview, the German book) I think I could do more with a little help by some of my friends - than an article. But of course I want to begin with it.

Later, if I can see you often, I can try to find a French or Swiss publisher for your book,⁴ and if you want help you to translate it, but I guess these ideas are for later. Do you prefer I wait to have these prints back to ask you different questions?

I know you prefer to wait I have these questions to send me the different information that we decided, but maybe, in fact these documents⁵ would be a great help... It is maybe too early for that, since the prints did not come yet... unless you already have the time to prepare it?

I guess I still may ask you different questions in this letter; and if you think they are a lot to personal, please excuse me, and just dont answer them... This information anyway is not at all for the interview, unless you feel it would be interesting to publish your answers.

Did you have any connection with the different german avant-garde movements? Were you ever asked to participate to a group Zero show,⁶ or to have an event with Beuys?⁷ I know that Beuys copied some of your works, as you said, but is your connection with him more involved in exhibits, and group shows?

Why did you come to America?⁸ I mean, did you feel the new American Art, or the critics here could bring you information, or could be interested in your work a lot more than german people?

You told me you dont feel very comfortable in the book of Germano Celant,⁹ and I think also that your art is very different from this concept of Poor Art, or Earth art... Do you think that your place in the MOMA show "Spaces"¹⁰ was not in the same kind of mistake. It is just a supposition I ask, but in fact as the show had no continuity -i thought- and no real connection between the works, your work was here as a question to the other artists' selection...

Do you know different artists that you think very important, to-day/ Artist living?

What was your evolution in art? I mean did you start by painting, and what kind of painting? Or did you come right away, about 8 years ago to the . Do you think Duchamp had any importance on your work, or Klein,¹¹ or any other artists? Did you have an artistic conversion, I mean, did you chance quickly of art form?

You said in the interview¹² that meditation is a stereotyped word, and I remember you to say in front of a print: too mystical... Dont you think that your work, with this basic hope in creativity, is sometimes related to a modern faith, or mythism?

I hope all this jam of questions does not bore you too much, and that you will find time to answer some.

I hope your wife and your kids are in good health.

all my admiration,

Abel

1. A reference to Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962). Bois was the first to bring up this text in connection with Walther's work. He likely had read the French translation: *L'oeuvre ouverte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965). The English translation published by Macmillan that he refers to does not exist. *The Open Work* did not appear until 1989, published by Harvard University Press.
2. An international artists' collective whose German version was founded in the late 1950s by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene.
3. Bois is referring to artists such as Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, and Lygia Clark (see n. 4, p. 69), members of the Brazilian neoconcrete movement who had engaged in participatory works at the same time as Walther.
4. Franz Erhard Walther: *Objekte, benutzen*.
5. Bois is referring to photocopies of the *Diagramme* (Diagrams) and/or *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings) that Walther had shown him during his visit in April.
6. Like many of the artists of his generation and graduation class—Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke, for example—at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he studied from 1962 to 1964, Walther kept aloof from Group Zero and never took part in the events they organized. See his reply of May 17, 1970.
7. Walther's relationship with Joseph Beuys was highly conflictual. Walther never studied or collaborated with him, but the older man nonetheless lent himself to activations of Walther's pieces, notably *Weste* (Vest), 1. *Werksatz*, element # 11, 1965. In Walther's telling, Beuys did everything he could to sabotage his own career. See his reply of May 17, 1970.
8. Walther moved to New York in 1967. The reasons were many, and included the incomprehension and denigration his work was meeting with in Germany at the time. He outlines the situation over and over in his diaries (now in the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Archives in Fulda) and concluded, correctly, that the New York scene would be more receptive. His differences with Beuys also played a part in the move. See his reply of May 17, 1970.
9. Germano Celant, *Arte povera* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1969).
10. The MoMA exhibition *Spaces* was held from December 30, 1969, to March 8, 1970. The other artists included in the show were Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, and the Pulsa Group. The aim of the exhibition was to present works that take account of both the relationship with space and spectator involvement. Each artist had his own space, which meant no interaction or correspondence between the works. Walther's space "opened" onto 54th Street. He was present on a near daily basis to guide "users" through the activation of the 1. *Werksatz* pieces. For more information, see https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/4393/releases/MOMA_1969_July-December_0086_160.pdf (accessed February 14, 2017).
11. Walther appreciated both artists but saw them as not especially "important" to his work. See his letter of August 28, 1970.
12. Bois is referring to the interview with Walther published by MoMA for *Spaces*. The interview was made available in photocopy form during the exhibition, and Bois translated it into French with a view to publication in *Robho* (see n. 2). Never published in full, the translation was included with his letter of October 19, 1970.

Franz Erhard Walther

May 17, 1970

1. At the beginning of 1970, Walther described himself as hampered by the "limitations" of language and opted to replace the generic term work with the pictogram □, which enabled him to "open up" his concept. In his diary Franz Erhard Walther, *Tagebuch Museum of Modern Art, New York*, 28. Dezember 1969-1. März 1970 (Cologne: Heiner Friedrich, 1971), we learn that □ corresponds to "object, instrument, thing, piece, artwork, fact, unit, installation, work, concept, vehicle, element, material, etc." (n.p.).

Franz Erhard Walther
436 East 75th St.
Apt. # I FE
New York City, N.Y. 10021

New York, May 17th 1970

Dear Mr. Beis -

with a little delay the material we spoke about when you were here...

I intended to send you a larger number of diagrams, but - by going through the material I realized, that most of the stuff needs a this or that correction, so I decided to keep it back. But I think the few samples will give you an idea of the realm of developments with the □, (In the future I hope to be able to broaden and deepen these inventions/developments.)

By the way, I count on that ~~XXXXXXXX~~ more and more people become aware of their own creative ability; the diagrams are a kind of a challenge, to drop the stereotyped schematic thinking (besides that I consider them as inventions, developments, processes, concepts to be thought of...)

To your letter - I try to answer the questions :

I do not know the mentioned book of Umberto Eco, "l'oeuvre ouverte".

When I came to my pieces to be used, I was not aware of, that there had been something existing which we call today 'open Structure'. I discovered that later through my work; so till that moment I was blindfolded in a way. But, that is a rather historical ~~view~~ point of view, for even if I had known these things, I probably would not have been able to relate it to my work. (I have strong doubts whether it is wise to construct a relation to works of the literature. Yet it is the only field, I would accept relations to.)

I feel very uncomfortable with the term 'participation' in connexion with my work. As soon as one is capable to use this instrumentarium, one does not participate anymore, (this state can ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ happen to precede the process of use/development, but stays irrelevant for me. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ It is the approach of the spectator, thus far away from developing something.)

Of course you can keep the prints as long as you ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ feel need for it.

I never had any connections to German avant-garde movements, or avant-garde movements in other countries. Different reasons didn't allow that.

No, I never were asked to participate on a Zero - group show.

My relations to Beuys result from meetings at the Dusseldorf Fine Art Academy where I used to study for two years. There were several other meetings, among them an event at a private house on which he and I took part. But actually there was never the smallest idea of having an appearance together. He was always very opposed to me and my work - at times it ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ rather looked pathological, and he undertook quite silly things, with the intention, to prevent, that my work becomes known. For myself I have to confess, that I was not interested to work together with him.

I think, that will not change in the future.
He belongs to another generation.

Why did I come to America? This question is simple and complex at the same time. For the first time I had the idea to come here about 1963. Then I only was curious to see this place I had heard a lot about. My means did not allow that trip. The reasons changed or after a while there was an accumulation, a mixture of reasons to go to New York. (Strange, I never thought of going to another American City.) If I am asked to recall the time when I made the final decision to come here and tell, what made me finally move, I just can give key-words: Europe at that time had no attraction to me and I felt it would be good to leave it behind for a certain time.

I can't say, that I was attracted by the American art-movements. It was rather that I hoped to find a situation, which gives me the opportunity, to formulate, to explain my claims and demands. Europe seemed to be busy with other things.

Of course it is nonsense to put the label 'Spaces' on my works. I agreed on taking part in this show, because I wanted as many people as possible to become known with what I am doing, what my work consists of.

I turned my ~~room~~ into an area, where the ~~pieces~~ were demonstrated to the public and ~~who~~, who ever wanted to, could have exercises with the things.

(Sometimes I saw structures of a possible use.)

So I did not more, than use the space for demonstrating the , (it was a demonstration-room for the)

I gave my space a function and I did not consider it in any connection to the other artists, despite the general title.

Artists (contemporary ones), whose work I think as important are:

✓ No, I should not list names - ~~in~~ in another letter, I will discuss the (probably aggravating) structures of today. ok?

Well, I started with doing drawings and writing poems. I painted and did sculptural things.* By looking back, from a certain point on the things seem to have necessity and logical consistency.

(* As far as I remember, I was more interested in what is happening between the viewer and the object, than in the object itself.

That might be the fracture, leading to the later . But, since the exist, this state of problem for me belongs to the past.)

I don't think, I can name an artist (or artists or movements) I feel related to.

One goes through developments, phases, realizations and at times is forced to reject things, one once has viewed as essential.

Shall we call that conversion?

I have been following my intentions. One intuition, conception developed out of the other.

I can't think of an abrupt change.

I spoke of the fixed word meditation a.o. as stereotyped, because people operate with these words as if the substance, content of it is available by will.

If one is able to comprehend its respective meaning and in addition is capable (if willing) to practice what is meant by the word, it is not necessary anymore

to suggest, to work with something more concrete for the time being.

... 'too mystical' I said, because I want the to be shown as neutral as possible.

To show them under particular circumstances signifies an addition already and, as I see it, can easily turn into a suggestion. I am concerned to prevent that.

(The individual is asked to determine the importance of origins and formations.)

I accept all serious attempts to use the - and as for myself, mysticism always had great attraction.

The human being with his abilities carries on the evolution; so the will be related to the Zeitgeist, as much as the user is.

(I prefer to use the term Zeitgeist instead modern mythism)

I hope my answers do help you on with your work.

When ever questions arise, feel free to ask me.

Best wishes
yours,

Timothy E. J. Walker

Yve-Alain Bois

Undated handwritten letter

Xoe-Alain Bois
R.D.#1
Hanover Pa. 17331

Dear Mr. Welther — can I say, dear friend:

I just received your letter and your beautiful documents to-day and will — of course — ask many questions as soon as I study them —

Few pre-questions, however:

- the zeitgeist?
- What is "Book" at Temple University and Harvard University?

I would you accept to zerox the letter I wrote to you last time ... so I could do something with the beautiful letter you wrote me, and have a following correspondence + the list of questions I asked you ... OK?

Now, the big reason for what I write to you so soon is that a very good friend of mine arrived in New York. She is the first person who showed me your work ... She is the person, I told you, would eventually publish your book in France or find a publisher ... She planned me that she saw your book, and told me that "we" should publish it in France¹ if somebody do it in America ... Even before I told her about my feelings ... She is german and goes often in Germany and Switzerland. She is the agent of the estate of Johannes Ihen² ... (in fact Ihen? what do you think of his pedagogy, his ideas of the "viewer as an artist", a "reflectable act" ... May he in a very chemical way, be was a kind of precursor of your ideas? ...).

Her name is Eve Eyquem³ (at Hotel Wpale 1295 Madison Avenue at corner of 92th St. NY, NY / tel AT 96 000 - extension line 922) ... →

sorry to write
by hand: → do
not want this
letter to be
late :- -

I told her to reach you, and that I would write
to you as soon as possible (she phoned me this
morning).--- but in case she loses your phone, would
you mind to phone to her---

Besides I send you the magazine - also, in french -
where there is an article on Lysia Clark⁴ - the Brazilian
artist I spoke to you about... I hope Kira Eyquem
could translate to you in German... the texts are beautiful,
but the pictures of the work are very lousy, and
it is impossible to understand what is her search... I hope
you would not judge her work and ideas on these sad
pictures, but on the text, sometimes too feminist, or
housewife... (my best wisher) Alessia B...

Besides, Lysia just wrote me to tell me that she
like very much your work, but, unfortunately, seen
it only by pictures... (my best wisher) Alessia B...

I hope this letter will bring you no disappointment.
and I will write to you soon about the diagrams...
Could you phone me - or write quick if in contact with Mrs Eyquem? Alessia B...

Yve-Alain Bois
RD#1
Hanover Pa. 17331

Dear Mr. Walther – can I say, dear friend:

I just received your letter and your beautiful documents today and will—of course—ask many questions as soon as I study them. Two pre-questions, however:

The Zeitgeist?

What is “book” at Temple University and Harvard University?

Could you accept to xerox the letter I wrote to you last time... so I could do something with the beautiful letter you wrote me, and have a following correspondence + the list of questions I ask you... Ok?

Now, the big reason for what I write to you so soon is that a very good friend of mine arrived in New York. She’s the first person who showed me your work... She is the person, I told you, would eventually publish your book in France¹ or find a publisher... She phoned me that she saw your book, and told me that “we” should publish it in France if somebody do it in America... Even before I told her about my feeling... She is German and goes often in Germany and Switzerland. She is the agent of the estate of Johannes Itten...² (In fact Itten? what do you think of his pedagogy, his ideas of the “viewer as an artist”, or of “tactile art”... May be in a very classical way, he was a kind of precursor of your ideas?...). Her name is Eva Eyquem³ (at Hotel Whale 1255 Madison Avenue at corner of 92th st. NY.NY/ tel AT96000 – extension line 922)...

Sorry to write
by hand:
I do not want this
letter to be late...

I told her to seek you and that I would write to you as soon as possible (she phoned me this morning)... But in case she loses your phone, would you mind to phone to her...

Besides I send you the magazine—alas in French—where there is an article on Lygia Clark⁴—one of the Brazilian artist I spoke to you about... I hope Eva Eyquem could translate to you in German... The texts are beautiful, but the pictures of her work are very lousy, and it is impossible to understand what is her search... I hope you would not judge her work and ideas on these bad pictures, but on the text, sometimes too feminist, or novelistic... Besides, Lygia just wrote me to tell me that she likes very much your work, but, unfortunately, seen it only by pictures...

I hope this letter will bring you no disappointment. And I will write to you soon about the diagrams... Could you phone me—or write quick—if conversation with Ms. Eyquem?

Amities (my best wishes) YAlain Bois

1. *Objekte, benutzen* was never translated into French.

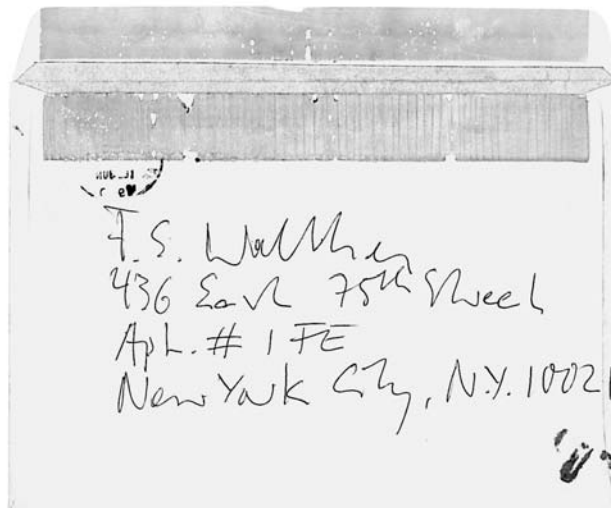
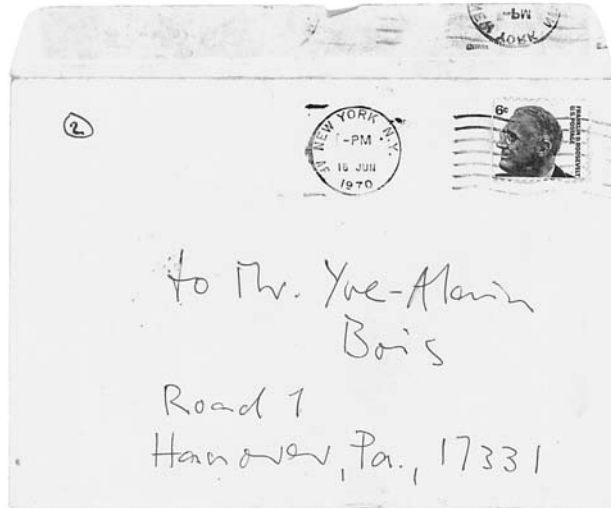
2. Johannes Itten (1887–1957) was a Swiss artist and educator who taught at the Bauhaus.

3. According to Bois, Eva Eyquem (1915–2009), an art educator (*Kunstpädagogin*) and a disciple of Itten, played an important part in his training in aesthetics. “She was enormously knowledgeable artistically, especially where Germany was concerned, and her library was a refuge where we had many, many conversations until I left definitively for the United States in 1983.” (Yve-Alain Bois, email, January 6, 2017.) Eyquem met Bois in 1966, when he was fourteen. See Sabine Richter, “Einblick in ein kunstpädagogisches Skizzenbuch: Leben und Werk von Eva Eyquem” (PhD diss., Philosophische Fakultät der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 2015), 81.

4. Lygia Clark (1920–1988). The French review Bois refers to is most likely the fourth issue of *Robho*, published in 1968, in which a sizable feature, notably including essays by Jean Clay (“Lygia Clark: Fusion généralisée,” 12–15) and David Medalla (“Participe présent: L’art de Lygia Clark,” 17–19), was devoted to the Brazilian artist. Bois met Clark during the summer of 1968, shortly after she had moved into the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. Regarding their meeting, see Yve-Alain Bois, “Some Latin Americans in Paris,” in *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums; Caracas: Fundación Cisneros; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 77–103.

Franz Erhard Walther

June 14, 1970



Franz Erhard Walther
436 East 75th Street
Apt. # I FE
New York City, N.Y. 10021

New York, NY June 14th 70

Dear Yve-Alain Bois -

I have not been in the position to answer earlier - for different reasons, but finally now a few lines to your last letter -

Yes, Mrs Eva Exquem visited me and we had a long talk together. She seemed to be a kind of enthusiastic about my work and we spoke about the possibility of publishing my book in France. (I told her about the forthcoming English Edition¹ and we went through a part of the material.)

It is great, if she is going to work together with you on that part.

As to the picture she drew to me about the art situation in France, this publication seems to be necessary. But, we will see...

By the way - have you got the Strocher-Catalog² in the meantime ?

(Having got a copy meanwhile, I find several mistakes and errors in my chapter (will be corrected in the next edition).) I would be glad to know a copy in your hands - despite of these errors.

I have to thank you for sending me an article on L. Clark.

With the help of my little French I tried to read the text. Unfortunately the pictures hardly give an idea of what her things are and consist of.

If she is interested in what I am doing, as you mentioned - please let her know about my book and the Strocher-Catalog.

Within the next two month the diary I wrote on the MOMA-event will come out in German and English. ³ I will send you a copy.

To your questions :

Zeitgeist. You spoke in a letter of the relation of my work to modern faith or mythism. I can't interpret my work, but since I know that it depends on the human being, (willing to use the suggested means,) I know at the same time, that all of what a today's existence possibly consists of, is operative/effective in developments with the . (the word Zeitgeist covers more than faith and mythism. Only for that I preferred to use it.)

BOOK at ...⁴ I have done two books to be used (1963). At the mentioned institutions I demonstrated them to large audiences.

(x one of them has been published in an edition of 80 copies ← last year)
I did not quite understand what you ment with ...would you accept to zerox the letter!
Please let me know.

The slides I hopefully can send to you soon -(they only need to be put into these cardboard-frames~~x~~)

If you have the possibility to do that, I can send them immediately.
(~~X~~On my part, at the moment I do not have the time to take care of that matter.)

Greetings
yours,
Franz Eberl Walther

P.S. I just discovered that
your French address went lost
Would you mind to give it to
me once more?

1. The English translation of *Franz Erhard Walther: Objekte, benutzen* was never published.

2. Karl Ströher (1890–1977) was an industrialist, patron of the arts, and collector. Edited by Gerhard Bott, the catalogue is titled *Bildnerische Ausdrucksformen, 1960–1970: Sammlung Karl Ströher im Hessischen Landesmuseum Darmstadt* (Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum, 1970). Shot through with errors, the part devoted to Walther was republished as an offprint by Heiner Friedrich the same year.

3. Walther, *Tagebuch*.

4. Walther is referring to the *Großes Buch I* (Large Book 1), and the *Grosses Prozess-Buch* (Large Process Book, 1963).

Yve-Alain Bois

Undated handwritten letter

Xve-Alain Bois
RD#1
Hannover Pa. 17331

Dear Mr. Walther,

I just came back from a trip when I received your nice letter.

I am very glad to know that you meet Mrs Eyquem, and I think the publication of your book in France would be very possible with her. She knows a lot of publishers (she told me she was thinking of asking Hans Namuth¹ to make a movie on you)... Anyway it would be wonderful to me to work on it, if we do it.

I did not receive the Strocher catalogue yet, but I hope to do before I live here... I hope you have the opportunity to translate the texts of Jigjia Clark...

I am still waiting for the duplicates of prints to come out and I really hope they will be ready quickly, so I can start working on the article. (Studying the diagrams without the pictures is not too easy, and I prefer to have the material on the same time I work).

Would you mind if I make references to philosophy... presentism seems to be important, in relation with your work, and also Umberto Eco's book.

Do you feel close from any philosophical tendency?

Your diary about the NOMA will be a wonderful information, and I would be very grateful to receive

me.

How much is the "multiple" book at Neuenhof Verlag? (maybe I could buy it with some kind of credit, or ask somebody to buy it, and I would pay him at credit...).

For Zerosing the first letter I sent you, I meant: I had there a couple of questions, and you answered me exactly... If I had a copy of this letter, I could use your answers — and my question as research material.

I am glad you would be able to send me the slides quick... In France I could of course put them into the cardboard frames but I do not have that kind of material here, and it is not reliable!

I hope I can make the duplicates before I leave...

My address in France is

Yves Alain Bois
Centre de Rencontre et de Recherche
Avenue de Saragosse

64 PAU

FRANCE.

I hope you are still going in Europe this fall... (I probably will go in Frankfurt in September, as I will be working for a publisher) and I hope to meet you then.

All my best wishes, and I hope to have news from you.

Yves Alain Bois

Yve-Alain Bois
RD # 1
Hanover PA. 17331

Dear Mr. Walther,

I just came back from a trip when I received your nice letter. I am very glad to know that you meet Mrs. Eyquem, and I think the publication of your book in France would be very possible with her. She knows a lot of publishers (she told me she was thinking of asking Hans Namuth¹ to make a movie on you.)... Anyway it would be wonderful to me to work on it, if we do it.

I did not receive the Stroeher catalogue yet, but I hope to do before I live here... I hope you have the opportunity to translate the texts of Lygia Clark... I am still waiting for the duplicates of prints to come out and I really hope they will be ready quickly, so I can start working in the article. (Studying the diagrams without the pictures is not to easy, and I prefer to have the material on the same time I work).

Would you mind if I make references to philosophy... presocratism seems to be important, in relation with your work, and also Umberto Eco's book.

Do you feel close from any philosophical tendence? Your diary about the MoMA will be a wonderful information, and I would be very grateful to receive one.

How much is the "multiple" book at Neuendorf Verlag?² (May be I could buy it with some kind of credit, or ask somebody to buy it, and I would pay him at credit...).

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Avenue de Saragosse
64 PAU

FRANCE.

I hope you are still going in Europe this fall... (I probably will go in Frankfurt in September, as I will be working for a publisher) and I hope to meet you then.

All my best wishes and I hope to have news from you.

YAlain Bois

1. Hans Namuth (1915–1990) was a German-born photographer known especially for his photographs of Jackson Pollock at work in his studio.

2. A reference to the *Handlungsbuch* (Hamburg: Neuendorf Verlag, 1969), published in an edition of eighty.

Yve-Alain Bois

July 15, 1970

Y.A. Bois
RD#1
Hanover Pa. 17331

July 15, 1970

Dear Mr. Walther.

I received the pictures - that I had sent on for duplication - and I am quite furious with it.

These people did only the negatives (but did not make the prints) and it cost me 38 dollars, that of course I cannot pay now! Well, maybe the article money will pay this back.

As I receive it, I can now work seriously on the paper, but I am afraid that I will have to take the pictures along in FRANCE until the prints are done, and send them to you by then.

I am leaving Hanover in 3 days, but will stay for a couple days in Maryland, until the 24th. So I guess you'd better send me news in France instead of here---

Is the diary for Museum of H. Art ready? It would be tremendously helpful.

I still did not receive the Stroker catalogue, but I receive the bill to pay it, so I guess I can pay and receive it directly in France.

Do you still have the pamphlet on you by Kiefeld Museum?¹

Could you explain to me the action of "spots", since I do not see the connection with the 2nd diagram of it (L
E
in
etc.

As I am now working with the diagrams, I can ask more questions about it - what are exactly their role, and their importance in front of the work?

For example in 4 and 3, is the kind of "sonnet" written after experiencing the piece, and such words as ["energy transfer / energy transference" - collusion, defense - communication], are they intuitions, ideas brought by the work. The work being then ^{idea} philosophy - generator?
_{feeling}

Could you re-write more clearly the diagram of FOUR?

Could you give information about how the diagram for simultaneity-piece was written? or the one

for "for preparation"?

- Does a diagram as the one for Silence #2 and the one for simultaneity-piece assume the same role?

Catching the essence of the piece?

I would like very much to know when you come in Europe, as all these questions are a lot easier to ask directly, with less chance of misunderstanding.

But if you could understand me, it would help surely - passing by Paris, I will see Mrs Eyquem and try to see about your book (or the distribution in France of the book).

Please excuse me for my writing.

I hope to hear from you and see you soon,

best wishes

Alain Bois

YA. Bois
RD# 1
Hanover PA. 17331

July 15, 1970

Dear Mr. Walther,

1. Unidentified.

I received the pictures—that I had send on for duplication—and I am quite furious with it. These people did only the negatives (but did not make the prints) and it cost me 38 dollars, that of course I cannot pay now! Well, may be the article money will pay this back.

As I receive it, I can now work seriously on the paper, but I am afraid that I will have to take the pictures along in FRANCE until the prints are done, and send them to you there.

I am leaving Hanover in 3 days, but will stay for a couple days in Maryland, until the 24th or so I guess you'd better send me news in France instead of here...

Is the diary for Museum of M. Art ready? It would be tremendously helpful.

I still did not receive the Ströher catalogue, but receive the bill to pay it, so I guess I can pay and receive it directly in France.

Do you still have the pamphlet on you by Krefeld Museum?¹

Could you explain to me the action of "spots", since I do not see the connection with the 2nd diagram of it.

As I am now working with the diagrams, I can ask some questions about it. What are exactly their role, and their importance in front of the work? For example in 4 and 3, is the kind of "sonnet" written after experiencing the piece, and such words as ["energy transference/ energy transformance" – collision/ defense - communication], are they intuitions, ideas brought by the work. The work being then idea,
philosophy – generator?
feelings

Could you re-write more clearly the diagram of FOUR? Could you give information about how the diagram for simultaneity- piece was written? Or the one for "for preparation"?

Does a diagram as the one for Silence #2 and for the one for simultaneity-piece assume the same role? Catching the essence of the piece?

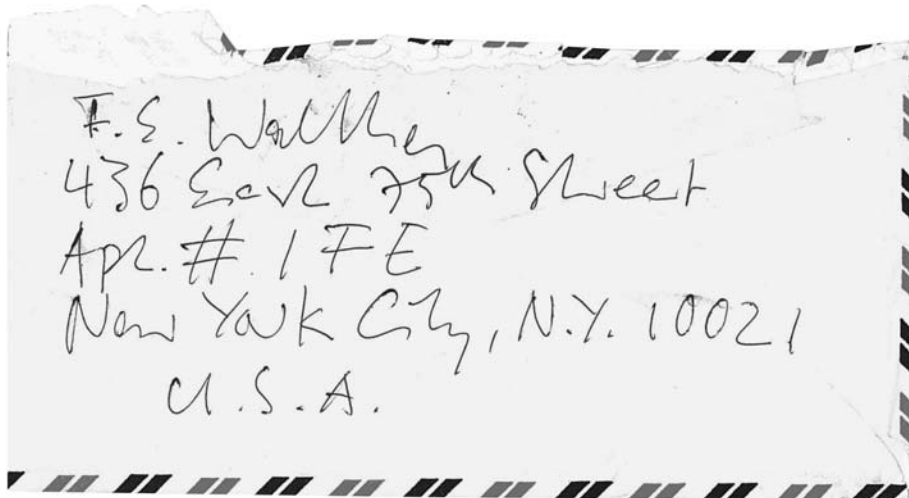
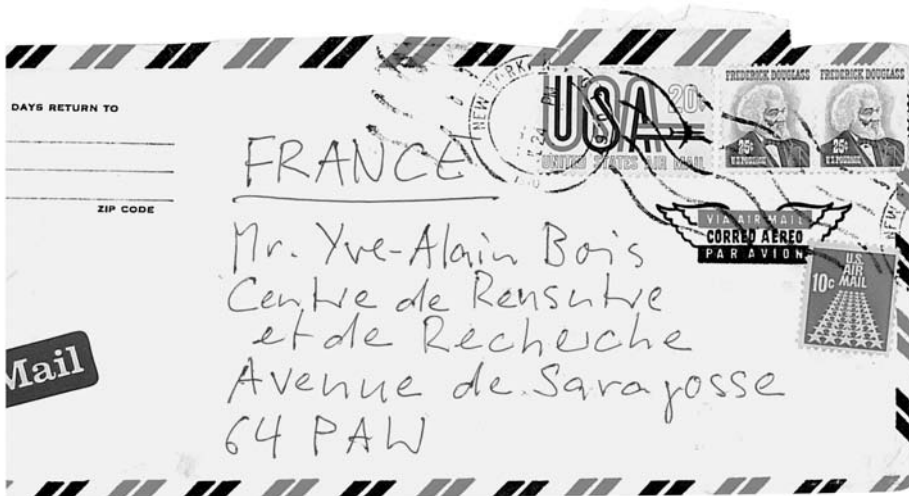
I would like very much to know when you come in Europe, as all these questions are a lot easier to ask directly, with less chance of misunderstanding. But if you could understand me, it would help surely. Passing by Paris, I will see Mrs. Eyquem and try to see about your book (or the distribution in France of the book).

Please excuse me for my writing.
I hope to hear from you and see you soon,

Best wishes,
YAlain Bois

Franz Erhard Walther

July 22, 1970



New York City, N.Y. 10021
July 22nd 1970

Dear Friend -

I feel sorry for not being able to answer your penultimate letter yet. Please allow me to answer both of your letters in one.

In a line as the questions occur:
I can not say that I feel close to a philosophical-tendence, (but I have doubts, whwther the traditional philosophical methods of how to ask, are still a way to get answers.)

The MOMA-Diary has not come out yet, but will appear within the next few weeks.

The BOOK, published by Neuendorf-Verlag, Hamburg is at the moment 1800 DM.

~~XX~~
Finally I managed to xerox your first letter - forgive me for doing it so late.

I received the 'slides' and got to see, that they consist of simple negatives. So I had to give them back and I am still waiting for ~~them~~ those slides. I will send them to your address in France.

Yes, I will go to Europe this fall, probably Mid-September. Maybe we see us in Frankfurt. / By the way, how long are you going to stay at Frankfurt ?

Since I am coming to Europe soon, you do not need to send the photographs here, it's ~~too~~^{so} expensive!

Unfortunately I don't have any more of the Krefeld-prints - but I can ~~include~~ ^{include} a Manifesto I published at the occasion of a demonstration of my [] at the Academy of Fine Arts, Duesseldorf in 1967, just three days before I left for New York. (There on the backside you find a few pictures of some of my early pieces, which have found several followers since.) (When we meet in New York again, I will show you more of the early things. Most of the survivals I have here.)

'SPOTS'² consist of 10 canvas bags with a round bottom, wide enough to stand in. (Photographs of the piece you find in the Stroeher-catalog.)

I would like to see the piece to be used in the open, so that the users ~~can~~ ^(do have) the freedom, to choose distance (for me an important item with the work). The distance one chooses becomes a meaning for the others and has influence to what ever the users may develop. One condition I want to see obeyed, that is - not to move around while being in the bag. One may alter the distance, but for that, one has to untie the bag ~~and~~ ^{and} get out.

The diagrams:
In general the diagrams consist of ideas, Experiences, inventions, projects, concepts, observations, reports, developments, statements, suggestions, conceived through the use of the []. ...only possible through the works...
They can be written before (than only as concepts), while or after the use/exercise.

I want to enable the people to write down their own experiences, They must become able to find a form for that (though it is not easy.)

I consider the [] for getting the above mentioned 'results'.

To be able to bring on developments ~~requires~~ requires, to be familiar with, what the can be used for, thus exercises on the beginning are necessary, to get an idea of the realm of the .
Use can not be a thing in itself, I at least would not accept that.

By now, my diagrams serve as examples, showing ^{of} what can be developed with the .
My hope is, that some day more and more people will be able to record their experiences and thoughts.

I don't have all the diagrams in mind I sent to you. I try to remember.
SPOTS the ~~side~~ ^{side} with the is a rather objective one, telling only about quantity and quality. The ~~vertical~~ ^{vertical} line can be quality, the ~~horizontal~~ horizontal one can be quantity - and reverse. There is no definition of, what the quantity and quality consists of. This invention is a concept, extraction from thinkexperiences with the piece.

The mentioned 14 and 31 diagram, with the words energy transference, energy transference etc. should be seen together with the graphical pattern. It shows possible movements and developments of the four people, using the piece. The words name observed creations with the claim, to give the essence of this particular use. (Although it is a subjective record, this notation nevertheless determines an aspect, ~~EXPERIENCE~~ evoked by the piece.)
With this diagram, the actual use was approximately one hour.

As a neutral reader it is not ~~wrong~~ absolutely wrong to use the term 'sonnet', but when you are known with the connections, you can't keep up that term.

Yes, these ideas etc. are brought about by the .
Not the work is the idea, but what we generate by using it.

The diagram of 'for the time being' 3 (that is the piece with the two sticks, to be fixed on the upper arm) tells a 20 minute use, (with a given concept to move ~~EXPERIENCE~~ up one of the sticks - but without a concept of the ~~next~~ intervals).
The decision 'move' comes up in you - than the positive confirmation 'yes' or the negative counter-decision 'no'. The decision 'move' is allowed to occur. The notoric signal 'move' - the rather brain-controlled yes or no...
(That I call a invention with the piece.)

FOUR:4 the exercise lasted from the morning to the evening (Noontide was a kind of a time-mark.)

Here the text of the Four-diagram you have:

MORNING	NOON	EVENING
time	call	happy
meditate	onerous	balk
draw	gesture	slide
innovate	flow	help

(1. Passan)
2. "
3. "
4. "

Those words describe what the people were working with in the morning, at noon, in the evening. It does not exclude, that there also were other things happening, but the noted words give moments, psychological generations, covering everything else.

The diagram for 'simultaneity-piece' 5 was written time after the actual use, reflecting the/my situation, my positions with the others, while using the piece. (two hour use) I would have been unable to write this down right after the use.

For preparation :6 the piece consists of a large part and a small part.

Diagram : the triangle gives the field for the piece, the interrupted line divides the field for the large part and the small part, according their size (in proportions true to scale). The four vertical lines starting in the corner mean possible movements (without a definition of the kind of the movement -it can be real or just happen in thinking.) By reading the diagram, the lines can be interpreted.

'For silence # 2': On both ends of a canvas 7,50 meters long and 1,80 meters wide closed in a plank 1,80 m x 0,24 m x 4 cm.
Both users will move towards each other by turning over the plank from time to time. The matter is over, as soon as the planks are so close together, that another turn is not possible anymore. (see photosequence in Strocher-catalog.)
Obviously the use develops in time. (To turn in long ~~intervals~~ intervals or short intervals has influence to the other user, also whether one turns slowly or fast, bangs ~~the~~ the plank or not, looks at the partner or not.)

The diagrams 'for silence # 2' show the 'main-themes', emerging during the use :
for example : loosing energy ~~***-----~~ ~~LEAVING~~ deviating / leading away.
Or (16 develop } only gives the number of turns of each user, and in a word the totali-
(12 transfer } ty of what the use for both has been, yet it is not the outcome.

The diagram I can mean the energy of both (one has put in more), or -without counting the turns- the distance they have made while working. It also simply can mean the power of both or their capability to comprehend the developments.
The distance between the vertical lines (high energetic) = the part they still have to advance.

In general, when we work with the I, so many things do have influence :
the weather, the environment, time of the day, being known or being not known with the other users, the psychological conditions, the physical condition, composition male - female etc. All those items play a role, and a wise user will pay attention to it or possibly integrate it in the development. It even can become the 'subject-matter'.

I see me speak of use, but - a real use requires a lot, so on the beginning ^{'use'} will be more a kind of exercise or demonstration with the I. (The people will demonstrate the pieces to themselves and will have exercises with them.)
If the I are not fully comprehended, I know of no way, how to come to developments, concepts, generations, dilatations, creations, ideas... with the I.
As I said, use as an end in itself I can not accept.

When you are at Frankfurt, you should try to reach Bazon Brock. He wrote the only substantial article on my work so far. His address is 6 Frankfurt/M
Hans-Sachs Strasse 1
Telephone 772635

I hope I was able to give some answers to your questions.

Love wishes
Don & I Wally

New York address fill
Mid-September!

1. A brochure titled *Information. Objekte. Benutzen / Franz Erhard Walther* (Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, 1967).

2. *Spots (zehn Feststellungen)* (Spots [ten fixations]), 1. Werksatz, element # 57, 1969), retitled *Spots* in 1976, then *10 x Ort Strecke Ort* (10 x Site Distance Site) in 1982.

3. *For the Time Being*, 1. Werksatz, element # 43, 1968, retitled *Proportionen und Zeit* (Proportions and Time) in 1982.

4. Walther is almost certainly referring to *Sockel, vier Bereiche* (Plinth, Four Sections), 1. Werksatz, element # 49, 1969. Like the great majority of the *Werksatz* pieces, it underwent changes of name: it was called *Vier (Anfüllung)* (Four [Fillings]) in 1972 and *Vier* (Four) in 1976. Many *Werksatz* pieces are associated with the figure 4.

5. *Gleichzeitigkeitsstück* (Simultaneity Piece), 1. Werksatz, element # 23, 1967, retitled *Zentriert* (Centered) in 1982.

6. *Vorbereitungsobjekt* (Object for Preparation), 1. Werksatz, element # 14, 1966, retitled *Vorbereitung (Teil + Teil)* (Preparation [Part + Part]) in 1972, *Vorbereitung* in 1976, then *Sackform und Kappe* (Sack and Hood) in 1982.

7. *For Silence # 2*, 1. Werksatz, element # 55, 1969, retitled *Gliederung* (Proportioning) in 1982.

8. Bazon Brock (b. 1936), artist, teacher, theoretician, philosopher, and art mediator (*Kunstvermittler*), is the author of an article about Walther titled „Die Überwindung der Kunst durch die Kunst,“ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 28, 1969, 32. Bois tried unsuccessfully to meet Brock during a stay in Germany.

Yve-Alain Bois

August 21, 1970

Yve-Alain Bois
Centre Rencontre
Avenue de Saragosse
64 Pau France

August 24, 1970

Dear Friend:

I hope you do not feel terrible for not receiving an answer from me. Your letter had just been brought to me in Spain where I am now, and I hope you are also in vacation.

Your letter arrived open, and without the Dusseldorf Manifesto, and I felt very sorry for this. If it was still possible to have one, I would be very glad, as I never seen your early pieces. Thank you very much for the zerox copy of the letter...

Your notes on the diagrams are really precious, and I think as soon as I shall be back in France I will work very seriously on this article. Evidently, I would prefer to see you in Europe before the publication of it, to prevent from mistakes, for example...

Already two magazines asked me for photographs (I send them only copies) and participation for articles on your work, interviews and so on. It would be quite easy to set up this kind of thing when we meet each other.

For Frankfurt, I still do not know when and for how long will I be there, but I think around a week, as it will be during the Book fair, in mid-september...

By the way, as I stopped in Cologne one day (coming back to Europe, the plane landed in Germany), I saw the wonderful Ludwig Collection in Waldafr-Richards (?) Museum, and was very impressed. Unfortunately, your piece was out of seen, and I asked everywhere to see it... For some unknown reason it was invisible. But, as you told me, it would have been probably impossible to "work with it". I was very impressed by the Yves Klein's pieces, as well as Warhol's. I missed the giant Kienholds (Portable War Memorial), which was as invisible as your piece, and was quite disappointed by the Beuys's piece....


Another thing: I am trying to get the Ströher catalogue (but french money system does not allow any transaction), and it would probably be possible through a swiss system (International Art Catalogue Press). Could you tell me if the "Stroher Catalogue 1968- Hamburg" is the same than the catalogue published by Darmstadt Hessisches Museum?

As I was in Kohl, I phoned to Wolfgang Feelish,¹ and was delighted to speak with him. This fall, in Pau -and also in Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse-, I will organise a sale of Gheep multiples, and will sell his editions as well as others. I hope your piece will have a lot of success.

Do you remember Lygia Clark, the brezilian sculptor I told you about? I met her during my short stay in Paris, and showed her the book and the photographs: she was very much surprised (because she knew of you only earlier things) of this work, and really liked it. I was also very surprised to see how close

was her new works from yours. I am sure if I find more information about her, I shall send it to you. Peter Ludwig² just brought a very big piece from her.

You write "Not the work is the idea, but what we generate by using it". Can I also read (must I?) The idea is not the work... or What we generate by using it is the work... I hope you excuse this baroque phrasology, but some intuition of mine had to be precisised...

Have you ever been influenced by John Cage theories on Hasard and Aleatory sequences? It is true it concerns more theatrical and musical experiences, but do you deny any connection with Happenings or Zen in your work? More sensuality in your work show a distanciation from these ~~works~~ ideas... You say: " In general, when we work with the , so many things do have influence: the weather, the environment, time of the day.....(..). All those items play a role, and a wise user will pay attention to it or possibly integrate it in the development. It even can become the "subject-matter"... Do you think such idea bring you closer ~~from~~ to american art, or to Duchamp?

Thank you for the address of Bazon Brock. Does he speak english??? I think further questions will come, and hope you are not tired of this dialogue. Your letters are of an immense interest for me, and help me a lot.

please receive all my friendship and all my thanks.

BEST WISHES

Yvan B...

P.S.

What is your address in Germany and in Frankfurt?

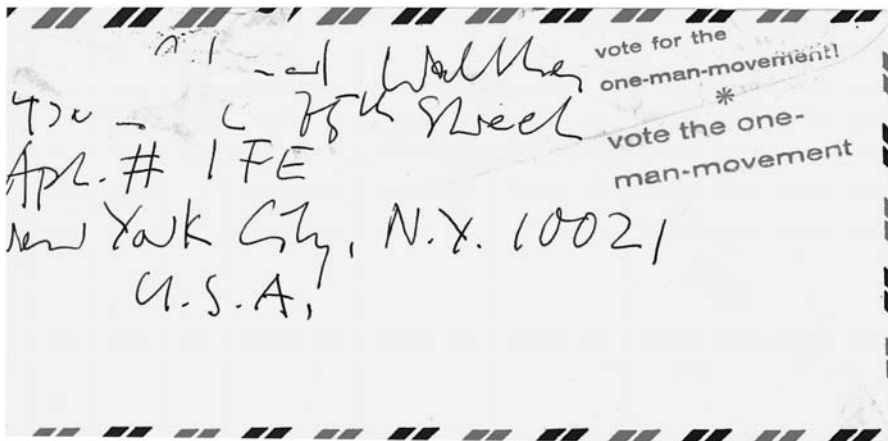
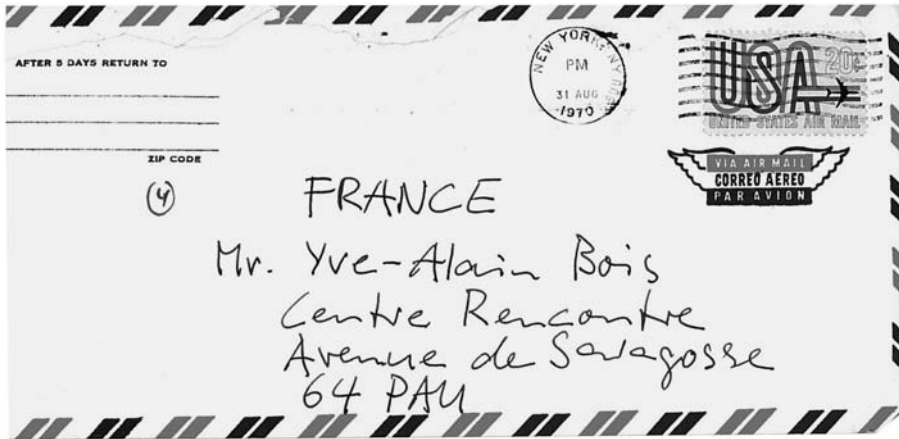
I hope the roman diary is in print

1. Wolfgang Feelisch is a collector and producer/distributor of multiples.

2. Peter Ludwig (1925–1996) was an industrialist, art patron, and collector.

Franz Erhard Walther

August 28, 1970



Franz Erhard Walther
436 East 75th Street
Apt. # 1 FE
New York city, N.Y. 10021
U.S.A.

August 28th, 1970

Dear Friend -

I am determined to go to Germany short after September 15th, then for about three weeks my mail address will be c/o Heiner Friedrich 5 Koeln I
Lindenstrasse 20 tel. 0221/210168.
(Koeln in French is Cologne)

Do you think we shall meet there ?

After this time my address for several month will be

F.E. Walther
Staatl. HfBK Hamburg 1
2 Hamburg 22
Lerchenfeld 2

In the Cologne-area I am going to do the photographs of the English edition of OBJEKTE, benutzen.²

In Cologne as well as in Hamburg I will have the time to work together with you on your different articles. Let me know.

I think you should take the opportunity to see more of the diagrams as I have all of them with me. Yes, I feel we should go together through this material.

A few month ago I learned about two of my pieces³ exhibited ~~in~~ within the Ludwig Collection at the ~~RICHARD~~ Wallraf Richardts Museum Cologne in a way, I could not accept. They were shown on a pedestal as precious art works not to be touched. So in a letter I asked them to take the pieces ~~away from~~ ^{away from} the exhibition, till I come to Cologne, to find out about the possibilities of showing them.

That is the reason why they are not to be seen.

Besides that I am not so much interested in having only a few single pieces on a public place. It should be the whole set. Ludwig hasn't understood that matter yet it seems to me.

Streeher-Catalog: the issue Hamburg 1968 is only a small publication, containing a part of the collection. You should try to get the catalog edited by the Hess. Landesmuseum Darmstadt.

You speak of Mrs. Clark and her work, close to mine. (I remember the things, being shown in the review you gave me, as quite different from what I am doing.)

If it has really something to do with my intentions, I would come to Paris to see her things. Please send me some photographs of her works.

By saying !..not the work is the idea, but what we generate by using it..' relates to a sentence in your preceding letter in which you state: the work being then idea...

This seemd ~~too~~ put to much weight on the particular piece. I want it only as an instrument. But what we generate by using it, is idea/becomes idea. These ideas again become 'works', immaterial ones, existing only in our mind. ~~THAT~~ It is sometimes possible to write them down, to record them, but that does not change their very nature of being immaterial.

And - the Instrumentarium is not the generator, but the person, working with the Instrumentarium. For me it is elementary to distinguish that.

It touches my theory on the human being as generator - in relation to my work: everybody has to make use of his own abilities, -I don't want the people ~~depending on the possibilities of an artist.~~ to depend on the possibilities of an artist.

You are right when you define my sentence as !..what we generate by using the Instrumentarium, is the work! That precisely means, what I demand: to use our abilities - only then something can generate and evolve.

(The Instrumentarium serves as a medium, evoking our spirit, demanding the whole human being, not only his artistic ~~capability~~ capability.)

Let me know, if you feel your question not being answered precisely enough.

No, I don't think, that John Cages theories had any influence on me.

An) ~~the~~ theory of Aleatory we can find in the Zuerich-DADA, and this has played an important role in the arts since. We find it in the literature as well as in ~~the~~ music and the visual arts (not to mention the science of today). It has penetrated our whole life. I have ~~grown~~ grown up with this as an element of our time. was brought

Zen had no influence on my work, simply because I am not known with it.

When I read about Happenings for the first time, my concept of essentially was formulated already. I can't think of an Happening-influence, but for a certain time I acclaimed this movement, because in my eyes it helped to push back the conventional art. (As we can see, it didn't help much.)

You ~~can~~ quote my sentence !..in general, when we work with the , so many

things do have influence: the weather (temperatur), the environment, physical - psycological conditions, etc etc.... play a role.....(while working with the), - related to that you ask, whether it is closer to american art or to Duchamp.

Living in New York, I became aware of, that I am rooted in Europe. I value the work of Duchamp very high, but I don't feel connected to him in any way, (though I can see his immense influence on the contemporary art.)

Maybe I can give you a more ^{informative} ~~precise~~ answer, if you can formulate your question more precise.

Yes, Bazon Breck speaks English. Tell him my best regards.

Love with
Lutz & Walther

P.S. DIARY in in print.
Information about it:
Heine Friedrich
5 Köln 1
Lindenstraße 20

P.S.

Until when do you need
the slides?

Finally I sent the negative
(contact sheets) to a photo-
grapher in Germany I am
working together with. — He
will do the job.

Is it early enough, if I
select the slides around
September 20th and send
them to you short after?

1. Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg. Walther taught there from 1971 to 2005.

2. See n. 1, p. 73.

3. The pieces in question are element # 33 (current title: *Plastik—5 Stufen* [Sculpture—Five States, 1967]) of the *Werksatz* (Work Set) and *Handlungsbuch I* (Book for Action I) of 1969.

Yve-Alain Bois

September 21, 1970

Yve-Alain Bois
Centre Rencontre
Avenue de Saragosse
64 Pau France

1. This translation never appeared.

September 21, 1970
Lombreuil, France

Dear friend,

I am very sorry to answer so lately, but I have been quite sick and am now working for a publisher.

Contrarely to my wishes, I did not work too much lately on the article (sick... different works...) but hope to work quick on it.

If you are in Hamburg for several monthes, it will be very possible to meet.

I will be in Francfurt from the 23 to 29th of September: the adress is Yve-Alain Bois , Nouvelles Images, Hall 5, Stand 5162, Frankfurter Buchmesse. Franckfurt/Main... The letter, if you can write would be very easily transmitted to me...

In fact, I give you this adress: if ~~it~~ a meeting was possible, it would be perfect...As you say, it would be very good to go through the material together... So, if you come to Frankfurt during the end of September, let me know directly (by writing at the book fair).

Besides, I have few projects of which I must talk with you. I have seen recently Mrs. Eyquem, and she is now building a publisher's company. It will be set up around Christmas... Could a translation of the english edition of your book be published. I could work with you and help as well as I can for the translation. Could it be done in correlation with the english edition?

Besides, I have now the Strecher catalogue, and need that you tell me the mistakes made about your works...

Pictures by Mrs. Clark: I will send something as soon as I will get it...

At any rate, I bring the material about your pieces to Frankfurt if we could meet... If not, it would be for later (in Paris, or again in Germany where I must go). But I would like to write on you seriously and soon... It must not come out too late.

Would you accept to publish right now a translation of "diary"?¹ I can easily translate it, and after you've seen the proofs, send it to a french magazine (in fact, I am solicited)...

The slides: as soon as you can
Please excuse this short note, and receive my best wishes

Yve-Alain Bois

Yve-Alain Bois

October 19, 1970

Yve-Alain Bois
Centre Rencontre
Avenue de Saragosse
64 Pau

October 19, 1970

Dear friend,

It was great to meet in Frankfurt!

Now I have to ask you some questions: Is the DIARY in print?
And if it is, could you send me a copy?

How about the book, did you ask the price it would be for
printing 1000 copies. If you can have an idea about it, please let
me know.

Would it be possible to have a new prospect of Düsseldorf?
~~Who~~ should I ask for it?

Besides, I quickly translated for a little magazine the MOMA
interview: they will take part of it for publications. I ~~gave~~ them description
of the pieces, I lent them some prints under insurance, and made a bio-biblio-
graphy. It is not at all what I would like to do in a long article, but
this obliged me a little to work, and I think now, I am in a good track.

I did not translate a sentence in the MOMA interview, because
I could not see how to bring this idea in french. It is not too bad, because
they will only take part of it for publication. I send it all along.

You told me in your first letter: "Artists (contemporary ones)
whose work I think as important a re:
No, I should not list names--may be in another letter, I will discuss the
(probably aggravating) structures of today. OK?"

Could you do this?¹

Besides I asked Bazon Brock to send me a copy of his article
but he does not seem to think of it. Could you find a copy?

I hope you are patient with me and will accept my slowness!
(I had too much articles refused because they were written too quick).

Receive all my wishes and my friendship.

Yve-Alain Bois

Alain Bois

1. This list was never drawn up.

Franz Erhard Walther

December 31, 1970

Franz Erhard Walther
436 East 75th Street
Apt. # 1 EE
New York City, N.Y. 10021
U.S.A.

New York, December 31st 1970

Dear Friend -

I have to apologize for answering your letter so late. I have been occupied with so many things in the last month, ~~which~~ forced me to defer answering my letters. I hope you are not angry about the delay...

To your questions of your letter of Oct. 19th.:

Yes, the NOMA-Diary is in print. I expect it to come out by January 15th (finally). At the same time there will appear an essay¹ on a piece of the I.set (I.Werksatz) - consisting of an structured interview and an written interview on the piece (PRO-PORTION) along with a photosequence and 5 diagrams. The idea is to show on one vehicle paradigmatically what it needs to be able to work with the things. I will send you a copy of each issue.

The English edition is ~~now~~ in progress and can be expected to be printed in about six month (printing will ~~take~~ take about six to eight weeks).

I remember that you were speaking to Mr Koenig about a French edition of the book OBJEKTE, benutzen.

I think we should not try to publish this copy, since with the English edition we will have² a more objectivied publication, in hand.

By now we do not know exactly what the English book will cost. (The price calculations we should get in circa 3 month.)

Of course the price for the supposed 1000 copies in French would come down considerably if the printing is done ~~simultaneously~~ simultaneously with the English ~~edition~~ edition. But this matter we should discuss in Cologne together with Heiner Friedrich. If the two New York publishers who are in question to do the book do give me the obligation-condition to make compromises ~~with~~ the book (I would ~~refuse~~ refuse that), Heiner Friedrich is ready to finance ~~it~~ it. It seems to turn that this will happen...

The contemporary artists I regard as important I would like to discuss when we meet either in Cologne or Hamburg. Doing this in a letter I feel will bring misunderstandings for the simple reason, that I need to shorten the explanations.

I can't find a copy of Bazan Brocks article. It should be possible to get it through the FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG 6 Frankfurt / M I Postfach 3463. The article was headlined: Die Ueberwindung der Kunst durch die Kunst (issue No 50, February 28th 1969, S-Ausgabe).

Would you accept the following translation of the sentence you did not translate into French:

A mon avis c'est plus important ~~sen~~ s'en occuper en avance consciensement avec du temps et du recul. C'est dabord plus comprehensible et doit être vu avant de compter sur le sentiment.

In the translation you used the word JOUEURS for people who work with the vehicles.

I think this easily will be misunderstood, or better, this word evokes something ~~in~~
I regard as not proper for the use of the pieces.
In German I speak of the BENUTZER. The adequate word in French would be UTILISATEUR.

For me that means a significant difference: player/actor or: user.

user-----developer

best wishes

Dieter E. d. Walther

in about a week I will leave for Hamburg ~~again~~ again

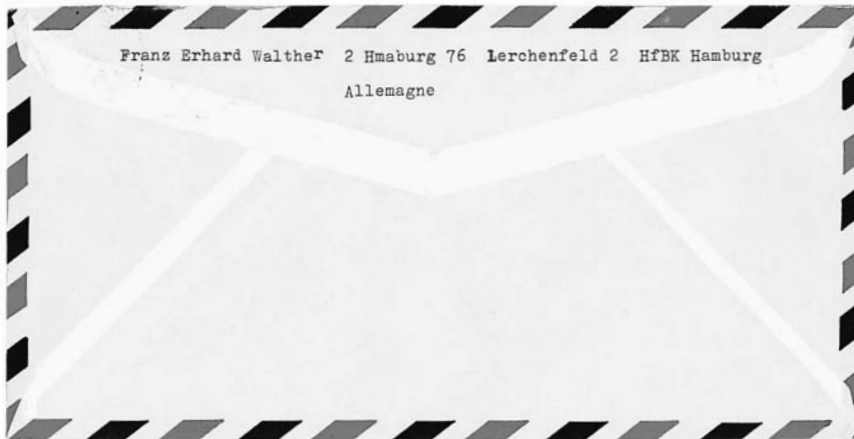
2 Hamburg 22#
HfBK Hamburg
Lerchenfeld 2

1. Ingrid Krupka, Zu Nr. 51 "Proportionen" aus dem 1. Werksatz, "Prozessmaterial" Franz Erhard Walther (Cologne: Dumont, 1971).

2. Dick Higgins of Something Else Press in New York was supposed to publish an updated version of *Objekte, benutzen*. According to information passed on to Walther by Emmett Williams, publication was sabotaged by Wolf Vostell. In addition, Ursula Meyer's plans for a book on the 1. Werksatz, to be published by Praeger in New York, came to nothing.

Franz Erhard Walther

September 17, 1971



Franz Erhard Walther
2 Hamburg 76
Lerchenfeld 2
HfBK Hamburg

september 17th 1971

Dear Friend -

I was wondering about your silence, since you seemd enthusiastic about dealing with my work. Now - finally your letter¹ is a real relief and gives an explanation.

It's good to hear that you take the article serious.

As for my understanding you can't expand the field of questions far enough.

Almost all of the hitherto written essays lack expansion leaving the fenced historical art relations behind.

On the other hand, people who try to comprehend the work from an out-of-art-field fail, because they take it too narrow, defining it only from their department-point of view, without having the endeavour to take in alle the other fields involved.

But I think things will go better in the future.

I underline your sentence, that the pieces do not give one meaning but are existing in their productivity.

I don't object at any point to da a philosophical work on the matter. What I would object to is the attempt to define my work on the basis of art only.

It overlaps with many fields since the whole human being is meant with all his abilities, possibilities, interests and speculations. Not only the art-field I claim, although it is a field, capable to allow work as a whole (Ganzheitsverfahren), whereas other fields rather seem isolated.

My relations to Marx and Heidegger² are good. Both are part of my thinking experience.

The book in English is still to come. The work on it takes longer than expected, mainly because of the fact that I have to prepare five main shows for next year, -which takes a lot of time. Not to mention the time my teaching took away.

There are some other small publications available, among them the DIARY/Museum of Modern Art and a publication dealing with one piece from 1.Werksatz/aggregate one. (I will send them separate as printed matter.)

I am most unhappy that it is not possible for me to send you a copy of the manuscript of the english book. By now not even one copy is in my hand. The people contributing to the book do have one , and - my copy I gave to the printer. He has to do proof-prints.

Whenever you feel you need more information, don't hesitate to write to me.

With what ever I can do I will support your essay.

my best wishes to you

Franz E. L. Walther

1. This letter is lost.

2. Walther almost never refers to "authorities" who might provide theoretical backup for his approach. Martin Heidegger is one of the few philosophers he describes himself as close to—albeit less for his thinking than for the "plasticity" of his language.

Yve-Alain Bois

March 13, 1977

1. The letter from Walther that Bois is referring to is not to be found in the archives of either.

2. Bois defended his doctoral dissertation (his supervisor was Roland Barthes) on "El Lissitzky et Malevitch et la question de l'espace" in 1977 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

3. Bois was the joint founder, with Jean Clay, of the review *Macula* (1976-1979).

Yve-Alain Bois
3, rue des Ecouffes
75004 Paris

le 13 mars 1977

Dear Franz-Ehrhart Walther,

Pierre Bouchet had forgotten to give me your letter,¹ as I was not here when it arrived : he discovered it again, while putting his papers in order.

I have to apologize for the long silence of all these years. The fact is I had a kind of big psychological crisis, which made me withdraw from the world, and more specially from the art world. It more or less came to an end, and I am now working as a kind of art historian (I made a thesis on the twenties,² and so on), and this deviation of my interest towards art history was certainly influenced by the fact I could not cope any more with the artificiality of the art world: you know?

That's why I'm so glad to receive your letter, as I remember you were different for me from the other artists, less occupied by the carrierist stuff than they all are, and more by sensitive research. I always remembered, even in the deepest of this long depression I had, your encounter, and the nice way you were towards me : yes, please, send me information about your work, as all what I know of it I like very much.

True: you must have been disappointed that I did not write the big article I always wanted to write on you. But I found, and find it more and more difficult to write on living art. Not because of a fear of commitment from me, but because I don't feel ~~that~~ I have the right to interfere with my words on what's happening (this feeling was partly born, as I think the critics have too much importance: they tell too much what to do, they give meanings too quickly).

I don't remember if you read french : I'm sending you an article I wrote a while ago, but which just appeared. It's the first version of the first chapter of my thesis, and the most crazy one. May be it'll interest you, but I doubt it, as it is not so good anyway, just funny (as it mixes everything : painting, cinema, architecture and linguistics...).

Any way : I'd like very much to know what you are doing at the moment! But if you send me information, could you do it at the adress of the redaction of *Macula*,³ in my name (6, rue Coëtlogon 75006 Paris) : it is surer than my mail box!

Hoping you'll ~~again~~ forgive me for my english (I did not have a real practice of it since such a long time) and for my long long silence, I send you my very best wishes, and cordial souvenir, while waiting for some news.

Sincerely,

Yve-Alain Bois

Yve Alain Bois

A Letter to
Franz Erhard Walther
on the Subject
of an Exhibition

João Fernandes

Madrid, March 27, 2017

Dear Franz,

The admiration I have always felt for your work started with the intuition, shared by many, that you have shaped and conceptualized some of the most relevant and current issues around the redefinition of the artwork in the last decades, such as the use of new materials; the significance of the body as a material that is not only a reference in sculpture but expands the possibilities of its manifestation; the interaction of the work with the spectator, invited to leave passivity behind and participate in the artistic process; the research on language, rematerialized through typography, color, processes of signification, etc. Our conversations during the preparation of the show at Palacio de Velázquez allowed me, however, to start looking at your work beyond the relationships of correspondence or complicity with the works of other artists whom I knew. I could refocus on its singularity while questioning the specificity of what I consider one of the boldest of "attitudes that become form," which transformed our perception of art history and the possibilities offered by the artwork to broaden our experience of life.

Artists have been the protagonists since romanticism by bringing art and life closer together, confronting social, cultural, economic, and political conventions that determined the existence of the artwork as the reflection of a system of power, creating new languages and forms of expression, increasingly free in their lack of finality and ambition regarding the instrumentalization and appropriation that art was always subjected to. Your work has a libertarian quality and indeed brings art closer to life, without ever abdicating autonomy, because it reveals itself in the expansion of the range of sensorial experience and participation of the spectator in the artistic process itself. The very idea of beauty, subject to a ruthless critical revision by last century's art history, is always present in your work. But that idea of beauty can also never be mistaken for a conventional reduction or exacerbation of perceptual experience. In fact, the opposite is true.

The novelty that your art embodies tells of your proximity to the historical avant-gardes, which rethink the possibilities of making art independently of an entire history, as if art began at that precise moment and its past was nothing but a set of conventions to be shed.

Everything in your work starts with the body, and even with your own body. By choosing to work with textiles you assume fabrics are the main material to cover the body. By working with fabric, you bring another material into the fold of the history of sculpture, a material that had existed merely as costume or decoration. The fabrics you work with are industrially manufactured. They are the example and the result of the driving role the textile industry had in the affirmation of industrial and commercial capitalism as it entered its last chapter, before today's globalized financial capitalism, at the time of the Cold War and colonial conflicts, precisely as you began your work as an artist. Working with fabrics was also working with a material that was close to you in postwar Germany. Fabrics were easy to find, the factories that manufactured them were there. The situation is not the same today. Some of these fabrics no longer exist. They are now manufactured in Turkey or the Far East. If you had started your work today, I ask myself whether you would still choose a material whose production is no longer close to you in any way.

Fabric found a prominent role in the work of Sonia Delaunay. But Delaunay's starting point was painting, whereas yours is sculpture; in her work there is always the pictorial two-dimensionality of the pattern, whereas in yours fabrics gain volume as sculpture, as they propagate space and originate different times. In your work, fabrics are seldom given the role of lining. When you build a volume, that volume is not hard; instead, it is lined with foam and soft materials. You explore the properties of fabric, such as malleability or flexibility to build objects that are soft and pliable under pressure. Your sculpture welcomes the body that activates it; therefore, it is not hard. The agent of pressure is the body that interacts with your sculpture; in fact, resistance does not define it. Your sculpture is invertebrate like a mollusk confronting the vertebrate body of the experiencer. While their soft nature might resemble Oldenburg's sculptures, yours set themselves apart from his in their non-iconic, non-representational nature, despite sharing

with Oldenburg a derision of the concept of object. While your forms are close to the abstraction of minimalist sculpture, they distance themselves from it by the lack of rigidity of their outlines. They are also different from Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés*, which are the result of a fusion between an artistic situation and popular culture translatable through dance; Lygia Clark's sensorial masks or Lygia Pape's *Divisor*, even though they use fabric to extend the context of an action, because in their case the relation that fabric establishes with the body is sculptural and predominantly aesthetic. Your wearable pieces do not invite us to dance, to move, or to do anything external to their sculptural condition. Unlike Oiticica, you do not exit the field of the artistic by contaminating it with popular culture or carnival. Instead, you are interested in expanding the possibilities of sculpture through the presence of the body. Among the pieces of these Brazilian artists that seem most complicit with certain features of your work, perhaps the closest to your oeuvre is Lygia Clark's *Bichos* (Animals), as Yve-Alain Bois remarkably intuited in his correspondence with you so many years ago! By demonstrating a variable geometry according to the various possibilities of manipulation of each of her *Bichos*, Clark created a situation akin to that found in your work, in which action invites us to discover the work instead of the work inviting us to discover action.

On the other hand, while many of your fabrics convoke the presence of the body, suggesting it its own manifestation in space, they do not evoke the body in the same way as the sculptures of Eva Hesse, for whom the employment of soft materials was also a hallmark. Even when they appear as garments, your items of clothing echo the statue in the construction of the figure and the manifestation of the body. But I shall come back to this later regarding the way in which your work incorporates action and movement, activating the sculpture as if it could only arise from the body and manifest through the presence or the action of the body.

Fabric is also a material that allows you to confront its industrial manufacturing with the most delicate handcrafting of the finishing. You once explained to me how you had found in sewing an alternative process to the modernist tradition of collage or assemblage. Sewing is always the expression of time, which is not visible in the latter techniques, and time is an important concept in your work. Not only the time of perception or of the situation with which you integrate

and challenge the spectator but the very time of making. While the former are always incidents along a temporal line, underscoring the dimension of the ephemeral, your sewn fabric works suggest continuity, even if a dialectical relation always exists in them between permanence and impermanence, potency and action. In the history of art, from Dada to Robert Rauschenberg's combine paintings and assemblages, to glue or to combine were always actions prone to contradiction, antithesis, paradox, and dissonance. In your case, sewing becomes a manifestation of the continuity of that temporal line: instead of putting them in opposition, it brings together materials that share the same nature; it integrates each of your pieces, as well as your oeuvre. An example of that integration is how you packed the elements of the 1. Werksatz (First Work Set) into carefully sewn bags with white fabric handles, each embroidered with the configuration of the fabric contained in it. Many of the fabrics used in your pieces may take on different configurations: folded and put in storage or opened, stretched, unfolded, in actions that complete them.

And then there is color: those colors that are also a work material in your oeuvre, a prodigious work material! In your pieces, color takes on the condition of an iconic sign, always revealing a relationship with a possible referent in a recognizable, and therefore interpretable, reality. Earthy ochres, brick-orange or tile-orange, wine-red or blood-red, ash-grey or bluish-grey, mustard ... And these are always part of a constructive, albeit non pictorial, process. Even in your sculptures in which colors confront and combine with one another, they are part of a construction, not of a composition. Your colors, too, are unexpected and astonishing, always revealing a surprising relationship with reality. Already in your early Wortwilder (Word Pictures), the colors metonymically pointed to a broadening of the possible meanings of the words you had painted. The background pink in Venetia refers to the washed out pink of so many Venetian houses ...

Restarting with the idea of the actionality and the conversations we had about this issue, I would like to underline the misunderstandings that your work has aroused, even in me, as a continuation of the paradigm of the relationship between the body, sculpture, and theatricality, a model in part rooted in Oskar Schlemmer and in the Bauhaus context. Nevertheless, you made a point of clarifying

that they were never a reference for you. In your work, action and movement are never performed for an audience. They do not have a performatic sense, except as a demonstration of the piece activated in that manner. Therefore, your sculpture is activated, or can be activated (because it manifests independently of its activation), and is thus different from the action props found in the more actional pieces by Richard Serra or Robert Morris. I read in one of your interviews that you prefer the word doing to the word action. In German, you like to use the word *Handlung*, in which the concept of action implies a process in development. In your early pieces, the *Handlungsstücke* (Action Pieces), you invite people to touch and hold your works. There was always, from the beginning, a concept of duration relative to the way in which your pieces invite us to interact with them. To experience them is also to become the protagonists of the time of that experience.

On the other hand, you distance yourself from movement, choreography, or action as mimesis of life in its most trivial gestures, which we find in so many other instances of the history of interaction between the performative and visual arts. When action takes place in your pieces, it is the construction of a moment of presentation, never of representation. Even such actions as folding/unfolding, rolling/unrolling, entering/exiting, opening/closing, stepping, walking, lying down, covering/uncovering become conjugations of the Latin verb *stare*, which in turn points to the verb *essere* in the experience proposed by each of your works.* There is, therefore, a slowness—I would even say a static dimension—in the movement that your pieces set off in each action that actualizes and completes them. It is a matter of demonstrating a relationship between potency and action, between the virtual and real, between possibility and its demonstration. The body often resembles the statue in that ritualizing of action proposed by your sculpture. That was already apparent in the exercises that spectators can discover in your *Handstücke* (Pieces Made to Be Handled) of 1962 and 1963. Action frees the object from any finality, from any intention, in the invitation to discover how to complete it via the sensorial experience and the time of each spectator. The object is materialized through action, but action is never external to it. You do not propose an interaction with your objects to test the boundaries of art; on the contrary, the objects create the conditions to understand the possibilities that art may offer as another way of experiencing life. Another path that

doubtlessly led you to expand the possibilities of sculpture is that of writing understood from the perspective of the various types of letters in the history of graphic design. The relationship between writing and image is one of the most subversive paths in the history of the visual arts and literature throughout the last century, from the moment when Mallarmé spatialized the text with his "coup de dés" and his idea of building a book of the world and life. However, your starting point is not Mallarmé but Gutenberg and the exploration of the sculptural possibilities offered by a history of typography. As with your fabrics, the presence of the letter and the word in your work is another example of a world that has changed radically since you began. While in the past printing was inseparable from the materiality of the typeface that existed in the form of its lead mold for graphic printing, today a typeface is above all an image, and printing has become a process of transforming images into other images, which is why here, too, I wonder whether you might have developed the same kind of work were you starting your oeuvre today. Your *Word Pictures* bring together sculptural drawing and sculptural painting in their treatment of the letter's thickness, the outline of its color against the background color, or the graphic configuration of the different typefaces used according to the nature of the very words you present. Once again, you present those words to us instead of representing them. As I have mentioned, color is an important utensil that you add to them to manifest and expand the context of their signification processes.

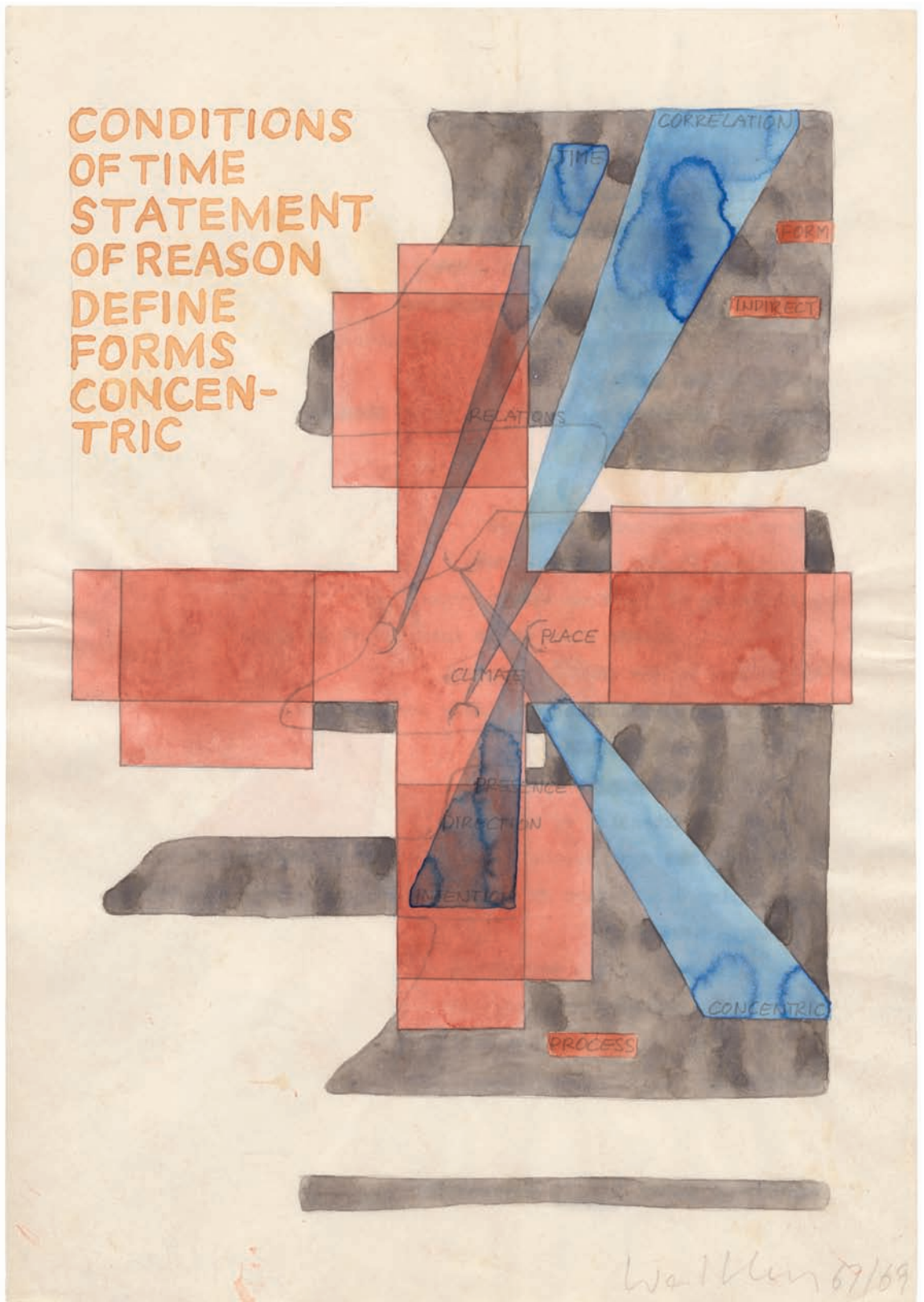
While for Mallarmé the book could be the world, for you sculpture can be the world, which you share with us by inviting us to discover your work. Examples of that are the *Wortformationen* (Word Formations) from the typeface characters that constitute them, but especially your *Das Neue Alphabet* (The New Alphabet), through which you experiment with the limits of each letter's legibility and offer us the evidence of the sculptural possibilities given to you by each letter at different moments. The objectual expansion of each letter does not monumentalize it. On the contrary, the delicateness of the fabrics used to configure your letters, the suggestion of fragility through the suggestion of its moldable nature under the pressure of the body, the surprising color of the fabrics you use, approximate them to the scale of the body, to the proportion of the corporeal through which you invite us to read not only with the eyes but with the existence of our body in the space of the exhibition.

For all that has been said in this letter, we decided to jointly organize the show at Palacio de Velázquez according to the vectors of action, time, and space, as well as language. In a drawing-manifesto titled *Ich bin die Skulptur* (I Am the Sculpture, 1965/1969), you reveal to us how the body is the beginning and the end of your work as a sculptor. I hope that the visitors to this show may now rediscover that challenge and rethink the possibilities of sculpture from the physical evidence of its presence in the space and times that it offers them, inviting them to discover your work and also to discover themselves in it.

Once again, with my wholehearted admiration and gratitude for all that you have revealed to me,

João Fernandes

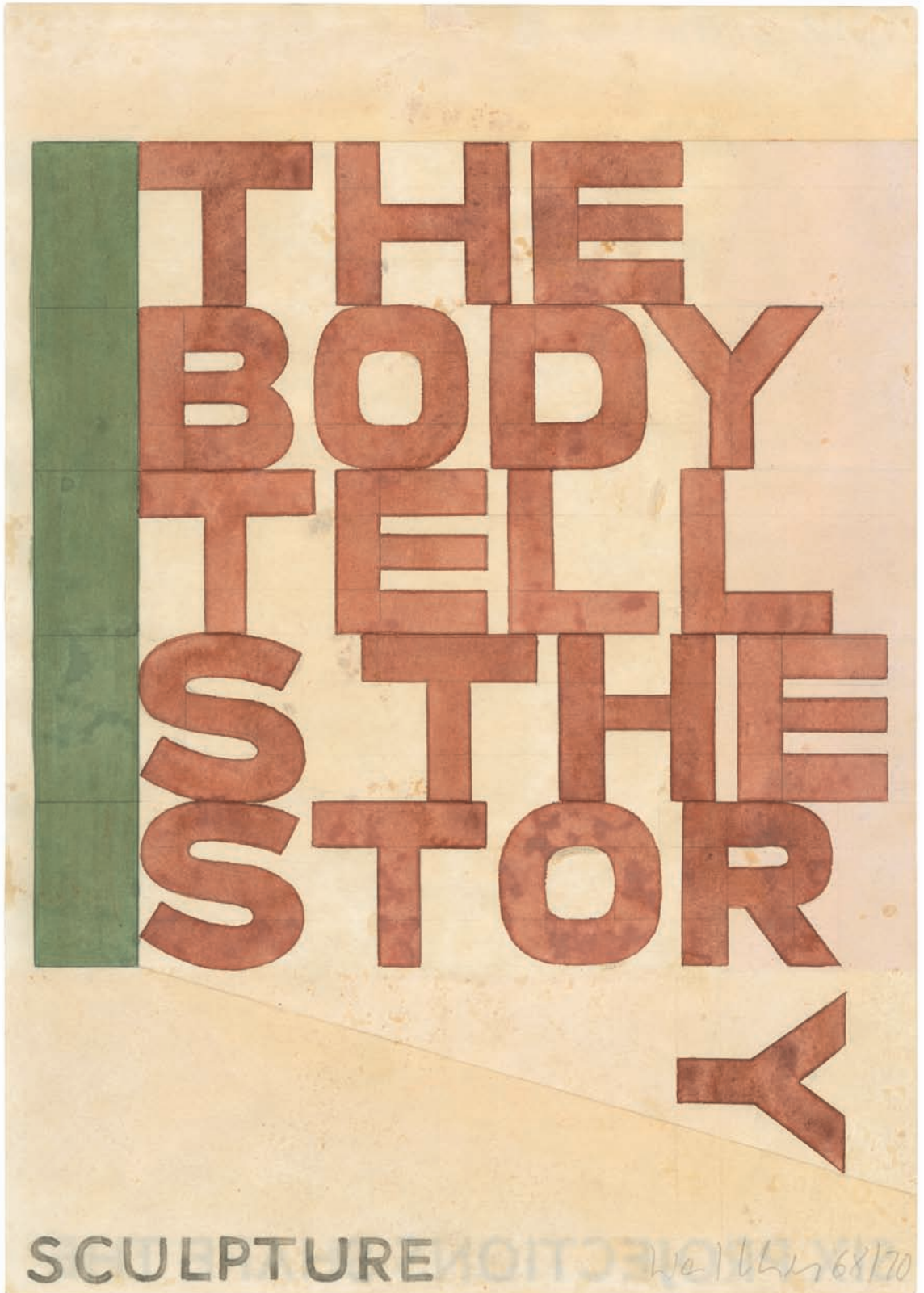
* In the English the difference between the Latin verbs *stare* and *essere* is lost. The English verb *to be* is used to translate both, but the ontological feature of *stare* points to a more "static," more "spatial" mode of being that could be conveyed by the ideas of 'standing' or 'staying' (which in are etymologically linked to *stare*).—Trans.



SKULPTURVERDICHTUNG (Condensed Sculpture), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 23, 1967/1969
Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.7 x 20.9 cm



VERDICHTETE REDE (Condensed Speech), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 1, 1963/1969
 Pencil, watercolor, tempera on paper (double-sided), 29.4 x 20.9 cm

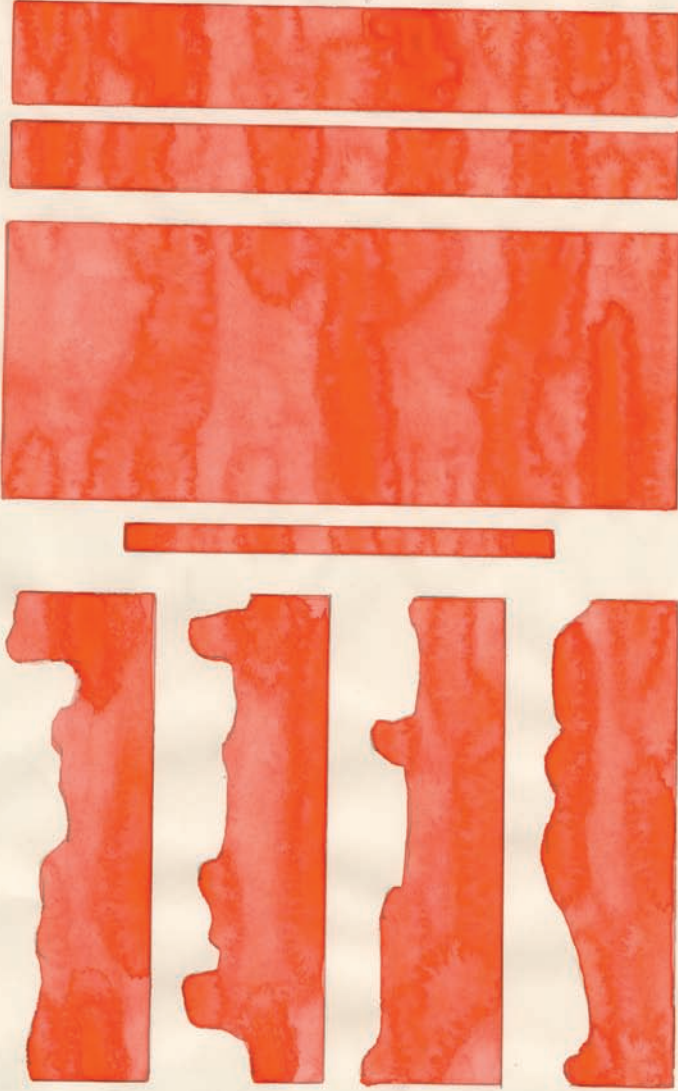


FÜNF KÖRPER—EIN WERK (Five Bodies—One Work), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 13, 1968/1970
Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.7 x 20.9 cm

Kopf in der Kopf
gegenüber
Gespräch

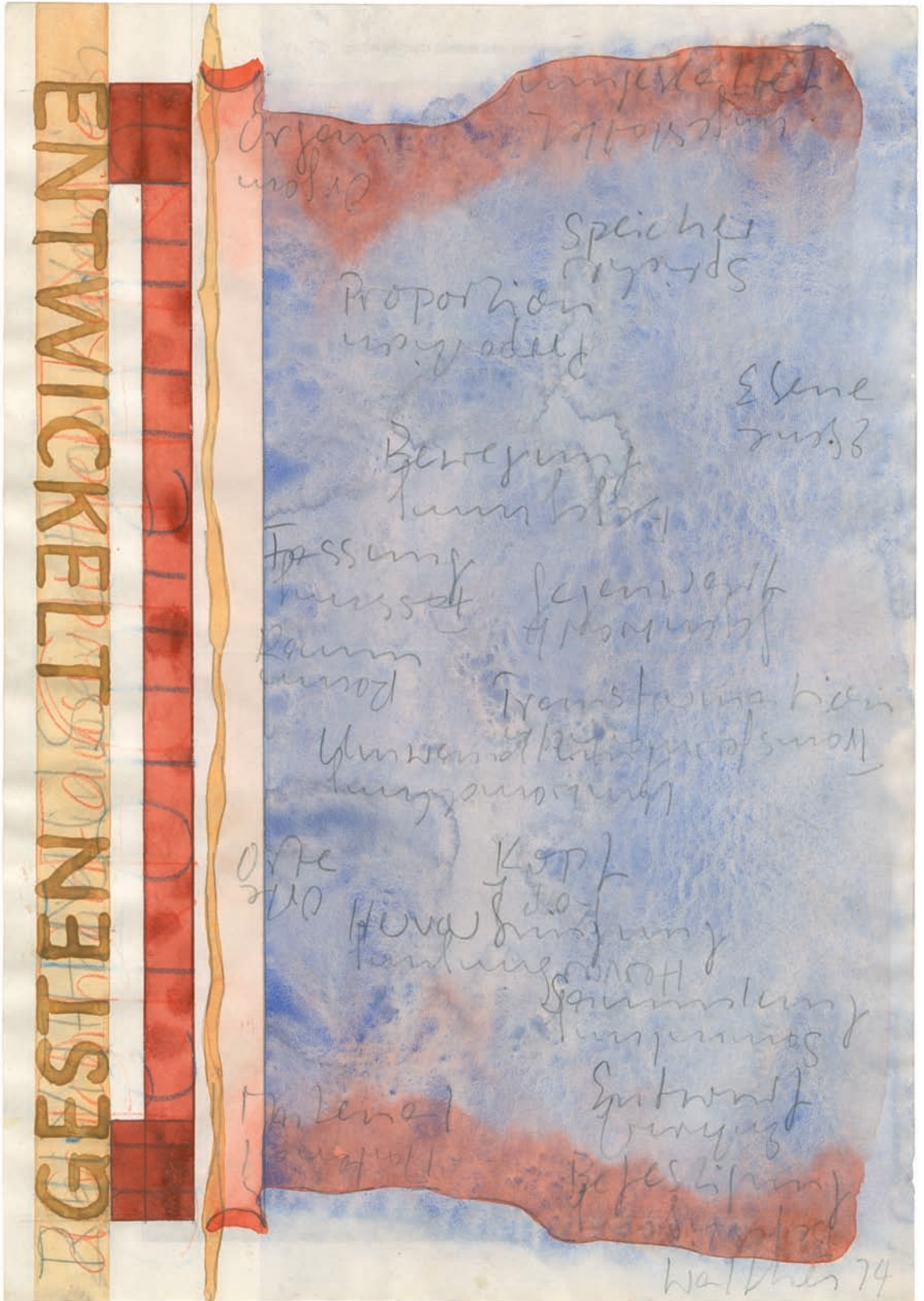
gegenwärt
Umwandlung
Vergleich der Rede

die Formen hierin &
hinwoll im Kopf
festen sind nicht notwendig

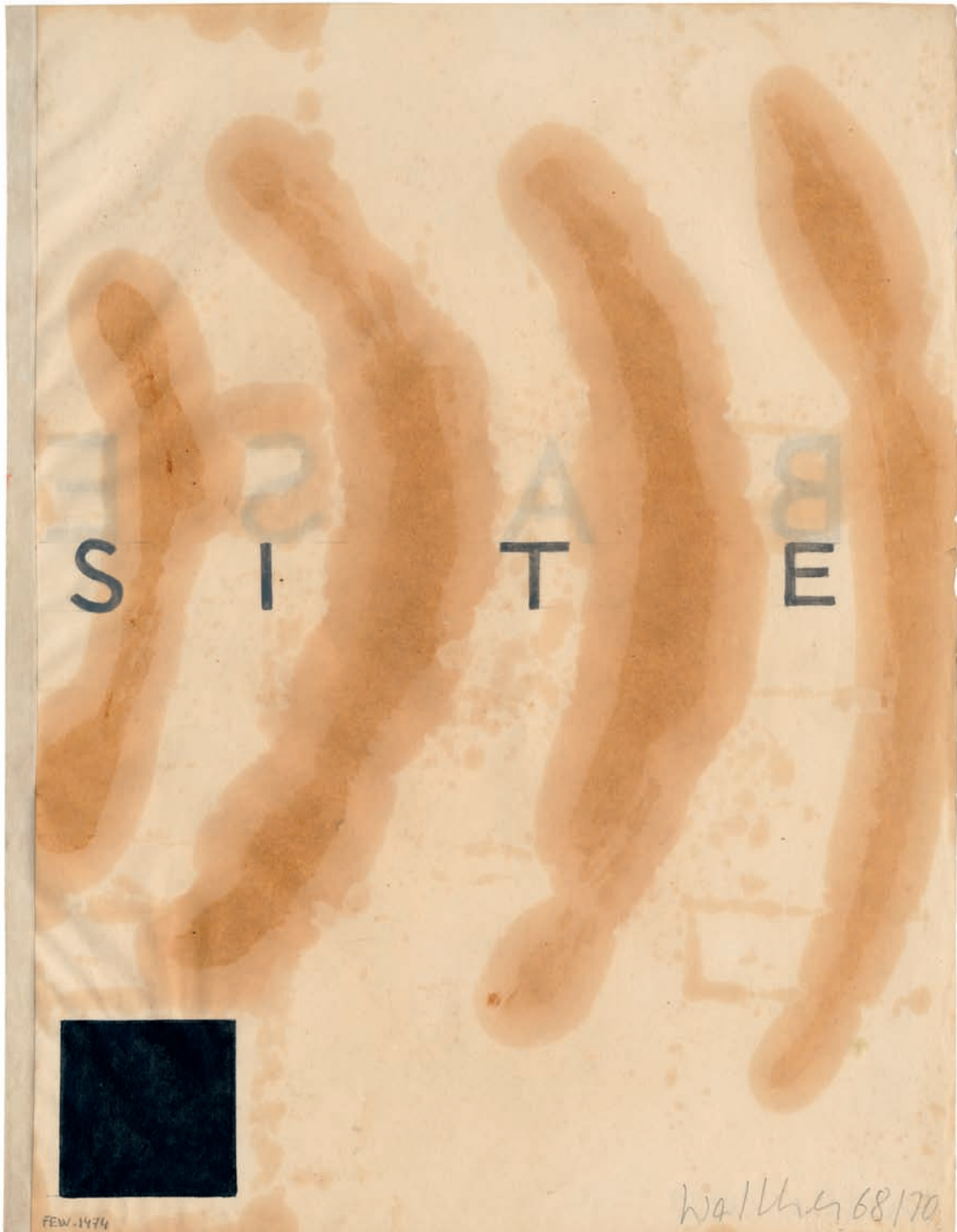


Waller 67/69

FORMIERTE HANDLUNG (Former Action), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 24, 1967/1969
Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.7 x 20.9 cm



BEGLEITENDES FELD (Accompanying Field), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 25, 1974
Pencil, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.6 x 20.8 cm



BEFESTIGTE STELLE (Fastened Site), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 13, 1968/1970
Pencil, watercolor, oil on paper (double-sided), 27.9 x 21.5 cm

MODELLIERUNG DES UMRAUMS (Molding of the Environment), related to 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 32, 1967/1970
Pencil, tempera, watercolor on paper (double-sided), 29.4 x 20.8 cm >>



Weller 67/70

FEW. 459

Memory Is a Place for Recordings

On Language in the *Diagramme*
and *Werkzeichnungen*

Franz Erhard Walther in Conversation
with Susanne Richardt

SUSANNE RICHARDT: In your drawings for the *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set) you distinguish between *Diagramme* (Diagrams) and *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings). How did these names come about, and what does each of them denote?

FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER: From the beginning of the work *1. Werksatz* there were different types of drawings. On the one hand sheets in which I set down experiences, ideas and images that entered my mind during the action. Mostly these were recorded in a notational way. Then there are sheets that are more programmatic or like manifestos. These are intended as if they were as an advertisement or propaganda for the *Werksatz*. They often have the character of layouts, because they could be printed and published in that form. And yet as I embarked on formulating the *Werksatz* in words and diagrams, I was already using the term “diagram.” I had used it for the typewriter texts with deletions from 1962 to 1964, which were later called *Textfelder* (Text Fields).

The term must also have appeared in my diaries in the early 1960s. I wanted to avoid the handed-down term “drawing” because it was weighed down by too much historical freight. “Diagram” was also meant in the sense of “recording.” I then occasionally used the term “diagram” from the 1960s and on into the mid-1970s for the drawings in the *Werksatz*. But then I noticed the term wasn’t enough to describe my undertakings. And I increasingly got the impression that the drawings had changed their function; I didn’t set out with the idea that they should give rise to work projections and also represent or, indeed, be works. Although these questions had crystallized during the early 1960s, I lacked a concept for them. I had gained a new awareness of what these drawings could be: Did they refer to works, or were they works? Did they summon up works while they were being read or studied? These questions assumed a power that no longer accorded with the word “diagram.” I then spoke for a while of “work diagrams,” but that was a rather skewed term and I didn’t like it. Then at some point it was simply there: “Work Drawings.” Only later did I discover that this was a traditional term for sculptural drawings done in preparation to clarify matters of form. But I felt then that the term was wasted on what it traditionally described. One could in fact fill it with a different meaning, a different volume, and at last give it a proper weight. At the same time I still used the name *Diagramme* though for the strict, more notational, conceptual drawings. There are a number of sheets that have not been set out in such a way that they can or are willing to cope with the volume of the *Werkzeichnungen*.

SR: The collecting, sorting, filtering, and selecting of the concepts occurs simultaneously in the *Diagramme* and the *Werkzeichnungen*. But the *Werkzeichnungen* are decisive for how you shape your language, which is why I want to concentrate on that now. Your language has developed much more in them than in the *Diagramme*, and many of your later linguistic works have their beginnings here.

FEW: The *Diagramme* have a different function: they clear the field so that it can be filled with new meanings by the *Werkzeichnungen*. I could never have reached the dimensions of history with the *Diagramme*. They are too specialized and too rooted in the style of argument of that time. I can present much broader arguments in the *Werkzeichnungen*, which present visual and conceptual formulations at the same time, so that the combinations and amalgamations become much weightier. A major concern in them is historical awareness. With the *Werkzeichnungen* I could attempt to evoke historical structures, directions, and relationships, bring them back to consciousness and enter a dialogue with them.

SR: One of the chief materials in the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* is language.

FEW: Language is absolutely central. But the concern is not with language per se, but with putting it to use as artistic material. In the same way that I use the *Werksatz* to grasp the present, history, origins, and memory. I try with language to say all that I remember, the things from history that continue to act in the present and which I perceive. I don't play with language but have attempted rather in the *Werkzeichnungen* to formulate my insights. For this I talk in images.

SR: When you began your actions with the objects in the *Werksatz* the work concept had not yet been formed. So you had to phrase your artistic concerns more precisely. You needed your own linguistic world so you could name the new artistic experiences you came up with. The fact that your work could not be categorized under any group or direction, right from the outset, increased the necessity to develop dedicated concepts.

FEW: With the first pieces for the *Werksatz* came the awareness that one can shape and model language and must view it like a traditional art material. This awareness developed in line with the experiences I gained with the *Werksatz*, and with that the concepts sorted themselves out. I saw how they developed meaning within themselves, that they do not denote anything but can act as empty vessels and be filled. If I say, for instance, "place" or "space," that triggers something in everybody's mind, but what I notice is that mostly these are very much floating notions.

With "place," "inside," "outside," "space," "body," and "direction" I meant something other than what present consensus associates with them. I knew full well what it meant when I came up as a young man and said, "I see something quite different there." I was laughed at when I

claimed that. I wasn't talking off the top of my head, though, into thin air, but in the light of my experiences in the actions, which I maintained were works. Not that I could prove it in any way. I formulated what I mean by "place," "direction," or "inside/outside," and everyone remembers something different, yet it all lacked the weight that I envisaged as my working material. Not that even I could word it precisely; it was more an underlying feeling. So the challenge and enticement consisted in forever trying to outline my concerns in the drawings.

SR: Can you explain how your linguistic structure and conceptual world came into being as you embarked on your work on the *Werkzeichnungen*?

FEW: The first formulations were based more on sensual experiences, which initially had no names or designations but created a space for projections. I knew that the action situations and the work situations could not be described, so I tried to devise parallel formulations. I noticed that certain figures of speech and also my own way of speaking drew on historical examples. What emerged was a feeling for the technique of breaking the syntax and a penchant for allogical concepts, of connecting various linguistic levels—all in order to let out fresh, unspent images.

Think of my picture titles from the early 1950s. Without being familiar with surrealism, I took titles that had a surreal flair to them. Twisted descriptions in which a word was slipped in contrary to logic, or a sentence was constructed in a way that prompted me to think about what was said. There is no direct statement, only an indirect one. When later I happened upon surrealism, I was drawn to the idea of automatism, to *écriture automatique* with its chains of associations and amalgamated images far removed from everyday life. Not that I have worked in a surrealist manner, but evidently there was a certain turn to the workings of my mind. But this was of no help for the *Werkzeichnungen*, because the historical connection struck me as too strong, and just as I was trying to release myself from historical patterns. Then, one by one my own concepts formed, and proved capable of monumentality. I wasn't interested in inventing new concepts, and didn't think art needed them. Rather, I had to take concepts that stood out, strip them of their historical connections, and give them a new meaning. At the same time, you will find almost no psychologizing descriptions in my work but always simply projections of a pictorial, sculptural nature.

SR: In the collections of concepts and formulations in the *Werkzeichnungen*, you bring together experiences from the actions and arrange them to achieve clarity about work processes and their significance. To what extent did language serve to shape the work idea and further it in terms of content?

Is it not so that, by giving a frame to your experiences and impressions with a concept, you first become able to work with them? Forming the concepts must have helped you press ahead with the work idea and develop further objects.

FEW: The WORK was immaterial, and for that reason of course concepts played a decisive role. They are indispensable when formulating what I conceive of as work. But the moment the action takes place, they scarcely play a role. I took a long time to realize that. In the beginning I thought, here's the work action and afterward I can formulate it in words and drawings, until I noticed that you can't do it like that. I don't walk around with concepts in my head. Rather, things happen. Sometimes they are described, but generally it's more of a vague outline. Which is to say that instead of designations that can really name the events, things just happen. Naming is a procedure that occurs after the event and is part of the work figuration. You have to imagine I try to formulate what in the action was work, but the process of formulating goes on and on inside me. And in that moment when I translate it into concepts, it is part of the work. The time in between acts in some ways as a purifying filter.

SR: Could you describe more precisely the process by which the concepts have established themselves over the distance of time?

FEW: For all their simplicity, the real actions were mostly so complex as experiences that they confused people. Often the experience was so strong it seemed impossible to find a direct formulation. With time, certain impressions have paled and others stood out. With that, the essentials formed in my mind as the structure and basis of the work experience and became the foundations of the work.

In my experience one cannot truly render what occurred. At the beginning I tried to capture it by means of description and saw that that wasn't enough. Simply reading the description produces a structure in one's mind that makes a distortion. But how am I to represent an intense experience, such as the construction of a place, say, that assumes a direction, if I cannot describe it but still want to keep very close to the experience? I began to trust that single words, placed in the right way, as well as a certain kind of script, would convey more of the idea, more of the image than a description. So I inscribed, for instance, the term PLACE on a sheet of paper in roman capitals, along with its alignment. If the place or the notion of place was somewhat sketchy, I only conveyed it in a notational way.

SR: I have noticed when using the *Werksatz* objects that in some pieces certain concepts are immediately present, almost insistently so, and in others the experience simply cannot be named but instead remains as more of an inward-directed feeling.

FEW: Some work pieces only yield a few linguistic formulations. The concepts only start to form slowly after a work action, or resist language completely. With other pieces, though, concepts (in the sense of work formulations) come quickly. Whether they are good or not is another matter though. So some pieces have only produced a few drawings, and others a lot, although this makes no qualitative difference to me. It depends not on my momentary capacity but rather on the work pieces themselves.

SR: You often use the terms “inside” and “outside.” Is there also an inside and outside in your language?

FEW: Yes, of course. When I first tried to formulate WORK with the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen*, I had a very clear picture of it. OUTSIDE was always for me the description of the outer situation, as for instance how the body looked when viewed in space, its position, the place where it was located, the mutual relationship between the bodies, and the direction. I can depict all that with my means and with that alone produce a highly suggestive image.

But when I describe the situation of this body as feeling and mental image, that is a projection, and that can only come from INSIDE. With that there is no more viewer, unless that is I am my own viewer, my own audience, but that is also inside.

And then in addition I observed that in the moment in which I am in a space, the space surrounding me is of course external space. It may be a built space that is defined by measurements, or an open, natural space that I then termed “field.” I describe my sensations as INTERIOR SPACE—which is to say I have a space inside me which in certain situations is projected into exterior space. In that moment the OUTSIDE SPACE, regardless of whether a built space or a landscape space, becomes a projection space.

I have always acted then with this awareness of INSIDE and OUTSIDE. What is the boundary between them? Is it my skin? My powers of imagination? Or what I see? The answer is defined in the relevant actions. In one work situation, the power of the imagination is the boundary; in another, it really is my skin or the place I am standing. Certain concepts can only appear in interior space, and others only in outside space or at the boundary between inside and outside. If they could appear at both poles, both in inner *and* outer space, they would assume a hazy meaning. If, for instance, we were to study the drawings under the aspect of spatial formulations, we could in each case identify the boundary between inside and outside. The boundary must be visible because otherwise the drawn formulations would not be credible.

SR: An important procedure that recurs across the *Werkzeichnungen* is the tireless collecting and processing of concepts. The concepts that arise through the experiences gained with the works are sieved out in the sheets with the aid of different emphases, such as deletions, then highlighted by means of constructed types and checked and thought over time and again. In this way a number of central concepts have crystallized that focus the individual concerns of the work idea. PLACE, TIME, SPACE, for example—but place, time, and space are not only work concepts but simultaneously material for your work. To what extent has dealing with these concepts also affected the notions of material in your work?

FEW: If I had simply taken as my material the concept as I had worked it out, and not kept formulating it, the result would have been a fixed, cramped gaze, an undefined, unclear

direction. But the moment I see the unique character of a concept, use it, create a form for it by means of script and a specific place through the drawing—the position on the sheet is in some ways a definition—that in turn obviously affects my ideas about the concept. But through formulation a space emerges and a volume is defined in which I can move. I can't avoid this feedback which arises when handling the written and drawn formulations. With the result that this also leads to a change of meaning in the linguistic usage. The concepts are not static, after all, but have undergone changes throughout the history of my work; they are always in flux, not least because they are constantly being revised.

By dealing with the concepts like this, they have become part and parcel of me. Nowadays I sometimes feel as if it was me who actually invented some of them. They had simply been more general beforehand, denoting something other than I used them for. With that they could gain a new dimension. These concepts we are talking about now describe the artistic space as is existentially given—and I think not only for me. Each concept allows me to make an allusion in the space of art. I want to possess everything that has ever appeared in art throughout history through these concepts and action forms. Which is why I keep my work concept open. The concepts are the distillation of what I can say about art. Whereby I exclude certain artistic approaches that are not mine and never could be. Such as for instance, the aspect of subjective expression, as was formulated for instance in expressionism. That is not included. It's not a matter of me expressing myself as an artist—that would be too narrow for me and is why my work has no equivalent concept of “expression.” I formulate fundamental situations. I would probably say INTERIOR SPACE for what people think of as expression, because INTERIOR SPACE covers a wider range, while expression is too specific. Naturally I acknowledge the expressive approach—it has led to some truly great works—but I want something else.

It's curious that I attempt on the one hand to objectify artistic matters and refer to the historical stock, and at the same time strive to penetrate things in a very personal way. If that were not so, the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* might be of no artistic interest at all. I don't want to set down some pattern or provide forms but to formulate ways of using that go without saying. It must not simply remain an idea that is there as a projection. Rather, I as an artist must also say what I think I recognized as a work figure.

Hitting upon concepts through my work is then the objective part. Penetrating them individually is the use that is made of them—in the mind, in practical dealings with them, in their formulation, and ultimately in the drawn version too.

SR: How is one to explain the enormous quantity of approximately five thousand sheets, all worked on from both sides, which is to say ten thousand drawings, plus the two thousand drawings in your *New Yorker Tagebuch* (New York Diary)? Particularly since the sheets reveal no qualitative differences, even after repeated viewing, but constantly tackle the work idea in new and different ways?

FEW: If a definite statement about the WORK had been possible, a few sheets would have sufficed. But since it is not possible, or since the rubble from what history has handed down to us had first to be removed in order to present a new, free, open terrain, all these many attempts at formulations were not only possible but actually necessary. As is evinced by the drawings. It's not just a matter of building but, first of all, of clearing away, again and again, destroying and reinterpreting. For a long time there was no sign of construction, although clearing away is ultimately rather like constructing.

SR: You worked for twelve years on the *Werkzeichnungen*, from 1963 to 1974. Can you describe the development of your language during this period?

FEW: In 1965 I began to think my way into the English language while in Düsseldorf, because I wanted to move the year after to New York.¹ Johanna spoke good English, so we often chatted in it. While still in Düsseldorf, and then massively so after our arrival in New York, I noticed that my ability to think in a foreign language led to an enormous development in my mother tongue. I could speak it more fluently, formulate my ideas better, and all at once was “more intelligent” in German. Suddenly I could free myself of Dada and surrealist echoes. I could look at the German language from a distance now, regard it like an object and see a volume there I hadn't previously noticed. I learned to see my mother tongue anew by thinking in another language.

1 “Today I sent in my application for an immigrant visa for the USA.” Franz Erhard Walther, in his diary, 27 September 1965. That Franz Erhard and Johanna Walther first moved to New York in the middle of 1967 and not, as planned, in 1966 was due to the birth of their second child, Kaspar Lehmann, in February 1966. [Editor's note.]

SR: The *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* were only possible in light of the past history of your work. Without the experience of drawing—also including nudes, your studies in typography, the *Wortbilder* (Word Pictures), and, above all, your formulations in your diaries—you would not have been in a position to develop the *Werkzeichnungen* in this form and scope.

FEW: I wouldn't have been able to produce so many sheets if I hadn't been able to handle language. To which came my feeling for script and typography. Although the latter is ostensibly a formal affair, it can also become a kind of content. What was important was that I didn't first have to devise the means of representation.

Although the early language pieces certainly are nice individual achievements, a work concept never manifested in them. First the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* showed a direction. Looked at solely in terms of form, as configuration and image, I hadn't gained much. Basically, the earlier sheets were just as good. But the work concept underlying the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* first arrived in them and immediately became all-encompassing. The drawings should not be measured by the yardstick of formal development or progress in the sense

of “getting better.” Particularly since what I wanted to push ahead in the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* was not the drawing but the work idea I had arrived at by working with the *Werksatz*. Drawing was just a means to do that.

SR: What artistic methods from the preceding language works were of particular importance in this context? I think for instance of the *Textfelder* from 1962–1964. You worked over the typed texts, correcting them by painting over individual words, sections of sentences, and whole sentences, and thus deleting them. This intervention produced twists in content, individual concepts were emphasized, and the sheet gained a pictorial quality. This method of selecting language is frequently employed in the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen*, which also helped you to organize the concepts, sort them, and select from them. Or the *Sprachversuche* (Language Experiments) from 1961–1962. Here a certain kind of overlap appeared in the content on either side of the same sheet: the one pictorial side contrasted with a reduced side, which in turn acted like a substrate for the visual motif. Apart from a few exceptions, this kind of relationship between the two sides of the sheet can be distinguished time and again in the *Werkzeichnungen*: the one as an opulent accumulation of material, the other as a decision on key forms and concepts.

FEW: The decisive observation with the *Textfelder* was that, having the awareness of form that I do, I saw echoes of expressionism there, a touch of Dada here, and surrealities over

there. But I didn’t want these borrowings, even though I loved the originals. That began at age seventeen or eighteen. At that time, Kurt Pinthus’s *Menschheitsdämmerung*² was part of my intellectual baggage. And however fantastic Jakob van Hoddis’s “End of the World” is, I always stuck to August Stramm, who was more in keeping with my temperament. After that I discovered Dada and Schwitters. It all exerted an enormous pull back then, especially the twists in Schwitters. He writes in the mode of Stramm and then suddenly includes a piece of found writing in the form of a line from an advert. I knew of course that I couldn’t do that any more, but the example nevertheless remained for me as material and was part of the backdrop as I developed my own language. That was my primary experience from that early period, inquiring into how I should arrive at my own language.

Because I knew I needed one in order to shore up my work figure. At that time I was still producing texts as works. Then the deletions came on top of that. I always worked over the texts repeatedly and in that way arrived bit by bit at this way of working. I simply wrote as it came, knowing I must try things out if I was to arrive at my own form.

But not until the *Werkzeichnungen* did the whole thing gain artistic momentum, when I attempted to formulate the actions in words and chanced upon handed-down terms and noted that I must give them a new meaning. But I didn’t have to invent any new concepts for that.

2 The foremost anthology of expressionist poetry, published in 1919, which opened with Jakob van Hoddis’s explosive poem “Weltende.” [—Trans.]

I had to ask, rather, which are serviceable, and filter out the concepts that modernism had done to death, not least because they had become too specific. Thus, for instance, you will never find me using the term “composition.” I speak instead of proportion, a term that goes back much further, includes more, and is thus more open.

I could equally have interested myself more for what is said *in* the texts, but then the form would not have been so important. But I was always more concerned with the HOW than the WHAT. Thomas Mann, for instance, never particularly excited me, despite his brilliant linguistic images. I responded on the other hand to August Stramm and his language because there you have “form,” created by tightening the language—the HOW. And I responded in the same way to Gertrude Stein and “discovered” her for myself. When I orient myself to the WHAT, I arrive at totally different conclusions. But I was concerned with the form, even though the content was not a matter of indifference. I wasn’t able to get very excited about most of the literati in the 1950s. I found, for instance, Günter Grass’s *Tin Drum* pretty dull. I didn’t give a hoot for this aroma of yellowing family photos. Even Schwitters in the 1920s seemed fresher than these contemporaries. That might sound ignorant, but I had my own interests that I pursued.

The *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen* aimed at form right from the start. That is connected with the approach and experience I’ve just described. I had taught myself to see that there is a difference between the artistic and literary use of language. The artist—as Schwitters particularly made clear—has an awareness of form and material, so pictures always assume a shape. The literati tend to paraphrase things, whereas Schwitters can name them. This realization was enormously important for me, and prevented me from being lured into narrative.

SR: From the beginning of 1957 until 1970, you kept work diaries in which you formulated, considered and also criticized your artistic plans. They were an important accompaniment to your work, especially until the mid-1960s. How did you distinguish between the diary entries and the concepts and texts in the *Werkzeichnungen* that were done parallel to them?

FEW: I kept them strictly apart. I largely reflected on art and art developments in the diaries and always thought about new forms, other media, and expanded dimensions in the light of history and with the question: Is that possible as art? I knew the historical stock and the existing possibilities pretty well. I knew that there were fundamental questions that appear sometimes insistently, sometimes less so, but that do not disappear with the developments. I asked myself whether they might undergo a transformation. I felt the urge to release myself from history, from the feeling that the concepts, the formulations, and the means anchored in it no longer bear up, that they are too limited, that everything in it has already been said.

There is absolutely none of that in the *Werkzeichnungen*. I do not reflect there on art but try to formulate WORK. In the diaries I initially clarified my awareness of art, but I no longer

needed to do that in the *Werkzeichnungen*. It is quite feasible though, that trying out and honing my linguistic abilities had an effect on the drawings.

SR: You use a variety of scripts for the text in the *Werkzeichnungen*: handwriting, printed letters, capitals, typewriting, and written constructions done in different kinds of types—outlined in lead pencil or watercolor and often colored in—as well as print proofs. Each of these forms determines to a large extent the significance of the word. To what extent are the references to specific contents related to the various forms of script?

FEW: I have never used the different writing forms purely for formal reasons. Although graphic notions may certainly enter the arrangement, they are always secondary to the work idea that is formulated in the drawing. Handwriting dominates where direct notation is done. When I write an idea down directly, I don't do that in constructed letters or set up my typewriter. That applies likewise to the spontaneous notes that I transfer to a sheet some time later. There, where I draw, construct, and color in letters, assumes something of the character of a manifesto and is highlighted. In that way I monumentalize a concept or a phrase, often placing it on top of a drawing or complex of writing. If I were to write a concept—TIME, for instance—by hand or with a typewriter, that would have not only a different feel and quality

but also a completely different meaning from TIME constructed in roman. Roman types come complete with a memory space for history. Another form arose through the use of so-called brush proofs³ that accumulated during the printing of the publication *OBJEKTE, benutzen*⁴ and which I then drew on and also included in the work.

3 An old term for proofs taken from a typeset plate: after being blackened with ink, a sheet of paper is laid on top of the plate and worked over with a special brush. [Editor's note.]

4 *OBJEKTE, benutzen*, the first publication of Walther's work on the *Werksatz* published by Gebrüder König, Cologne-New York, 1968. [Editor's note.]

SR: You had already worked hard to establish that you could also produce content through the form of the writing in the *Wortbilder* from 1957–1958.

FEW: Yes, I had had that in mind ever since I was at the *Werkkunstschule* for applied arts. The typography teacher Hans Bohn sharpened my eye for the fact that there are old types, modern ones, and contemporary types, and that each has its own sphere of meaning, or that at least is how I understood him. The *Werkzeichnungen* produced an arsenal of experiences in handling types, which I could draw on as a matter of course, quite incidentally, without consciously recalling or summoning them up for the purpose. After all, I couldn't simply apply my knowledge from my early works. I was now involved in quite different topics and contents.

(...)

SR: When one attempts to write about your work idea, it is very difficult to escape your designations, which often cannot be expressed in other words. In order to avoid a second-rate compromise, one needs one's own developed linguistic form. Your language not only has power and influence as an artistic form, it formulates your concept of the work in a scarcely surpassable way.

FEW: I was unaware of that for a long time. And I learned about it less from my own ruminations than from the reactions of others. All I knew was that I could talk about my work the way I see it and that I didn't have to borrow another language. But initially I considered it pretty unlikely that I would be able to develop my own linguistic form through the work. So much had already been done with language, with linguistic forms, modes of speech, and in such an outstanding way, I thought it would be impossible to do something of my own.

SR: The uniqueness of your language is not limited to personal style. You have worked rather on the structure of language. The "open work idea" has been transposed to language but at the same time may arise from and be employed within it. But this is not a case of linguistic individuality being imposed as a form on language; it grows rather from the artistic concerns.

FEW: Perhaps it was also possible because I did not set out from language but from form. I didn't think in a literary way in the sense of describing, and certainly not lyrical feelings. Language alone would not have sufficed for my ideas. I set out from visual, plastic thinking and attempted to grasp the linguistic aspect. I hit upon formulations, upon languages that I then had to elaborate for art. But when did I first dare to present the *Werkzeichnungen* to the general public? I waited a long time before, because I felt uncertain and very much left to my own devices. The only encouragement I received came from the climate created by conceptual art and its use of language. However, my drawings were too individual for that, had too much aroma and too much color to them. As Joseph Kosuth once said about them, "Too much sentimentality."

SR: Has the work concept been exhaustively formulated in the *Werkzeichnungen* and *Diagramme*?

FEW: I think essentially I said everything in these drawings that I could say at the time. I must emphasize this limitation. Because assuming some situation prompted me to say today, "The *Werksatz* must be developed again from scratch," my actions would outwardly resemble those of old, but I could imagine I would make other references, and that would necessarily entail new formulations—for the simple reason that I would argue about certain things in a different way today. I don't know if that would be substantially more, probably it would be more of a variant. And I also don't think that the *Werksatz* work would have to be updated again in such a way that I could produce another work figure. And if so, it would presumably come about differently.

But the work concept I worked out in the 1960s claimed it would stand the test of time, and in the light of that one must realize that the drawings are simultaneously a document of the times that tells of my possibilities for formulating back then.

SR: A continual update, further construction on the work concept, already exists through its reception as well as through your artistic work. At the same time, the treatment of your own past work is also one of your regular topics, particularly with regard to the

grammar of forms and language in the work. As for the *Diagramme* and *Werkzeichnungen*, they range from a collection of phrases, as in *Gelenke im Raum*,⁵ to the work on a CD-ROM. ... Each of these works is, however, autonomous from the source material, the drawings, so that new, separate approaches come into being. What is your feeling when you discover that there is a potential in the drawings that, in keeping with the work idea, is many-sided and, above all, inexhaustible and can be constantly reworked?

5 *Joints in Space*, published in 1987 by Edition Patricia Schwarz, Galerie Kubinski, consists of 141 small-format excerpts from the *Werkzeichnungen* 1963–1974, largely comprising texts.

6 “I couldn’t have pictured a large exhibition of these drawings before the middle of the seventies. However, in 1971, on the insistence of Heiner Friedrich and the then head of the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, there was an exhibition there with drawings, but actually against my will. I had justified reservations that they would be viewed as kind of directions or action instructions for the pieces. What I wanted was for people to come up with their own ideas. At the end of the sixties, early seventies, the drawings also underwent massive attack on the political front. The drawings accompanying the *Werkstatt* performances were not on any account to be hung in frames because this, it was said, would ‘be supporting the system.’ At most they would let me put up a couple of purist examples. And I was supposed to fix them to the wall without frames. All that they allowed me was to hang them in transparent pouches. In the mid-seventies Hermann Kern from Kunstraum München completely rejected the pictorial sheets because he considered them incomprehensible and illegible. They were all pushed aside. He praised the ‘explanatory,’ illustrative sheets, the notations and the sketches to high heaven, and wanted drawings without any smell, any aroma, any taste. He found that only a couple of pictorial sheets were interesting, and I allowed myself to be persuaded to redraw the sheets for the publication to the exhibition *Diagramme zum ersten Werkstatt* in order to make them legible. In addition to which, Kern deliberately had the repros overexposed so as to eliminate the pictorial overpainting or gradations in the handwritten notes.” Franz Erhard Walther, in conversation with the author, 1995.

FEW: In some ways the *Werkzeichnungen* developed into an arsenal of forms and concepts that I was and still am able to use in the greatest variety of ways. But employing them with formal changes is not easy. The *Wortwerke* are linguistic organisms in their own right. The *Wortformationen* (Word Formations) consist of monumentalized concepts that also refer to the surrounding architecture. The *Textzeichnungen* relate to what concretely has been seen. The *Schichtenzeichnungen* (Layer Drawings) develop pictorial physiognomies. In the works from recent years, the *Configurations* transform text figures, text outlines, and their historical stock into sculptural realms and with that become monumental. Finally, the work group *Das Neue Alphabet* (The New Alphabet) attempts to give the letters a different form with an expanded meaning. None of this would have been possible without the experiences gained during the work on the *Werkzeichnungen*.

SR: From the late 1960s well into the 1970s, the *Werkzeichnungen*—and to a lesser extent the more conceptual, sober *Diagramme*—were accused of being too rooted in tradition.⁶ In these sheets, many conventional means for drawing were brought together: type constructions, color relations, figural drawing, and so on. You wanted to convey the work experiences, but how can one make people grasp something immaterial? You used the possibilities that were available to you.

FEW: I hesitated to show the *Werkzeichnungen* whenever they were pictorial or had the character of depictions. I saw them as personal investigations, as a kind of diary, an arsenal which I thought was only of concern to me. I stored them in boxes and would just hang up a few sheets at work demonstrations as examples of formulations.

If I had seen a way to set forth the work formulations with more modern, contemporary means, I would have enjoyed doing so. But I was not comfortable with film and the camera as a means of representation. They would only have shown the outward image, while for me the inner image was important.⁷ All that remained was the form of drawing, such as I mastered. Even though I felt that those were historical forms within my own personal history, I had nothing else to hand.

7 See Rudolf Bumiller, "Da ich nicht fotografieren kann: Der ideale Rezipient," in Franz Erhard Walther: *Das Haus in dem ich wohne*, ed. Michael Lingner (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 1990).

I wouldn't have dreamed in the 1960s that these drawings could be of special importance. How was I to know that these sheets, which seemed to be so far behind the works on paper in the early 1960s that looked so provocative by contrast, would be deemed so important?

SR: For a long time the *Werkzeichnungen* were the only place where the work idea was permanently manifest and tangible. You didn't attempt to describe or illustrate the work experience. Instead, the procedure ran parallel to the actions. With the drawings you have not so much availed yourself of the artistic freedom of an aesthetic decision as chosen a particular expression in line with the matter. The work idea is what gives structure to the drawings. Concepts, lines, colors don't offer their services but act like a speedometer that swings around according to the nature of the work experience. It is not a depiction, not empathetic. They are more like superimposed layers of exposed film from your mind.

FEW: And yet in the 1960s and early 1970s, this time of new departures, the *Werkzeichnungen* seemed obsolete. With the *Werksatz* I had tossed the ball out far to the front; it was the future, a utopia; I had devised a new art. And now with these drawings that interpret, paraphrase, designate the work processes, I no longer seemed to be abreast of the times. The medium of drawing, individual writing, had no basis in the arguments of that time. Art back then was all-in-all different, it argued in a different way. The art world looked askance at my drawings on paper. I had a feeling of uncertainty, even scruples about myself, and not only once these arguments began to be leveled.

Not until the beginning of the 1980s, with the arrival of a new belief in the picture, did the *Werkzeichnungen* start to get a positive reception. Eyes opened again for pictorial formulations. The sheets were once again allowed to have a smell and a taste. The times were changing.

8 See the publication accompanying the exhibition *Franz Erhard Walther, Werkzeugzeichnungen*, Kunstmuseen Krefeld, 1982.

Drawings that had previously been seen as anachronistic were suddenly viewed as fresh. I was even asked if I had just done them. Gerhard Storck put on the first overview of the various forms of the *Werkzeichnungen* in 1982 in Museum Haus Lange.⁸ And some of the more sober *Diagramme* sheets, which were the only ones to have been given a reception in the 1970s, suddenly seemed “old.”

I regained my pleasure in it all and in a way got to see the drawings with new eyes, through other people’s reactions. From the middle of the 1980s, the understanding of whether they were sheets typical of the 1960s or the 1970s became uninteresting.

SR: The question remains as to how far there is a qualitative difference between the kind of rejection that came in the 1960s and 1970s and the rediscovery at the beginning of the 1980s? Both reactions were determined by the *zeitgeist*. Did they really do justice to the importance of the *Werkzeichnungen*?

But I would like to return to the concept of “tradition.” Aren’t the drawings traditional in a different sense, inasmuch as your work, and quite explicitly the *Werkzeichnungen*, revisit lost and forgotten ideas of proportion, measure, time, and space? You choose something that you consider worthy of being transposed to and kept alive in a different age. You find out what the origins are and translate, emphasize, preserve these aspects in the *Werkzeichnungen*, as in the rest of your work. You haven’t reconstructed what once was, but picked up the ideas, the value, the concept of what has been lost and shape from it something new.

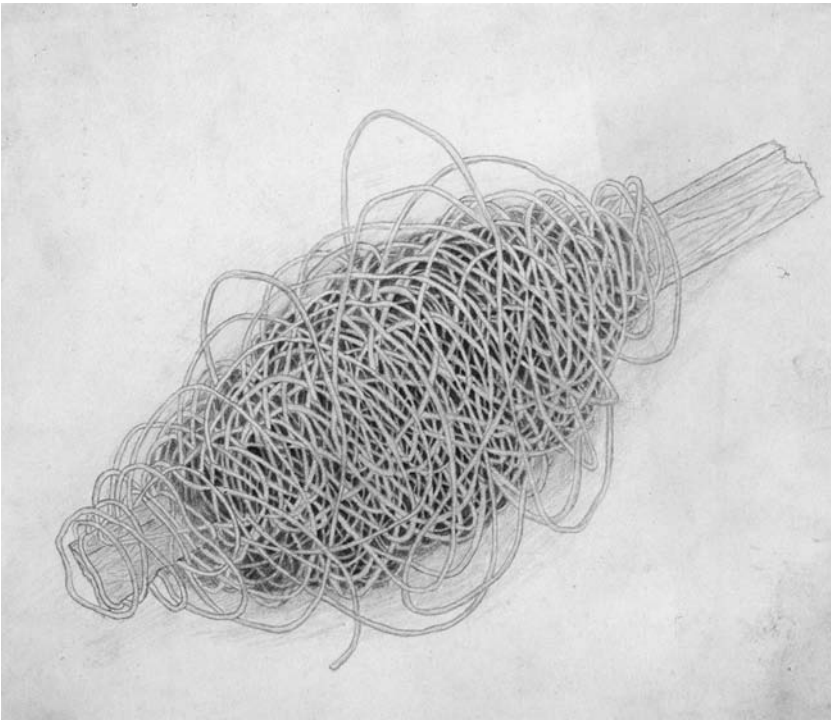
FEW: I not only accept the term *tradition*, I insist on it. I have always attempted to think of tradition. I have to distinguish between what is important and what is unimportant, because antiquated traditions can also disappear. Tradition is always confused with convention. Although I have used conventional means in the drawings, their topics and content are anything but conventional. Every artist who continues and expands history has gone back and questioned traditions, transformed them, and shaken them off. Wols, for instance, had a basic figure that he modified in his pictures. With that he came up with *personal* pictures—despite the formulas of *écriture automatique*—complete with the mental image of the existential in the background, which crystallized in a difficult period and can still be felt in his paintings today. He could never have acted as he did without a sense of history.

One can refer directly or indirectly to history. The reference to motifs, ways of thinking, attitudes, concepts, and definitions that have already existed in history enables one to act directly. A more indirect way is prompted by the awareness that historical forms have had their day. But that can also be an incentive to act directly.

I decided to try to win back lost forms and to reconstruct lost talk about art. But I knew one thing: I wasn't going to do so in the form, the configuration, the material, and the methods in which it was originally cast. When I work with proportions, for instance, I cannot do that in the spirit of the Renaissance. If I were to do so, it would only be permissible as a citation. But when I work through citations I am not original. And I want to be original. I have to think of it like that, or else my work idea will not be credible. Everyone who acts in that way must be original, or else they are not credible. So I don't come up with "theatrical gestures." There are no citations, there is no drama or enactment, there is no play for others. The event is only possible with you and inside you. This is a fundamental premise: a conceived work would in no way be possible without identity. That, too, can be seen in the *Werkzeichnungen*: one keeps sensing the struggle for identity; specifically, the identity of appearances and what is really there. How it looks and what it is—there can be no breach there. And if I did show a purely theatrical gesture, that would also be done with a clear historical awareness.

The situation that things I consider valuable are no longer there and can no longer be passed on—that no one points any more to the loss or spreads the word any more—is fundamental to what I do.

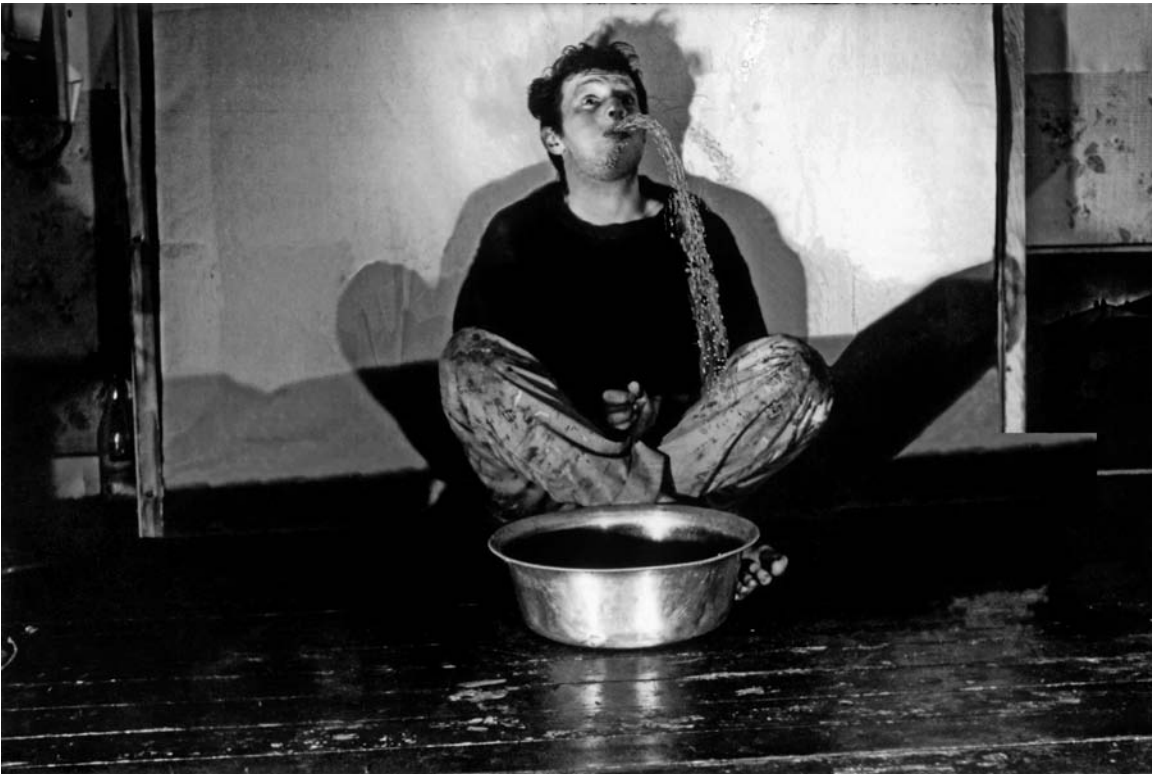
The interview took place in 1995 and was first published in Susanne Richardt, ed., *Franz Erhard Walther: Stirn Statt Auge: Das Sprachwerk* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1997), 128–60.



1. *Aufgewickelte Schnur*
(Coiled Cord), 1955
Pencil, 21.7 x 24.2 cm
Private collection,
Hamburg

2. From the series
Versuch, eine Skulptur
zu sein (Attempt to
Be a Sculpture), 1958
The Franz Erhard Walther
Foundation Collection

1



2



3. Von oben nach unten (Schraffurzeichnung)
(From Top to Bottom [Hatch Drawing]), 1959
Pencil, watercolor, 61.4 x 48.4 cm

4. Sechzehn Luftteinschlüsse (Sixteen Air Enclosures),
1962
Paper, paste, air, 86.5 x 60 cm each
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection



3

4

5. *Drei Bänder* (Three Bands), 1963
Cotton, nail, 733 x 3 cm each
Collection of the artist



5

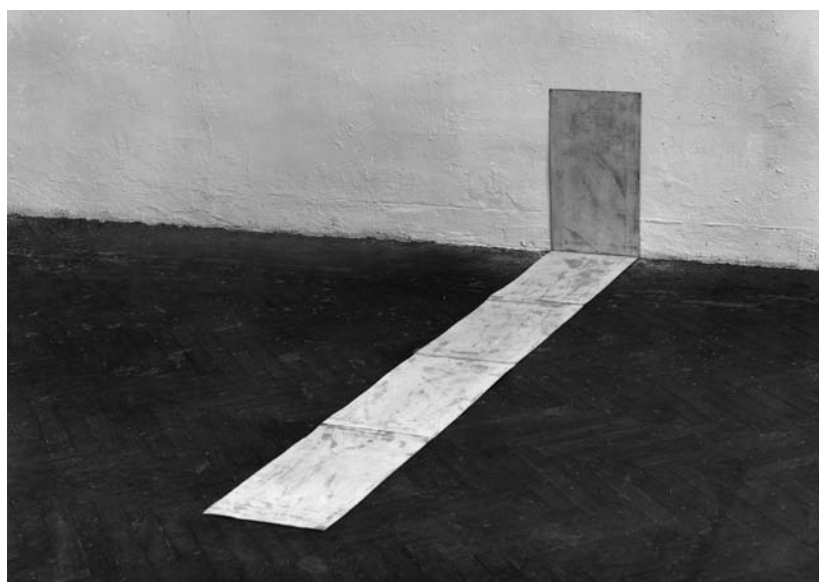
6. *Handbrett 1* (Handboard 1), 1962/1963
Wood, muslin, white casein paint, paste,
47.3 x 37.2 x 1 cm
Susanne Walther Collection



6



7



8

7. *Zwei Packpapierpackungen, zwei Nesselpackungen* (Two Wrapping Paper Packages, Two Muslin Packages), 1962–1963
Muslin, cardboard, wrapping paper, paste, approx.
27 x 19 x 1 cm each
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

8. *Faltbahn Wand-Boden* (Folding Track Wall-Floor), 1963
Cardboard, muslin, paste,
276.5 x 30.6 cm
Gilbert Brownstone Collection, Paris

9. Franz Erhard Walther and Chris Kohlhöfer activating the *Elfmeterbahn* (Eleven Meter Path), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 5, 1964, Düsseldorf, 1965

10. Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik acting with *100 m Schnur* (100 m Cord) and *Zwei Gläser mit Reis* (Two Glasses with Rice), at the *Frisches* (Something Fresh) exhibition in Chris Reinecke and Jörg Immendorff's apartment, Düsseldorf, 1966

11. Joseph Beuys with *Weste* (Vest), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 11, 1965, at the *Frisches* (Something Fresh) exhibition in Chris Reinecke and Jörg Immendorff's apartment, Düsseldorf, 1966



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12. Work Presentation at Galerie Aachen, Aachen, 1966, with Franz Erhard Walther and Jörg Immendorff; visible: *Zur Verbesserung der Sprache III* (For the Improvement of Language III), 1963–1964 and *Rote Weste* (Red Vest), 1965; on the wall: a *Sprachbanner* (Speech banner)



12



13

13. Sigmar Polke acting with *Ich-Objekt / Beinstück* (I-Object / Leg Piece), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 4, 1964, Düsseldorf Art Academy, May 1967

14. Presentation of work pieces that will later constitute the 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), Düsseldorf Art Academy auditorium, May 1967; Sigmar Polke and Franz Erhard Walther demonstrate the *Elfmeterbahn* (Eleven Meter Path), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 5, 1964

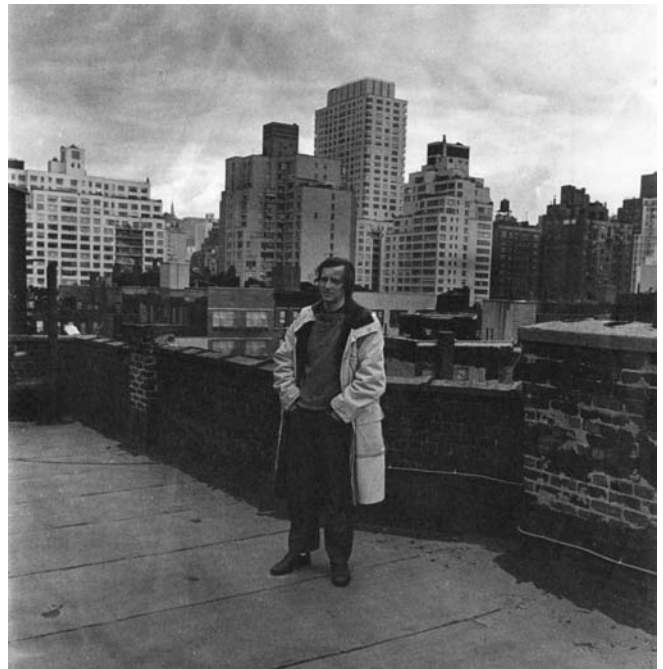


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15. Kasper König with *Fallstück* (Falling Piece), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 22, 1967, Galerie Zwirner, Cologne, 1968



16

16. Franz Erhard Walther on the roof of East 75th Street, New York, 1969

17. Work activation with *Zentriert* (Centered), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 23, 1967, Loft, East Broadway, New York, 1968

18. Robert Ryman activating *Nachtstück* (Night Piece, 1965), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 8, 1967, Loft, East Broadway, New York, 1968

19. Loft, East Broadway, New York, 1968

20. Work activation with *Mit Richtung* (*sechs*) (With Direction [Six]), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 16, 1966, Loft, East Broadway, New York, 1968



17



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21

21. Work demonstration with *Vier Körpergewichte* (Four Body Weights), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 42, 1968, at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, 1969; on the left: Walter de Maria

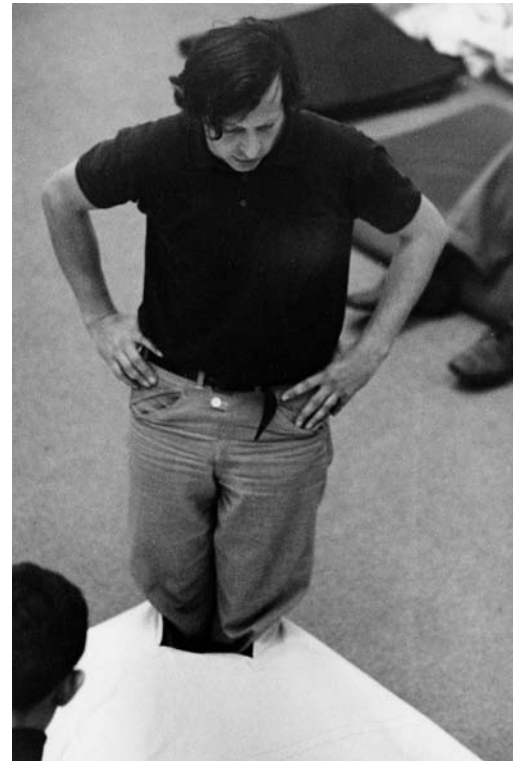
22. Franz Erhard Walther and Johanna Walther with *Handlungsbuch I* (Book for Action I), 1969, Fulda, 1969

23. Franz Erhard Walther during a work demonstration at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1969
Collection of the artist

24. Work activation with *Streik* (Strike), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 41, 1967; and *Plastisch* (Two Sculptures) (Plastic), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 52, 1969, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1970



22



24



23

25. Franz Erhard Walther activating *Landmaß über Zeichnung* (Land Measurement by Drawing), 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 6, 1964, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970

26. Franz Erhard Walther setting up his room at the exhibition *Spaces*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1969

27. Work activation of *Zehn Sockel* (Ten Pedestals), 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 57, 1969, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970



26



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27

28. Franz Erhard Walther in discussion with visitors to his “First Work Set room” at the exhibition *Spaces*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970



28

29. Work activation with *Sammler, Masse und Verteilung* (Collector, Mass, and Distribution), 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 15, 1966, Hochrhoen, Germany, 1971

30. *Speerstück* (Spear Piece), 1969
Hochrhoen, Germany 1971
Collection of the artist

31. Work activation with *Kopf Leib Glieder* (Head Body Limbs), 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 26, 1967



29



30



31



32

32. Drawing for *Beinstück* (Leg Piece), 1. Werksatz (First Work Set), element # 4, 1964
Pencil on paper, 24.5 x 20 cm
Giorgina Walther Collection



33



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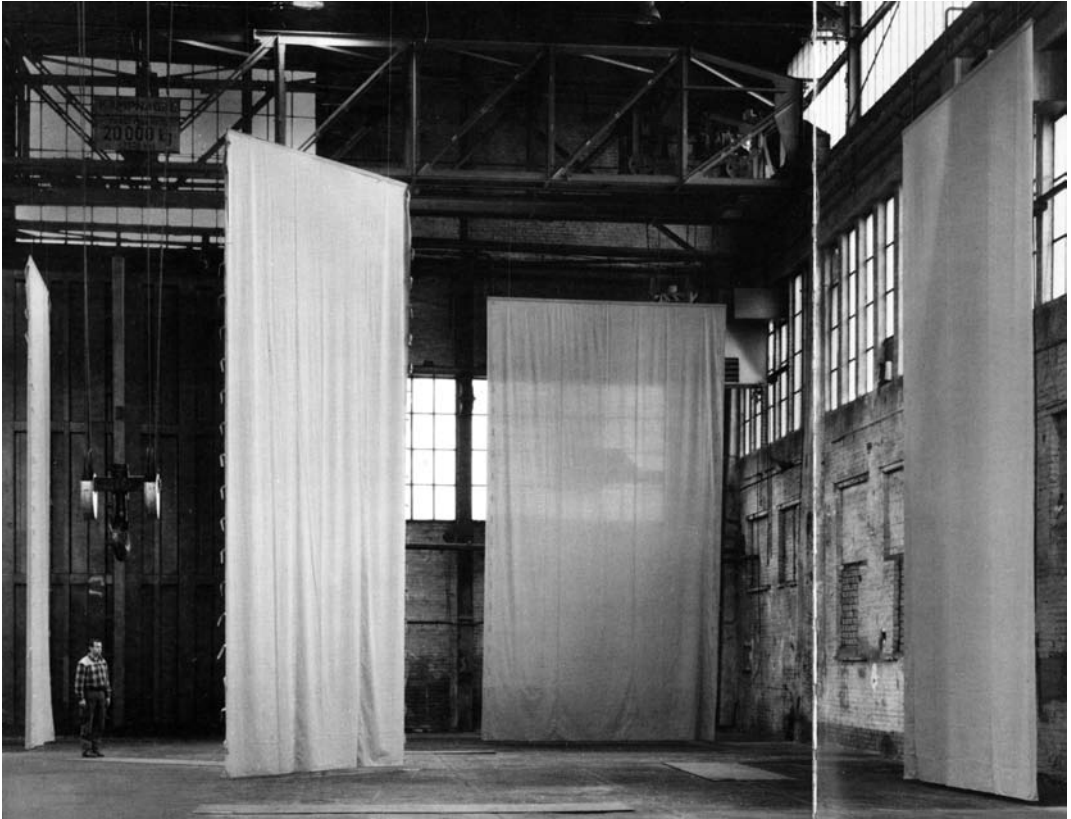
36

33. Franz Erhard Walther activating *Form für Körper* (Form for Body), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 29, 1967, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1970

34. Franz Erhard Walther activating *Weste* (Vest), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 11, 1965, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 1971

35. Franz Erhard Walther activating *28 Standstellen* (28 Standing Places), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 35, 1967, documenta 5, Kassel, 1972

36. Work activation of *Kreuz Verbindungsform* (Cross Connecting Form), 1. *Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 36, 1967, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 1973



37



38

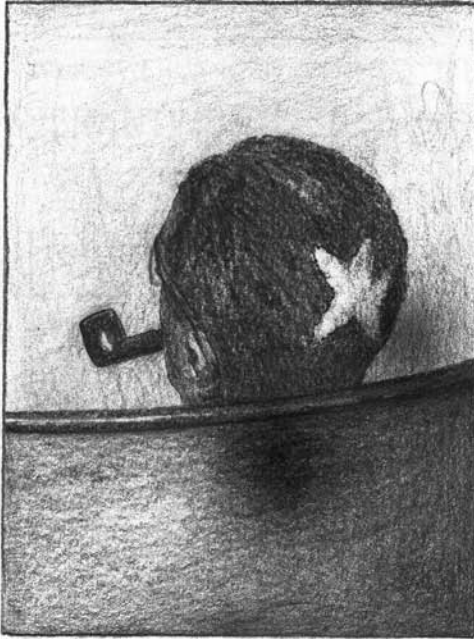
37. 4 Wände—4 Flächen—4 Standstellen—2 Maße
(4 Walls—4 Surfaces—4 Standing Places—2 Measures), 1976–1978
Exhibition Halle 6, Hamburg, 1982
Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

38. Kunsthalle Ritter, Klagenfurt, 1989–1991

39. Franz Erhard Walther and Susanne Richardt
in the studio, Hamburg, 1995



1968



Marcel Duchamp muß am / Bin
 perplex / sagt, daß er seitdem
 Male Copley Aufnahmen
 von Hamlet in Situationen
 mit meinen Werkstücken
 gesehen hat / möchte mich
 kennen / lernen / heißt in den
 nächsten Tagen in seinem
 jährlichen Sammelan-
 fehrhalt nach Frankreich /
 da ich ihn erst in der fol-
 genden Woche aufnehmen
 kann, was werden wir ein
 Treffen nach seiner Rück-

kunft im Herbst / Wochen später nächstens mit dem
 Bus vom East Broadway zur 75th Street / lese in der

Duchamp Dies at 81

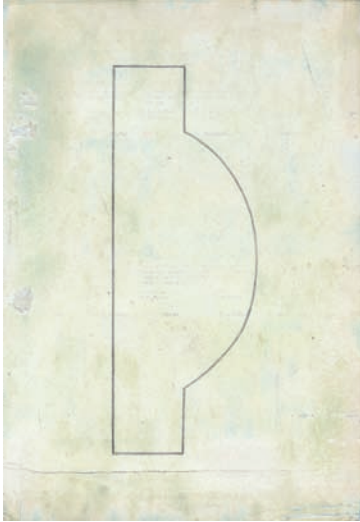
PARIS (AP) — Marcel Duchamp, painter of the controversial "Nude Descending a Staircase," died last night in suburban Neuilly. He was 81.

Duchamp's portrayal of superimposed mechanical figures, barely recognizable as human, much less female or nude, created a scandal when it first was shown in 1913.

He painted it at the age of 26, and when it was shown in New York police had to intervene to save the picture from being ripped off the wall by angry art lovers. Since then it has become a prized art work, often reproduced in books.

It took Duchamp until the age of 80 to be shown in a museum, when a Paris museum displayed

'Daily News' / mein Blick
 fällt auf einen Kurzse-
 richt: Duchamp Dies at
 81 / Paris / ALS am seinem
 Geburtsort Nemilly /
 wie fern hätte ich diesen
 großen Mann getroffen, der
 die Entwicklung der Kunst
 im 20. Jahrhundert so
 stark beeinflusst hat / auf
 die Frage eines Journalisten,
 was er im Alter noch Künst-
 lerisch tue: "Einarmen,
 Ansarmen" /



41

41. Umrisszeichnung (Outline Drawing), 1955
Pencil, traces of paint on thin cardboard (double-sided), 29 x 19.8 cm
Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

42. Wortbild Nature Morte (Word Picture Nature Morte), 1958
Pencil and gouache on paper, 42.9 x 53.6 cm
Frac Bretagne Collection, Rennes

43. Wortbild Auge (Word Picture Eye), 1958
Pencil and gouache on thin cardboard, 69.6 x 99.4 cm
Giorgina Walther Collection

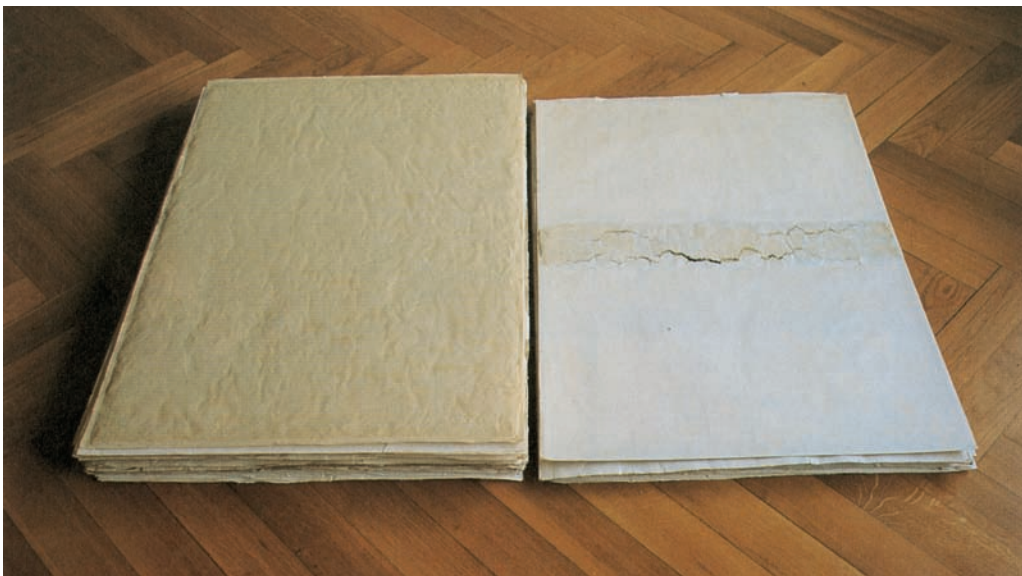
44. Großes Buch I (Large Book 1), 1962
Paper, paste, glue, gummed paper strips, card, muslin, linen, dispersion paint, casein paint, color powder, pencil, plastic foil, thread, oil pastels, adhesive tape, 82.2–91.3 x 60–63.5 cm, 52 elements
Nationalgalerie Berlin Collection



42



43



44



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45. Acht Kissenformen im Gestell (Eight Pillow Forms in a Rack), 1963
Paper, paste, foam, steel, 118.5 x 45 x 25 cm
Gisbert Seng Collection

46. Zwei Papprollen (Verlegenheitsstück) (Two Cardboard Rolls [Piece to Overcome Embarrassment]), 1962
Cardboard, paste, paper, 39.8 cm (length) x 9 cm (diameter) each
Courtesy Peter Freeman Inc., New York

47. Zwei kleine Quader Gewichtung (Two Small Blocks—Weighting), 1963
Cardboard, muslin, gummed paper strips, gesso powder, synthetic resin binders, 10.2 x 7.7 x 3.5 cm each
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

48. Gelb und Blau (Yellow and Blue), 1963
Two glasses filled with yellow and blue powder color, sealed with metal lids, 16.6 cm (height) x 8.3 cm (diameter) each
Musée d'art moderne et contemporain Collection, Geneva



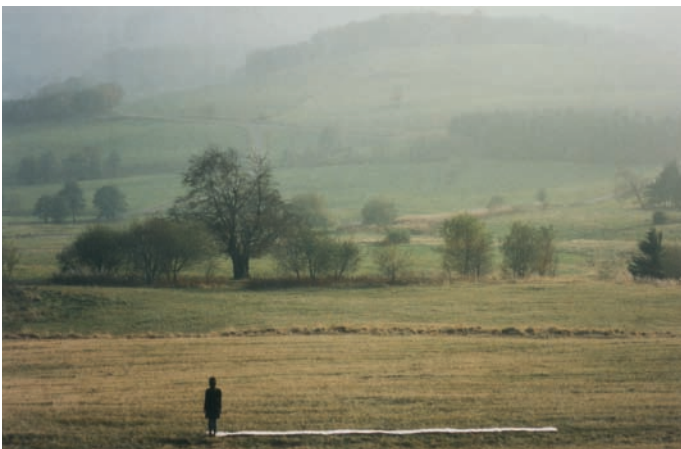
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49. Work activation with *Sockel, vier Bereiche* (Plinth, Four Sections), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 49, 1969, Tate Modern London, 2008

50. Work demonstration with *Über Arm* (Via Arm), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 25, 1967, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013

51. Work activation with *Zehn Sockel* (Ten Pedestals), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 57, 1969, CAC Brétigny, France, 2008

52. Work activation with *28 Standstellen* (28 Standing Places), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), element # 35, 1967, Hochrhoen, Germany, 1997

53. Gelber Doppelraum (Yellow Double Room), 1969
Tent canvas, iron poles, 265/230 x 330 x 330 cm each
Work activation, Hochrhoen, Germany, 1971
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

54. Ring: Schritte seitwärts (Ring: Sideways Steps), 1975
Steel, diameter 600 cm, 8 x 35 cm, 8 elements
Collection Marco and Luisa Rossi Collection, Turin

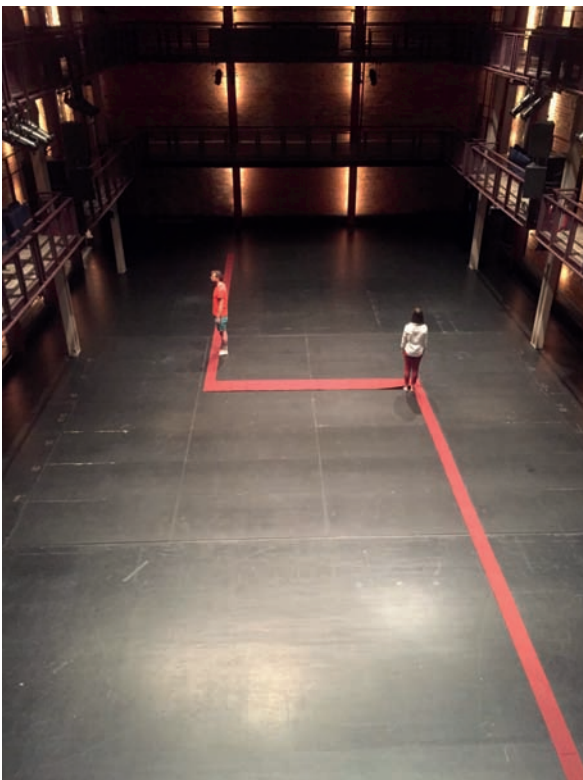
55. Work activation with Schreitbahnen (Walking Tracks),
Bordeaux, 1972. The Power Plant, Toronto, 2016
Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris



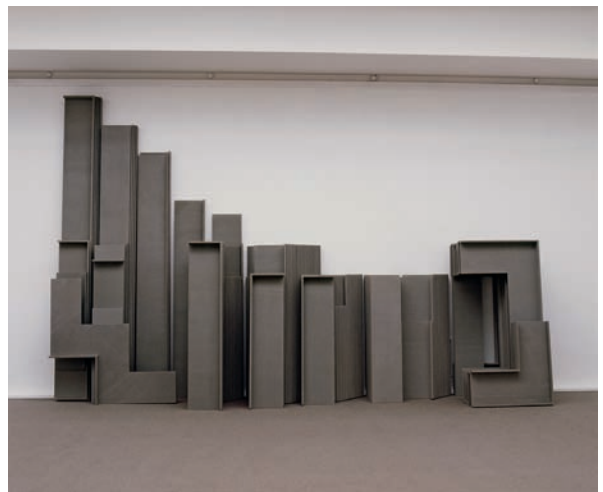
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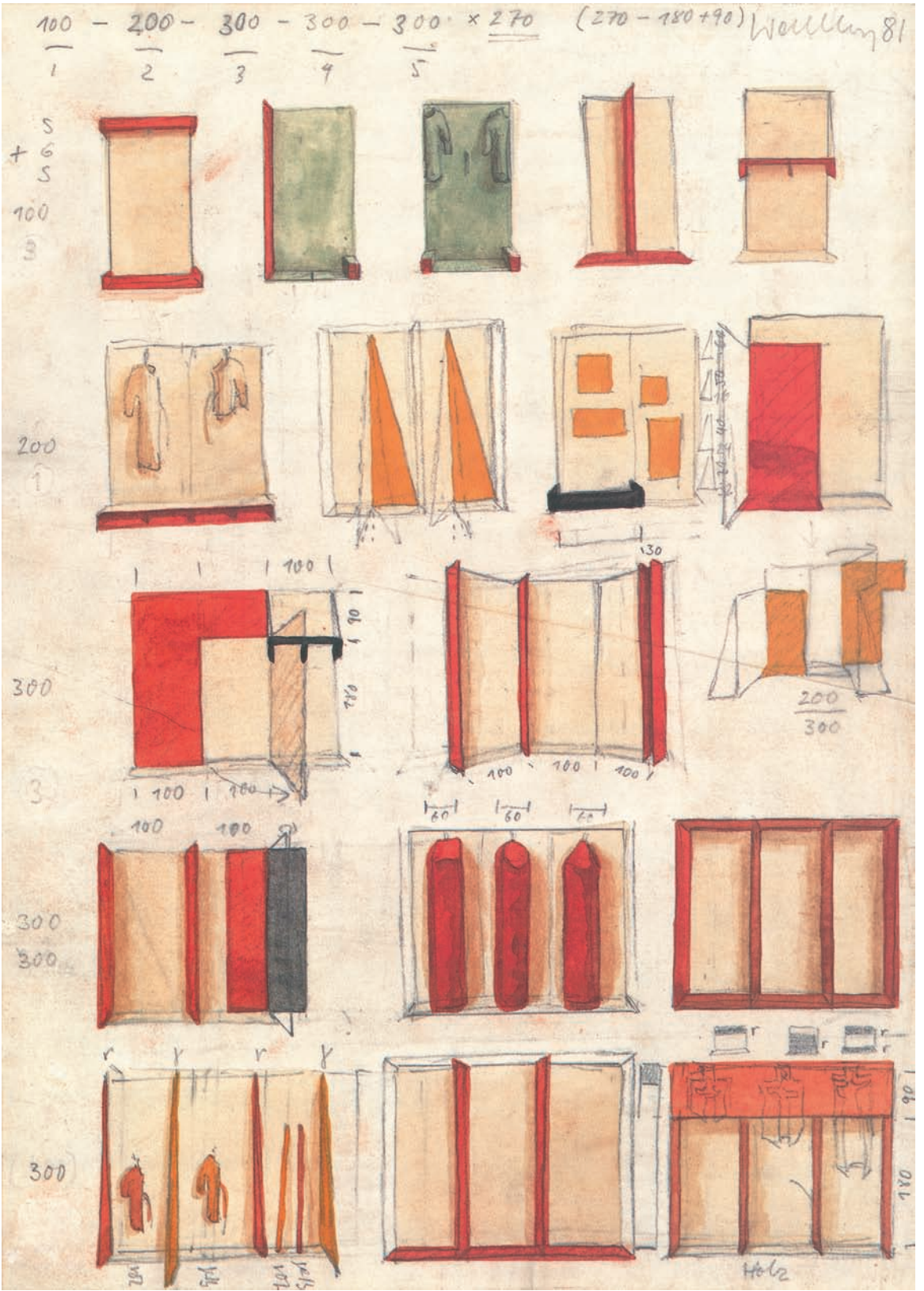
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56. 40 Sockel (40 Pedestals), 1978
Cotton, wood, glue, construction size variable:
Maximum length of the elements 360 cm, all 38 cm
wide, 8 cm tall, 148 elements
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

57. Drawing, "Storage of Implements 2," 1981
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm
Collection of the artist





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58. Wandformation Gelbmodellierung
 (Wallformation Yellow Modeling), 1980–1981
 Cotton, wood, 500 x 1190 x 60 cm, 7 elements
 Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen 1988
 Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; Peter Freeman, Inc.,
 New York; KOW, Berlin; Skopia Art Contemporain, Geneva

59. Wandformation Plastische Rede
 (Wallformation Sculptural Speech), 1983
 Cotton, wood, 365 x 470 x 40 cm, 6 elements
 FNAC Collection, Centre Pompidou, Paris

60. Wandformation Werkstatt
 (Wall Formation Workshop), 1983/1986
 Cotton, wood, 365 x 600 x 40 cm, 12 elements
 The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

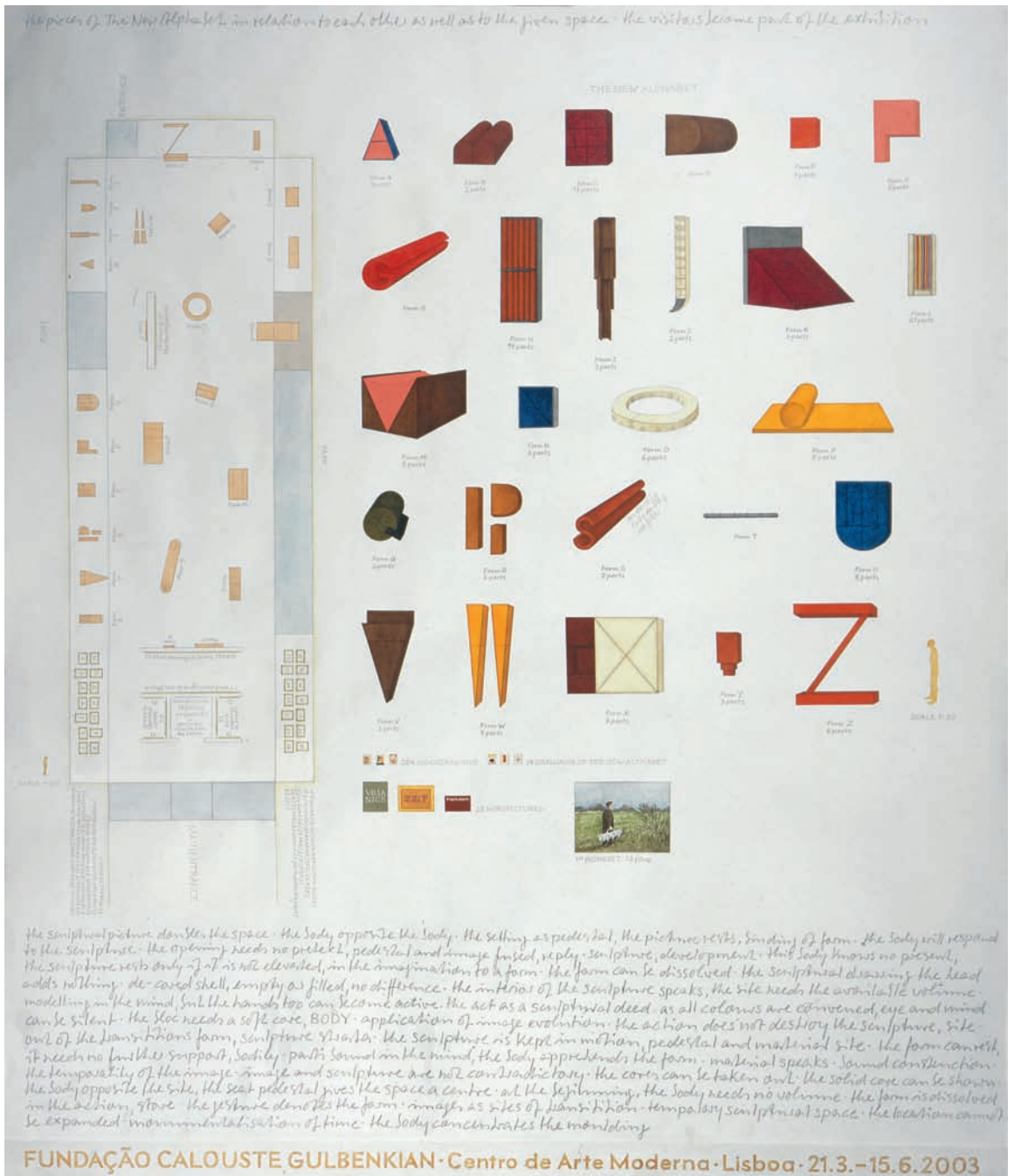


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61. Configuration Plastischer Text (Sculptural Speech), 1987
Cotton, 180 x 125 x 11 cm, 68 elements
Exhibition Deichtorhallen Hamburg, 1998
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

62. Raumabnahme Blau (Space-Skinning Blue), 1997/1998
Cotton, construction variable; Basic measurements, 1007 x 470 x 365 cm, 14 elements
Exhibition Deichtorhallen Hamburg, 1998

63. Plan drawing based on the exhibition of *Das Neue Alphabet* (The New Alphabet) sculptures at Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centro de Arte Moderna, Lisbon, 2003
Pencil, watercolor, and gouache on paper, 113.4 x 94.5 cm
Collection of the artist





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64. *Form N, Q, H*, from the work series
Das Neue Alphabet (The New Alphabet)
Exhibition Musée d'art moderne et contemporain,
Geneva, 2010

65. Work activation *Handlungsbahn* (Action
Path), from the work series *55 Handlungsbahnen*
(55 Action Paths), element # 21, 1997–2003
Cotton
Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

66. *Körperformen Weinrot*
(Body Shapes Bordeaux Red), 2013
Cotton, foam. Construction:
682 x 316 x 90 cm, 10 elements
Courtesy KOW, Berlin

67. *Probenähungen* (Trial Sewings),
1969–2013
Exhibition WIELS Contemporary Art Center,
Brussels, 2014
The Franz Erhard Walther Foundation Collection

Lexicon of Terms and Concepts

Editor's Note

The following contains the key terms and concepts of Franz Erhard Walther's artistic vocabulary.

He first defined these during an interview with Susanne Richardt in 1996 and specifically in relation to the concepts behind the series *Standstellen* (Standing Places); but as these terms and their definitions speak volumes about the artist's larger thinking and oeuvre, they have been reprinted in their entirety here.

I would like to explain why I have used these terms and what I mean by them. They were chosen not for their sound or their literal meaning but for their ability to evoke pictorial and sculptural ideas. They refer to a particular activity, direction, and internal state, and to a form of consciousness. They have been developed over many years of using language to formulate my concepts in the *Diagramme* (Diagrams) and *Werkzeichnungen* (Work Drawings), and they convey the substance of the ideas behind my work.

Most of the terms are nouns. The properties arising from the encounter and the experience of engaging with the pieces would be adjectival. People can and should approach this in their own way and according to their own abilities. Someone who doesn't have an artistic way of thinking may develop quite different ideas. It can all be much more banal than how I describe it.

Response (*Antwort*)

I must respond to what I find in the given situation, whether it be reality, imagination, or history. Generating a response is a challenge and presupposes knowledge.

Extension (*Ausdehnung*)

Asks the question: to what degree can I extend myself spatially, temporally, or in terms of my consciousness? How far can I extend the concrete space of the Place to Stand? Is there a limit to it?

**External Space—Internal Space
(*Aussenraum—Innenraum*)**

External space is what surrounds me; internal space is the space within me. The boundary can be my skin, or it can be my consciousness. This twofold term also refers to the particular state of mind required to be able to react to the external space from within the internal space.

Consolidation (*Befestigung*)

Everything is fluid, processual, open, and, initially, it has no shape or form. I have to consolidate the flow, create a place for it so that it can assume shape and form.

Movement (*Bewegung*)

This can be an external or an internal movement. It is the basis of every formative act.

Relationship (*Beziehung*)

I always have to relate to something so that form and shape, space and time, can be generated.

Link (*Bindung*)

In carrying out the action, I form links to concepts, space, time, substances, and history. It is a challenge to find, and also to define, links.

Thinking (*Denken*)

Recalls the fact that it is only about the experience. I can think of particular forms, shapes, volumes, or spaces; I can find things out about myself and my situation. I imagine this thinking process as a sculptural form.

Distance (*Distanz*)

The length of space in relation to which I am positioning myself. It also contains the idea of interspace.

Insertion (*Einfügung*)

There will always be things that are already there, things both spoken and unspoken. What I generate or develop in a new and different way is inserted into what already exists. This is a sculptural mode of working, and it can be significant.

Memory (*Erinnerung*)

Without the memory of history, of the existing historical situation, I am unable to act; there is no spatial framework; I can see nothing. In my view, memory stands in opposition to experience: experience is spontaneous, current, and ultimately has no knowledge of memory. It has no real dimension, whereas memory has.

Form (*Form*)

I do not think man can exist without form or shape. By form I mean not only a materialized shape, but also a matter of consciousness. Without the dimension of “formedness,” of space and material, of recalled historical forms, I have no parameters.

Built (*Gebaut*)

Can refer to two things: either to the fact that something formed is already there, or that I’m called upon to build or construct something. But it also means that you are not in an open, free, undetermined space of experience, that you must generate ideas of form.

Use (*Gebrauch*)

I can make use of a situation, of myself, of time, spaces, history—of every kind of material. Things are brought to life through use. I shall not simply use something, however: I must first of all earn the right to do so.

Vessel (*Gefäss*)

The three-dimensional notion of an enclosed space. It can also be a space of thought or imagination. A vessel has an outline, a particular capacity, a volume. It is empty and waiting to be filled.

Structure (*Gefüge*)

Refers to an arrangement where things are joined together, a mesh. I also regard it as a challenge to create a structure—not to leave the various parts as separate, detached elements but to find a shape within them. This presupposes an experience of form and imagery. Structure stands in opposition to taste. With a notion of structure one can construct a world; with taste one cannot.

Counterimage (*Gegenbild*)

I carry pictures within me. I must create a counterimage in order to be able to form a response to the pictures around me.

Presence (*Gegenwart*)

Is geared toward immediacy, the “now-point”; it is neither past nor future. Presence evaporates the very instant I say that something is “present.” I can think of it as linear, flowing, or as existing at certain points; these are appeals to consciousness. I imagine presence as the three-dimensional opposite of past and future.

History (*Geschichte*)

Is the memory of origin and of substances. Without the history of the body in space, of sculpture and of projected images, there is nothing. Like memory, the grand scale of history stands in opposition to experience. By which I do not mean the history one constructs within oneself, but rather existing history. It takes considerable effort to bring this to mind. Everything fades away, and we must continually strive to secure history and its references, without which history itself cannot be decided.

Gesture (*Geste*)

A gesture will always be three-dimensional; it is never random. The gesture can be performed internally as well as externally, and in both cases it is a gesture in space. The gesture must be related to my internal state.

Ground (*Grund*)

The ground can be the place where I stand, and it can also refer to the grounds for my action or inaction.

Action (*Handlung*)

An action, an act, is never unfounded. I can explore the underlying cause, the grounds for an action, and this generates a space. With my concept of the artwork, I have attempted to define possible forms of action.

Evoke (*Hervorrufen*)

This is intended as an invitation to the participant to become active: to engender, evoke, produce something.

Inside-Outside (*Innen-Aussen*)

Is more broadly conceived than internal and external space. It refers to everything that can be perceived within us and around us. It recalls the interaction between the two poles and the transition this involves.

Body (*Körper*)

Refers very directly to one’s own body, to the particular, existing volume, and is also an invitation to imagine something corporeal. This does not have to be the human body; terms such as “sculpture” and “vessel” also appear in this context.

Material (*Material*)

An artist cannot work without material. Everything, including immaterial resources such as time, can be material I use to form things. The term prompts the imagination to think about, define, or say something about material.

Modelling (*Modellierung*)

The idea of forming something, lending it shape, or giving it a bodily dimension.

Modulation (*Modulierung*)

Modifying and at the same time transforming something. Placing one thing in relation to another through modification.

Place (*Ort*)

Means an awareness of the significance of a place. I can choose the place that is created by the Place to Stand, or be called upon to find a place. This place can have a material, spatial existence, or it can exist in the imagination.

Proportion (*Proportion*)

Is a dimension of memory. The knowledge of what proportion was in each case in history. It is also an invitation to find a sense of proportion within oneself, to think about the relationship of one's own body to and in space.

Space (*Raum*)

In the first place, of course, this means the given space, the external space, the physical space, the space that is seen. It can also refer to the internal space. I also use the term "space" for a particular kind of extension, which can be either internal or external.

Direction (*Richtung*)

Without direction, an artistic form remains imprecise. Directions are not simply there. The term is an invitation, a challenge, to find a direction, to work this out for oneself. This is an artistic-sculptural act.

Sculpture (*Skulptur*)

Is an appeal to consciousness. Standing on the Place to Stand, one can develop notions of sculpture or gain a sense of oneself as a sculpture.

Language (*Sprache*)

Recalls the ability to formulate or articulate something, whereby language should not be limited to words.

Transition (*Übergang*)

Is related to presence. I imagine this as a transition from something to something else, wherein there is no indication of what the "from" is and what the "to" will be. It can be something temporal or historical, or it can encompass notions of form.

Surroundings (*Umgebung*)

By this I mean the surrounding space, the environment. The Place to Stand must be situated in a particular environment, which can be highly charged but can also be completely banal. Having works from the *Standstellen* series in this or that place calls attention to and emphasizes the surroundings.

Conversion (*Umwandlung*)

Converting or transforming something is an artistic act through which history is revealed. The term is a challenge to act.

Connection (*Verbindung*)

Means not just naming things but thinking of the connections between things or times as pictorial-sculptural situations.

Volume (*Volumen*)

I associate this with concepts such as sculpture, body, and receptacle. Volume must be found in the given situation. This can be a dimension of experience or of the imagination, or it can be physical reality. It must refer to something, and one must find a limit, an enclosure, an outline for it.

Change (*Wechsel*)

A relationship, a replacement, a transition to something else. This can be a time shift, a paradigm shift, a change of step.

Time (*Zeit*)

By this I mean pausing, reflecting upon time, developing concepts of time. This can emerge from experience, from the moment. I think of time as fluid rather than spatial. In this respect, it differs from duration, which has a more spatial dimension, indeed a static element.

Center (Zentrum)

Means: I am the center of the situation, or the place I find myself in is the center. It also challenges the imagination to tie down what is fluid, soft, unclear, incidental. If I imagine a center I can center things, relate them to the center and secure or solidify them there.

The original German “Die Begriffe” appeared in Susanne Richardt (ed.) *Franz Erhard Walther: Stirn statt Auge: Das Sprachwerk*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997) and in English in *Franz Erhard Walther: The Body Decides*, (WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels / CAPC, Bordeaux, Cologne, Walther König, 2014). Translation by Jacqueline Todd.

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Six Projections, One Work, 1968
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