Aesthesis

AESTHESIS: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics in Management and Organizational Life

This journal is published by THE AESTHESIS PROJECT: The Aesthesis Project was founded in January 2007 and is a research project investigating art and aesthetics in management and organizational contexts. The project has its roots in the first Art of Management and Organization Conference in London in 2002, with successive conferences held in Paris and Krakow. From those events emerged an international network of academics, writers, artists, consultants and managers, all involved in exploring and experimenting with art in the context of management and organizational research. The Aesthesis Project will be developing extensive research and artistic projects internationally, with academic research fellows and associate creative practitioners, publications and consultancy.

CONTENTS

AVANT-GARDE ORGANIZATION

UNDERSTANDING RADICAL ART PRACTICE AS MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL INVESTIGATION

Jonathan Vickery

What concerns have driven management and organization studies to art? Art, artists, design and the creative process have become useful subjects of analysis and a means for re-thinking the value of culture and cultural knowledge in organizational contexts, the nature of management and leadership, new methods of communication, the very concept of 'organizational structure', how organizations maintain a capacity for innovation (combat 'institutionalization' and creative sclerosis), and how they negotiate the border between inside and outside (the synergy, or lack of, between the organization and consumer culture).

In the last decade a plethora of publications on art, aesthetics, management and organization has emerged, many of which have been read widely in industry and become part of mainstream business literature. Aside from the countless articles and magazine features we could cite, influential books include Pine and Gilmore's *The Experience Economy* (1998), which uses theatre and the work of the actor as an heuristic by which to examine unexplored realms of 'experience' in business development, observing a paradigm shift from the 'service economy' to 'experience economy'; John Dobson's *The Art of Management and the Aesthetic Manager* (1999) offers a critique of existing models of management leadership and identifies a new paradigm grounded in models of thinking, action and communication characteristic of the work of the artist; Austin and Devin's *Artful Making* (2003) extended the concept of the artist's improvisation, innovation and leadership to the level of strategy in business organizations. Dickinson and Svensen's *Beautiful Corporations* (2000) is part of an emerging genre of research on the powerful function of image, style, design, aesthetic and symbolic systems within successful corporations. Pasquale Gagliardi's earlier *Symbols and Artefacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape* (1990) in some ways pioneered this broad area of research, and it continues to develop (see Rafaeli and Pratt, 2005).

With specific regard to academic research, we now find established cross-disciplinary research centres, from the international European Centre of Art and Management (ECAM) to Denmark's Learning Lab, the European Research Institute for Comparative Cultural Policy and the Arts, as well as many institution-specific research projects. Journals *Tamara: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science*, *Culture and Organization* and *Organization Studies* regularly feature research on the uses of art or on aesthetics; the *International Journal of Arts Management* and *Journal of Cultural Economics* also broach this field from their own disciplinary standpoints. Surveying the breadth of current academic research we find that art emerges as *process* (as cognitive activity; as communicative action; as creative signification; as emotional engagement); as *object* (syntheses of diverse sensory stimuli; composition as innovative organizational logic; object-viewer relation as metaphor of object-consumer relation; creator of new social dynamics); and as *economy* (as a business; as a commodity/market product; as business network (art world); as marketing). Art and aesthetics have informed the study of marketing communications, such as branding and advertising, for decades now, and with growing sophistication (see Schroeder, 2007, 2006). The emerging discipline of 'design management' has also put art and aesthetics to work in an industrial as well as commercial retail context (Bruce and Bessant, 2002; Best, 2006).

The critical objectives of this present article emerged from reading two chapters in Linstead and Höpfl's volume *The Aesthetics of Organization* (2000). The first was Antonio Strati's 'The Aesthetic Approach in Organization Studies'; the second was Pierre Guillet de Monthoux's 'The Art Management of Aesthetic Organizing'. The first (more fully explored in his book *Organization and Aesthetics* of 1999) cast art as a cognitive enterprise – and aesthetics as a mode of thinking and knowing that has the capacity to reconstruct dominant conceptions of human rationality, subvert dominant organizational models of human productivity, and extend our philosophical understanding of the aesthetic ground of human experience. The second, by Guillet de Monthoux, directly engages with specific artworks, artists and art movements, generating an innovative mode of philosophical critique and interpretation relevant to specific management and organization issues (developed in his major book *The Art Firm: Aesthetic Management and Metaphysical Marketing* of 2004). Strati is conceptually abstract, analytical, and concerned with the speculative dimension of problems in organizational aesthetics and the philosophy of management; Guillet de Monthoux is more discursive and experimental – he uses modes of analysis one finds in art criticism, art theory and art history, also incorporating random observations, philosophical assertions and vivid ideas, many of which cannot be assimilated into a master argument or single-line trajectory of thinking.

These two essays – speculative analysis of organizational aesthetics and an empirically-based engagement with actual art and art projects – suggest a substantive emergent research field. Carr and Hancock's *Art and Aesthetics at Work* (2003) is an example of research since Linstead and Höpfl's volume that has begun to charter this research field, as have many individual research projects, like the Stockholm-based Fields of Flow project, directed by Guillet de Monthoux, Gustafsson Claes and Sjöstrand Sven-Erik, which examines the 'flows' of energy between art and business enterprise. In this research field the challenge will be to explore the relation between the disciplinary frameworks of organizational aesthetics and the somewhat more anarchic and less constrained realm of artistic and aesthetic practice (both the practice of making art, as well as the practice of viewing art), as well as the business enterprises and organizational networks through which art makes it into both the public sphere and the market place.

This current paper does not assume to make any further headway in this research task as such; rather, it is an attempt to construct a viable theoretical framework through which at least one strand of research in this field can be conducted. The rationale of this paper is to construct a framework from the vantage point of art criticism, art theory and practice, not

from academic management and organization studies. However, the first major point of this paper, the subject of the first section, emerged from reading a chapter in Guillet de Monthoux's *The Art Firm*, entitled 'Avant-Garde Enterprises', where a dense historical inquiry results in an understanding of avant-garde aesthetics as a matter of strategy, as distinct from the usual art historical attentiveness to 'style' (Guillet de Monthoux, 2004: 110-153). The 'strategic' dimension of the avant-garde emerged through an historical analysis of the way that for some leading nineteenth-century artists 'art' involved more than just making an object; it involved the artist negotiating a complex and ever-shifting relation between the contexts of display, the management of its production and distribution, its changing audiences, its critical reception, and the politics of the organizational field in which it moved.

This is the first of two broad art historical observations I make: avant-garde art was primarily concerned with 'strategy', not style or aesthetics. The second observation is that by the late 1960s, when avant-garde strategies entered mainstream artistic practice in London, New York and to a lesser extent Paris and Munich, we find that the dominant operational conception of 'art' has ceased to be centred on an object at all, but is more accurately defined as an *activity*: art is the aesthetic organization of space and management of the conditions of its function as 'art' – display, distribution, interpretation and reproduction. I am not concerned with art historical arguments in support of these observations (though there are many we could draw on within Krauss, 1991; Foster, 1996; Buchloh, 2000; Harrison, 2001). I am simply concerned with pursuing these observations in order to find intersections with between art, management and organization. Methodologically, therefore, I will simply be considering the 'avant-garde' as an empirical-historical phenomena from which to abstract points of relevance for our interests in constructing a dialogue between art/art practice and its theorization, and management and organization studies.

This paper is in three parts: the first simply attempts to define 'avant-garde'. When people think of 'art' they usually think of single 'works of art', or individual artists, not new enterprising forms of organization. Avant-garde, I point out, can be defined in terms of strategy and organization. The second updates our understanding of the concept of avant-garde by considering contemporary art since the 1960s. The larger part of this section argues that while mainstream contemporary art could be defined in terms of the aesthetic organization of space and management of the conditions of its function as art, latent in a certain genre of conceptual art (specifically the writing and practice of Joseph Kosuth) we can locate a more explicit concept of art as *a form of* experimental organization. This, I argue, has implications for us in finding a greater synergy between the practices of art and the research interests of management and organization studies. The third part of this paper is in the form of a case study, attempting to illustrate an example of contemporary art practice that can be define in just these terms. The work of Jochen Gerz cannot be defined as the making of art objects, or simply in terms of the management of creative activity, but as 'avant-garde organization'.

AVANT-GARDE AS STRATEGY

Avant-garde art has been studied from many vantage points: aesthetics (Herwitz, 1993), art theory (Krauss, 1991), art history (Wood, 1999), and there are major scholarly perspectives on the avant-garde that would challenge my own viewpoint here: Donald Kuspit views the avant-garde as a 'cult' of the charismatic individual, the organizational dimension of which is of little consequence (Kuspit, 1993). What is absent from scholarly research on the whole is an investigation of the corporate life and organizational formations of the avant-garde, of the kind relevant to our interests.

Avant-garde 'movements' were not historically equivalent to modern art movements (an association of artists involved in the same stylistic development, such as Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Suprematism); in France today, however, modernist artists are still referred to as 'the avant-garde' (Duret, 1998). In English-speaking countries there remains a tendency to conflate the terms 'modernist' and 'avant-garde' in so far as avant-garde can simply denote the most radical of modern artists. Influential New York art critic Clement Greenberg understood 'modernist' as the artistic innovation of 'avant-garde' cultural formations (i.e. what was avant-garde was essentially the social formation of artistic subcultures, not artistic practice), although he himself often implied the terms were synonyms in a number of essays (Greenberg, 1939, 1961). In sociological terms, the avant-garde were often actual organizational entities, in part inspired by political movements. The Futurists, Dada, De Stijl, Constructivists, Surrealists, and the Dessau Bauhaus and its lead practitioners were in various ways centralised as a group in particular locations, with membership regulation and recognised leadership, with a strong corporate manifesto and a programmatic approach to production (an agreed vocabulary and syntax of visual language, specified set of techniques and methods of construction); they also demonstrated an understanding of their market and the means by which they were to change it (Poggioli, 1968); they were highly aware of their corporate branding, pursued a programme of public relations, and in the case of a

number of them (Van Doesburg of De Stijl, Kurt Schwitters of Dada, for example) managed small businesses. Their relevance from the viewpoint of organization studies is that avant-garde organization harnessed and internalised negativity and what is usually unproductive in organizational contexts – interruption, disruption, breakdown, conflict – and used them in generating new modes of productivity. And importantly, throughout the avant-garde we find a consciousness of their activity in organizational terms – their basic cognitive framework was not the art historical development of visual language, or simply the aesthetic dynamics of the 'art object-viewer' relation, but the collective 'intervention' into non-art realms of life, intervention into their 'contexts' of production, understood in terms of the shifting permutations of market, economy, social systems, political structures.

It is possible to identify six historical periods within which different kinds of 'avant-garde' art emerged (beginning in Paris around 1850), so I qualify my use of the term by referring to the dates 1910-1940. However, it's worth mentioning some historic context in the form of two of the most commonly known corporate characteristics of the avant-garde before 1910, shared with all later modernist art. The first is 'style' or stylistic innovation: each artist was allied to a community of style. Style was more than new artistic techniques or principles of composition, it was a mediator of a worldview, a method of socio-cultural analysis, a means of locating a subject-position within a context of social and cultural disorientation. Style (from Impressionism to Fauvism) was a producer of values strong enough to create micro-communities, and within these communities individuals found the conditions of personal 're-invention' – a new identity and 'life-style'; the phenomenon of 'bohemianism' is one example, expounded in Jerrold Seigel's classic study *Bohemian Paris* (1986), where poverty, cultural exile, and an emerging mass consumerism provided the conditions for a new and productive social space.

A second corporate characteristic was in the form of direct socio-cultural engagement. As historians like Thomas Crow have demonstrated, the avant-garde from 1860 developed in and through an interaction with what seemed inimical to their own profession as artists – mass culture, or the culture of 'the people' (Crow, 1996). This later included new media, popular cultural forms like posters or advertising, and the ephemera of social consumption like cheap everyday commodities. The artistic characteristics by which avant-garde is remembered – the visual dissonance of clashing colours, direct

rendering and crude application of paint, montage or synthetic imagery, flat uninflected surfaces, and so on – demonstrably emerged from an experience and 'translation' of the aesthetics of the artist's own socio-cultural experience of emerging pop culture. Leading to a gradual 'de-skilling' of the artistic profession, direct *relevance* to the experience of contemporary life became valued over the ancient past, tradition and past *professional achievement*. The past, no longer the standard and source of value, was repudiated in favour of the ephemeral 'contemporaneousness' of the present. The earliest proclamation of this is usually identified as Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), where the modern artist is likened to a 'flâneur', or roving bohemian, would stand aloof from the crowds, detached and observing the subtle but potent elements of the 'new' of modernity emerging in everyday life.

The primacy of style as the organizing factor in avant-garde innovation disintegrated in the 'anti-style' of Cubism and in the 'anti-art' of Dada – from Duchamp's own personal anti-art movement to the diverse performances of Zurich, Paris, Berlin, Cologne Dada, and later on to the 'industrial' art of Tatlin and Rodchenko's Constructivism, El Lissitsky's Prouns, or Moholy-Nagy's graphic art and art photography. The 'anti-style' trend subverted the post-renaissance conventions that were intrinsic to the very concept of art – of verisimilitude, anatomical rendering and modelling, colour harmony, tonal coordination, and spatial and formal coherence. 'Anti-art' subverted art's ontology: the identity of an object as 'art' was not predicated on institutionally endorsed conventions of material construction (such as oil paint and stretched canvas). The range of avant-garde art that emerged was broad, and without in any way suggesting an aesthetic homogeneity to avant-garde art, Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (1936) nonetheless indicates one *general* characteristic of central interest to us. His seminal and short essay can be read as an historical account of how style was supplanted by strategy in the development of avant-garde art after 1910.

Benjamin's example is Dada montage, but the implication is broader: the significance of the object was no longer lodged in the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of the object, but in its very process of signification – visual engagement, performativity and impact, or, what Benjamin called its 'shock-effect' (Benjamin, 2003). In a broader reading of Benjamin's commentaries on avant-garde aesthetics (such as the study on Brecht), we find further characterisations of this 'strategy'. Words, meanings, and representations of everyday life were placed in opposing or conflicting contexts (like Braque's cubist paintings where the principle of formal 'harmony' is substituted by a principle of formal 'conflict') and thus the static banality of everyday 'reality' was given an unexpected fluidity and motion. Creating an internal conflict between the artwork's illusory depiction and the reality it 'represented' became a means of forcing a consciousness of the contingent relation between viewer/subject and artwork/object (Benjamin, 1998). The implication was that avant-garde experience would (i) bring to consciousness the cognitive processes by which meaning is constructed: the experience of avant-garde art – the fragmented and anarchic compositions of 'anti-art' – was not immediately intelligible but could be *made* intelligible through the viewer adopting other, non-normative, modes of rationale thinking; and it would (ii) bring to consciousness the social processes by which meanings are made: the way that recognisable words and images, while claiming to impart 'truth', are representations whose relation with their object is relative to the position of the subject, which is socially constructed, thus always ideologically contextualised. In short, avant-garde art – by virtue of this performative critique of the cognitive and social conditions of contemporary sensibility – revealed that the shape of social life and our experience of life could be otherwise: life can be reconstructed in radically different ways and still make sense, still work out. The capacity to see things differently – emerging from the imagination – is for Benjamin, the facility out of which the demand for real socio-cultural change emerged.

Benjamin's basic observations, which I have elaborated on here, identify the general strategic dimension of the particular and seemingly anarchic modes of communication that characterised avant-garde artworks. On a corporate level, there were characteristics of avant-garde movements themselves that have implications for thinking about organizational structure. I will list some of them – extracting general features of the avant-garde as a socio-cultural phenomenon – to help us construct a broad framework-definition of 'avant-garde'.

1. *Experimentalism*: artistic 'conventions' (methods of technique-application and the professional protocols that governed their deployment) were no longer accepted as the historical accumulation of professional knowledge, but as regulation and institutionalized limitations on the possibilities of practice; this entailed an attitude of nihilism with regard art's entire institutionalization as it stood – even against *modern* styles; experimenting often began with destruction, using materials and practices in conflict with the aesthetic sensibility that professional protocols had cultivated, combining genres (painting and theatre, or drawing and photography, for example), as well as aspects of life usually kept

apart (such as art and political violence), producing energy and possibility from conflict and difference between opposing practices and values (using elements of art and science or technology) and supplanting inherited principles with their opposite.

2. *Inter-media/synthetic constructionism*: materials were to be released from their canonization and institutionalization as privileged 'media' or of specific genres of artistic practice, combined to address all the senses not just the 'optical' (dissolving the categorical distinction between reading, seeing and physical action/interaction); this became known as the principle of 'collage': the interaction of new materials created unforeseen possibilities – in turn creating 'new' modes of perception and comprehension.

3. *Chance*: a sudden transformation according to collision of unpredictable or random variables; chance operated in terms of opening known quantities (paint, canvas) to hostile conditions (nature, violence, impact with other materials); 'possibility' itself becomes a positive value as an artistic means, no longer requiring the justification of predicted outcomes. The art 'product' was not as important as the experience or dynamic process of its creation; chance entailed the structure and direction of any project emerging from the friction and collision of multiple possibilities in the production process itself; the artist responds to, rather than determines, the trajectory of a chance-driven construction.

4. *Playfulness*: sarcasm, parody, wit and humour become methods of both self-reflection and creative stimuli; playfulness entailed subjecting a given subject matter to a variety of perverse translations or imaginary scenarios; it could re-combine the elements of an art work (words in a poem, frames of a film, for example) to suggest the opposite of what they were intended to mean; it could involve posturing, caricature, provocation, distortion and bluffing as tactical means by which entrenched processes of artistic production can be subject to alternate modes of management; for example, 'play' can dissolve 'innovation inhibition' reinforced by an oppressive sense of tradition, authority or hierarchy, and also introduce engaging marginalia into the process of construction.

5. *Simplicity*: a preference for direct and unmediated forms of address, and an attack on over-cerebral modes of construction and communication governed by 'official' socially determined norms. 'Simplicity' was an analytical frame of mind identifying complex constructions in terms of combinations of elemental forms; it divested art of authority and conventional acceptance of complexity as signifier of quality; expression was measured by strength of impact rather than

quality of detail; it entailed a recognition of the marginalisation or repression of possible solutions that stand outside officially endorsed orders and hierarchies of production.

6. *Ephemera*: art is a form of creative activity emerging from specific temporal and spatial coordinates, not a permanent rare/valuable object universally communicable: avant-garde art was conceived in terms of artist-viewer interaction/dialogue (where viewing itself is as creative as production); it entailed a recognition of 'flux' as the fundamental temporal condition of modern life, and thus of any organizational entity; creativity can only exist if the mechanisms of creativity can exist in a perpetual state of interpretation and translation within ever changing contexts of meaning and action; the organizational entity of the group and its art products are intrinsically value-less – 'value' is conceived in terms of transformative potential and impact.

7. *Iconoclasm*: a perpetual overturning of the signifiers of authority and the claims of authority; a perpetual attack on the processes of institutionalized authority, and a radical scepticism of the disinterested or moral foundation of any form of social authority; this attitude was co-extensive with a radical scepticism and suspicion of the way artistic practice mediates forms of social authority, and entailed an intolerance for forms of artistic production that did not allow for radically non-conformist individuality. Iconoclasm, in part modelled on the French *philosophes* attack on Catholicism, entailed an obligation to perpetually insult and desecrate widely respected norms or personages.

8. *The unity of art and everyday life* – art became a kind of laboratory of industrial, social and cultural transformation, producing models and new elemental methods for the construction, combination and appropriation of materials: the avant-garde organization attempted to embody the cognitive conditions of social change in micro-cosmic form; art became conceived as a 'problem-solving' activity, and creativity was understood as much in terms of formulating and re-formulating problems as finding solutions; solutions emerged from the collision of the rational with non-rational, technical with aesthetic, sensory data with conceptual analysis. The sensuous particularity and aesthetic everyday that gives our individual lives substance and meaning was no longer suppressed or expelled as unproductive or non-quantifiable, but itself provided the vital clues for thinking beyond institutionalized rational solutions.

Without suggesting these above characteristics were co-extensive or each

add up to a coherent art practice – counter-examples can be made for every assertion on this – they did become the historical hallmarks of the avant-garde, as evidenced in any current text book on the subject (Wood, 1999). While many of the above characteristics apply to art objects, they are more properly thought as the strategic dimension to avant-garde corporate life, operative within avant-garde work and the way they developed and managed their own productivity: we could identify this in a broader study of the Dada networks and Dada Cabaret, Futurist groups and their Futurist 'Evenings' (serata futurista), the international Surrealist movement and their exhibitions, the Bureau of Surrealist Research, through to the part-institutionalized art making programmes of the Dessau Bauhaus or Moscow VKhUTEMAS).

In thinking about the avant-garde in management and organizational terms, the above elements of strategy were often mobilised as a means of positioning the group in a broader organizational field – in relation to the organizational complex outside its own orbit of actvity, whether art academy, political party, government, or business. This 'positioning' can also be explained by reference to common descriptors (see Shapiro 1978 for a classic overview): Firstly, avant-garde was interdisciplinary: against the entrenchment of individual artists in an individual (and idiosyncratically stylised) genre-based craft, avant-garde art demanded a cross-field application of ideas and techniques, and the re-application of art-ideas within socio-political contexts. The development of photomontage by Berlin Dada and its deployment in both gallery, political newspaper and as public billboard poster is an example.

Secondly, avant-garde was activist. The fulcrum around which avant-garde movements revolved was not the art object, but their evolving discourse of socio-cultural transformation (which in the case of the German Bauhaus and Russian constructivists and their colleagues, was explicitly industrial and economic transformation). This discourse was often generated in the first instance by the group 'manifesto', and was multi-facetted, offering a conceptual sphere within which both those inside and outside the organization (artist, critic, intellectual, public) could interact. The activist ethic of the avant-garde reassessed the professional protocols of the world of the fine artist, creating new identities for the artist (engineer, designer), new labour models, and new means of professional association (such as networks).

Then thirdly, avant-garde was interventionist: it was socially interventionist in the sense that its significance in part was measured as the extent to which its presence was registered within the public sphere; it deliberately courted publicity and public controversy to this end. However, it was also 'internally' interventionist in the sense that it subjected itself to perpetual self-interrogation and self-questioning as to its very identity, meaning and value; the Surrealists or Dadaist are perhaps the most vivid example (Heulsenbeck, 1998). Mostly, however, the avant-garde recognised the perpetual process of institutionalization (in values, practices, management) that is inherent in any effective organization: heterodoxy becomes orthodoxy; leadership becomes domination; innovation spawns a new set of restrictive norms. The avant-garde movement was a perpetual assessment of the conditions of their own production, exhibition and consumption, and so they developed new forms of display as well as new markets.

In this opening section we have simply attempted to define 'avant-garde' conceptually through a general characterisation of the art movements between 1910–1940, and to which historians like Poggioli and critics like Schapiro would testify (Poggioli, 1968; Schapiro, 1978). I have done so to emphasis points of relevance for management and organization studies – points which perhaps seem obvious to any art historian, but mainstream historical accounts of the avant-gardes invariably remain fixated on artistic personalities and individual works of art rather than corporate or organizational characteristics. (Moreover, they often side-step the 'assertive' commercial aspirations of many avant-garde artists, from Van Doesburg to Salvador Dali).

Avant-garde gradually supplanted style by strategy, and whose organizational forms evolved through direct response to the socio-cultural conditions of art production. The art object was simply a mediating device in a broader scheme of organizational activity aimed at engagement and transformation of the conditions of everyday life (whether psychic (surrealism), social (Bauhaus), cultural (Futurism) or political-economic (Constructivism). We now need to find a more recent formulation of 'avant-garde' and a more specific theoretically-grounded rationale for an emphatic relation between avant-garde and the interests of management and organization studies.

NEO-AVANT-GARDE

There remain many arguments on the success, failure and fate of the original pre-war avant-gardes (Bürger, 1984; Foster, 1994, 1996; Buchloh, 1984, 1986; Berg, 2005; Scheunemann, 2005). It was the German Peter Bürger who initiated the debate on the relation between the

pre-war and post-war avant-gardes during the 1980s, asserting that the avant-garde 'artistic' techniques and methods of performance repeated during the 1950s and 1960s (with groups like Fluxus, CoBrA, or the Internationale Situationiste movement) were empty repetitions, as the substantive aspirations for socio-cultural transformation that were the very raison d'être of avant-garde art (i.e. revolutionary politics), had failed. What continued in the 'neo' avant-gardes were in effect just visual techniques (Bürger, 1984). Foster and Buchloh, however, see post-war developments (more significantly, the 1960s) as highly critical and productive translation, interpretation and appropriation of avant-garde aesthetics in radically changed conditions, and in no way a parody of failed aspirations. Among these neo-avant-gardes were Pop art (wained in strength by 1970, except for Warhol); Minimal art (in strength only between 1967-1969), Process art (1968-70), Land art (which reached its zenith around 1975), and the more expansive Performance art and Conceptual art (dominant in the art world in the 1970s and 1980s). Many of the artists involved in these movements had political aspirations and affiliations that bore some relation to the social-democrat, Marxist or anarchist motives of pre-war avant-gardes, but these were not embedded in manifestos or organizational formations. Nonetheless, all of these movements continued to deny the intrinsic significance of the discrete 'work of art' as both object and objective of art, and instead defined art in terms of an activity of intervention in a specific social space. From the theoretical writings of key artists of the late 1960s – such as Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, and Joseph Kosuth – it is evident that 'art' was now defined in terms of the aesthetic organization of space, and the management (by the artist or collective agent) of the conditions of display, distribution, interpretation and reproduction (Buren, 1991; Morris, 1993; Smithson, 1996). The art object, even if a focal point, was one factor in a larger matrix of activities, and these activities were consciously geared towards the transformation of the conditions of creative production in general (both artistic, cultural and social conditions, articulated to varying degrees).

To briefly illustrate this: Minimal art defined itself explicitly in terms of an epistemological and phenomenological investigation into the 'situation' dynamic of viewer-art object in the 'controlled' space of the art gallery; Process art attempted to locate new non-rationalized modes of interaction between the creative subject and raw materials that formed everyday *objects*, locating the 'materiality' of materials expelled by rationalised

construction techniques; Land art involved site-specific interaction with nature, forming new or altered environments, then often documenting those sites, revealing how experience of 'nature' is a complex web of images, memories, ideas and prior responses degraded by industrialization and urbanization; Performance art explored event-based communication, where the human body was the vehicle of signification and whose presence is always invested with the protocols of socio-political power; Conceptual art created a public discourse on the very nature of art; their art was not so much exhibited in, as utilised, gallery space as just one medium of its own production, reception and distribution. The exception to this clipped overview is perhaps Pop art – it was pictorial and its impetus emerged from the developing popular culture in the mid-1950s. It did, however, decisively facilitate the avant-garde dissolution of the high art--mass art dichotomy that had regulated the boundaries of aesthetics and art theory since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Altogether these movements arguably provided the dominant historical-conceptual framework, models of practice and philosophical reference points, for the later generations of dominant artists in the USA, Europe and beyond.

Art, by 1970, could appear in terms of multiple unrelated objects, identical serial constructions, as site-specific, made of industrial/commercial materials, mixed-media, assemblage, empty space, or text, a field of activity, investigation, information, the various 'parts' were not necessarily located in the same place or physically connected; labour relations were transformed, as the artist often delegated manufacturing and became active in the marketing, publicity, distribution and display of the work. A large degree of contemporary art can still be described in these terms, despite the fact that so-called postmodernism from the late 1970s provided a rationale for the return of the historic genres, such as oil painting (even if by way of parody or irony). What has remained pervasive in the art world – as a generalised philosophy of curatorship – is that the 'artwork' is not hermetic, autonomous or independent of it specific placement, orientation, and location in space, and its meaning is relative to context as well as to its configuration in relation to other objects. Art is coextensive with the space and with the movement of the viewing subject – object, subject, space are bound up in the same dynamic that is the 'experience' of the art. For this reason the intellectual investment in art's display by the institution/curator is often equivalent to that of the creation of the art object by the artist in the first instance. As organized space, art as gained a new relevance to organization studies in so far as it departed from the illusory realm of 'depiction' or the representation of the empirical world, and innovated new means of communication by reconfiguring the elements of everyday life:

-- the art installation (whether exhibitions in the traditional sense or 'installation art') can be used as a metaphor of organizational spatial dynamics: it rehearses the basic modes of subject-object interaction on phenomenological (or, in the case of certain kinds of conceptual art, epistemological) planes, locating the intersections between rational regulated and legislated behaviour and the spontaneous aesthetic-perceptual facility of the individual human body.
-- the art work can be metaphor of organizational structure, with its diverse interrelations and interconnections of elements (different from the traditional work of art's rational-logical 'composition' and its subjugation of part to whole); its arrangements of space and information often collapse the usual regulative distinctions in organizational space between cognitive and sensory, or stimuli and response, and their usual hierarchies, and offer new modes of rational comprehension.
-- innovative modes of communication – visual, scripto-visual, and typographic – offer communication techniques and use of media that maintain a semantic-conceptual generality without expelling the sensual particularity or materiality of the sign, eroding the specificity of the context, or the performativity of the utterance.

My main point here about the 'neo'-avant-garde is that while the origin of this strategy-driven approach to art making is 'avant-garde', it nonetheless became increasingly institutionalized in an 'art world' system that was growing in both economic and administrative power over the conditions of art's production, distribution, display and reception. The aesthetic organization of space and the management of the conditions of display, distribution, interpretation and reproduction, was an increasingly hermetic affair, and whose organizational logic was entirely convention, not itself 'avant-garde'.

Unsurprisingly, contemporary art continues to be a mine for visual merchandizing managers and graphic designers. I want to turn our attention however back to a moment in the late 1960s – one of the most notorious and compelling artist statements of that time – which registers the complete dissolution of the traditional concept of art whereby art has no substantive content other than as an organizational activity. The reason I am returning to Joseph Kosuth, aside from the pivotal role his essay plays in the intellectual history of this era, is that Kosuth is at once central to the art world 'institutionalization' of art, but also points a way out of it, in terms of the uses of avant-garde strategy. For that to make sense we need to consider the essay in some detail – the essay is 'Art after Philosophy' (first

published in *Studio International* (London) 178, October 1969: 134-137) (my references below are taken from Kosuth, 1991: 13-32).

For Kosuth, modern art's visual qualities – the style and 'aesthetic' qualities of the sensual, formal or morphological aspect of the art works material existence – was historically never the vehicle or locus of art's meaning. All visual qualities belong to the social history of taste, embedded in the sensibility cultivated by a socio-economic class in a certain location. Art's 'meaning' emerged from its creative function, and this function was only operative within a specific discursive context, an 'art context' (whatever form that took). This 'function' was primarily conceptual, not visual: each work of art embodies a 'definition' of art – and it is this that makes it a meaningful visual experience. A work of art was a 'proposition' in visual form. A work of art's impact (the thrust of its meaningfulness) emerged only to the degree the art-proposition explored the nature of art, extending our conception of it. 'Art is an analytic proposition', stated Kosuth, (its function is to tell us about itself); it is not synthetic, that is, it does not make substantive claims about the world, or need an external referent as a source of validation (Kosuth, 1991: 20-21). The dichotomy of 'analytic' and 'synthetic' is important here (important to Kant, and taken up by Kosuth through reading Wittgenstein). While the dichotomy was subject to a series of controversies in the history of logic, for Kosuth an analytic statement is simply a statement whose truth solely depends on the meaning of its terms (any predicate – what we can say about it – is intrinsic to the subject: 'all batchelors are unmarried', as the classic example goes). A synthetic statement demands a meaning other than that contained within its own terms: 'The book is black' (books are not necessarily black, we need to refer to empirical experience to affirm or disaffirm this statement).

Kosuth's assertion that art's meaning is fundamentally conceptual was underpinned by an assumption on the identity of the work of art, an assumption perhaps best outlined by reference to Warhol's *Brillo Box* and Danto's essay 'The Artworld' (both 1964), an essay which bears more than a coincidental relation to Kosuth's text: If an art object and a non-art object can in principle be visually non-distinct, then the concept of 'art' bears no necessary relation to any material property or visual characteristic as such. Art is more accurately defined as the activity of an artist(s) in a specific context: an art context. This, again, became a truism of contemporary art, but unfolds in Kosuth's text in a more nuanced way, expressing a significant historical as well as a decisive theoretical shift. I want to consider Kosuth's basic claims, as they provide a route for a philosophical definition of art as an 'organizational' activity (whose implications will emerge). Kosuth's major point, as we have seen, is that art is fundamentally conceptual, not 'visual' in the way it mediates meaning (becomes a meaningful experience). The immediate historical context for Kosuth's 'Art after Philosophy' was the development of Conceptual art – which was characteristically art made from text, such as typographic designs or statements, documents or information in a variety of formats and installations. As a statement, it is expressive (intentionally so) of the condition of contemporary art in general. Kosuth's claims are as follows (in my words):

1. There is a *category distinction* between 'the aesthetic' and 'art'. Aesthetic responses and judgements and concepts relating to those responses/judgements have always been extraneous to the meaning and value of art. Aesthetic concepts are (only) a response to the formal, sensual, morphological aspect of the art object and tells us nothing about the essential meaning of the art. The 'form' of an object is mere 'decoration'.

2. Art's *meaning* is, conversely, lodged in its function: inquiring into and thus revealing the nature of art – and do so in an art context (re: Wittgenstein: 'if you want to find the meaning of a word look for its use' – pragmatics are logically prior to semantics). Art does this by presenting new propositions: 'Art is an analytic proposition'; it is a tautology: art is about nothing but art (it cannot tell you anything about the world), that is, its identity as art is its presentation as a proposition in this art context.

3. The *conceptual value* of art has been historically ignored. Aesthetic judgement is subjective; it masquerades as both objective interpretation and evaluation, yet it only reflects the individual 'taste' of the critic. The formalist art history of modern art is merely an inductive process of developing the material possibilities of the medium as defined by a set of arbitrary a priori requirements on genre specificity (for example: 'art' is said to be either painting or sculpture; to be a painting the object has to be presented in a certain format, on a flat plane, hung on a wall, framed).

4. There is *another history of art*: the progressive emergence of art's conceptual function. The value of Cubism was not the visual qualities in any one given painting, or a particularisation of colours and shapes, but what Cubism told us about the nature of art (its function not form, as concept not appearance). The colours and shapes were art's language, not its meaning. Similarly, 'If Pollock is important it is because he painted on loose canvas horizontally to the floor. What isn't important is that he later put those drippings over stretchers and hung them parallel to the wall. (In other words, what is important in art is what one brings to it, not one's adoption of what was previously existing).'

5. Modernist formalism collapsed in principle with Duchamp's *Readymade*.

Duchamp demonstrated that an object could function as art without any formal artistic characteristics: hence the identity and meaning of art only exists conceptually.

6. After Duchamp *the value of art* is entirely the degree to which it impacts on its art context, and extends our concept of art. Its impact is registered by 'its conceptual growth', and the way its propositions 'logically follow that growth'.

7. Only *contemporary* art functions as art: 'Van Gogh's paintings are [now] not worth any more than his palette'; their 'meaning' has been fully assimilated by culture. Art is an event, an annunciation, and only finds meaning and value in its context of that annunciation, even it the implications of that work extend throughout history). Only art now can be of value now, that is, function as art.

Of course, the radical dichotomies that structure Kosuth's argument – visual form and 'meaning', art and aesthetics, sense and concept – are cause for philosophical suspicion, and one must bear in mind the degree to which this essay is embedded in a broader combative polemic against the 'modernist formalism' hegemonic in the New York art world at the time (specifically involving critic Clement Greenberg). More important for us here are the implications of Kosuth's perspective: Kosuth (i) takes art's meaning (and consequently its value) to be temporal (salient only as 'contemporary' art) – though it is not *ephemeral*, as it maintains a role in the narrative of the philosophical development of art as a concept); art's value is invested primarily in its self-annunciation, as a proposition; (ii) art has no *intrinsic* value (as object); its value is its capacity for impact on, or interaction with, its 'context' (for Kosuth, 'art context'); (iii) art does not prescribe any material or objective form through which this interaction must take place – the material manifestation of the proposition is entirely relative to its context. Kosuth, like his contemporaries, presupposed that the historic genres were now exhausted in any case – there was nothing new or relevant that could be made with drawing, painting and sculpture; (iv) central to the process of making art is a critical interrogation consistently asking 'what is art': the argument may seem circular ('art' is the question 'what is art?'), but the 'art as proposition about the concept of art' is a process whereby art engages with a specific environment (the 'art context'). There is no universal meaning or art identity that can be formed prior to this context-engagement. Furthermore, this 'context' is evidently not just a *physical* environment (such as a gallery) but an *epistemic* one: this is a concept-making environment, though which and within which we understand and develop the concept of art. If we consider the nature of

the New York 'art world' in 1969, say, it was a discursive framework of theories, ideas, notions and presuppositions all circulating through magazines, exhibitions, artists statements, books, through which the very activity of art was understood and produced by young artists like Kosuth. Even so, art 'discourse' is never purely discursive (never simply a circulation of concepts, theories and ideas), but always embedded within some kind of organizational frame (such as a network of art galleries and dealers). Kosuth, however, does not make an equivalence between 'art context and 'art world'.

We need to further consider this last point: there is a sense in which Kosuth's 'art as an analytical proposition' is circular, and a rather convoluted argument for the autonomy of art or updated *l'art pour l'art* – art may use references to objects in the world, but only to explore its own unique nature. However, the circularity dissolves on a close reading of Kosuth. He states, 'works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact' (Kosuth, 1991:20). We could respond to this with the following: If art was (only) an analytic proposition, surely it wouldn't need this 'context'; art always has a physical context of course (for instance, a painting presupposes a wall on which it is hung), but Kosuth's art needs a context determinative of its very identity – a sphere of meaning outside of itself through which it can function, a discursive environment that will allow it to operate – it has no meaning-function without it. Without it the art proposition is not 'art' (or at least fails to embody the 'meaning' function that would make it truly 'contemporary' art). There is a sense in which Kosuth's art is not analytic at all but synthetic. A proposition has a subject and predicate (the such and such....is such and such.....), the predicate necessarily presupposing a subject. The subject here is 'art' (Kosuth's art object), and the predicate is 'the concept of art'. What is interesting is that the 'analytic' proposition only becomes 'analytic' by virtue of an engagement in a 'context' – this proposition is only meaningful in an art context. As a statement, however, Kosuth's 'art-as-analytic proposition' is not enclosed, self-referential and container of its own meaning – but only becomes a 'definition of art' by engagement with the art context, the discursive environment through which it finds meaning (and thus identity). It is 'synthetic' because it does 'speak' of something 'in the world' or outside of itself – it speaks of 'the concept of art', which it does not possess, but which resides in this 'art context', a context that has the power to affirm or disaffirm its meaning.

The nature of this 'engagement' with a context is crucial in Kosuth's framework. To say that the concept of art resides in the 'art context' is to say (one can only assume) that the art context is discursive by nature and inhabiting this discourse is some implicit or explicit institutional consensus on what counts as art. Moreover, for this 'art as proposition' to count for anything, it has to in some way 'engage' with the concept of art as to 'extend' or exemplify it (for Kosuth a 'definition' of art that is at once 'new' and consequential). In order to exemplify the concept of art – for Kosuth, to embody and at once extend – what task is art undertaking? The concept of art inhabits the 'art context' as what? In what form?

'The concept of art' is not explained by saying it is inherent in 'the discourse of art', or is self-evidently available in one dominant publication or school of thought, or some pure ideal concept inhabiting the 'art context' like some spirit of higher consciousness; moreover, the 'consensus' on art mentioned above, if it exists, does not fully take an explicitly conceptual form. Any 'art context' will at best remain a loose contiguous chain of ideas, notions and theories. When we talk about a 'concept of art' we can only be talking about the current conditions of meaning and the organizational administration of meaning in operation in that context. 'Current conditions' are simply what counts as relevant art (criteria according to which Kosuth's object will be recognised and apprehended as art); and the 'organizational administration' of that meaning is the institutional-commercial management of the curatorial process of exhibition and distribution to which the object is subject. By saying that the object is 'subject' to this, we are saying that the object *in its very material constitution* anticipates the administrative process through its format and media – what kind of material form it takes, the way it presents itself, how heavy it is, or easy to move or distribute.

Perhaps we can now refer to Kosuth's art not as 'analytic proposition' but as an oxymoronic term, 'synthetic (analytic) proposition', as it may indeed be (only) about art, but 'the concept of art' is not *merely* about any given type of object – it is about an institutional-organizational complex of activity.

'Aesthetics', or concepts of art based on notions of 'aesthetic experience', was condemned by Kosuth for being synthetic – for, 'dealing with perceptions of the world in general'. Ironically perhaps, Kosuth's art deals in perceptions of the art world in general, both exemplifying and extending its conceptual and organizational horizons in visual form. With this irony in mind, we need now to mark our position in this investigation: we can summarise our observations by saying (i) 'art' is a process of intervention in an epistemic context (art discourse embedded in an organizational frame), for Kosuth and Conceptual art this is (in

practical reality) the 'art world' – the organisational network of institutions, businesses, organizations, individual art critics, gallery curators, scholars, and editors; (ii) 'art' cannot take any arbitrary form to perform this process of intervention, it must by its propositional form signify or embody in some way an understanding of the conditions of its own meaning-function (operates according to the organizational logic of signification and display).

Here is where the basic elements of the historical avant-garde return – art as a process, as intervention, as communication, as subverting or extending current norms and frameworks of authority, and doing so in a strategic way. Of course, Kosuth's art has no substantive social or political motivation, but it remains an elemental version of the 'art as strategy' that we discussed in our first section.

From Kosuth's text, largely because of its speculative generality, we could derive three quite distinct scenarios on a developing conception of art in contemporary culture. Bearing in mind the developments in art over the last thirty years, I will attempt to outline three 'scenarios' – broad notions on art's meaning and role in society – arguing for the last as both more faithful to Kosuth's framework as well as further extending the relevance of contemporary art to management and organization studies.

Our first scenario is *art as institution*: this school of thought would begin with the presupposition that 'art' is no longer a concept that can be sustained by the historical conventions of creating 'works of art' (for obvious reasons – most contemporary art does not look like 'art' and in fact is radically opposed to traditional genre-based art; there are no 'immanent' conventions or traditions that sustain art any longer, such as genres and their styles, techniques, etc.). Therefore only an 'art context' can provide a stable context of meaning and value for art; and art can be described simply as the aesthetic organization of space, and the management of the conditions of display, distribution, interpretation and reproduction.

This 'art context' is not some eccentric club for enthusiasts, which holds an otherwise hermetic or arbitrary power to conferring meaning and value on an otherwise meaningless and worthless object; it is an 'institution' of art. The term 'institution' connotes both an historical development and a social establishment, whose durability exceeds the salience of its activities at any one point in time. The institution of art is co-extensive historically with the history of art and venerable art institutions from the

Louvre to the Hermitage. We are, of course, describing what is referred to as the 'art world', inasmuch as a diverse network of actual institutions, organizations and businesses (from charitable or state funding bodies to dealers and commercial galleries) it claims historical validity for its function as framework of meaning and value for art. However, 'art as institution' as a frame of reference is somewhat contradictory, as art's historical identity is both eschewed and enshrined. What I mean by this is that the 'institution' only exists as institution by virtue of an explicit appeal to historical precedent (the history of art) and yet reserves the right to eschew any substantive historical concept of art (classical or 'traditional' criteria of identity) in favour of wholesale and uncritical support for radically anti-art historical forms of contemporary art.

The idea of *art as institution* arguably animates any concept of art that eschews a substantive identity for a work of art in favour of an understanding of art as any form of activity within the orbit of the art world. To illustrate this, since the late 1960s it has taken the form of *artistic nominalism* ('art is whatever I say is art'), or *aesthetic anarchism* (art as the experience of disruption, destruction, fun, play, provocation, parody, irony, humour), or a more diffuse and eclectic *art-as-artist-role play* (taking the form of the artist's confessions, personal revelations, scandal-creation or offensive gesticulation). We could also find the more studious *art-as-research* (art as illustrated media studies, visual sociology or cultural anthropology in pictures). The *art as institution* framework is a powerful rationale for the making relative all values, objectives and meanings art could possibly produce, and has become a significant means by which the art world has gained an hegemonic control over the management of art production and the reproduction of art discourse: here art is (only) valuable to the extent that it is a recipient of art world patronage and finds meaning by engaging with the terms of their discourse.

Our second scenario is *art as economy*: In this framework, 'art' may be a wholly traditional 'work of art', or equally not. However, all forms of art, whether art-looking or not, maintain a principal identity as a 'work of art'. This identity, however, is not grounded in some philosophical criteria or argument, but is historically derived from the romantic era (work of art as unique, culturally exceptional, intrinsically valuable, expression of human inspiration and vision). This romantic concept of art, however, has been converted into a brand identity (i.e. no longer appeals to any philosophical grounding romantic notions once had, and

as a concept does not develop in its meaning but is simply fixed like a label). So the work of art is a commodity circulating in a system of exchange (either physically or symbolic exchange, as in art gallery viewing as a form of cultural consumption). The art world is not recognised as the sole arbiter or context for the production of art; it is simply one organizational network in a larger organizational field. For there are many local, regional and international art networks and markets, both professional and non-professional, and many types of art-producer or art-provider; there are also cultural institutions who do not participate in the *art as institution rationale* or art world networks). This framework understands art as a commodity or service, and its orbit of influence is forever being amended and extended depending on how art responds to its audience's demands or needs. The *art as economy* framework maintains no major philosophical claims to art's metaphysical or aesthetic significance, or to art's superior status in our culture (unlike organizations working in the *art as institution* framework who tend to maintain an historically *pre*-avant-garde insistence on art's general and unquestionable cultural value – particularly evidenced in claims for State subsidy).

In *art as economy*, art's identity is fixed (it is a 'work of art'), but its meaning is entirely relative to its economic saliency as object or service inhabiting a position within the art economy. This saliency is not purely monitory of course (sometimes art is 'priceless', even in the marketplace), but its production and distribution is governed by an economic rationale (emerging from patterns of supply and demand). As a final observation, we must not make the mistake of thinking only those of an 'uncritical', conservative or traditional mindset favour the *art as economy* model. This framework also provides an arena for libertarians and anarchists, and offers a launch pad for attacks on politically motivated State-sponsored culture as well as art world patronage (for example, see the British art magazine *The Jackdaw*).

In *art as organization*, our third scenario, art is not inseparable from the strategic management of art world institution networks, nor is it fixed as brand identity within a micro-economy. Kosuth's account does not maintain a categorical distinction between 'work of art' and 'art context' or art/consumer, but does not collapse the distinction either, whereupon 'art' objects (for lack of a stable ontology) are merely the discursive mediation of the art world, or are a commodity servicing consumer desire. For Kosuth the weight of emphasis remained on the 'art' (whatever form it took), and the relationship between the two was interactive or inter-productive (but Kosuth offered no elaboration on this). The 'art' understood its context as an epistemic context, whose parameters could be extended by its creative intervention (as I outlined above). In his argument we can find an art that is decisively divested of historical artistic characteristics, of the artist's psyche, ego or personality, or any other trait of a past philosophical era. Kosuth's art is resolutely activist: art is an 'immanent' investigation into its own organizational formation – its identity, function and context, through which both art and art-making change as does this organizational formation. This investigation is not academic socio-philosophical analysis (analysis in visual form on gallery walls, so to speak); being 'immanent' it does not 'import' elements from outside but moves through the very processes, structures and dynamics of concept-formation as this takes place within the organizational frame of its context. Ontologically, even though the art is an intrinsic part of this context (the 'art context' in which it belongs), it does not become wholly identified with it (unlike the phenomena of 'art world art' of the *art as institution* framework, where the art object can become a pile of rubbish or without substantive meaning if taken out of the gallery and placed in another context).

Rather, the intervention of the object in the art context only maintains an impact to the degree it is *not* identical with the 'concept of art' within which it finds meaning. This interaction or intervention is a process of affecting change, and thus mobilising the management and organizational administration of the art context. Ultimately, this process mediates that context's understanding of its own conditions of possibility -- according to what criteria meaning is produced, according to what administrative logic art is displayed.

In *art as organization*, art can only be defined in terms of an immanent investigation into its own organization and organizational life – all other facts about it as an object (i.e. what visual form this takes) are contingent. Of course, what we have just said could in some ways be construed as *art as institution*. For *art as organization* to be different – and to avoid the institutionalization of art-world art (the arbitrary, self-referential, culturally secluded condition of art world production) – we would logically at least need to exit the 'art context'. But how can we? How can the meaning-production process – engaging the 'concept of art' – happen without an 'art context' in which it is embedded? The central dynamic of 'art—art context' engagement is the central dynamic of art's intervention. For Kosuth, art needs an art context in order to engage with the very 'concept of art'. If this does not happen, either the 'art' has to be a self-sustaining 'work of art', or it becomes a kind of social or cultural activism, with no real connection to any art historical trajectory: i.e. not really 'art' (or art becomes just a label for eccentric-creative behaviour).

Quite simply, I had noted above that Kosuth did not make equivalent the 'art context' with art world, and as the *art as economy* framework reminded us, the role of art stretches beyond the art world, into commercial and even domestic domains. The resolution perhaps for this lies in the fact that sociologically and cultural 'the concept of art' is latent in the broader terrain of social life and the public sphere, not simply the limited 'art world'. *Art as organization* can locate and engage with an 'art context' outside a delimited art world.

So we arrive at a concept of *art as organization* -- art as immanent organizational investigation -- from a critique of Kosuth's 'Art after Philosophy'. Our main point is that a reading of Kosuth has enabled us to conceive of art in terms of strategy (an activity of intervention) that does not require a process of institutionalization within the organizational spheres of the art world, or be redefined as a service offered in the marketplace of the cultural economy. Given our starting point, I am suggesting by implication that the 'definition' of art that emerged from Kosuth is 'avant-garde' in essence. To summarise as simply as possible the character of *art as organization*: (i) it maintains an identity as 'art': it is neither arbitrary in form (to be so would be to betraying no particular criteria of identity) nor is it just a creative form of social or cultural activism; (ii) it locates an epistemic or discursive context that embodies a 'concept of art' (however that is conceived); this 'context', however, is outside the orbit of the art world; (iii) it 'intervenes' in this context, i.e. engages with the concept of art in the form of an established criteria of meaning (what in this context counts as art) and organizational administration (the art this context is equipped to facilitate); (iv) it 'extends' this context -- subjects it to some degree of transformation (even if just de-stabilising confidence in an established consensus on art's identity and value), and ultimately provoking organizational reflection on that context's own meaning-producing processes, structure and dynamics of administrative control.

ART AS ORGANIZATION

We now need to flesh this out by considering one (one of the many) ways this emerges in contemporary art. As a case study, I have chosen Jochen Gerz's recent work in Coventry City, in the UK, for two principle reasons, other than the apposite nature of his project. First, he emerged as a conceptual artist in the late 1960s and, while not artistically connected to Kosuth, has developed a strong international career that engages many of the issues that are critical to our understanding of the condition of art after Conceptual art;

second, I myself participated in Gerz's project, and understand something of the organizational character of the project from within. There is one caveat perhaps to our case – it is a 'public' project, as most comparable art projects are, working within a broad economic context; it will leave us with the issue concerning the applicability of our framework to non-public organization. In what follows I will not be evaluating Gerz's project or offering a comprehensive description, but summarising it in way that 'fleshes out' the conceptual framework of *art as organization* as a contemporary manifestation of avant-garde strategy.

If Gerz is written about in the art press, then he is often categorised in terms of 'public art', as his large scale work takes place in the public domain (Baker, 2001). However, Gerz's art objects are always points of reference, or 'markers', for a broader project, and a project that often intersects a complex terrain of urban, commercial or civic spaces, and where private, corporate and public interests and not visibly demarcated (Gerz, 1994,1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2006). Gerz is an artist of strong ethical convictions, but avoids imposing his values on his projects, or engaging in self-promotion, or the micro-management of participants (common traits of art world 'social' projects). It would be more accurate to describe his role as initiating and facilitating a social intervention, the impact of which can be described as a self-generating discourse in so far as public and media were the main factors in its continuity. However, this project takes a number of years, and consistent management (with his Project Manager, Olivia Morel-Bransbourg) of the following strands: (i) the design, construction, location and interpretation of art objects; (ii) the organization and administration of research, public debate, educational events, press and media coverage, and public meetings; (iii) the political diplomacy by which such projects are developed in the public domain; and (iv) the management of research groups and their collaboration in the ongoing process of the project. All these activities run concurrently. Gerz's management involved constant dialogue with diverse stakeholders, often public officials and bodies and sometimes private businesses. The nature of the matrix of key individuals, governing bodies, and dynamics of multiple decision-making contexts, demanded that Gerz had a comprehension of the institutional environment of the project as an organizational field, within which a variety of institutional and organizational networks operated. His diplomacy was successful only to the degree he understood the political logic of this field and the political dynamics that animated it at any given time. He therefore spent considerable amounts of time engaged *in situ,* with the process of the project taking over five years, in consultation, conversation and negotiation. In Gerz's work the art project becomes an organization, branded, with employees (if transient and unpaid) and with many different management functions.

Gerz's project was complex; here we can only but summarise the project in so far as it informs our definition of *art as organization*. In the project, Gerz was commissioned, and did not respond to the initial invitation without a proposal. As an organization he carried an existing commitment to a specific strategy; he was not a roving social activist. His proposal (or proposition, in Kosuth's terminology) is coextensive with other work he has undertaken in Europe, and was entitled Public Authorship. It began with a theme, and designs for two 'objects' (see figs 1, 3, 4, 5). The theme was 'past enemies – current friends'; the objects were the *Future Monument*, a 4.6m high glass obelisk around which were plaques embedded in the floor, positioned adjacent to a public plaza, and *The Public Bench*, a 45m long seat emerging from a cyclorama wall around the plaza, the front of which was animated by over 2000 plaques. The plaques were inscribed with the names of individual people, associations or groups, and nations who were enemies and are now friends; these were obtained within the duration of the project. Around September 11, 2001, the project gained a more politically charged resonance than was initially expected, but Gerz did not seek to make cultural capital from this occasion. The objects were not referred to by Gerz as 'works of art' – but were identified in the context of the civic scheme as 'public art'. In continuity with my observations on the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s, one could simply say that Gerz's art is the aesthetic organization of space, and the management of the conditions of display, distribution, interpretation and reproduction. However, Gerz moves outside the institutionalized space of the art world, where art becomes an organizational investigation not physically grounded in one space, and involving objects that offer more than just metaphors of organization and its management.

Gerz was commissioned by the Phoenix Initiative, Coventry City Council's urban regeneration programme, initiated in 1996 (McGuigan, 2004). Gerz's project is ongoing in the sense that *The Public Bench* is the object of vandalism and thus subject to current restoration (see fig. 6). The initial installation, however, was completed in 2004, developed from a brief that requested a contribution, as one of eight artists, to the masterplan of the Phoenix urban regeneration (MacCormac, 2004a, 2004b). The masterplan explicitly attempts to convert a region of a city into a fully functioning open-plan urban organization – a reconstructed area under strategic local authority management, and all of whose parts work together with an

economic development plan, incorporating set social and cultural objectives to this end (involving housing, entertainment, café/restaurants, leisure facilities, and public spaces like squares and parks) (Bell, 2005). This new 'mixed economy' in urban centres is a UK government priority: the old cultural-political dichotomy of public versus private interests or public and private space is no longer tenable (ODPM, 2005). The logic and rationality of business management – as well as the adoption of corporate organizational forms – has become ubiquitous in the public realm. Gerz's project suitably involves both commercial and social/public modes of activity in order to negotiate this hybrid environment. It involved an initial proposal, then negotiations with the architects -- MacCormac Jamieson Prichard [MJP] as Master Planner and Robert Rummey Design Associates as architects of the public realm; Gerz's commission was managed by the Public Art Commissions Agency [now Modus Operandi, London]. The masterplan was conceptually sophisticated: the entire area would be structured as a metaphorical journey (the physical trajectory being an actual pedestrian route) through Coventry's historic centre, animated by the theme of reconciliation between the past, its industry and its conflicts, and the present and its aspirations for renewed productivity and for peace. Physically this would run from the old bombed-out cathedral from World War II and earlier archaeological sites through a new boulevard, into a new plaza onto which the famous transportation museum opened (see fig. 7), around a new spiral ramp and up to a parkland area: The Garden of International Friendship. This would provide an emotive and culturally inspiring fulcrum – an ethically charged journey from past to future – to the further re-branding and marketing of Coventry city centre.

In terms of our *art as organization* schema, I can only indicate here how Public Authorship cannot be defined in terms of making art objects but as organization of an extensive project of cultural diplomacy. What we need to consider in more detail is the role of 'art'. Our first question therefore is: how did Gerz retain a non-arbitrary concept of art that nonetheless did not appeal to an established notion of 'work of art' (avoid the *art as institution* and *art as economy* scenarios above)?

This was a matter of Gerz's role as artist: he was not hidden away in an artist's studio, only to appear when a work of art was complete and to be installed. Gerz maintained a consistent personal presence in the city over five years and within the regeneration development. This presence was not simply as 'art creator', nor as representative of the civic development, but as conveyor of a proposition (the designs), manager of a series of research groups, and mediator of public opinion. His first task was public meetings and talks and then setting up an extensive consultation and public contact procedure whereby members of the public could offer their comments, proposals and apply to be a 'name' on the plaques (using advertising, direct mail, broadcast media, and public information outlets). The multiple role of the artist was important in displacing both public and media's conception of 'the artist'. Second: Gerz's 'art' was not the designs for *Future Monument* or *The Public Bench*, but the project – Public Authorship. As a concept, 'Public Authorship' reverses the order of priority with regard the relation between artist and viewing audience, in fact, dismantling the passive role of the public as 'audience'. Gerz presented himself in the public sphere as facilitating an act of public creativity or some collective involvement in this art project – through which the 'art' was to emerge. Importantly, Public Authorship reconfigured the terms of public art in a way that extracted it from the traditional discourse of municipal sculpture or civic architectural decoration.

It is one thing to displace or disrupt established modes of understanding, it is another to do so intelligibly and with a strategic rationale. Public Authorship circumvented traditional public art – single objects in the form of fountains and monuments – but it did engage and inhabit the 'concept of art' within this public location. *The Future Monument*, of course, is not a standard monument; 'monumentalization' was absent, and as a blank and uninflected object, it negated common artistic signifiers of creative expression (art history, the individual artist's psyche, ego, imagination, personal feelings). In one sense it was like a *readymade* – re-contextualisation or de-contextualisation of an already existing object. This object is instantly recognisable as an ancient obelisk; it is a sculptural form extracted from an ancient past. It is a trans-cultural art form, as Eastern as it is Western; it was imported and re-imported to the West by conquest, from the Romans to Napoleon, and its internationalism is thus embedded with the politics of colonialism and issues of neo-colonialism, meanings which emerged in public debate as to the way Coventry's waves of immigrants were brought in by these two historic forces. The obelisk monument in ancient times was a vehicle for collective meanings not individual expression. As Gerz's researchers (many students from Coventry University School of Art and Design) began to actively uncover Coventry's multitude of immigrant minorities, many absent or invisible with regard the public realm, the terms 'origins', 'conflict', 'identity', 'history', began to configure a growing public conversation.

So our first major point is that Gerz's art was an organizational 'strategy', both at once circumventing the established identity of the artist and the 'work of art' through managing a

multivalent project, yet secured an identity as an 'art' project by engaging with an epistemic context – in this case 'public art' (to be sure, the concept of public art specific to this context and its historical character). He did this, not by using the traditional Victorian monument form, but an ancient sculptural form, albeit without the expected historical monumental proportions. This use of an intelligible yet 'foreign' object in turn activated an embedded 'concept of art' in this epistemic

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context – this concept we can identify as 'art as memorialization'. Gerz gained access to this epistemic context precisely by avoiding standard 'public art' forms (merely *being* pubic art), and conveying the rationale for this through his work as public mediator – asking the Coventry public 'Who are your past enemies? Who are your current friends?

The Future Monument is a 4.6m high obelisk made of a glass compound whose surface appears shattered. The 'shattered' visual appearance was intentional. It was not only resonant of the fate of Coventry under the bombing of its old enemies, but a signifier of the actions of present day civic enemies in the form of Coventry's many 'vandals'; the work was constructed as if already vandalised. During the day it appears as a thick blue-white glass column, but by night it lights up internally. Around it are plaques placed equidistant and engraved with two categories of names, each on one side – the names of former countries who were enemies but are now friends ('To our German friends', for example: see fig. 2), and the names of public associations in and around Coventry City. Art as a concept is subject to regulation, specifying, among other things, acceptable modes of signification. The concept of art – 'art as memorialization' – does not have a single meaning, (as if art can be defined in a word), but is a conceptual field within which 'ruling concepts' operate.

These 'ruling concepts' form the horizon of expectations (manifested in public diktat or bureaucratic demand) of this kind of art in public space: they are (i) significance, (ii) representation,(iii) and stimulation. These three ruling concepts are three categories of aesthetic imperative – implicit demands to which art in such a public location must be subject:
(i) mark an event of a formative historic or cultural importance.
(ii) involve the public and create a 'sense' of community.
(iii) express or harmonize (aesthetically or thematically) with the character of the location.

Conventional public art usually does this by the following (pertaining to the order above):
(i) contain recognisable imagery, iconography, or unusual abstraction, with some visible connection to a known event or person.
(ii) involve the community in its creation; or, standing as 'land-mark', acknowledging the location's communal significance.
(iii) involve shapes, materials or iconography that resonate with the environment or local industry (such as using iron in a region known for its ironworks).

The Future Monument and the *Public Bench* inhabit these three categories of expectation:
(i) as an obelisk-shaped monument its shape resonates with the traditional form of the war memorial and Coventry's officially designated civic identity as a post-war 'phoenix rising from the ashes'.
(ii) Public Authorship involved the civic population.
(iii) the items were fully integrated into an urban scheme of the urban regeneration project as managed by the Master Planner.

It was strategically important that Public Authorship embodied the current conditions for, and organizational function of, art within this context: as 'immanent investigation' it needed to inhabit and comprehend the way this epistemic context functioned and was governed; this governance involved a network of local authority officials, the city museum, heritage and archaeology officials. Gerz's object did not 'attack' officialdom, intrude, interfere or dislocate public space; his intervention was not *imposition*. He identified and inhabited the ruling concepts by which this epistemic context was governed, and according to what logic its own meaning-production is managed. Within this intervention, however, the ruling concepts were dispossessed and the mechanism of meaning-production was to a degree rendered dysfunctional.

(i) As historic event (*significance*): the traditional monument presupposes an intelligibility with regard those whom it represents, and the rationale for their elevation as an object of memorialization; moreover it assumed a public role as marker of the culmination of an historical event, now over, its significance without question. Here, however, we have a blank obelisk, with a circular base in which are embedded plaques naming the nationalities who were once enemies, and various civic associations who wish to stand as representative members of this public space. Rather than marking the culmination of a past event, we have in fragmented form a past history stretching over centuries and representatives of the present whose presence is not explained. The past enemies who are now friends: Why did they become enemies? Are they now true friends? Could they become enemies again? The monument quietly mediates unasked questions about official history, collective memory, unresolved historical tension, and as it emerged in media report and public debate, traumatic personal experience. World War II is still a powerful component in Coventry's civic identity, and still a source of both historical trauma and intellectual fascination for the British public. *The Future Monument* problematises this memory by admixing names of former colonies, and references to the present ethnic heterogeneity of 'the British'.

(ii) As public Involvement (*representation*): it involved the public, not as a 'general' public but a social population emerging through a myriad of disconnected groups and associations; rather than suggesting these identified groups and minorities are contiguous and form a coherent 'public', the invisibility of many of the groups from the mechanisms of public sphere management became an open fact. The concept of 'the general public' throughout the project slowly became ideological in the pejorative sense, as it became more apparent that the mechanisms of public representation in local governance and media served to *mis*represent, and neither was there any evident mechanisms by which the actual constitution of the 'public' could actually *be* represented. It became apparent that 'public' was something conferred or achieved, not an existential condition of social space. To this extent the monument was a marker of the unintelligibility of our concept of 'public', and the blank space that is our understanding of our social environment.

(iii) As aesthetic object harmonising with the environment (*stimulation*): the obelisk is in one sense a 'universal' sculpture form, but not of monumental scale or proportion and thus not functioning visually as a monument; it does not provide a dominant focal point for the plaza (see fig. 3). The shattered glass disrupts the harmony of its appearance, and as the area is punctuated by specific names, text becomes more significant than imagery. It features names that are inseparable in official historical narratives from specific conflicts and even atrocities, but here they do not stand for one historical event or story. *The Public Bench* is for sitting, but in sitting one has one's back to the plaques and cannot read them; sitting on the bench makes the sitter a part of the work and a focal point of public gaze as the plaques are read. In terms of general principles of good urban design, the monument and bench seem sensibly located and conventionally attractive; in terms of their meaning-production – how we approach them, spend time there, 'read' and understand what they are saying – they are not clear and comfortable, but awkward, and puzzling, without straightforward answers to our questions.

The term 'Future Monument' is a paradox of meaning. Only the past, not the future, can be memorialized; but here, the past remains in a disconnected state, as a series of unresolved issues of the present – apparent by the way that the stable criteria of significance, representation and stimulation have now admitted forms of existing social experience not commensurable with the memorialization process. At the same time, it is suggested that memorialization is an important social function, and that needs to be re-thought with reference to a 'future' (whatever form we think that will or can

take). Moreover, in the meantime the project of Public Authorship had engaged those other organizations of memorialization, both veteran groups and associations and Coventry Cathedral with its international mission for reconciliation, who only added to the emotion, and unresolved state of public involvement. The title 'Future Monument' was an intentended oxymoron, requiring an act of imagination as to its immediate meaning. Monument to the future? As a visual device, even at design stage, it evoked a lot of questions concerning the function of 'monuments'. Coventry is a city whose identity is forged through the memory of war, being the first successful target of Luftwaffe bombing in World War II. Monuments played an important role in the city; they have a certain kind of visual logic, embedded in the cultural consciousness of civic life. They bear a representative authority (they signify State power or national military prowess) and they express a certain (or incontestable) knowledge of history, that is, a moral sanction of one version of historical events undertaken by the nation state. The visual function of the traditional monument utilised visual signs of authority, power and strength; it also functioned as a memorial whose meaning was activated by inscriptions of the heroic dead.

The monument form in this context demanded a version of history complementary to the image of a nation state as moral subject, and an aspiration for a sense of power and moral justification afforded by a secure and coherent national identity. The Public Authorship project, in using the monument as discursive fulcrum, took the social compulsion for the absolutes that are mediated by this narrative as ever present. Gerz did not use the occasion to preach progressive politics, but allowed whatever thinking on nations and nationalism to emerge in the ensuing cacophony of media and public opinion on the emerging issues. *Future Monument* identified this social compulsion – the social compulsion for official narrative hegemony – as the major dynamic factor in the governance of meaning-formation in this epistemic context. The active identification and apprehension – articulate most explicitly through the public reading of his work – this became the heart of his intervention.

For five years Gerz's project continued, and in part because of its duration, it became embedded in the collective life of the city – both as city centre visual foci, but more importantly markers of a process where questions empowered with extreme emotion still remain circulating. Gerz located and interacted with all possible sectors, groups, societies, associations and clubs that make up Coventry's 'public',

providing a kind of civic 'map' of social reference points that did not previously exist. Gerz had used student research groups to liaise with each group and with individuals, recording their responses, often in the form of their own conceptions of art, articulating their own cultural history and even personal life-story. Over 3000 people and 61 groups were at some time involved in the process and the material was archived. Significantly, and contrary to media and city authority expectation, Public Authorship did not facilitate social conflict or revived hatred towards the Germans, or tension between the cities main ethnic groups, or unease about increasing immigration in the City. It created a dialogue where social differences did not become social boundaries or socially defining factors in one's identity, but subject-positions from which to speak. Each group formation offered the opportunity of the group similarly becoming productive and developing a tangential stream to a developing discourse. The trajectory of the dialogue continued beyond the installation and completion of *The Public Bench* and *Future Monument*.

The practice of 'memorialization' that emerged moved beyond a recollection of the official narratives and representations past events, towards constructing individual narratives based on personal experience. This counteracted the way in which traditional civic memorialization locks memory into two categories – official and personal, where only the former is admitted to the public realm. The 'passive' nature of memorial reflection was made active, as it was bound up with the future of the civic culture of the city's development. Significantly, the memory of the past was disassociated with a necessary identity with the State or the fate of nations.

I have summarised Public Authorship as a way of going some way to explain our concept *art as organization*, which we derived from our critique of Kosuth; and this critique served as a means of explaining to ourselves what form avant-garde 'strategy' might take in the present day. As an example, Gerz's project in no way exhausts what this could mean, but adequately served as a way of finding a form of art practice that actively intervened in a concrete social context and its mechanisms of power, at the same time maintained an identity as art, extending the possibilities of art (not universally, but in a specific context). It demonstrated art as strategy, involving interdisciplinary, activist and interventionist means of engagement, as well as providing a framework for non-normative modes of thinking or rationality.

Gerz's 'art', as I described it, was *a form of organizing*, involving the management of various forms of cultural diplomacy and public activity, out of which emerged forms of productive interaction that could not have been planned. The project was not simply a form of cultural activism, but retained an identity as 'art' by using objects as foci. The monument and bench were used as an heuristic thorough which the artist identified and conceptualized the specific discursive conditions of artistic practice in this location, what we referred to as the 'epistemic' context (what counted as 'art': here, a variant of 'public art'); and within this context he engaged with an embedded 'concept of art' ('art as memorialization') within which he worked. This process may seem straightforward, but the socio-historical complexity of memorialization entailed a certain public disruption and demanded years of persistent negotiation. The ingrained public concept of art, as well as the established organizational administration of art in the public realm, was slowly re-configured in the emerging public discourse.

The crucial point of this 'intervention' was in the way that Public Authorship located the mechanisms of governance of the social practice of memorialization and the social compulsions that motivated it, namely the public's own complicity with the forces of authority that misrepresented their own pasts, or transposed their memories to an official mnemonic narrative. In Kosuth's language, this intervention 'extended' the concept of art by making explicit to the agents of this governance (largely city officials) their criteria of public art and the organizational administration of the central civic practice of memorialization, revealing it to be something other than what it was represented to be, something structurally dysfunctional and therefore ideological in the pejorative sense. Gerz's art is an example of art without works of art, art as organization, art that is strategic, and through which we apprehended the cognitive and social processes by which the meaning was constructed in that social space. It is an art of concrete possibilities not art world speculation, and offers a way of re-thinking the avant-garde as a model of management and organization investigation.

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Future Monument: Jochen Gerz, 2004, Coventry, UK
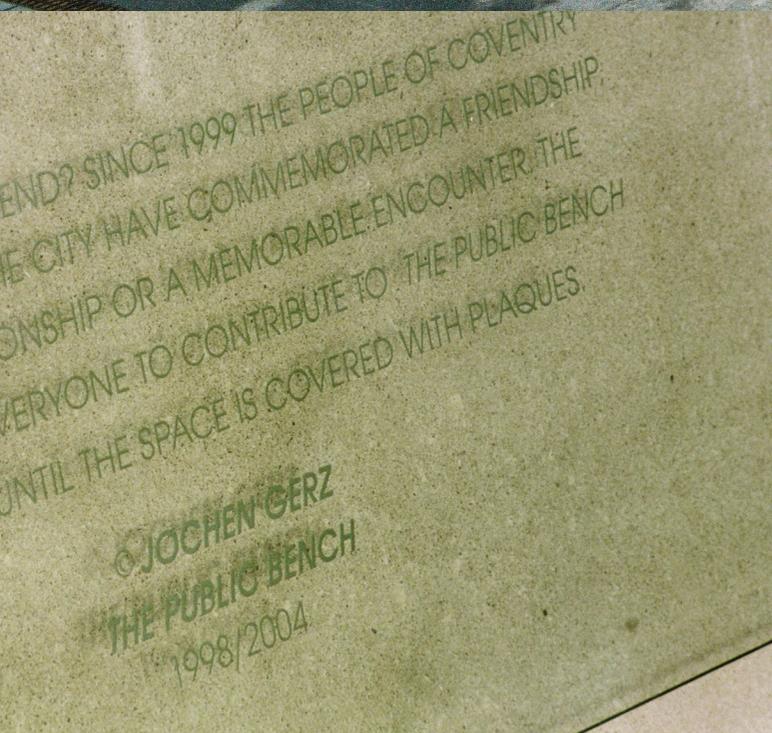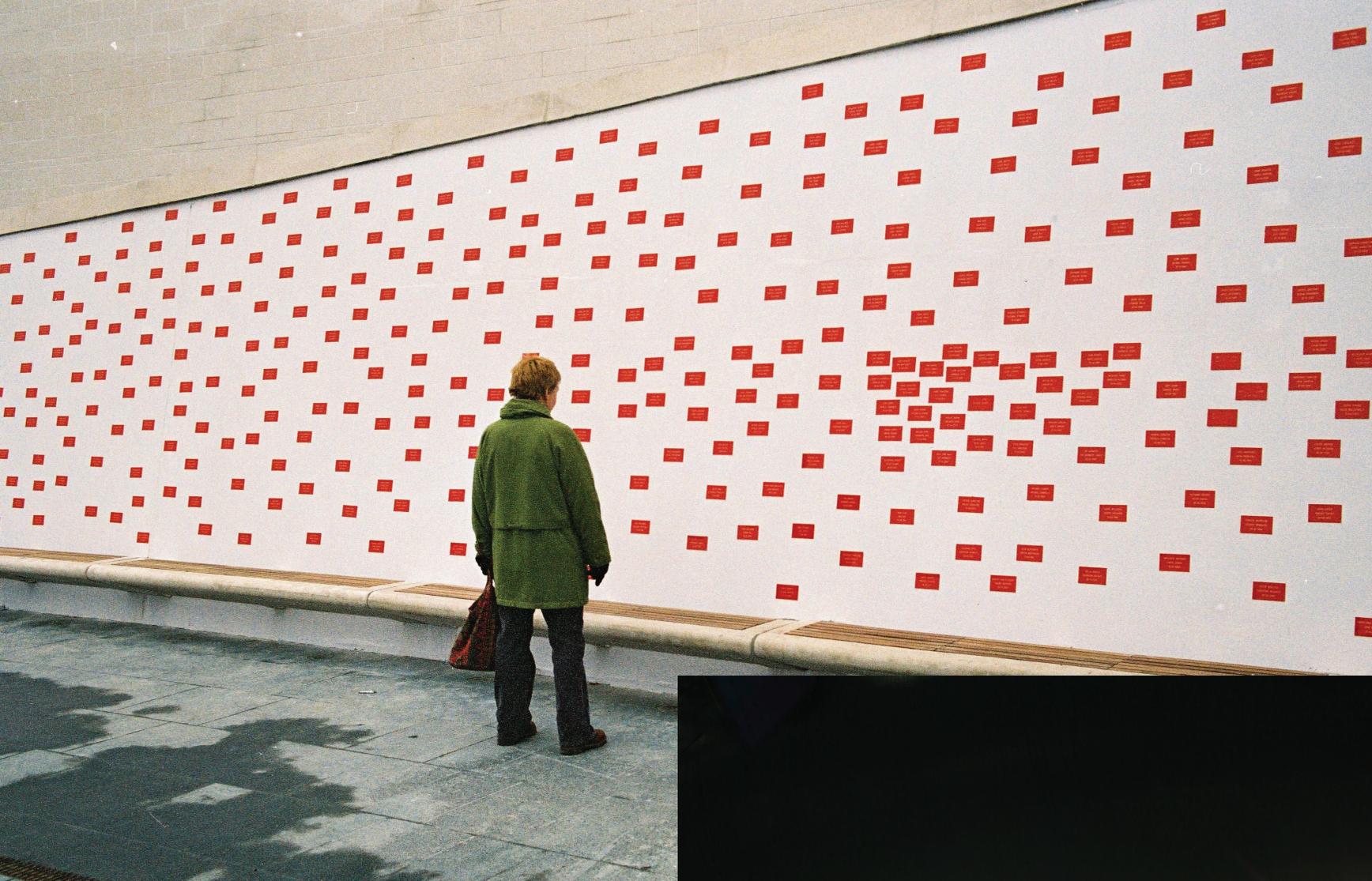Photograph: Jonathan Vickery

Jochen Gerz

4

EVE GLEASON
LEAH GLEASON
14-08-2002

KEVIN STANNARD
RICHARD SADLER
01-08-2002

SUSAN BLACKWELL
MATTHEW BLACKWELL
18-05-2001

JO TROWSDALE
NANCY UPSHALL
01-08-2002

MARY YEUNG
FAI WOON YEUNG
24-05-2002

HELEN
CAROL
24-10-

CATHERINE BEALING
GLADYS MORRISON
21-08-2002

JANE TSE
SOLEDAD LOSTE
26-05-2002

5

6

Artwork undergoing renovation

Photographs: *Coventry City Millennium Place*
Top left, middle, right - courtesy of Atelier Jochen Gerz, Paris.
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Bottom left and right, Jonathan Vickery

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