Mind over Matter?

The Changing Status of On Kawara’s Conceptual Art Objects

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introduction

Japanese artist On Kawara (1933-2014) never gave an interview. He did not attend any of his own openings, nor did he ever publish any writing in English. A grainy snapshot of the artist as a young man is the only image to be found (Fig. 1) All that is left of On Kawara is his art production, the anecdotes told by his friends and acquaintances, and the body of critical writings that shaped the reception and public understanding of his work. This elusiveness marks not only Kawara’s life but his art.1 Without emotion, pathos, or autobiographical information, the artist’s oeuvre records the minutiae of his own daily life from 1965 until his death in 2014, without offering even a hint of self-narration. His work, as we shall see, was constituted as a living network of conceptual projects, each one bound by specific rules. This thesis examines the status of his conceptual art objects as they move from idea, to materialization, to a system of commodities and historic artefacts.

Few details are known of Kawara’s biography. After moving to Tokyo from his hometown of Kariya in 1951, the artist immersed himself in circles of avant-garde artists. In the early 1950s Japanese artists were reacting to the postwar reconstruction of Japanese society, and began to create and show their work outside of traditional conventions of art-making and institutional display in galleries and museums.2 Tokyo and the Kansai region became the epicenters of these experimental practices, ranging from the gesturally abstract paintings by artists in the Jikken Kobo/Experimental Workshop, to the Gutai group’s performative innovations and multimedia explorations of the body and space.3 In this climate of innovative and avant-garde art-making, Kawara began to produce and exhibit figurative

3 Ibid., 46.
work that engaged with the human body and social realism.\(^4\) With no formal art education, Kawara self-educated, and upon moving to Tokyo began voraciously consuming works of philosophy and psychoanalytic theory.\(^5\) He quickly rose to great fame in the contemporary art milieu and came to represent the embodiment of a new generation of artists who confronted and processed the trauma still lingering in a postwar society.\(^6\)

In 1959 Kawara relocated to Mexico, abandoning the mantle of his cult-like status in the Tokyo art world. Over the course of the next three years, the artist alternated between attending art school in the capital and traversing the country. Leaving Mexico, the artist spent another three years travelling, going from New York, to Paris, to Spain, before returning to and settling in New York in 1964. This move marks a watershed in Kawara’s life and production, as he now began to create only time-based art. These works challenged traditional conventions of artistic production through the utilization of systems of art-making that mapped the temporal moments and physical movements of the artist’s own life. The following fifty years of Kawara’s life were spent travelling with his wife Hiroko and producing his multiple serial works.

In 1971, at the Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, Kawara held his first solo exhibition, which was followed by his first stateside solo show at New York’s Sperone Westerwater Fischer Gallery in 1976. His exhibition history reached its apotheosis with the ambitious retrospective *On Kawara – Silence* at the Guggenheim Museum in 2015, during the planning of which the artist passed away. Bookending this sparse biography are the artist’s birth, itself obscured (December 24, 1932 according to the artist’s work *100 Years Calendar*, or January 2 1933 in official records) in Kariya, Japan, and his death (June 27, 2014).

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according to *100 Years Calendar*, or perhaps July 10 2014 according to some obituaries) in New York City. Within the confines of these somewhat uncertain temporal and spatial boundaries, life, and the art that mapped it, unfolded.

Between his return to New York City in 1964 and his death in 2014, Kawara’s multiple serial works held a cohesive conceptual structure, namely the mapping of his own everyday existence through the means of material archives guided by strict rules of production. In 1966 Kawara began the *Today* series, a several decades-long serial work consisting of nearly 3000 paintings, continuously produced until the artist’s death (Fig. 2). Every painting in the series was completed before midnight of the same day that it was begun, and if a painting was not completed by the end of the day, it was destroyed. Each painting would take between eight or nine hours to complete, and whilst Kawara would on some days produce one, two, or even three canvases, other days would pass without the creation of a single object. As a result, a year’s production varied between 60 and 241 paintings. Also known as the “Date Paintings,” each constituent canvas depicts nothing but the date on which it was created, laterally inscribed at its center on a monochrome background (Fig. 2).

Contemporaneous with this time-consuming and laborious production, Kawara maintained multiple other serial projects. Two such works began on May 10, 1968, and were continuously produced every day until 17 September, 1979. For the correspondence series *I Got Up* the artist purchased two postcards daily, on which he stamped the time he arose from bed that very day (Fig. 3). He sent these cards to friends, relatives, art dealers, and collectors around the world, globally disseminating the physical materials of the work and the “facts” of his getting up. At the same time, Kawara maintained typed lists of every person with whom he held conversations over the course of each day, creating *I Met* (Fig. 4). Held in loose-leaf

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binders, the collected pages record every verbal interaction the artist had over the course of eleven years. On June 1, 1968, only a few weeks after the start of these projects, Kawara began to trace and archive his daily movements, in a work titled *I Went* (Fig. 5). The artist would mark his movements on photocopied local maps of wherever he was that day, producing at least one map a day, and two if his travels took him to a new location. These quotidian series form a trilogy, which ended simultaneously on September 17, 1979, when Kawara’s stamping and tracing materials were stolen from him in Stockholm, Sweden.

The three works mark the productive height of Kawara’s oeuvre. However, other works also begun in the late sixties or early seventies extend beyond the moment of the triad *I Met, I Went, and I Got Up*. From 1966 to 1995, and only on the days he painted a canvas for the *Today* series, the artist would take a clipping from a newspaper he read that day, label it with the appropriate date, and sometimes annotate or underline sentences or passages. Maintained in binders and plastic sleeves, in material conditions similar to *I Met* and *I Went*, the collected clippings form the work *I Read* (Fig. 6). From 1970 to 2000 Kawara also maintained the more intermittently produced serial *I Am Still Alive*, consisting of over nine hundred individual telegrams bearing the same titular message (Fig. 7). Whilst he sent many of the telegrams to friends and relatives, he would also produce them in reply to requests from art dealers, curators, and collectors. Once the real-world telegram system became mostly obsolete and thus difficult to operate through, Kawara ended the production.

Lastly, one must mention Kawara’s *One Million Years* and its many performances. In 1970 and 1971 Kawara crafted twelve bound volumes, the complete work listing the dates of every single year for a million years prior to the start of production, entitled *One Million Years Past*. From 1980 to 1998, Kawara mirrored the process, creating another twelve volumes charting the same trajectory into the future, starting in 1980 (Fig. 8). Each of the twenty-four volumes include two hundred pages of text with five hundred years to a page,
each page unique by virtue of a laborious process of cutting and pasting single digits onto a grid of photocopies.9 One Million Years Past and One Million Years Future are often jointly performed in live readings at exhibitions of Kawara’s work (Fig. 9). Every performance follows the same structure of a man and a woman reading each year alternately from far past to distant future.

Despite their variety, all these works have a similar conceptual origin, namely to articulate a prevailing conception of time and space. To this purpose, Kawara’s chosen materials evidence a thoughtful consideration of the way in which each object contributes to the meaning of the conceptual work of art. Kawara renegotiated traditional art forms such as painting, and adapted more contemporary practices such as correspondence art, tracing maps, and typographic record-keeping to his own conceptual gestures. His practice coincided with the 1960s emergence of conceptual art as a movement, a set of practices, and a philosophy. Existing along its axis, entangled with its aims, projects, and techniques, Kawara’s oeuvre represents a silent meditation on his own life and place in the world. His art objects reflect a life lived, where conceptualism and the regulated contemplation of existence itself replace aesthetic conventions.

For a historiography of important writings on On Kawara one may begin with Lucy Lippard’s Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; a Cross-reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries (1973). The survey includes a 1968 review of Kawara’s work, in which Lippard writes: “the fascination exerted by Kawara’s obsessive and precise notations of his place in the world (time and location) imply a kind of self-reassurance that the artist does, in fact, exist.”10 This is certainly one of the earliest attempts to characterize the artist’s work, and marks the beginning of Lippard’s

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9 One Million Years was also published as a limited edition two-volume set by publishing house mfc-michèle didier in 1999.
10 Lippard, Six Years, 49-50.
scholarship on Kawara. For subsequent critical writings one must inevitably turn to exhibition catalogues. *On Kawara, Continuity/Discontinuity, 1963-1979* at the Moderna Museet Stockholm in 1980 was perhaps the first solo exhibition that thematically contextualized multiple works by Kawara. The accompanying exhibition catalogue, edited by Björn Springfeldt, presented not only a chronology of the artist’s production and exhibitions, but also included two essays that elucidated themes of time and space in Kawara’s work. Almost two decades later, from 1996 to 1998, the travelling show *On Kawara: Whole & Parts 1964-1995*, disseminated a similar conceptual framework, inviting the audience the approach the production in terms of both the complete serial and its individual constituent objects. An exhibition catalogue was published in conjunction with the show, containing thirty critical and philosophical texts in multiple languages, emphasizing that Kawara’s work resists one singular definition, but is conceptual, serial, typographic, and global at once. This attempt to expand the public understanding of the artist’s identity and production was continued in 2002, when Jonathan Watkins published *On Kawara ‘Tribute,’* a book which brings the artist’s oblique personality out of the unknown. To this purpose, the book features thirty short writings by individuals chosen by Kawara himself to contribute their thoughts, anecdotes, and analysis of the artist and his work. Finally, one must mention Jeffrey Weiss’ excellent exhibition catalogue *On Kawara – Silence* (2015), which not only discusses each serial work after 1964 in detail, but also brings together the whole production in concert. The critical essays by Weiss, artists, critics, and curators present Kawara’s work for history and perpetuity through a framework that emphasizes both the breadth of production and its conceptual complexity. Together with authoritative accounts of each work’s history and process, the catalogue factually maps Kawara’s production, yet invites continued interpretation. These sources are not only index to the reception and understanding of Kawara’s work throughout
the artist’s lifetime, but will provide some of the critical framework that supplements the following analysis and discussion of the artist’s production.

Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy proposes that the question raised by Kawara is this: “How can we expose what is unexposable?”11 The artist’s production can be read as an exploration of how to visualize, materialize, and understand time, history, and space. By reusing and readapting familiar forms of production Kawara collapsed labor and life, allowing the routines and systems of daily activity to gain manifest presence. His serial works reveal to whom he spoke, his movements, when he got up each day, and what he read, yet contain no information on Kawara’s feelings or thoughts about these experiences. Other glimpses into the interior life and thoughts of the artist are sparse yet telling. Lucy Lippard, who knew the artist personally, has written that when Kawara created a work “he [did] not see it as art, though he (was) aware that later it may become art.”12 She went on to note that “since the time element is so important to him, it is only appropriate that time changes the nature of what he makes.”13 Kawara’s acceptance of the inevitable changes in meaning his work would undergo is evident in the work itself. By erasing his artistic intention from the process, the artist allowed for each work to maintain self-sufficiency and autonomy, in effect opening the meaning of each work to multiple and changing interpretations. However, paradoxically, Kawara’s work was generated from his own personal history, which creates the unfulfilled promise of knowing the artist’s identity.14 Thus, Kawara managed to release his objects from the conventional context of the artist’s biography and experiences, whilst simultaneously tying their production to his own self-made history. Through this creation of a living and continuous archive of his own movement, temporality, and networks, the artist established an

13 Ibid., 359.
alternative to the familiar framework of art history. By recontextualizing the objects of his production Kawara thus allowed for and facilitated the intersections of multiple meanings as the work moved from studio, to the public eye, to the market, and finally to the museum. The definite temporal and spatial boundaries of each work’s originary moment are thus juxtaposed with an infinite creation of meaning through circulation and archive.

The premise of this thesis rests upon the assumption that Kawara’s works of art can be categorized as conceptual – that the creation and appreciation of their idea and concept take precedence over traditional aesthetic attributes. It follows that, presumably, conceptual art is made by a conceptual artist. Whilst Kawara himself refused the label, he participated in numerous projects and exhibitions associated with the height of conceptualism, engaged with systems and strategies of art-making shared by conceptual artists, and in the 1960s and 70s was part of conceptual circles in Europe and the United States. The ubiquitous categorization of Kawara as a conceptual artist in articles, auction catalogues, and exhibition materials, further strengthens this narrative. Whilst Kawara himself may have found the moniker conceptual artist – or situationist artist, or minimalist artist – meaningless or too constricting, the historicized categorization of the artist and his work as conceptual is of the utmost relevance to this thesis. Through categorization works of art become aligned with a philosophy or a set of practices that dictates how the public and the art world should perceive them, and, as such, the label of “conceptual artist” thus establishes how Kawara’s works are considered, judged, and valued.

Paradoxically however, the conceptual work of art is created, exhibited, purchased, and preserved within a framework of material culture, a framework that demands the work have a visual manifestation. Indeed, it is the apparent contradiction of this materialized...

15 Nancy and Sparks, Multiple Arts, 198.
16 Ibid., 192.
immateriality, shaped and interpreted by public display, the art market, art history and canonization, that creates the dissonance that fuels this thesis. In theory the conceptual artwork need not ever be materially realized in the traditional sense, that is through a materialized medium, but can exist as pure idea. However, the encounter with the concept, and subsequently conceiving this concept as art, rests upon sensory perception – listening, reading, seeing, touching – to give rise to an interior cognitive process. Even works that employ language as medium, such as Kawara’s serial works *I Met* and *I Am Still Alive* or Lawrence Weiner’s typographic works, depend on visuality to be read. There is thus often an optical or material requirement to conceptual art, without which the work’s existence is unknowable to the public.

Some scholars argue that this perceptual requirement mandates a direct encounter with the work. In 1965 British philosopher Frank Sibley posited that “merely to learn from others, on good authority, that the music is serene, the play moving, or the picture unbalanced, is of little aesthetic value; the crucial thing is to see, hear, or feel.” Art theorists Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens agree, noting that since “aesthetic appreciation isn’t transferable” we must undergo personal experiences in order to make judgments of perception. What then is a direct experience with a conceptual work of art? The conceptual processes of consideration, appreciation, and cognitive activity are not synonymous with an aesthetic process, and they can certainly take place without the convention of a traditional object of aesthetic contemplation. Robert Rauschenberg’s *This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So* (1961) (Fig. 10) would give a viewer the same cognitive experience where she to hold the telegram in her hand.  

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18 Ibid., 71.  
19 There is a discourse on whether ideas themselves can be aesthetic. Goldie and Schellekens (2009) argue that there is no “emotional involvement in an idea,” which results in an absence of human involvement in the encounter with conceptual art. They posit that other traditionally aesthetics works of art provide this involvement. Their reasoning raises the question whether emotional investment in an idea is possible, and whether cognitive appreciation is equal to or can replace traditional aesthetics.
hand, see a photograph of the telegram, or have it explained to her by another person. How
she encounters and perceives the work has no impact upon its cognitive value. What then is
the purpose of the material requirement if the means of perception is irrelevant to our
experience of the work?

Let us posit that our encounter with conceptual art should not rest on gaining any
aesthetic pleasure through the means of perception. Whether we encounter the conceptual
work through a potential photograph of its physical manifestation or through reading its
description, our experience and understanding of the work leads to cognitive consideration
and appreciation. This interior experience can exercise a force upon us, altering how we
approach and understand the world. We feel the work’s presence in our own mind. It follows
that the successful work of conceptual art operates in a cognitive rather than an optical or
physical arena, and any physical materialization is – in the words of Sol LeWitt – “a
perfunctory affair.” The means of perception, whether we hear, read, see, or sense, should
hold no sway over our understanding of the work. In short, in order to encounter the work of
art, we must perceive it, but the means of this perception is perfunctory.

This line of reasoning dismisses the means of perception as influential in our cognitive
processes. It negates the importance of the actual encounter with the work itself, and leaves
one with a sensation of absence. By reducing perception to a means for cognitive stimulation,
we ignore the power of perception to alter our disposition and modify how we consider the
world. Whilst we may refuse the aesthetic and sensuous properties of perception, the
cognitive value of a conceptual artwork is affected by how we perceive our encounter with
the work. Many works of conceptual art present themselves as candidates for appreciation
not by virtue of their form, colour, or shape – traditional means of aesthetic appreciation – but

21 Goldie and Schellekens, Who’s Afraid of Conceptual Art, 70.
through re-adaption of these material properties. Robert Rauschenberg’s portrait of Clert, for instance, readapts the written word on paper to destabilize the historical framework of traditional portrait painting. The material execution of the work, the writing on the telegram, manifests the conceptual work of art by making us aware of the utilization of a non-traditional medium to create a portrait. Perceiving the portrait through reading influences our encounter with the work, and its cognitive value is communicated through altering our awareness of our own perceptions.

Conceptual works of art must therefore be understood as hybrids of materiality and conceptualism, wherein each property influences and realizes the other. The conceptual creation of a work of art begins with the artist having the idea and ends with its communication or implementation. Hereafter the idea can only be encountered insofar as the material acts as its record, embodiment, or agent. The life of the object has however just begun. As the material leaves the artist’s ownership and agency and enters the art world, it becomes artefact, whose ascribed value and meaning shifts as it enters different contexts. With this foundation laid, this thesis will present the argument that physical materials can be agents of the conceptual work of art, and that the status of these materials embodies, alters, and adds to the work’s meaning. To support this central claim, the thesis attempts to evaluate how perception, understanding, and appreciation of the work of conceptual art changes as its object moves through distinct art world contexts and phases.

The relationship between the work’s conceptual aims and its material presence is examined through a trifold exploration of the production of On Kawara, mapping the life of the conceptual art object as it is realized in the studio, enters the market and exhibition, and transitions to its afterlife in the permanent museum collection. Kawara believed that his work was “best served by direct encounter with an audience, without explanation,” allowing

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viewers to perceive the work through their own subjective perspectives. However, the work of art does not exist in a vacuum. The work’s conceptual meaning is hypothesized, historicized, and shaped by contemporary criticism, curatorial interpretation, and anecdotes from Kawara’s own friends and colleagues. These interpretations work in tandem with factors such as the material associations and traditions of art-making, auction prices and provenance, and categorization and canonization, to inextricably tie the meaning of the conceptual gesture to the material.

The thesis’ first chapter expounds on the history of the conceptual art work, its physical realization, in order to examine the conceptual creation and material production of On Kawara’s works. A dyadic selection of these works are analyzed in terms of their traditional or non-traditional media, and how these means of production are influenced by their historic, aesthetic, ancillary, and epistemic functions. Close analysis of the issues surrounding the painted Today series yields a discussion of the conceptual art object realized through traditional means, whilst the series of mail art I Got Up and I Am Still Alive are contextualized in terms of the readaptation of banal and everyday objects to the artist’s idea.

Following this exploration of the conceptual art object, the second chapter turns to the object’s transition from the artist’s hand to public commodity culture in order to assess the effect of the exhibition and art market on the conceptual and material status of the work. This chapter establishes the dialogue and dialectic between these two arenas of commodification and communication, in order to assess sites of value creation and attribution in perception of the conceptual. Recent auction records for Kawara’s work, such as the 2014 sale of the Date Painting MAY 1, 1987 for USD 4,197,000 at Christie’s, give rise to an examination of the changing monetary value of Kawara’s Date Paintings and works of correspondence art. In doing so I argue that Kawara created objects that have and accrete value, and which are categorized in discrete groups by virtue of their means. Further, the chapter examines sites of
meaning such as the past and present marketplace for idea art, the auction house, the artist in
exhibition, international art fairs, and the 2015 retrospective On Kawara – Silence at the
Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, curated by Jeffrey Weiss. By examining intersections of
meaning between market and exhibition, and curator, artist, and audience, I hope to address
how this transition alters the work’s material and conceptual status.

Finally, the thesis concludes with an examination of the conceptual object as it enters
its afterlife, determining if and how the material body transforms from ancillary to a relic of
the artist’s life by becoming part of permanent museum collections. As we consider the future
of the conceptual art object after its inclusion in museums, questions of canonization, history-
making and narrative emerge. The chapter expounds on the issue of conceptual art
preservation through discussion of object permanence, artist’s intention and authority (or lack
thereof), and preservation of Kawara’s paintings and works on paper. By examining the
conceptual work of art through these three distinct approaches this thesis follows the materials
of Kawara’s practice throughout their life. The contextual changes from studio and living
system, to exhibition and art market, and finally to the museum’s permanent collection, alter
the object’s status. These phase changes of the object thus influence, guide, and both open and
potentially close conceptual meaning.
chapter one

The Creation of the Conceptual Art Object

The Epistemology of Conceptual Art

In 1967 the American artist Sol LeWitt articulated what would become one of the first defining statements of the conceptual art movement when he wrote 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' for the magazine *Artforum*:

> In conceptual art the idea or the concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form in art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.

Through this emphasis on mental faculties, pathos and aesthetics were rejected and removed from the familiar conditions of art-making, and LeWitt became the spearhead of his self-defined art method. LeWitt went on to distinguish conceptual art “with a small c” (works that may employ traditional material forms but are generated by a primary idea, which includes the artist’s own work) and “Conceptual art with a capital C” (the ultraconceptual work of art, which does not concern itself with object status). LeWitt’s statement provided the origin of a wealth of critical and historical discourses on conceptual art, and gave rise to a host of questions and explorations regarding the conceptual method: Is the meaning of the conceptual work of art determined and fixed by the artist’s intention? Does the work stop gaining meaning after its originary moment? Does the execution of the idea not lead to the creation of new meanings as the idea meets the empirical expectations and associations of the physical world? Ultimately, what is the status of the object within conceptual practices?

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This thesis will attempt to answer some of these questions through examinations of the conceptual art work’s execution and material body, which will now be referred to as the conceptual art object. Through explorations of the object’s creation, value attribution, and iconisation, it will attempt to determine the epistemology of the work through its material realization. However, to begin to understand the complexities of the conceptual art work, we must first appreciate the breadth of histories, definitions, and criticisms that have attempted to answer these questions.

In their book *Who’s Afraid of Conceptual Art* (2010), Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens propose a new definition of the conceptual art work, the “idea idea.” The notion of the “idea idea” holds that the medium of the work is the idea, and any physical presence is “merely the means by which the artist lets us gain access to his idea.” Goldie and Schellekens believe that this makes conceptual art “radically different from traditional art,” as, unlike traditional practices such as painting and sculpture, the conceptual work does not operate through the media of form, materials, or colour. They go on to note that if executed or produced, the conceptual art work’s physical presence does not “celebrate its own essence” nor is it “a suitable object for appreciation.” By rejecting aesthetics, style, and appreciation of the physical, Goldie and Schellekens reduce the conceptual art object to an incidental and unnecessary aspect of the conceptual art project. The objections that can be raised towards the theories of Goldie and Schellekens have been summarized by Wesley D. Cray, yet we might

26 Ibid., 60.
27 Ibid., 57. Emphasis in original.
28 Wesley D. Cray. "Conceptual Art, Ideas, and Ontology." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 3 (2014): 238-239. Cray has three main objections to the “idea idea” theory. The first is the “location objection,” which contends that if the idea and the work are synonymous, the work must exist in several places as an infinite number of people can think the same idea at the same time. Yet many works of conceptual art have material bodies that exist within spatial and temporal sites and boundaries, such as the materials of On Kawara’s serial production. The second objection raised by Cray is the “conflation objection,” which argues that the “idea idea” conflates distinct works of art that reiterate the same ideas, and thus fails to differentiate between individual works of art. The third objection is the “survival objection”, which deals with the possible loss of the original idea. It holds that if the original idea is forgotten the work of art qua art itself is lost. Thus Cray argues that we can not “identify conceptual artworks with ideas.”
add another: some works of conceptual art are conceptual by virtue of their materiality. This may seem a paradoxical statement, yet works of art that challenge or question labor practices, traditional forms of art-making, and the value of the art object, may only be able to operate as a conceptual gesture through their physical realization.

However, this objection to Goldie and Schellekens creates another problem in considering the conceptual work of art; whilst the material may exist only out of necessity, it creates a complex hybrid appreciation between concept and object, where the idea can only be accessed through the material. When approaching the conceptual work one encounters the object before the idea by virtue of its physicality and visuality, ensuring that a viewer’s primary perception of the work is shaped by the object rather than by the idea. Thus, the production of the idea may undermine or direct its reception by the public. The material becomes the mediator and the site of the relationship between spectator and idea, and the object asserts itself as agent of meaning. This dynamic seems to go against the very essence of the conceptual art work, wherein the idea is primary, not the *prima facie* object, as stated by LeWitt. It is therefore not adequate to merely object to the *idea idea*. We must present an alternative: the object’s primary function is to be an effective communicator of the conceptual gesture. These objects may have material properties that invite aesthetic appreciation, yet aesthetics is not their primary function or goal. The conceptual work of art may use aesthetics as a tool to encourage cognitive consideration, yet no material properties of the work are superfluous – they are chosen by the artist to convey or allude to the conceptual gesture.

Goldie and Schellekens’ theory grew in part from Lucy Lippard’s concept of dematerialization, which in the late 1960s presented another epistemic challenge of the conceptual work of art. In her early survey *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; a Cross-reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic* 29

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Boundaries, Lippard collected writings and works from 1966-1972, the height of the conceptual art movement. Lippard was a participant in these early moments of Conceptualism, working both as curator and chronicler of its various practices, artists, and histories. Her Six Years is a chronologically arranged bibliography and list of events, focused on the categorization and recognition of the conceptualization of art. According to Lippard, this conceptualization involved the process of dematerialization, the reduction of the work’s material presence to a minimum accompanied by a lack of any visual or aesthetic emphasis. Lippard holds that by removing extraneous aesthetics and formalisms, the conceptual art work is dematerialized to pure content and communication of the idea.\textsuperscript{30} In “Escape Attempts,” her introductory essay to Six Years, Lippard raised Marcel Duchamp as the obvious art historical progenitor of Conceptualism, whose “claiming” of the non-art object as art became a conceptual strategy in the 1960s-70s. Lippard in turn proposed performance, text, narrative, and photography as Conceptual media, which allowed open-ended interpretation by “saying more with less.”\textsuperscript{31}

Lippard’s notion of dematerialization does not outright reject the object, but instead emphasizes the renegotiation of the object that took place in the art of the late 1960s and ‘70s. However, her approach does not account for the inextricable link between idea and the visual or physical form, nor does it fully account for the articulation of the idea through the object. As posited by Anne Rimier, the physical realization of a conceptual work should be reconsidered in terms of its efficacy in communicating the concept.\textsuperscript{32} For example, Joseph Kosuth’s One and Three Chairs (1965), a meditation on representation and embodiment through objecthood, questions what language, images, and objects communicate and signify by juxtaposing three realizations of “chair” as word, photograph, and physical object (Fig.

\textsuperscript{30} See Lippard, Six Years, VII-X.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{32} Anne Rorimer, New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 8.
This conceptual questioning can only occur by allowing these three signs of “chair” to exist in the same visual space. The theory of dematerialization, whilst underscoring the importance of content over form, thus fails to recognize the autonomy and relevance of the material properties of the conceptual art work.

Wesley D. Cray proposes an alternative, the “dematerialized object,” and remolds Lippard’s concept of the dematerial to consider conceptual artworks as “artefacts imbued with ideas,” acknowledging that the artefact chosen by the artist is “relevant to the appreciation of the piece.” Cray defines such artefacts as “physical objects, events, activities, or other things created or modified by agents, but also natural and otherwise unmodified objects merely indicated or selected by agents.” Put simply, conceptual art materials are physically or cognitively altered in becoming the art object, and in the process become artefactual. Cray uses Duchamp’s Fountain (1917) (Fig. 12) as a key example in his deconstruction of dematerialization. He argues that Duchamp’s readymades, works of art created by raising pre-manufactured non-art objects to art status, become artefacts through the artist’s conscious act. This act of selection imbues the object with art status, and is in itself a conceptual gesture that makes the object an artefact that acts as conduit for appreciation of the work. Here Cray presents two ways to engage with Fountain, firstly with “the urinal qua urinal” and secondly “with the urinal qua conduit for appreciation of Duchamp’s idea.” He deems the latter the most appropriate way to understand and appreciate Fountain as a work of art, as one should primarily appreciate the urinal only insofar as it complements or serves as conduit for the idea. Thus, the material should be appreciated for how its visual and material properties allow engagement with the originating gesture and idea. Cray goes on to argue that Lippard’s dematerialization need not be thought of as a removal of the physical, but rather as a

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33 Cray, “Conceptual Art, Ideas, and Ontology,” 241.
34 Ibid., 239.
“devaluing” of the material in favor of an “increased focus on the conceptual.”36 Whilst the principal agent of the work is the idea, we consider the idea through certain artefacts which act as conductors for cognitive operations. The artefact is therefore relevant to one’s appreciation of the work, yet its value lies not in its aesthetic properties, but in how effectively it allows for conceptual consideration and appreciation.

In terms of the status of the conceptual art object, Cray’s distinction invites the object back into the fold of the conceptual, and rejects Goldie and Schellekens’ division of traditional from conceptual art. Rather than an ontological difference between traditional and conceptual objects, Cray proposes a difference in appreciation of the imbued artefact from the historical work of aesthetic or optical art. He argues that we appreciate conceptual works of art primarily through cognitive processes, and traditional works through their aesthetic properties.37 However, traditional art practices are also used to realize works of conceptual art. There are, for example, paintings that operate as conceptual works of art, just as there are paintings that operate as traditional works of art. Painting to Be Stepped On (1960/61) (Fig. 13), one of Yoko Ono’s instruction paintings, offers an example of painting as a conceptual art strategy.38 The work consisted of the instruction “Leave a piece of canvas or finished painting on the floor or on the street. 1960 Winter,” and was first realized at a show of Ono’s conceptual paintings at the AG Gallery in New York in 1961. By placing a canvas on the floor of a gallery and inviting audiences to step on it, Ono’s instruction painting challenged conventional forms of production, execution, and artistic agency. Thus Ono created a conceptual work of art that eliminated the elevated status of painting as art object for aesthetic

37 Ibid., 242.
38 See Yoko Ono, Yoko Ono - Instruction Paintings (New York, NY: Weatherhill, 1995). Ono created a number of instruction paintings throughout the 1960s. She exhibited canvases with instructions attached that encouraged audiences to create the paintings in the galleries. She also published the book Grapefruit (1964) which contained numerous instruction works, whereby any individual could enact her works by executing the instructions.
appreciation, and invited a process of questioning into the familiar medium of the canvas. Ono’s instruction paintings exemplify the fact that conceptual works of art can operate through traditional art media, yet their primary material function is to convey a conceptual gesture rather than any aesthetic properties. It is therefore not a painting in the traditional sense, but a conceptual work that employs the cut canvas placed on the floor as the titular painting. Thus, an artist can utilize conventions of art practices like painting or sculpture to create a conceptual art object that questions the material, its creation, and its associated status.

Cray’s notion of artefacts imbued with ideas aligns with George Dickie’s greater theory of artefactuality as a framework for the creation of art. In his “Introduction to Aesthetics,” (1997) Dickie defines the artefact as something “produced by altering some pre-existing material: by joining two pieces of material, by cutting some material, by sharpening some material, and so on.” He holds that an artefact is created when a simple object becomes a complex object through a process of alteration. This alteration can occur both through traditional processes, but can also become realized through “art-world systems” that create value and transforms the simple object into a complex signifier; for example, the simple object of a urinal becomes Duchamp’s Fountain by the artist’s selection and its circulation in the art world. When an object occupies a position in “art-world systems,” they they the market and auction house, or the exhibition and the museum, they are granted art status. From this Dickie derives his institutional theory of art wherein the work of art is “an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an art world public.” Dickie’s theory allows for the material to be transformed into a conceptual art object through or against a background of art world systems, what Cray calls “the agent.” Drawing on these definitions we can propose that the conceptual art object is indeed an artefact, a material transformed against the

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40 Ibid., 92.
41 Ibid., 92.
background of the art world, regardless of whether the means of production are traditional or not. Thus the conceptual art object is made artefact by both its production and its reception.

Whilst Dickie and Cray’s propositions seem more viable than Lippard’s, or Goldie and Schellekens’, neither critic gives due attention to the fact that the artefact itself may be accompanied by a set of empirical meanings and real-world associations. When a material is transformed into an artefact, its material properties are not lost but instead change meaning. For example, Duchamp’s *Fountain* does not lose its shape, porcelain gleam, or white colour; in essence, it does not stop appearing like a urinal. Duchamp however utilizes the retained classificatory appearance of the urinal itself to create the conceptual art work. *Fountain* is therefore not only imbued with Duchamp’s core idea of challenging the traditions of the art world and display practice, but it does so actively through the meaning associated with the urinal itself. That the artefact chosen by the artist is ready-made, mass-produced, and carries associations of utility, bodily functions, and private acts, directly facilitates and creates its meaning. Thus, Duchamp’s’ urinal certainly does not fit the “perfunctory” and traditional execution of LeWitt’s conceptual works “with a small c.” If we hold that conceptual works of art “with a small c” are works in which the idea is paramount yet realized using conventional art media, and conceptual works with a capital C are either without material or executed in non-traditional media, Duchamp’s urinal can certainly be viewed as ultraconceptual. Where does this distinction leave us? If the ultraconceptual artwork is formed using non-traditional media, the material is not necessarily perfunctory even if it carries little to no formal art properties. The artist may even choose a non-traditional medium because it specifically lacks conventional art associations. It follows that these ultraconceptual art objects, by virtue of their non-traditional media, are less encumbered or defined by their material, thus, like *Fountain*, allowing the conceptual to be communicated without a conventional art historical framework.
The methods and distinctions proposed above do not account for the potential emotional or intellectual impact of non-traditional art objects. Duchamp’s *Fountain* is not only successful and impactful through its non-traditional form, but through the distinct associations that it carries. Enfolding this idea of associated meanings into LeWitt’s definition of the conceptual and the ultraconceptual, and Cray’s notion of the “artefact imbued with idea,” we may propose that conceptual art works are not only generated by the artist’s idea, but also through the meanings created by the empirical associations of their materiality.

**On Kawara’s Art Practice**

If one were to reconstruct a day in the life of On Kawara after 1965, simply based on the processes of creating his materials, his artistic production emerges as the guiding framework of the artist’s daily existence. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Kawara was at the height of his productivity with the daily creation of numerous constituent materials. The archival series of *I Read* (1965-1995), *I Met* (1968-1979), and *I Went* (1968-1979), and the series of postcards *I Got Up* (1968-1979) required laborious and time-consuming continuous production every day for several years. *I Met*, *I Went*, and *I Got Up* were created as a contemporaneous trilogy for over a decade, and were partially overlapped by *I Am Still Alive*, Kawara’s three-decade long dissemination of nearly nine-hundred telegrams to friends and colleagues around the world. The daily activities required to maintain this production included purchasing two postcards which Kawara stamped and sent with the time he got up (*I Got Up*) (Fig. 3), the notation of a list of every person the artist spoke to that day (*I Met*) (Fig. 4), the creation of an inscribed map of the artist’s movements around whichever city or space he occupied that day (*I Went*) (Fig. 5), and perhaps a telegram sent as part of *I Am Still Alive* (Fig. 7), which is not to mention the frequent, albeit not daily, production of Date Paintings. Thus from the inception of the Date Paintings in 1966, and the beginning of his serial works
on paper in 1968 and 1970, Kawara’s production became a ubiquitous and all-consuming part of his life, serving as the structure of his everyday. These works serve as points of reference in reconstructing Kawara’s daily life, yet as noted, reveal nothing anecdotal, emotional, or personal about the artist’s inner world.

The work’s pathos lies not in what is displayed, but in the existence of the work itself as record of time passing, only to be retrieved through the network of artefacts. To achieve this end Kawara’s work is serial, an overwhelming recording of his activity where each individual component has an autonomous identity yet is equally part of a whole unified work. Hence, each component not only exists within the material boundaries of its form, but also within its own spatiotemporal boundary and the overall framework of the conceptual work. In 1966, Sol LeWitt posited that “the serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object, but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise.” Kawara’s production certainly maps his conceptual premise. Each individual work was created through a serial production, and restricted by sets of rules that create visual and conceptual uniformity between the constituent materials. Kawara refused innovation in each production by keeping the physical properties of each constituent object constant throughout each serial work. This uniformity negates the convention that each object is a unique candidate for appreciation. Yet through these constrictions the variations among each of the constituent objects unfold into an infinite variety of meaning, at the center of which is the artist’s living practice.

The Traditional Art Object: Painting the Today Series

The Today Series consists of nearly 3000 paintings, painted in 136 cities over the span of five decades. The first of these so-called “Date Paintings” was created on 4 January 1966

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(Fig. 14), and like all the paintings that followed, it depicts nothing but the date it was made through painted letters and numbers indicating day, month and year. The dates are laterally placed in the centers of the rectilinear canvases, which exist in eight predetermined standard sizes ranging from 8 x 10 to 61 x 89 inches. There is no indication that there is a system or meaning to the choice of a specific canvas size. When not exhibited, each painting is stored in a cardboard box made by Kawara, which may be accompanied by a newspaper clipping from a paper the artist read that day. All works in the series are painted monochromatically without any visible traces of brushstrokes. The paintings were made in standard shades, typically grey but also sometimes red or blue, in paints hand-mixed by the artist from pigment powder on the day of each painting’s creation. The hand-mixed properties of the acrylic paint ensures that no paintings in the series are identical; they all exist in unique shades due to the varying concentrations of pigment in the paint.\footnote{Anne Rorimer. "The Date Paintings of On Kawara." \textit{Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies} 17, no. 2 (1991): 122. doi:10.2307/4101587.} The date is, however, always painted in white, and is always written in the language dominant to where it was painted, abbreviated according to the local customary system, as can be seen in \textit{16 FEV. 1969}, painted in São Paulo, Brazil (Fig. 15). Kawara considered the \textit{Today} series a single work, continuous from 1965 until the artist’s death.\footnote{Rorimer, \textit{New Art in the 60s and 70}, 54.} The series’ extreme uniformity of style is troubled by the individual identity of each constituent painting, which is proclaimed in its unique combination of language, typeface, colour, size, and spatial and temporal origin.

The \textit{Today} series embodies the dichotomy between “timeless art” and the constant flux of the everyday, as each painting is created in a specific temporality yet exists in a longer temporal scale of the continuously produced work. Each Date Painting is self-reflexive and rejects illusionism; its only external referent is the date in history painted on its canvas. Without any commentary or indication of the date’s significance to the artist, Kawara in
essence removes himself from the painting. Through this anonymity, the work allows viewers to project their own memories and identities onto the date, thus inviting an infinite number of experiences and events for association. The multiplicity of meanings is contrasted by the local newspaper clippings that line some of the handmade boxes that house the paintings. The clippings are selected from a newspaper printed on the same day as the creation of the painting. They were chosen by Kawara, and sometimes marked with annotations by the artist in red pen. Many early paintings in the series also have subtitles, sometimes drawn from the newspaper clippings, which serve to further anchor and juxtapose each painting in and against the day itself.45 The subtitles are recorded alongside each painting’s colour, size, and date, in journals kept by the artist. These subtitles range from personal statements (“I am Painting this Painting,” January 18, 1966), to statements from the news (“MAN WALKS ON MOON,” July 20, 1969), to personal anecdotes (“I played ‘Monopoly’ with Joseph, Christine and Hiroko this afternoon. We ate a lot of spaghetti,” January 1, 1968), to simply the day of the week (“Tuesday,” September 12, 1978).46 Through the newspapers and the subtitles, Kawara captured the range of banality and monumentality in the everyday. By not marking any event or day as sensational he levelled each day’s affective significance. All days were thus made equal as they became part of the work; whilst any day may hold great significance to an individual, it is ultimately and inevitably neither singular nor confined to any individual meaning.

What then does the mode of painting do for the work and what did this specific material presence allow Kawara to convey? The answer may be found in style. Kawara’s process is meticulous, repetitive, and bound by rules. Four to five layers of paint were applied to the canvas in order to produce a matte surface with little to no trace of visible brushwork.47

45 Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70*, 57.
47 Rorimer, “The Date Paintings,” 122.
The colour of each painting is either different in type or hue, yet there is no imposition of symbolic or emotional association with the colour and its saturation. As noted by Rorimer, the viewer will never know if each colour has meaning related to the artist’s psyche or mood that day. Thus there is no explicit difference between a cerulean blue painting or a bright red one except for the fact of difference itself, and the endless potential for variety is hence rendered meaningless. The date is painted in a similar manner with an exactitude that creates the illusion of being stenciled, yet in actuality is carefully drawn by hand and painted in 6-7 layers of white. To Kawara the contrast between the colour background and white lettering only alludes to the dark of night and light of day. By embracing the flatness of the canvas and the use of contrast, Kawara operated through familiar conventions of Modernist painting and formalist composition. However, the paintings reject figurative imagery as a signifier of meaning in favor of letters and numbers, and therefore they actively resist any illusion of representation through appearance. This removal of imposed meaning and illusion allows the Today series a unique place in Kawara’s œuvre.

The idea of style as a guiding principle for the conceptual art object is seemingly at odds with the denunciations of LeWitt, Lippard, and Goldie and Schellekens. However, in Kawara’s work, the rules of style that dictate the process of production ensure that the paintings in the Today series operate as a system. In this way, Kawara eliminated the convention of a painting as a unique object for appreciation, and manipulated the familiar medium to become a serial in line with the rest of his production. By removing unique

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48 Rorimer, “The Date Paintings,” 128.
49 Rorimer, New Art in the 60s and 70s, 56.
50 See Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” (Forum Lectures, Washington, D.C., 1960). According to Clement Greenberg, the flatness of the canvas is one of the principle elements of Modern painting. Unlike the works of Old Masters, which strove to create depth and illusionistic space on the canvas, modern painters embraced the limitations of the canvas to create perspective. Whilst Greenberg acknowledged that flatness in Modernist painting can never be absolute, as both literal and pictorial depth is created when paint touches the canvas, Modernists stopped trying to defy flatness, and instead understood it as a unique property of painting as opposed to other art forms. Kawara embraced flatness even further, by refusing not only the illusion of depth but figurative imagery in its entirety.
51 Rorimer, New Art in the 60s and 70s, 56.
external referents, Kawara embraced a rigidity of style that allowed painting to take on a primarily cognitive function. This operation through a continuous production guided by rules and divided into temporal units ensures that the appreciation for each individual painting is overwhelmed by the cognitive significance of the system. In this manner, Kawara unsettles and adapts the highly conventional art medium of painting to suit the purposes of his concept and turn abstract temporality into materially bounded reality.

Kawara’s *Today* series began in the mid-1960s, a time when artists seeking to oppose the visual and transcendental emphasis of abstract expressionism, began to create work in which the notion of the autonomous object was reinterpreted and often suppressed. Minimalism, performance art, and conceptual art were on the rise through a reevaluation of the work of art’s aesthetics and materiality. The majority of Kawara’s peers in New York had rejected painting as an anachronistic practice, too closely tied to history and abstract expressionism. However, a minority of artists working with these critical issues chose to reconsider rather than abandon the traditional medium of painting. Artists like Ad Reinhardt and Frank Stella chose to explore new possibilities of the painted work’s process, meaning, and preferentiality by negating external references and figurative imagery through their black paintings, as evidenced in Reinhardt’s *Abstract Painting* (1960) (Fig. 16) and Stella’s *Zambezi* (1959) (Fig. 17). As noted by Anne Rorimer, Kawara’s Date Paintings reflect an understanding of his antecedents. Like the works of Reinhardt and Stella, Kawara’s Date Paintings demonstrate that within the boundaries of the canvas an immaterial date can gain form and shape, and through the redefinition of the pictorial, the painted canvas can gain significance as the concept. By enfolding time into the intrinsic properties of each canvas, the artist endowed each painting with its own self-contained reality and temporality. In effect, he

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52 Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 12.
53 Rorimer, “The Date Paintings,” 222.
54 Ibid., 222.
translated the painted canvas into a medium independent, if not dismissive, of the world outside its frame. Thus, by questioning the means of delivery, Kawara both embraced and explored the possibilities of what can be visualized through paint on canvas. By renegotiating how we understand painting, the *Today* series renegotiates how we understand reality.

The Non-traditional Art Object: Correspondence Art in On Kawara

Kawara’s art production and life revolved around documentation of the artist’s movements within carefully announced boundaries of time and space. The artist travelled extensively, and his diasporic lifestyle became a major driving force and constitutive subject of his art production. From 1968 to 1979 (*I Got Up*) and 1970 to 2000 (*I Am Still Alive*), Kawara engaged in practices of what came to be known as correspondence art. Correspondence art, or mail art as it is also known, emerged as a populist art strategy wherein works of art were sent and created through transmission in real-world postal systems. By-passing traditional channels of circulation, artists worldwide sent small-scale works of art in self-made circuits of exchange. The creation of these direct lines of communication between artists and others allowed works of art to avoid the commercial gallery system altogether. This circumvention also carried political and anti-institutional weight, having taken root as practice in the 1950s and 60s during the Cold War. At a time where borders and communication were politicized, mail art emerged as a strategy of information exchange that by-passed national and political divisions. Kawara’s works of mail art may carry the weight of these associations, yet *I Got Up* and *I Am Still Alive* do not engage with their contemporary political terrain. Rather, the works center upon direct and intimate communications between the artist and a number of recipients by using real-world distant communication systems, what

Kawara called “primordial” forms of image-making. Whilst he had settled in New York City in 1965, Kawara’s was a Japanese national whose extensive travels provided him an expansive global network. This network became the site of his correspondence art, as he sent his mail art to family, friends, agents, art critics, curators, and artists such as Sol LeWitt and Kasper König. The means of communication were postcards and telegrams, each method carrying their own associations for Kawara, to the object’s recipient who was would receive the message without warning, and to the spectator. By adapting postal systems of communication, Kawara circumvented official art institutions, approval systems, and the art market, in order to establish a personal connection with the recipient.

Using language and banal or conventional objects Kawara’s works of correspondence art invite the spectator to actively encounter and engage with the work through reading, imagination, and reception. Aside from the Date Paintings, Kawara’s art production after 1965 consisted almost solely of works on paper created through the conceptual strategies of record keeping and typography. Hence language itself, as inscribed in text, became a material entity that could convey an idea conceptually, offering an alternative to conventional figurative representation and pictorial imagery. However, while language is cognitive it also has visual properties in its appearance on paper. Kawara situated the visual language within archives representing frames of time. Through systems of timekeeping, archives of movement, lists of social interactions, and series of mail art, Kawara’s embraced the materiality of non-traditional art media. With works like I Got Up and I Am Still Alive being created over the course of one or several decades, Kawara’s production becomes an embodiment of ‘process-as-art.’ It is the length, continuity, and repetition of production that allows these works on paper to be added together into an archive of a lifetime.

57 Papastergiadis, "Space/Time: Matter and Motion in On Kawara,” 127.
Each work of mail art exists at an intersection of the material, Kawara’s conceptual gestures, and the creation processes of real-world correspondence systems. The objects are quasi-temporal, displaying their own originary moment, yet the moment is over and their message is no longer immediate by the time the object has been received. The postcards indicate the time of Kawara’s arrival on a day that has passed by the time the first recipient first sees it, likewise the telegrams of I Am Still Alive proclaim the artist’s state in a moment that is already past and can therefore not guarantee his continued existence.

I Got Up is part of a trilogy of works produced contemporaneously, along with I Met and I Went. Each work was created over time through the daily production of a constituent part and consists of recordings of the artist’s activities. I Met is a series of hand-typed lists held in loose-lead binders, each individual page representing one day, and listing the names of the people Kawara spoke with that day. In effect, the work maps Kawara’s social network over eleven years of his life. I Went has a similar material body, consisting of individual pages with maps indicating where the artist moved each day. Kawara would acquire a map of whichever city he was in, photocopy the map to ensure uniformity of size and scale, and at the end of the day mark the map in red pen with his movements. Thus rather than mapping his social interactions, I Went maps the artist’s physical movement within the temporal boundary of the day and the spatial boundary shown on the map.

I Got Up began on a trip to Mexico on May 10 1968, which Kawara had partially funded using a gift of $200 from his friend and curator Kasper König. Seeking to express his gratitude, Kawara began sending a variety of postcards to König from the journey, and on May 10 sent the stamped message “I GOT UP AT 11.38 AM.” (Fig. 18). He sent a similar

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61 Weiss, Silence, 119.
62 Ibid., 119.
postcard the following day, with a new time of getting up, and from May 12 began to send two postcards. Following these originary moments, Kawara would send two postcards a day to friends and colleagues around the world for the next eleven years. Kawara selected and bought conventional tourist picture postcards in whatever location he was that day, and marked them using a typography kit he brought with him wherever he travelled. Each postcard was stamped with the artist’s current address, the address of the recipient, the date, and the message I Got Up followed by the time the artist got out of bed that day. Unlike his Date Paintings the postcards were always produced in English and the time given in an AM/PM mode. Thousands of postcards were received, and presumably many were lost through the perils of the global postal service. Kawara concluded the series, along with I Met and I Went on September 17 1979, as the case containing his unique stamps was stolen from a train station in Stockholm. I Got Up thus began as improvised correspondence, and ended by an unforeseeable incident, two unplanned happenings bookending its laborious production.

The postcards are ruled both by the standard rectangular format and On Kawara’s chosen style. Kawara always chose horizontally oriented postcards with colorful tourist-coded imagery that displayed bright beaches, impressive skylines, and local culture. He always aligned his stamped text in the same place on the back of the postcard, producing an unvarying composition and appearance over the thousands of individual objects. Following the rules of style and inscription imposed by the postcard format and the artist’s own aesthetic preferences, the mass-produced and everyday is turned into a collective yet self-referential art object.

64 See William S. Rubin, Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968). The accident as artistic practice was first embraced by Dada artists, whom wished to subvert artistic conventions of structure, control, and artistic intention. Later, Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists would also take on the accident as a structure to art-making, to unlock the artist’s unconscious and practice “automatism,” the performance of artistic action without conscious intent.
66 Weiss, Silence, 119.
I Got Up operates through a pre-existing mode of communication and accompanying pre-existing visual images. How are the already meaningful signifiers of the postcard and the tourist image part of the conceptual work of art? The images on the postcards are designed to portray a place with strong visual appeal, and be recognizable enough to inform the recipient of the sender’s location. Whilst the image intends to depict the unique appeal of the site, it is in actuality a crystallization of the banal which reduces a location to a cliché. Similarly, the postcard’s accompanying text offers no information about the artist’s experiences other than the quotidian information of when he got up. This heightened banality of both image and text allows Kawara to obscure his own thoughts and experiences and thwart the audience’s expectation of the postcard as vehicle for personal anecdotes of a particular space. By reducing image and text to equally banal statements, Kawara also captures a dialogue between private and public life. The text becomes a representation of private life, signifying the solitude of private moments before one ventures out into the public sites represented in the postcard’s image. Whilst Kawara moves to new locations, he choses to underscore the permanent part of his day, as the repetition of leaving bed every morning remains the same no matter where he goes. Crucially, the time stamped on each card is not only the time Kawara got up that day, but also the starting point of his day’s work. Without any qualitative information about Kawara’s everyday experiences, the banality of Kawara’s getting up is elevated to a private ritual that alludes to the structures of his art-making.

Kawara may have chosen the materials in the tradition of a Duchampian ready-made, yet only by allowing the postcard to complete its conventional journey did it become part of the work of art. Thus unlike Duchamp’s Fountain, Kawara’s postcards were not immediately removed from their real-world context and placed in an institutional site, but were realized as art by undertaking processes of being sent and received in the real-world mail system. In a

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mail oriented work the aim of the postcard is to be sent and received, and Kawara’s work operates through this convention. *I Got Up* therefore depends on the pre-existing process and system to which its material belongs. By operating within a familiar custom of travelling *I Got Up* gains significance as a connection between one person and another, an intimate way of communicating from afar. Through use of a real-world material and system, the work emphasizes the potential of conceptual art and alternative art-making strategies to operate within the artist’s own networks, outside of official systems of art distribution.

Kawara’s other work of correspondence art, *I Am Still Alive* (1970-2000) was created through a similar system. The work is made up of nearly nine hundred individual telegrams, sent intermittently over the span of three decades, to various colleagues and friends of the artist. In 1969 Kawara sent a series of three telegrams, three days apart, as a contribution for the exhibition “18 PARIS.IV.70.” The first telegram read “I am not going to commit suicide. Don’t Worry.” The second “I am not going to commit suicide. Worry.” Before finally “I am going to sleep. Forget it.” A month later friends and colleagues of the artist began to receive telegrams with the simple message “I Am Still Alive” (Fig. 19), which continued unprompted for decades. Subsequently the artist responded to all art-world requests only with such a telegram.\(^{68}\) The telegrams thus became part of both private and public correspondence and transaction between Kawara and the world through utilization of the pre-existing system.

As opposed to all other works in Kawara’s oeuvre, the artist has no control over the final appearance of each material in *I Am Still Alive*. Telegrams were not composed by the sender, but by a third party worker who received the message and formatted it before delivery to its recipient.\(^{69}\) The appearance of the object is therefore determined in the place where Kawara is not. The timestamp on the telegram also represents the time it was received, rather

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\(^{68}\) Weiss, *Silence*, 149.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 149.
than the time Kawara sent it. In contrast to his postcards, the telegrams therefore represent the spatial and temporal context of their recipient. Thus, whilst Kawara had chosen the means of production, the particular material properties of the work were outside of his control, determined by a number of intermediaries. As telegraphic technology disappeared I Am Still Alive became impossible to continue, yet a spiritual successor of the work continues on Twitter. Created and managed by the Icelandic digital artist, Pall Thayer, a daily automated tweet announces “I Am Still Alive.” The messages have continually been posted since 2009, even after the artist’s death (Fig. 20).

A now defunct communication technology, telegrams were once the fastest way of sending correspondence before the digital age. Their expediency lent itself to the delivery of urgent or bad news, and as such they became associated with the notification of death. A recipient of one of Kawara’s telegrams must have been greatly relieved upon reading that all was well with the artist. However, even if the telegram thwarted the recipient’s expectation of its message, the charge of death lingers in the work, and Teresa O’Conner has aptly described Kawara’s telegrams as “death letters.” By exploiting the empirical charges of the telegram and its system of communication Kawara’s continued existence becomes his only public statement. Indeed, the expectation of the object to deliver bad or momentous news transforms the work’s message from a statement of continued life to a reminder of the inevitability of death.

Like all correspondence art, I Am Still Alive is as much action as it is material. Not only does the work of art depend on the existence of the individual object, but it also depends

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70 “On Kawara’s “I Am Still Alive” Twitter Presence: An Anomaly in Post-Internet Art.” http://momus.ca/on-kawaras-i-am-still-alive-twitter-presence-an-anomaly-in-post-internet-art/. The twitter account handle is “On Kawara,” which Thayer uses without ever having gained the artist’s permission. Whilst Kawara never gave his explicit approval of the project, he also never asked Thayer to desist, perhaps implying a tacit approval of the project.

71 Weiss, Silence, 149.


73 Teresa O’Conner, “Notes: On Kawara’s I Am Still Alive,” in Whole and Parts, 47.
on the telegrams to travel, and to mediate a relationship between people and objects and people and people. Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” emphasizes the fact that any object holds its own functions and histories which serve as “codes by which our interpretive attention makes [the object] meaningful.” Brown’s understanding of the functions of the object is particularly useful when considering correspondence art. The functional value of this object used as artefact to create the conceptual art work ultimately invites us to engage with the meanings of human relationships, associations of banal objects, and the intersection and rupture of temporal and spatial boundaries.

Keith Moxey examines this problem of changing meaning through the history of the visual art object in his book *Visual Time* (2013), in which he proposes a dual understanding of time in the history of art: anachronic time in which “time is ineluctably particular and personal” and works of art cannot be assumed to “belong to period and places other than the present,” and heterochonic time which holds that time moves differently in different places and cultures. Combining these two concepts, Moxey proposes a reevaluation of time as the architecture of art history where the visual object is continually redefined depending on its present time and place. Thus a work may gain meaning for someone in a new context, simultaneously as it loses its meaning in another. Applied to On Kawara’s living practice, the concept of anachronic time allows the work to exist at different times, and to take on different meanings depending on the place, time, and location. The meaning of the work is therefore not fixed in the place of “the historical horizon of its creation,” but can exist in multiple times. Kawara’s works of correspondence art are especially germane to the concept of

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74 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001), 4. Brown’s “Thing Theory” holds that when the object stops working for its user or viewer, one is confronted by their “thingness.” If it loses its historical, societal and cultural framework, each object become what it is rather than what it performs. Brown believes that when the object asserts itself as thing it interrupts the relationship between human and object, in effect becoming the altered subject-object relation.


76 Ibid., 174.
anachronic time. When the artist sends his postcards and telegrams, their meanings shift and build, and they become part of a wider network of social relations between people. A viewer may read the timestamp of Kawara’s getting up on one of the postcard in *I Got Up* as that postcard’s moment of origin, as signifier of the artist’s physical, and as the creative beginning of that day. Yet the postcard was purchased and stamped at one point in time, mailed at another, received by its recipient yet another moment in time, and encountered by another audience today. Each new temporal and spatial context not only creates the work, but affects how the work is experienced by the viewer. The primary recipient of a postcard may not be aware of the fact that the paper is part of an ongoing work of art, and merely understand it as a unique object that carries a personal and direct message from the artist. In contrast, an audience encountering the postcard in a museum will understand it as part of a series and as mark of the artist’s conceptual gesture. Thus each work can exist in several times, the moment of its physical realization stamped on its surface, the multiple instances of its conceptual creation as it is sent through communication systems, and the “now” of the present moment.

The objects themselves are banal; the postcards are bought in souvenir shops and the telegrams are created by the processes of the real-world distant communication system. The artist’s hand is limited in the physical realization of each work. Whilst the postcards of *I Got Up* were chosen and their messages composed by Kawara himself, they are also industrially manufactured for travelers and the tourism industry. The touristic images on the front of each postcard may differ in subject, but their idealized visual appearance creates a cohesion to the series. The back of each postcard was stamped by the artist’s hand, yet each individual postcard held the same composition as all that came before it, creating a stylistic cohesion and uniformity (Fig. 2). In contrast, the message on the telegram and its recipient are the only aspects controlled by Kawara, as the telegram is composed at the place of reception by an anonymous third party who, working for the telegram company, is unaware of the telegram’s
status as art. Whilst Kawara’s control over each work varies, he allows both types of objects to leave his hands, subjecting each constituent part to the unknown on its journey towards its recipient. Crucially, the postcards and telegrams only became art once they had left Kawara’s hands and begun this journey. Without establishing a connection between sender and recipient and without undertaking the required crossing, neither *I Got Up* nor *I Am Still Alive* would exist as works of conceptual art. Kawara’s conceptual gesture of information transmission (respectively when he got out of bed that day, and that he was still alive) was thus facilitated and given meaning by the material agents of this information.

When confronted with the conceptual art object, the viewer is flooded with associations depending on the work’s context, appearance, and cognitive functions. Reconsidering LeWitt’s proposition for the work of conceptual art, one must acknowledge that the execution of the conceptual work is not merely perfunctory nor solely the product of the idea. Rather, the materials used to realize the conceptual work of art have intrinsic properties, and art world and real-world associations, that influence how the conceptual gesture is created, given meaning, and understood. Whilst the concept is still the paramount candidate for appreciation of the work, the idea as the “machine that makes the art” is joined in the creation process by material agents. The analysis in this paper of the means of conceptual production in Kawara’s art objects are not necessarily applicable or exhaustive for all conceptual art works. However, through the dyadic approach of traditional and non-traditional objects I have sought to acknowledge the potential significance of the object’s material properties, meanings, and associations, and their importance in shaping the conceptual gesture.
chapter two

Entering the Art World

The Creation of Value

Upon entering the art world, the object of a conceptual work is the inevitable candidate for consumption and value-creation. Unlike the idea, the object can be visually perceived, physically move from location to location, and be subjected to conventional art world processes. In order to understand how the encounter with the art world changes a conceptual art object such as Kawara’s, we must first unpack its various arenas of meaning and value appraisal. The means of appraisal for the object of art are varied and multiple and they are often determined by art world agents. In his seminal essay “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” sociologist Pierre Bourdieu proposes that products of culture – works of art, pieces of music, plays, and writings – become part of a “socially distinct category” as they enter the market – that is, they become distinguishable from other everyday objects by virtue of their symbolic value.  


77 This symbolic value is created through cultural consecration – a process of legitimacy that implies that the work is culturally important to society and irreducible to its intrinsic properties. Bourdieu acknowledges that objects of art are commodities with specific commercial value and that their economic markers of value strengthen their cultural consecration. Yet, they operate within an elevated social framework that separates them from other goods. Bourdieu distinguishes between cultural goods produced for a general public, the “public at large,” and goods produced for a discerning audience. He terms the former “large-scale production of cultural goods,” which attempt to reach the largest possible market and

78 Ibid., 4.
are primarily appraised on their commercial viability.  

In contrast, the latter, goods produced in a “field of restricted production” are destined for producers of cultural goods, the tastemakers, artists, and agents who recognize and consecrate the object as valuable by criteria of evaluation set by these producers. These are the objects of social distinction, legitimized by systems of agents and institutions, that this essay will explore.

On Kawara’s works examined in the previous chapter – the Today series, I Am Still Alive, and I Got Up – are decades-long serial systems comprised of several thousand individual objects. Kawara produced these objects over the course of years, and his systems of production remained constant and unchanging. The nearly 3,000 Date Paintings were created over the course of nearly fifty years, from 1966 until the 2013, the year before the artist’s death. Yet each painting exists within the same parameters and rules as those created before and after. Contemporaneous with this continuous production of a single serial work, individual Date Paintings entered the art market and were presented for sale at auction houses and galleries. Jeffrey Weiss, curator of the show On Kawara – Silence, at the Guggenheim museum in 2015, in conversation with Kasper König, articulates the production of an idea as follows: “[Kawara] produced an idea about painting that he would subscribe to for the rest of his life.” Here Weiss posits that a singular idea of painting became the generator of each individual object in Kawara’s series. It follows that each painting is created with the same conceptual value, stemming from an originary moment in which the act of painting becomes contemplative and conceptual. Whilst the dates painted on the canvases differ, the subject of every painting is identical, namely a meditation on its own spatiotemporal borders and on the moment and ritual of the artist. A Date Painting from 1966 is generated by the same idea as a

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80 Ibid., 4.
painting from 2013. Here we are faced with a paradox once the object enters the art world; whilst a painting is a constituent part of a serial work, once it is sold or owned it is ascribed individual value as an autonomous object.

The value of a work of art is a complex and ambiguous concept. Certain properties intrinsic to the work such as material condition, aesthetics, authenticity, and provenance, are indisputably influential in determining its value. However, the contemporary work of art often operates chiefly outside of these conventional parameters of value. Since the 1960s, artists working in non-traditional media, with institutional critique, or with conceptual strategies, have created work that directly challenges, resists, or opposes these paradigms. Certain works of art are anti-material or never enter the material realm, some are meant to disintegrate and disappear, whilst others again can be materially manifested in perpetuity without losing their conceptual authenticity. Thus, modes of value appraisal external to the material and conceptual work itself are employed to culturally consecrate these works.

Whilst often conflated with price, the term “value” also denotes cultural credibility, historic importance, and affective signification, all indices external to the work. Some of these value-markers can be considered causational in determining the monetary value of a work; for example, the prominence of a work within the history or culture of the movement, practice, or artistic circle with which it is associated, signifies the work’s importance and thus affects its price in the marketplace. Value may not be synonymous with price, but the sales price ascribed to the work of art by an agent, auction house, or gallery, is, at least partially, determined by external merits – be they social, cultural, and historic – of the work. It follows that works created in series by the same artist, from the same materials with identical manufacturing processes, and that have the same conceptual origin, should have a relatively unchanging monetary value from one another. However, constituent objects in Kawara’s serial works differ in price when sold at auction. One of the artist’s smaller paintings, *NOV.*
30, 1985, measuring 18 x 24 inches, was sold at Sotheby’s in June 2005 for 176,000 GBP.82 Another Date Painting with the exact same dimensions, OCT. 14, 1981, was sold for 509,000 GBP at Sotheby’s Contemporary Art Evening Auction on 1 July, 2015.83 Paradoxically, Sotheby’s catalogue note for OCT. 14, 1981 describes the Date Paintings as “seminal examples of the conceptualism of the 1960s, an artistic thrust characterized by an understanding of art as idea, prior to material execution.”84 By underscoring that the idea of the Date Paintings is the primary generator of its artistic value, this statement is directly at odds with the different estimate and sales price of each painting. If the idea of the Date Paintings was truly its supreme value, then each version would be priced equally when estimated and sold at the auction house. Instead we see that two works with identical material properties and conceptual value can differ greatly in price. It follows that each individual materialization, one of a number of physical artefacts translated from the artist’s conceptual gesture, becomes the site of complex external influences and circumstances. We can therefore posit that because an individual painting in the Today series enters the world at a different time and place than any other in the series, it is subject to a unique set of extenuating forces, influences, and agents that determine its monetary value in relation to the contemporary framework.

To further this point, we must turn to another source of tension in Kawara’s works in art world systems; the objects for sale accrue monetary value over time. On May 16, 2007, MAY 1, 1987, a work in Kawara’s largest standard size, measuring 61 x 89 inches, was sold at Christie’s for $ 1,832,000, exceeding the painting’s 800,000-1,200,000 estimate.85 On May

12, 2014, this same painting was resold at the same auction house by the present owner who had purchased it seven years prior. Its estimated price skyrocketed to USD 3,000,000-4,000,000, and the painting ultimately fetched an extraordinary $ 4,197,000.86 What happened in these seven years for the painting’s price to multiply threefold, and what causes the difference in price between works that are conceptually identical?

Crucially, the changing sales price of a conceptually and materially identical work of art is the clearest index to changing appraisals of the work of art and the artist in relation to factors external to the work itself.87 One of these factors is the categorization and canonization of Kawara’s work as conceptual art. This categorization is not only the result of the conceptual modes of engagement and signification in the work, but crucially, the position of the practice within the history of Conceptualism. Paintings from the Today series first entered the art market in the late 1960s and 1970s through Kawara’s gallery representation. Kawara was at the time represented by the Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf, a gallery noted internationally for its representation of young artists associated with conceptual groups such as Fluxus and the Zero artists.88 Kawara’s first solo exhibition, entitled Made in New York from 1970-1971, took place here.89 Also represented by Konrad Fischer were preeminent conceptualists Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner. This association with conceptual art circles was strengthened by various exhibitions Kawara took part in, such as the seminal Information show, a survey of conceptual art curated by Kynaston McShine at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970. The show’s press release explicitly articulated this focus on concept by noting that the only commonality between all artists exhibited was their desire to “extend the

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87 Conversation with Veronique Chagnon-Burke, Director of Christie’s Education, February 28, 2017.
88 Alongside gallerists such as René Block and Leo Castelli, Fischer was a seminal figure in forming exhibitions and by extension circuits of conceptual artist.
idea of art beyond traditional categories. Working in the same circles and represented alongside conceptual artists as he began to rise in international renown, Kawara was situated within a specific critical framework, as opposed to one of his own making, which resulted in his work being categorized and displayed as idea art.

Whilst artists continued to work in conceptual terms, the moment of Conceptualism as movement had passed by the mid-1970s. As the fervency of conceptual art ebbed, it transitioned from a contemporary and avant-garde zeitgeist to another historicized step in the forward march of modernist art history. Subsequently, conceptual artists and conceptual practices have been historicized, and their works, now seen as originary, have increased in cultural and monetary value. Works that were often produced to resists commodification have entered the art market, and are sought as additions to private collections as well as encyclopedic, modern and contemporary museums of art as representative of a certain moment in the history of cultural production. To ensure historical and cultural credibility, the work of art should be representative of and reflect its origin. If a work is both temporally and stylistically aligned with a canonical artistic practice, it is a legitimate representation of the art of its time. However, not all works of art are are representative of the most dominant or significant practices of their temporal origins. Indeed, a work can operate through strategies of art-making associated with a specific practice, yet do so at moment in time not associated with that artistic strategy or movement. For example, a painting can exist in the material vein of Abstract Expressionism, yet have been created in the 1990s. The strategy and style of this hypothetical painting would therefore not fit into a chronological and linear evolution of canonical art practices. Such works are not representative of the artistic zeitgeist of their time.

91 As defined in Lippard, “Escape Attempts,” Six Years.
temporal origin, and thus disrupt the linearity with which art history situates and canonizes art practices.

As discussed earlier in this essay, the constituent objects of Kawara’s series increase in sales price as they gain temporal distance from the moment of their physical realization, yet here I would like to propose another claim; that the physical object is more valuable if it is representative of its time. As a work enters the public consciousness, it is expected to fit an external framework, and it therefore follows that not all works of art are equally desirable in the art world. For instance, a preeminent collector of contemporary art can demonstrate the excellence of her collection by investing in works that are more typical or significant to the canon of certain movements, styles, or practices. A work categorized as conceptual but created in the 1990s holds less historic importance in terms of Conceptualism as movement, than a work created at the height of conceptualism between 1966-1972. Thus a work created in 1969 can be considered a more accurate representation of Conceptualism by virtue of its origin coinciding with the appropriate historical moment of invention.

In regards to a serial artist such as Kawara, the categorization and alignment of his entire practice with a temporally bounded movement of the past, forces the work into a historic framework in which its objects are considered distinctive from one another by virtue of the time of their material realization. Kawara produced through unchanging systems, each system with a clear conceptual origin, which then was allowed to run its course over several years. The unchanging structures of the system resulted in material realizations that remained constant. Yet, at auction the sale’s prize realized for Kawara’s works reflect the date of their materialization. At Christie’s in November of 2015, OCT. 25, 1966, a Date Painting fetched $581,000. Four months later in February of 2016, a

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92 Lippard, Six Years. Her survey defines the height of conceptualism as between 1966-1972.
painting of identical size, 28 DEC. 1981, was sold at Christie’s for merely $283,446, less than half the price realized for its antecedent.94 Similarly, two Date Paintings sold at Christie’s in 2007, APR. 22, 1967 (10 x 13 in.) and FEB. 17, 1982 (13 1/8 x 17 3/8 in.) respectively sold for $541,000 and $286,704.9596 Whilst the paintings’ intrinsic properties of size, condition, colour, and language are generated from the same idea, external factors such as each painting’s relative position in the chronology of production becomes a mean of appraisal that identifies the object as more valuable than others in the series. In essence, an object created in the late 1960s, at the height of Conceptualism as movement and practice, can be valued more highly than a Date Painting created in the 1980s.

Works that succeed in the art market are both rarefied and ascribed properties of value. Bourdieu argues that these properties can never be assimilated into intrinsic fixed properties of the work, as they are projected onto the work by a dynamic field of agents who operate in the art world’s consecratory systems. The importance of the work of art within history is certainly a property external to the work itself, as the linear narration of history is constructed by these very agents of consecration. Whilst two Date Paintings by Kawara are conceptually identical and materially similar, the temporality of their material realization in relation to the history of conceptualism is imperative in determining the value of each individual painting. The constituent materials of Kawara’s serial works, whilst having equal conceptual properties, are therefore seen as individual objects subject to a unique set of historic conditions. As such, an individual object can accrete value and meaning autonomously from its intrinsic conceptual properties and the series as a whole through its

localization in narrative and art canon. A phase change in the status of the conceptual object has therefore occurred; no longer is the object only a material agent of meaning in the conceptual work, but it has also become subject to interpretation by external forces of differentiation and consumption.

The Conceptual Art Object in Sites of Collection and Display

The conceptual art object is not only given value and meaning by virtue of its ascribed properties, but also by its contextualization in the art world. It is understood differently in varying contexts, whether that be in the gallery of the art dealer, in the thematic exhibition, in the retrospective, the biennial, or in the private collection. These sites of meaning offer distinct frameworks for an art object. They are distinguished by appealing to different publics, employing different methods of display, and projecting certain meanings, whether monetary, aesthetic, or historic, onto the object. By selecting, regulating, situating, and associating, these sites frame the work and impose a direction from which a viewer must approach it.

These sites of display not only shape the public encounter with the work, but they influence the work’s ascribed value through their status as legitimizing institutions. George Dickie’s “Institutional Theory of Art,” which was touched upon in the thesis’s first chapter, presents the notion of artefactuality, that a simple object can become a complex object “through art-world systems.” Dickie presents the example of Duchamp’s *Fountain*, which is a simple object when used as urinal, and then transformed into a complex object, “an artefact of the art world system,” once it is used as a medium in an art world context. Duchamp articulates this notion of giving an object a new idea in his response to the rejection of *Fountain* from the Society of Independent Artists exhibition. In the second volume of the

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98 Ibid., 87.
dada art journal *The Blind Man* (1917) Duchamp’s writes that *Fountain* is translated from urinal to art object by the act of his own choice: “[Mr. Mutt] took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new through for that object.”99 Whilst the material itself doesn’t change, it is altered through art world processes of signification, conferring art status upon the simple object. The urinal is transformed into a work of art through the legitimization, history-making, canonization, and value-inflation of art world systems. Removed from the real world, or in the case of *Fountain*, the JL Mott Ironworks’ plumbing suppliers shop in New York City, the simple objects enter arenas of discourse that imbue meaning and give complex value assigned by art world agents.

Kawara’s works of correspondence art are especially germane examples of this translation from simple to complex objects. The postcards of *I Got Up* exist as everyday banal materials before they are transformed by the artist’s choice and selection. Whilst the telegrams of *I Am Still Alive* are only created by Kawara setting in motion their production, his conceptual gesture distinguishes these objects from other telegrams produced through identical systems and materials. Like Duchamp, Kawara creates new thoughts for these objects, imbuing them with new meaning as materializations of the artist’s idea. Whilst Kawara creates these works through the material’s transmission through real world correspondence systems, their conceptual gesture is only complete once each material has reached its recipient. A postcard chosen and stamped by Kawara only becomes part of *I Got Up* once it has resurfaced on the other side of the postal system. The completion of the active process is therefore required to create these works of conceptual art. Once the telegrams and postcards have emerged from the correspondence system they immediately enter into a new discourse; they become public cultural goods. Whilst the recipient may choose not to release

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their telegram of postcard into the mechanisms of the art market or display it for public consideration, they now own a constituent material part of Kawara’s serial work. The materials have left the artist’s hand and authority, and by virtue of someone else’s ownership become cultural goods in the art market.

If we consider the market of symbolic goods as described by Bourdieu and the art-world systems of Dickie’s Institutional Theory of Art, operational intersections become apparent; both scholars expound on the impact of the public sphere on the cultural good. Bourdieu’s belief that cultural goods gain recognition through processes of consecration from agents in the restricted field of that particular good, can be read as directly corresponding to Dickie’s proposition that objects are legitimized and made complex through art world systems. Whilst Dickie announces that the systems of the art world create the legitimate work of art, Bourdieu takes a sociologist’s approach, arguing that processes of systems of legitimization hold true for all cultural goods. These discourses on the systems of cultural institutions underscore the dialectic between market and institutions of display as systems that legitimize, create value, and confer meaning. Institutions of the art market such as dealers, auction houses, and commercial galleries, overlap and share operations with institutions of display such as gallery shows, thematic exhibitions, retrospectives, and the permanent collections of museums.

Since the emergence of the modern commercial art gallery in the late 19th century, art dealers have been the agents that direct the work of art’s first encounter with the public. According to Veronique Chagnon-Burke, director of Christie’s Education, the modern art dealer emerged in France in the 19th century as the system of royal patronage began to deteriorate and artists gained autonomy within the system of art production.100 No longer required by external agents to create for religious, republic, royal, or ideological purposes,

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100 Conversation with Veronique Chagnon-Burke.
artists began to produce works that represented their own perspectives, temperaments, and comments on the world. Robert Jensen, in his *Marketing Modernism*, argues that this shift in production was accompanied by a move away from the public Salon and Academy, into the commercial art gallery. Jensen notes that by the middle of the 19th century, French modernists felt the Salon to be “commercially debased, appealing to the taste of the public rather than remaining true to the noble calling of art.”

Rather, artists who intended to distance themselves from the French academy and its primary exhibition site, the Salon, sought to financially vindicate their work by appealing to private collectors in order to demonstrate their “place in the pantheon of great artists.” This resulted in a conflict where modern artists in opposition to the Academy rejected the undiscerning commercialism of annual public Salons, but still needed the speculative market value to legitimize their artistic efforts and secure a livelihood. The commercial art gallery rose in response, serving as mediator between artist and market by appealing to “connoisseurs” of great art, the private buyers, as opposed to the popular tastes of the public crowd. Artists were hence set free from the publicizing and selling their work to suit popular tastes, and could pursue individual creative goals with the knowledge that their dealer would develop a suitable market.

Since this shift in production and market occurred in the mid-19th century, art dealers have emerged to run these commercial galleries, guide the tastes of connoisseurs, and nurture and protect the interests of the artist. The dealer must simultaneously develop audiences for the work by publicizing the artist’s production, whilst cultivating the artist, the gallery, and the collection. The art dealer thus becomes not only mediator between artist and audience, but between artist and other legitimizing institutions such as museums, curators, and private

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102 Ibid., 19.
103 Ibid., 21.
104 Ibid., 32.
collectors.\textsuperscript{105} Today the contemporary art dealer works in the primary market, negotiating the value for the work as it leaves the studio to be displayed and sold in the dealer’s gallery. The role of the art dealer as nurturer of the artist is complicated by the fact that the dealers and the commercial galleries they manage are also enterprises of profit financed by the sale of artist’s work. Thus the esteem of a gallery and art dealer, and the artist they represent, can rise in parallel, strengthened by their reciprocal economic association; the greater the public demand for the artist’s work, the greater the commercial gallery’s profits.

Private collectors emerged as the primary tastemakers and value creators of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as they operate in both the primary market (of the gallery) and secondary market (of the auction house). Not only have the premier collectors dominated the market, but they made and continue to make up the majority of museum board trustees.\textsuperscript{106} By virtue of their purchasing power, the most affluent and influential collectors thus provide the structural support of the art market, and are given cultural authority from their participation in art world institutions.\textsuperscript{107} The major auction houses Christie’s and Sotheby’s never deal with living artists directly, but they exist as spaces for private collectors to deaccession works from their own holdings.\textsuperscript{108} As works of art leave these collections and enter the market, their reputation and marketability is enhanced by the esteem and provenance of their collectors. This circulation of the contemporary art work between art dealer, private collector, and auction house, removes the work of art from the agency of the artist. In turn, the artist loses power over the work’s signification and value. Rather the work of art exists in sites of commercial signification dominated by institutional agents. These agents can defer to

\textsuperscript{105} Martha Rosler, “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers: Thoughts on Audience,” in Institutional Critique, 212.
\textsuperscript{106} Conversation with Veronique Chagnon-Burke.
\textsuperscript{107} Rosler, “Lookers, Buyers, Dealers, and Makers,” 212.
\textsuperscript{108} Conversation with Veronique Chagnon-Burke.
the living artist in dialogues that inform interpretation and display of the work, but have no obligation to do so.\textsuperscript{109}

This growing schism between the work and the artist is symptomatic of the ill-fitting interactions between art institutions and conceptual art. Whilst the art market of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century changed in order to accommodate the contemporary avant-garde, the dynamics of ownership, sale, and collection were still based upon the status of the work as object. Conceptualism as a strategy was a response to the weight of centuries of tradition in regard to collection practice, politics of display, and value attribution, by attempting to operate outside of art world conventions of display and distribution of the object. It therefore seems inherently paradoxical that value judgments conferred upon conceptual artworks should be the same as for traditional art objects.

The display of works of art categorized as conceptual by institutions and art world agents is complicated by the work’s redefinition of artistic conventions of judgment. Benjamin Buchloh, in his “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” posits that the the work of “Conceptual Art … constituted the most consequential assault on the status of [the] object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution,”\textsuperscript{110} employing strategies that “displaced the traditional object-status for works of art, resulted in works that no longer qualified for traditional studio categories.”\textsuperscript{111}

It follows that this destabilization of traditional categories of artistic production and aesthetic experience operate not merely on the level of renegotiating studio production, but also in terms of the art world institutions structured around categorizations of the object, the material, and the artist themselves. Buchloh proposes that the artists who employed conceptual

\textsuperscript{109}Conversation with Veronique Chagnon-Burke.


\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., 133.
strategies created a discourse critical of the administration of art, which sought to dismantle and redefine “the institutional determination of the object’s status.”\footnote{Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969,” 134.} The rejection of these traditional properties of judging legitimacy and value challenged curators and art dealers to invent new sites of display for the conceptual work.

According to Bruce Altshuler one can identify a watershed in the exhibitions of the avant-garde around 1960, coinciding with the emergence of early conceptual art strategies.\footnote{Bruce Altshuler, Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that made Art History, 1962-2002, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 11.} Important exhibitions transitioned from being largely organized by artists, such as the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 in Paris and shows by the Japanese Gutai Group of the 1950s, to shows facilitated and managed by “professional exhibition makers working in and for institutions, from those in commercial galleries to the huge biennials at the century’s end.”\footnote{Ibid., 11.} After 1960 the burden of avant-garde public presentation shifted onto curators. They became the agents of display, presenting works of art in thematic exhibitions and venues of commercial display on their personal terms, effectively imbuing the work of art with meaning through new and creative contextualization. This effect was furthered by the growing practice of curators actively inviting artists to participate in their exhibitions, effectively shifting the power of presentation from the artist to the institutional agent.

During the 1960s and 1970s new types of shows were created as alternatives to the traditional exhibitions of art world institutions, in order to facilitate the encounter between the public and art that employed conceptual strategies. Shows by art dealer and curator Seth Siegelaub such as “The January Show” (January 5-31, 1969) in New York City and “One Month” (March 1-31, 1969) were highly innovative in their presentation of conceptual works of art. Both projects were month-long and began with Siegelaub inviting avant-garde artists to participate in a show of the curator’s own devising. The “January Show” was the first major
show of Conceptual Art in the United States, and brought together artists such as Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner. For the show Siegelaub considered the catalogue to be the exhibition, whilst the physical presence of certain works in a gallery in New York were merely “supplementary.”¹¹⁵ Siegelaub thus deployed the catalogue, a traditional mode of recording exhibitions for both contemporary public and posterity, to renegotiate the spatial boundaries for the work of art.

Kawara did not exhibit in the “January Show”, but he was invited to participate in Siegelaub’s subsequent show, “One Month,” which ran from March 1-31, 1969. Unlike the January Show, “One Month” had no physical framework of gallery walls. Instead the show took the shape of a calendar in which 31 artists, one for each day of the month, were invited to contribute a work.¹¹⁶ The works of artists that did submit to the show were purely text-based; some examples include Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin’s statements that they both intended to participate on March 3 and 4 (Figs. 21 and 22), Robert Smithson’s instruction work that the artist would execute on March 28 (Fig. 23), and Stephen Kaltenbach’s manifesto of art making from March 16 (Fig. 24). Artists that did not participate nor respond to Siegelaub’s inquiry for submissions were represented by blank pages for their respective day. On Kawara’s page was blank, indicating that the artist chose not to submit any work to Siegelaub’s specifications for the show. Thus, whilst these new modes of display created sites for art to exist outside the traditional system of the commercial object-centered gallery, they still positioned works of art as selected and raised to public consideration through the work of the curator.

Siegelaub’s “January” and “One Month” shows demonstrated that the work of art as idea could be communicated linguistically as opposed to through the properties of

traditionally aesthetic art objects. Lawrence Weiner, one of the seminal figures of text-based conceptual art, was included in both shows. For the January show Weiner submitted a number of text-based works, including his *Statement of Intent*, a work articulating his philosophy of art-making (Fig. 25). His work for the thirtieth day of “One Month” was the sentence *An object tossed from one country to another* (Fig. 26). These examples of text-based works crystallize the innovation of Weiner’s art production, who saw himself not as a conceptual artist but as a sculptor whose media was “language + the materials referred to,” implying that language was the material itself.\(^\text{117}\) Siegelaub’s reconsideration of what the exhibition space could be allowed artists to operate in strategies that allowed each work to be shown without typically visual signifiers of meaning such as form, figurative imagery, and traditional artistic media.

Whilst the catalogue and calendar of “One Month” were the “walls” of the gallery, they were also material objects that could be reproduced, circulated, disseminated, and owned. As posited by Altshuler, for exhibitions that seek “to undercut the standard way of framing art for the public, the manner and mode of presentation [become] part of the content presented.”\(^\text{118}\) This negotiation of the art object reconsidered how works were encountered by the public, yet any display still required the work to be presented as a sort of documentation or trace, which became synonymous with the work itself. Thus whilst Siegelaub’s shows were highly innovative in terms of presenting the works in a context that liberated them from traditional aesthetic constraints, the shows relied on perceptual encounters mediated by a curatorial authority who directed the presentation of each artist within the frame of display, and conflated material presentation with the conceptual work.


\(^{118}\) Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition*, 236.
Whilst shows such as Siegelaub’s allowed the conceptual work of art autonomy from the visual and aesthetic traditions of art world systems, the work of conceptual art has also been forced to assimilate into more traditional institutional frameworks. As the art market has expanded to embrace “not only unique objects, but also those less evidently rare or even tangible forms once conceived as resistant to art’s commodification,” the avant-garde has come to be supported and valorized by institutional structures built on traditional strategies of ownership and display of objects.

Biennials, and other less frequent international art fairs such as triennials, quadrennials, and quinquennials, are paragons of the institutionalization of the avant-garde. The founding of the Venice Biennale in 1895 paved the way for a new type of exhibition, one focused on displaying recent art by important artists and establishing international networks. In the last few decades, biennials have been founded all over the world in increasing numbers, in Sydney (1973), Lyon (1991), Istanbul (1987), Gwangju (1995), and Berlin (1998) to mention but a few. Other recurring shows such as Carnegie International (founded in 1896, taking place every three to five years), Documenta (founded in 1955, taking place every five years), and Manifesta (founded in 1996, taking place every two years) are equally important sites for the contemporary art world. These large-scale exhibitions serve as grand international art fairs. They display works from disparate cultural and geographic sites of meaning, and prioritize interaction and trade across cultures and national borders.

Certain biennials, such as Venice, allow individual countries to show the products of their own artists in national pavilions. However, the predominant mode of display in these international art shows are thematic exhibitions. These exhibitions have since the 1960s been driven mostly by curators who cull works of art from different networks in order to establish international

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connections of style and strategy, linking together works and by extension creating new relational meanings. Thematic group exhibitions and biennales therefore situate artist within frames and networks created by the curator.

Kawara exhibited work in numerous international art shows, including Documenta 5 (1972), 7 (1982), and 11 (2002) in Kassel, Germany, and the 1976 Venice Biennale show “International Tendencies.” His participation in these shows was organized and framed by curatorial visions, aligning his practice with other international artists. For Documenta 11 a live reading of Kawara’s One Million Years (Past and Future) was performed at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, alongside exclusively works by artists from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The appointment Documenta’s new artistic director, Okwui Enwezor, brought with it his curatorial drive to include more art from geographically underrepresented artists. Thus Kawara’s work was exhibited in a geographically-weighted framework, situating him as Japanese, rather than a Global artist located in New York. In a similar vein, “International Tendencies” at the Venice Biennale also contextualized Kawara in relation to geography. The show was comprised of the work of 82 artists, meant as “representative” of the art of 1972-76, and decided upon by a committee of six art critics and museum professionals. Kawara was included amongst the participants from the United States, in a jumble of American-born and international artists such as Ed Ruscha and Hans Haacke, working in diverse styles such as installation art, minimalism, and pop art. A common theme hence emerges in the representation of Kawara in international group exhibitions; the artist’s work and history is subsumed into a greater narrative created by the curator or art director of each show.

121 Altshuler, Biennials and Beyond, 24.
Professional curators focus on framing contemporary work in terms of their own concepts, sometimes aligned with the artist’s stated intentions and sometimes departing from it. When works of art that resist traditional conventions of visuality and aesthetics, and that operate through conceptual structures and strategies of art-making, are shown in these institutional exhibitions they are equalized with other works of art in the same space or convention of display. It follows that as the work of conceptual art is circulated through conventional sites of value creation and legitimization, the encounter between work and audience is directed by its physical framing. As such the curator emerges as the creator of meaning, guiding and shaping the public’s understanding of the conceptual work.

The final site of display we will discuss in this chapter is the single-person retrospective – an exhibition showing the oeuvre of a single artist. Altshuler argues that retrospective shows of contemporary artists put forth and establish “an avant-garde lineage whose progressive dynamic set the stage for both art-historical canonization and future business.”124 These dual operations of economic value inflation and consecration into an art canon again serve to underscore the dialectic between market and exhibition. Works are culled from museums, private collections, commercial galleries, and art dealers representing the artist, to present a coherent display of the artist’s production. This display often frames the artist within a linear art historical construct of development in terms of style, manual production, and concept. Mutually reinforcing and dependent on one another, the forces of value-inflation and history-making allow the retrospective to serve as the apotheosis of an artist’s exhibition history – the ultimate sign of acceptance and consecration in the dynamic and multidimensional fields of market and exhibition.

Kawara Exhibited

124 Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond*, 1.
To examine Kawara’s works in regard to markers of display we must turn to the artist’s extensive and illustrious exhibition history. By January of 1996 Kawara had held 100 solo exhibitions, only fourteen of which the artist himself attended. Kawara’s limited his personal participation in the art world to the extreme, and instead relied on his art dealers Konrad Fischer Galerie in Dusseldorf and David Zwirner New York to publicly represent him and host commercial exhibitions of his work. Large travelling exhibitions such as *On Kawara; continuity/discontinuity 1963-1979* (1980-1981: Moderna Museet, Stockholm / National Museum of Art Osaka / Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven / Museum Folkwang Essen), *On Kawara: Date Paintings in 89 Cities* (1991-1993: The University of Chicago / Museum Boljmans van Beunlingen, Rotterdam / Museum of Fine Arts, Boston / the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), and *On Kawara: Whole and Parts 1964-1995* (1996-1998: Mouveau Musée, Villeurbanne, France / Castello di Rivoli, Turin / MACBA, Barcelona / LaM, Villeneuve-d’Ascq, France / Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo) extended the artist’s international fame. These solo exhibitions were punctuated by the frequent inclusion of the artist’s works in shows and exhibitions of contemporary and modern art. One can trace Kawara’s rise to international renown and consecration from the artist’s participation in shows of conceptual art such as the *Information* show (1970), contributions to contemporary-art exhibitions such as *Documenta* and the Venice Biennale, and his inclusion at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art show *1965-1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art* in 1995. These seminal and renowned shows positioned Kawara at the epicenter of the international avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s.


The first comprehensive survey of Kawara’s production, *On Kawara - Silence* took place at the Guggenheim Museum from February to May of 2015. *Silence*, curated by the Guggenheim’s Jeffrey Weiss, stands as the culmination of the artist’s exhibition history; the show displayed works from every category of the artist’s production since 1964, including Date Paintings, his two correspondence series, the trilogy *I Went, I Met*, and *I Read*, the calendar series *One Million Years*, and *Journals* (1966-2013), the artist’s inventory of his paintings (Fig. 27). This comprehensive selection of the artist’s oeuvre was shown in the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda of the museum and as the visitor ascended the spiral, one walked through the material records of time and space in the artist’s life.

Weiss proposed the show to Kawara without finalizing his curatorial ambitions. Rather he approached the artist with the intention to mount an exhibition that would be different from shows done in the past.127 In the show’s exhibition catalogue Weiss writes that he prioritized a cohesive selection of work in order to “represent [Kawara’s] practice as a practice rather than assemble a more exclusive selection of individual objects.”128 Weiss believes that an exhibition is “an unfolding process,” and to this purpose the curator met with Kawara on multiple occasions, collaborating with the artist on the formation of the show, its titles and themes, and its selected works.129 Whilst Weiss chose how to position the works in space, it was Kawara who proposed *Silence* as the exhibition’s title, and Kawara was the one to select the numbers of objects to display and the specific Date Paintings hung on the walls. By virtue of Kawara’s cooperation and communication with curators to shape the show’s vision, *Silence* can be viewed as a mouthpiece for the artist, legitimizing the exhibition’s curatorial propositions and structure.

129 Conversation with Jeffrey Weiss.
Weiss attempted to display each constituent material as “an index to the entire continuous practice,” as record of the conceptual process itself rather than as a self-contained object. The works were organized into vitrines and niches according to their material; paintings exclusively lined the walls (Fig. 28), whilst the dual-sided postcards of *I Got Up* were sandwiched in freestanding glass cases, the rows of postcards narrating the artist’s movements around the globe (Fig. 29). Cases placed along the rotunda’s walkway housed the artist’s extensive *Journals*, binders containing the records of his production (Fig. 30). Vertical glass cases also surrounded *I Went, I Met*, and *I Read*, some volumes open to a singular page (Fig. 31), chosen carefully by Weiss in order to demonstrate the content of each discrete group of closed binders. Another vitrine housed the original pages of the hand-typed series *One Million Years*, the thick binders standing alongside one another, behind a singular open volume (Fig. 32). These open books stood in for the rest of the production, allowing the viewer to imagine the remainder of the series through extrapolating its continuation. Throughout the exhibition a man and a woman, seated at the base of the rotunda in the museum lobby, alternately read the years of *One Million Years Past* and *One Million Years Future* (Fig. 33).

Whilst many categories of work were represented, Weiss wanted to steer away from the convention of the retrospective, a concept he felt to be “ill-suited to the nature of the work as a continuous project.” Indeed, the institutional frame of the retrospective is intended to show the development of the artist over the course of his or her career by establishing a linear chronology of their early, middle, and late artistic style and expression. Kawara’s unchanging serial production resists such a narration, and Kawara’ himself objected to the public construction of an origin for his work. To ensure the work presented was conceptually

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130 Conversation with Jeffrey Weiss.
131 Ibid.
cohesive and removed from the artist’s biography, Kawara gave Weiss permission to show 48 years of production. At the beginning of their communication Kawara set the temporal boundary of the exhibited objects from 1964 to 2012. This excluded any work or information from the artist’s career in Japan, which Kawara at the time considered irrelevant to his later serial production. It is important to remember that Kawara’s relocation from Tokyo to Mexico in 1959, and eventually New York in 1964, was a watershed in the artist’s production. The Kawara who produced, wrote, and displayed at the heart of the avant-garde in 1950s Tokyo was not the same artist who created serial works for nearly five decades. Everything that followed was part of a single system, with a cohesive system and structure originating from the same conceptual origin. In order to display the work to the artist’s specifications, traditional modes of display such as chronology and total information of production were rejected.

To this purpose the architecture of the Guggenheim was imperative. To Weiss the museum was “a kind of irresistible container for the work… the collection being particularly germane to the place.”\textsuperscript{133} The distinct open architecture of the rotunda (Fig. 34) allowed the curator to reject showing the work as a ‘single timeline,’ a mode of display the curator found cliché.\textsuperscript{134} Instead the works are displayed in what Weiss describes as a double-helix, placing early works from the mid-1960s at both top and bottom of the ramp, and entwining temporally distant objects throughout the rotunda.\textsuperscript{135} A visitor ascending the ramp may at first have believed that the display presented the work chronologically, but once at the top realized that one had arrived at the beginning of the artist’s post-Japan production (Fig. 35). Thus, experience of walking through the exhibition space communicated a truth of Kawara’s work: that traditional art world structures such as biography, narrative, and chronology are irrelevant.

\textsuperscript{133} Conversation with Jeffrey Weiss.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
to the work itself. The open space of the museum also allowed visitors to consider the exhibition and work as a whole; one could look across the rotunda and appreciate the connections and juxtapositions that arose from the spatial arrangements of display. The continuity of the ramp was thus disrupted by the open architectural structure in what Weiss describes as a sort of “three-dimensional chess situation;”¹³⁶ the eye was pulled in multiple directions, discarding the idea that a particular object can be severed from the entire production.

_Silence_ rejected labelling Kawara as a conceptual artist, a categorization Weiss believes does injustice to the work.¹³⁷ Rather Weiss hoped to allow the audience’s encounter with the work to exist outside of narration and categorization. By cutting the work loose from external referents, _Silence_ universalized Kawara in a way previous institutional displays had not. By limiting wall-text, artist’s biographical information, chronological modes of display, and total information, the individual viewer could approach the work on their own subjective terms.

However, that is not to say that _Silence_ was an oasis apart from the art world institutional systems of consecration and value creation. Earlier in this essay I raised the question of causational influences that led to the increase in sales price of _MAY 1, 1987_ from $1,832,000 in 2007 to $4,197,000 in 2015. The answer is found in the success of _Silence_ and the artist’s death that proceeded it. The death of Kawara only half a year prior to the show’s opening elevated the exhibition’s status to a history-making endeavor. As the first posthumous show of the artist’s work, the success of _Silence_’s curatorial endeavors and popularity with critics and the general public cements its consecration of the artist and his

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¹³⁶ Conversation with Jeffrey Weiss.
¹³⁷ Ibid.
work. With *Silence*, the objects of Kawara’s art production transitioned from markers of production to mementos of the artist’s life.

As an artist working within societal structures Kawara produced objects of value. His production directly challenges traditional aesthetic paradigms of the artwork by repurposing the everyday object, refusing innovation by maintaining unchanging serials, and renegotiating the painted canvas. Yet these disruptions are only affective when they enter into confrontations with the art world. It is in sites of display that institutional agents such as critics, dealers, private collectors, curators, and auctioneers, along with the general public, can respond to the work, and be challenged by and recognize its avant-garde efforts. This chapter has presented the argument that once an art object categorized as conceptual enters the art world, numerous factors external to the object influences and shapes its encounter with the public. The movements of the object in time and space can be read as sign of the work’s merit, the object being elevated and consecrated by the changing of hands. Even if the work is presented in a thoughtful context, informed by the artist’s wishes and intentions rather than curatorial whims and pressures of traditional display, it is never divorced from art world systems of consecration. Thus, the material realization of the work is no longer document of labor and concept, nor only agent of conceptual meaning. Rather, it has become the index with which we trace the history of the work’s engagement with and consumption by the art world, and through which we construct its historic, cultural, and economic value.
chapter 3

Approaching the Future, Becoming the Past

Art Historical Time and Museum Narratives

In an essay for the Department of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curator Douglas Eklund describes Kawara’s oeuvre as “the purest strain of Conceptualism” by virtue of the artist’s commitment to erase “the boundary separating art production and everyday life” by testing “the limits of self-expression within the structures of modern society.”¹³⁸ The Metropolitan Museum only has one “work” by Kawara, a selection of forty-seven postcards from the *I Got Up* series (1968-1979), sent by Kawara to his friend, author and artist Richard Kostelanetz in 1970 (Fig. 36). The Met purchased the postcards in 2001 from the Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf, using resources donated by members of the museum’s board of trustees. Eklund’s effusive praise underscores a paradox of displaying works of art categorized as conceptual. Namely, how can Kawara’s work be understood as a crystallization of Conceptualism when the museum displays these objects within an institutional and expressly material framework, which has been created for the collection of objects and their historic preservation? This is but one of the tensions that arise when the conceptual art work enters the museum; as the conceptual art object transitions from market, auction, and contemporary exhibition into the permanent museum collection issues of history-making, intentionality, authenticity, and objectification take center stage.

As the materials of *I Got Up* move from living networks of correspondence to the museum’s permanent collection, processes of history-making and classification occur. The Metropolitan Museum has categorized and canonized their slice of *I Got Up* in relation to

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their encyclopedic collection. Their structural framework situates each work in their collection according to a number of factors such as geography, artist, object type/material, date/era, and department (Fig. 37). The museum’s online catalogue lists the avowed medium I Got Up as a “photomechanical print,” rather than its format, a postcard, removing the object from the vernacular of everyday life and objecthood. This re-branding of the material mirrors the changing role of the object, from its circulation in systems of the real world to its relocation to an interpretive art historical context in the museum. When sent by Kawara the physical materials were agents, their travels through the postal system facilitating a direct relationship between Kawara and Kostelanetz. The Met’s postcards were sent and received in New York, constituting an act of correspondence in a city occupied by both artists, which defies the convention of the postcard as a vehicle for long-distance communication. Another point of disruption is created by the images of the postcards, which show New York from the sky, effectively creating an aerial view of the city. The postcard is no longer a memento of travel and tourism, but an exploration of New York as city shared by Kawara and Kostelanetz. The cohesion of Kawara’s correspondence with Kostelanetz, forty-seven daily consecutive postcards all with frontal images of New York, cement these disruptions as a readaption of the postcard as a conceptual material, with multiple, open-ended meanings. The repetition of the act and the imagery removes the convention of individual consideration of each postcard, and replaces it with appreciation for the work as a serial of multiple realities and meanings.

The inclusion of the Kostelanetz set into the Met’s collection situates these many-layered oddities and disruptions of the material into a framework that emphasizes the provenance, exhibition history, and categorization of the materials. The descriptive text of the online collection record describes I Got Up as ”the most personal and intimate of his works,” and goes on to use words like “urban poetics,” and “cinematic” to present this set of objects to
This description becomes a definite interpretive act, closing off the multiple open-ended meanings of Kawara’s series and silencing the complex reality of the conceptual gesture. Instead the Kostelanetz set is historicized, interpreted, and classified according to the Met’s own systems of meaning and creation.

The shift from market and exhibition to permanent museum collection is marked by a shift in an object’s status and purpose. No longer is the conceptual art object a perfunctory material in the studio or system, nor is it subject to the complex dynamics of the contemporary art circuit. Rather, its exit from these complex forces of value-creation signals its entrance into a new site of meaning, namely the art object’s placement in an archive that inevitably shapes its past and projection into the future. As materials become enfolded in the permanent collections of encyclopedic, modern, or contemporary art museums, their importance for collective humankind is cemented by virtue of their newfound permanency. Inclusion into these collections marks not only monetary or cultural value, but the objects’ projected historic importance; such works have been deemed important for perpetuity and worthy of preservation for future generations. The collection of objects for repositories of art entails the archiving and display of these works to the public, founded on the idea that works of art and other precious historical objects are a public good to which everyone has a right of access. If the museum can make art objects permanent and stable, it guarantees that future museum visitors can encounter the work on similar visual terms to how one perceives it today. Thus, material permanence ensures the continued dissemination of and access to human expression and ideas across time.

In Collecting the New, Bruce Altshuler claims that since the establishment of the museum in the 18th century, its central function has been to collect, preserve, and display

objects. The selection and subsequent preservation of the object has two immediate implications; firstly, that the object is different from others not selected and similar to objects already in the museum, and secondly, that measures will be taken to ensure that the object’s current material status remains constant. The former implication speaks to the cementation of the museum object’s elevated status over non-museum objects, as caused by its distinctive aesthetic, cultural, or historic merits. The latter can be read as a direct consequence of this elevated object status as the incentive leading to preservation. Altshuler goes on to state that the collection of contemporary art in museums gives rise to two distinct tensions between the contemporary status of the work of art and the functions of the museum; the issue of perpetuity in museums of contemporary or modern art, and the issue of contemporary selection in traditional museums.

For museums of contemporary or modern art, the so-called MoCAs and MoMAs of the international art world, the collection of contemporary art is only realized within the temporally bounded condition of recent decades. This temporal bracketing results in a foundational paradox for museums dedicated to art of the present or the recent past; whilst they seek to display art of the moment, they are faced with the fact that their objects are already enfolded in the past. Questions of when a contemporary work of art is no longer contemporary, and when a modern work of art no longer modern, leads to issues of deaccession and the renewal of collections. This process of valuation is further complicated by the fact that the definition of modernism is in itself contested, as recent historic art is classified as “modern” according to the bias of each succeeding moment. When the New York Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929, under the helm of its first director, Alfred Barr Jr., “modern” meant works created within the last fifty years. Works of art older than

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141 Ibid., 7-8.
142 Ibid., 46.
fifty years were deaccessioned and subsequently sold to the Metropolitan Museum. This guiding principle served the dual functions of ensuring the relevance of MoMA’s collection, whilst presenting high-quality and time-tested works for inclusion into the historic holdings of the Met. In 1953 the policy was revoked, and MoMA became a historic collection of modern art, thus enshrining modern art as history.\textsuperscript{143} This transition from strictly contemporary to a more traditional museum of modern art history evidences the severity of operational difficulty in maintaining a temporally bounded permanent collection, and how becoming a historic collection can both resolve and problematize this issue.

A more conceptual tension in regards to the collection of the contemporary in MoMAs and MoCAs is the investment of a historical condition in the art object. Whilst these museums are devoted to the contemporary, they inevitably raise their collected objects into a kind of historic consecration due to their identity as museums. Museums are sites of history-making, and they confer an auratic quality of historic importance onto the works in their holdings.\textsuperscript{144} The inevitable aura of museums positions contemporary works of art as candidates for art history and art canonization, selected from those of their peers that do not make it into MoMAs and MoCAs. The distinction of being selected for a museum’s permanent collection implies perpetuity, what Altshuler defines as becoming “the future’s past,” where contemporary works are “projected into the future, identified as playing a role in an anticipated history.”\textsuperscript{145} Removed from the circuits of art-making and art-dealing, the contemporary art object’s projection into the future gives it a place in an art-historical narrative that confers pastness; it becomes implicated in processes of history-making.

The second point of tension raised by Altshuler is the collection of contemporary art by traditional museums, which he defines as museums that intend “to preserve and display


\textsuperscript{144} Altshuler, \textit{Collecting the New}, 46.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 2.
works that have withstood the test of time.”¹⁴⁶ The traditional museum can also be termed a historic museum as it typically displays and collects from a locus of historic pre-eminence, collecting works of art that have maintained their favor as their contemporaries have disappeared from visibility. The preference for the time-tested work of art protects the quality of museum holdings from potentially flawed aesthetic and cultural judgments. However, when historic museums wish to bolster their contemporary collections they are faced with an art object for which this evaluation process is not possible.¹⁴⁷ Rather, they are collected on the basis of the perceived value of the work in future, which is projected based on the work’s novelty, market value, or the popularity of the artist. In his Making and Effacing Art (1991), Philip Fisher positions the contemporary critic as the architect of this projected future, whose essential task is “to historicize the present, to imagine it as the future’s past, and by that act to give or deny value to the individual work or artistic career.”¹⁴⁸ In this way the critic becomes the “advance scout of museum culture,” whose job is to select works for consideration into this historic framework.¹⁴⁹ The critic becomes the first art world agent to contextualize the contemporary work of art in and as historic canon. This projection of the work into the future effectively fixes it in the past. By locating the work in constructed art historic narratives and enfolding it in art history, the object is situated in relation to a number of its perceived predecessors and contemporaries.

In Visual Time (2013), Moxey challenges chronological time as an interpretive framework from which to understand art. He posits that art history tries to order its objects in order to “contain or tame them, and thus render them more susceptible to attributed meaning.”¹⁵⁰ Moxey argument is two-fold, and he begins by problematizing the notion of

¹⁴⁶ Altshuler, Collecting the New. 7-8.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 1.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 90.
¹⁵⁰ Moxey, Visual Time, 2.
universal and linear time as an ethnocentric Euro-American construct, which he argues does not prioritize or allow for other cultural conceptions of time.\textsuperscript{151} As noted in Chapter 1, Moxey presents the idea of heterochronic time as an alternative Western canonical time, arguing for an understanding of history sensitive to “many times existing at the same time.”\textsuperscript{152} Heterochrony thus rejects a single chronology of art history, especially in terms of a linear development of style and concept, as a neutral framework in which to understand art.

Moxey’s second argument cements this critique further by considering the implications of heterochrony for the individual work of art. He argues that if we divorce the work of art from “the horizon of its creation, then its status as an agent in the creation of its own reception, its anachronic power, shines through.”\textsuperscript{153} The encounter with the work of art divorced from a fixed historical interpretation would thus allow the work some degree of autonomy in producing its own meaning, and by extension its own history. In Chapter 1, Moxey’s ideas of heterochronic and anachronic time were used to elucidate the multiple temporalities in which Kawara’s art can exist in the studio and in living networks. Now, applying Moxey’s argument to conceptual art objects in a museum framework, a valid concern emerges in regard to systems of historical interpretation; how is the status of the work altered by its implication and inclusion in established narratives?

As noted earlier, Kawara’s Date Paintings exist in many temporalities simultaneously; they live at the time of their individual material realization, at the moment of their conceptual realization, and as part of the continuous production of the series. For example, \textit{18 MAI 2000} (Fig. 38), in the collection of Dia:Beacon, was painted in 2000, conceptually originated almost forty years prior, and simultaneously exists as part of a continuously realized idea. The conceptual gesture of the \textit{Today} series has a beginning in 1966 and and end in 2013, yet its

\textsuperscript{151} Moxey, \textit{Visual Time}, 173.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 3.
status as continuous ensures that each individual painting exists in the longer temporal frame of the entire series. The temporal existence shared by all Date Paintings is due to the constant and unchanging idea of painting uniting their conceptual existence, which Kawara “would subscribe to for the rest of his life.”\textsuperscript{154} Thus, whilst each Date Paintings has an individual time of materialization, its conceptual beginning and continued creation exist in a shared and communal temporality, challenging the idea of the painting belonging to any fixed and singular time. However, when in the museum collection, this material temporality takes precedence over the painting’s communal existence in the conceptual timeframe.

Dia:Beacon has thirty-five Date Painting in its collection, one from each year between 1966 and 2000. In the museum the paintings are hung in chronological order in their own gallery (Fig. 39). This linear mode of display situates the selection of Date Paintings in a narrative of artistic development. By ensuring that it has a representative of each year of Kawara’s production, Dia:Beacon amplifies the material time of each painting and historicizes each work in relation to its direct material predecessor and successor. This imposition of a historic narrative of development fixes each painting at the horizon of its material creation, refusing and subsuming the painting’s existence in multiple temporalities or as part of an organic human process. Dia:Beacon’s chronological mode of display and conscious collection of paintings from each year of production until 2000 crystallize the imposition of art historical time on Kawara’s work. The fact remains that the \textit{Today} series was a continuous and living process, maintained by the artist until his death. The confined and stabilized framework of this museum display thus prioritizes its own narrative imposition on the work, over the actual systems of the \textit{Today} series.

Whilst contemporary museums such as Dia:Beacon employ chronological time to organize their collections, historic museums also locate contemporary works in relation to

\textsuperscript{154} Guggenheim Museum, “Conversation between Jeffrey Weiss and Kasper König.”
their more temporally expansive collections. Historic museums serve as repositories and showrooms for pre-modern, modern, and post-modern objects alike, and through dependence on chronology and categorization they equalize these objects by levelling their interpretive framework. These historic museums present the forwards-movement of art history as a neutral site for all objects in their holdings, whether these objects were created to operate within museum conditions or not.

This equalizing of objects that have different relationships to the museum is inherently problematic. Objects in art collections that were created before the rise of museums in the 18th century were never intended to be displayed or preserved in the conditions enforced by the museum; a pre-modern object’s religious, utilitarian, or political purpose is thus suppressed, and it is given new value in terms of an aesthetic and historic interpretive framework. A second category of objects can be found in what Fischer terms the “museum candidates.” He argues that the rise of museums brought with it the creation of a new type of art object, the Modern work of art, which at its inception was intended for display and preservation within the museum. These objects are thus not distanced from their original purpose by their inclusion in the museum, but created for consideration in these historic collections, what Fisher calls “produced to exist in the afterlife.” The ubiquity of objects that were created for the museum framework in order to be encountered by the public and preserved in perpetuity, gave rise to a third category of museum object, namely the anti-institutional work of art. These works challenged familiar conventions of museum interpretation and display, such as aesthetic quality, permanence, and conventional art mediums. Often conceptual, minimal, or performative in nature, they gained prominence and value through their resistance to notions of value-construction and history-making, yet they were nevertheless collected and enfolded

155 Fisher, Making and Effacing Art, 27.
156 Ibid., 27.
in historic museum collections. The fact remains that whilst these objects may have been
created to upset and challenge traditional interpretive frameworks, they have ultimately been
subsumed within conventional museum paradigms. Whilst the Met’s selection of postcards
from *I Got Up* are materials that resist the very framework imposed upon them by the
museum, they have been categorized and contextualized within the structures of the Met’s
ideology. Placed in storage only to be resurrected for display when and if the museum desires,
the postcards are inevitably made static, and reduced to artefacts localized in a history of the
Met’s making.

Whilst objects have different relationships to the museum, they are equally enfolded
into new interpretive frameworks divorced from their original environments and contexts.
Many historic museums strive to have encyclopedic collections, assembling objects from
spatially and temporally disparate origins to create new communities of objects.157 This
process suppresses context by distancing the works from their world in order to create a pure
experience of history, within the presumed neutral white cube of today’s museum.158 Fisher
proposes that this relocation forms new collectives of art, where the public no longer
perceives the individual work but rather “relations between works of art, both what they have
in common and what in the sharpest way clashes in their juxtaposition.”159 The placement of
art objects within the museum space creates relationships among works of art by visually
establishing certain narratives of style, periods and purpose, locking each object within a set
history. The experience of walking through a museum is one of walking through histories
manifested by objects, the viewer meandering through spaces organized chronologically and
moving forwards through time.

158 See Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Los Angeles, CA:
University of California Press, 1976). O’Doherty seminal text argues that the modern gallery space is a closed
off space, in which the art object is isolated from everything external to itself, only to be consumed by the spatial
context.
The collection of works of contemporary art in encyclopedic collections, such as the inclusion of Kawara’s *I Got Up* at the Met, cements the historical localization which occurs in the museum. *I Got Up* is not currently on view at the Met and as such does not actively create physical relationships with objects in its vicinity. However, whilst the work is in museum storage and away from public view, its online collection record localizes it within art history and a community of objects. Underneath information on exhibition history and provenance, the Met has provided a “Timeline of Art History (2000-present)” in which *I Got Up* is categorized as part of the grouping “Conceptual Art and Photography” within a timeline of “Japan, 1900 A.D.-present.” These two categories allow the public to understand the work in relation to readymade histories and similar objects. Further down in the online record, the Met provides a list of “Related Objects,” all photographs by mostly Japanese contemporary artists. Hence, even without physical and public display Kawara’s work is still localized in relation to a community of objects. In short, *I Got Up* is relocated from a history of Kawara’s making, to one constructed by curators and art historians within the museum.

Works such as Kawara’s correspondence series is given meaning alongside the works of old masters, which relies on the uniqueness of the object and its autonomous value from others of its kind. Whilst the Met’s selection of postcards from *I Got Up* is but a small selection of objects from the years-long serial and conceptual work, these select postcards become burdened with the historic weight of the Met’s ideology and collections. They are no longer active components of Kawara’s production, but are divorced from the circulation of their fellow constituent postcards. These materials are now part of a set of historic relations where they are made to represent Kawara’s oeuvre within a greater canonical narrative.

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160 “Collection Record – *I Got Up.*”
161 Ibid.
alongside other works of correspondence art, photographs, the works of Japanese artists, and other conceptual materials.

The New York Museum of Modern Art has a greater selection of works by Kawara than the Metropolitan, and classifies the artist’s work in less encyclopedic terms. Its collection contains numerous works, none of which are currently on view,\footnote{As of April 7, 2017.} including four Date Paintings, the two artist’s books of One Million Years published by Michèle Didier in 1999, a recording of a live performance of One Million Years (Past and Future) published by the David Zwirner Gallery in 2000, twenty-eight postcards from I Got Up from 1970, and twenty-seven postcards from 1977. The collection records of the two selections from I Got Up are particularly fascinating. Each set of postcards was sent to different people, respectively Seth Siegelaub and art dealer Angela Westwater. Whilst Westwater gifted her selection directly to the museum, the 1970 postcards were exchanged to the museum by private collector Richard S. Zeisler. Another difference between the two selections is their museum classification; the postcards from 1970 are located in the “Drawings and Prints” department, whilst the 1977 postcards are in the “Paintings and Sculpture” department. Strangely, whilst the postcards are part of the same serial work and made of the same exact materials, they are categorized differently within the museum’s media framework. Thus the categorization disrupts the closed system of I Got Up, and undermines the cohesion of the serial system that rules Kawara’s practice. This classificatory system thus reveals the uncertainty, arbitrariness, and problems of placing conceptual materials into traditional museum categories.

Unlike the Met situation of Kawara’s work in relation to other works and greater historic, geographic, and stylistic narratives, MoMA merely lists their collection of the artist’s work alongside the exhibitions these works have been featured in. However, the fact remains that none of Kawara’s works are part of the museum’s permanent display; they are only
pulled out of their physical archival location for exhibitions, when they are situated amongst and related to other works through curatorial narratives. The MoMA exhibitions Kawara’s work has been featured in range from the conceptually germane “I Am Still Alive. Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawings” (March 23-September 19, 2011) to shows focused on form and materials, such as “Color Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today” (March 2-May 12, 2008). The former show places Kawara front and center, taking its thematic foundation from his telegram series. Its curatorial purpose is to display work of “profound truth expressed in almost immaterial form,” and the focus on Kawara is supported by the display of work by other artists, among them Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Robert Morris.163 The latter exhibition is vastly different, celebrating contemporary artists use of colour as a decisive formal gesture in arbitrary systems or ready-made materials, featuring work by Sherrie Levine and Damien Hirst.164 This contextualization of Kawara in such thematically disparate exhibitions, in different histories, and alongside artists with other intentions, practices, and strategies, demonstrates the immense influence of the curatorial vision on museum display Kawara’s work.

The museum’s interpretive framework is largely dependent on the work’s visual appearance and physical presence. The perceived neutrality of museums to convey the history of human expression relies on their objects and the authenticity of these objects. Pre-modern art objects and modern art, in which the physical object and the work are one and the same, suit the museum’s ideological foundation to collect, display, and preserve, allowing these works to be encountered by the public. However, for works that challenge conventional objecthood, inclusion into these collections requires some form of visual component to the

work. Like conceptual works of art, non-traditional or ephemeral products such as earth works and performance art, depend on documentation and material records to facilitate an encounter between the work and the public. Without video of a performance, photographs of a transitory earth work, or a written list of conceptual gestures, these works of art would not exist beyond their originary moment, memory, or the human mind. To the museum, a visual component or trace of the work must exist in order to ensure the work’s continued existence, or in other words, its preservation.

The museum’s intention to collect and display contemporary art alongside their historic collections, and to preserve contemporary art for future generations, is complicated by the variable materiality and often non-traditional requirements of display. For works of conceptual art, inclusion into historic collections requires a physical presence or trace that can be preserved and enfolded into the museum’s constructed narratives. Subject to the processes of selection and projection into the future, conceptual art materials become situated in the familiar museum frameworks of permanence and artefactuality. They in essence are translated from perfunctory materials entangled in living relationships, to objects that manifest the work and can be located in historic relation to other, more traditional, objects. Thus another phase change has occurred in the status of the conceptual art object; it is no longer subject to the consumption and differentiation of the art market and exhibition, but rather a collectible the museum will locate in the past and project into the future.

The Preservation of Kawara’s Conceptual Materials

The museum’s goal to preserve its collections for the future is complicated by the challenges of conserving conceptual works of art. These works are often invested with

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intellectual or symbolic meaning, and they derive this meaning from an artistic idea rather than the physical characteristics or material properties.¹⁶⁶ That is not to say their materialization is not meaningful, but that the materialization has meaning beyond the contained entity of the object itself. Often conceptual works are embodied in ephemeral or non-traditional materials which serve as the support for the conceptual gesture and are not meant to be permanent. To this purpose, unorthodox media such as text, image, or everyday objects clearly communicate their rejection of conventional art paradigms through their non-traditional materiality. Instead, they demand a public understanding that extends beyond their object status by confronting conventions of art-making and enduring, stable objecthood.

When conceptual works of art employ traditional art media they create conceptual meaning by unsettling the viewer’s expectations of that media. Whether they be traditional or non-traditional, these materials are not static, but dynamic objects that operate on multiple levels of meaning outside of their bounded physical presence. For example, whilst *I Got Up* are listed as “photomechanical prints” in the Met’s collection, they exist in multiple ways; to mention but a few, they are traces of living networks, agents of communication between the artist and other people, they record aspects of the artist’s everyday, and their status as postcards situate them within a banal and utilitarian vernacular. Thus, when such materials enter the museum, we must ask what their conceptual and non-traditional material status entails in terms of preservation.

As discussed in previous chapters of this thesis, conceptual art materials are perfunctory before they enter the paradigms of art-making that are perpetuated by art world systems. At the risk of conflating their meaning with their materiality, conservators must take heed to understand the conceptual work. Robyn Sloggett, in her treatise on the conservation of

the Australian artist Mike Parr’s work, claims that the materials of conceptual works “may be irrelevant of inappropriate as basis for treatment decisions.” Rather, she proposes that the conservator’s process should be based in an understanding of the conceptual properties, the very intellectual basis, for each work. The preservation of a work’s conceptual properties has traditionally not been the concern of conservators, but rather of curators, who interpret the work’s meaning. However, when confronted with conceptual art materials, Sloggett claims that conservators now have to consider interpretation of meaning as relevant to their processes. The preservation of conceptual art materials in museums is complicated by issues of context and meaning, rather than necessarily the physical condition of the materials. Whilst the drive to stabilize the visual and physical properties of an object is paramount in the conservation practices of the museum, original conceptual art materials may be reproducible or even irrelevant to the continued existence of the work. Some conceptual materials are mere records of the work have been created, whilst others can be mass-manufactured, or even infinitely disseminated as image or text. Other materials may even degrade, such as Joseph Beuys *Fettbatterie* (1963), a sculpture comprised of felt, fat, and cardboard (Fig. 40). As such, the preservation of original materials may not be paramount in the conservation of the conceptual work, and conservators have to take other factors of meaning into consideration when determining a course of action.

Conceptual art materials, regardless of whether they are materialized through non-traditional or traditional forms of art, must therefore be considered in terms of their meaning rather than their object status in questions of preservation. Conservators must therefore approach these materials in due course, and only after ascertaining how material properties allow the conceptual work to be realized, understood, and ethically enter the museum archive.

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168 Ibid., 317.
169 Ibid., 317.
A contextual study of the work’s meaning, or an artist’s statement expressing their artistic intentions and their understanding of the materials used, are useful tools to understand the best course of action for the work’s future.\textsuperscript{170} If an artist is deceased, museum professionals can attempt to glean the creator’s intentions from written statements or interviews. Living artists offer an easier solution; they can be consulted as an authority on the preservation of their own work, giving curators and conservators valuable guidance that ensures both the continued authenticity of the work and the validity of their preservation decisions.

Several scholars agree with Sloggett’s proposition that the artist’s statement should be the guiding principle in conservation practices. Glenn Wharton, Associate Professor of Museum Studies at New York University, proposes a number of models for contemporary art conservation that challenge the conventions of preserving the authentic object above all else. He presents solutions such as visual archives between museums to share information about artistic intent, non-permanent preservation strategies using new technologies or even installing reproduced materials, or interviews or questionnaires given to artists by museums to ascertain their specific intentions for their work.\textsuperscript{171} Ethical concerns to honor artistic intent and meaning becomes another way of ensuring a work’s authenticity in the future; by preserving the work to the artist’s specifications, a museum can claim the work’s continued authenticity even after the artist’s death or any material degradation. Professor Oscar Chiantore of the University of Turin and conservator Antonio Rava, in their \textit{Conserving Contemporary Art: Issues, Methods, Materials, and Research} (2012), also hold the artist’s opinion sacred, noting that the conservation of ideas “requires the safekeeping of the artist’s specifications as well as the conservation or reproduction of the material and the technologies that the artist prescribed for the representation of his or her idea.”\textsuperscript{172} Without honoring the

\textsuperscript{170} Sloggett, “Beyond the Material,” 327.
\textsuperscript{171} Wharton, “Conserving Contemporary Art,” 173-175.
artist’s original idea and the elements used to represent their concept, the work will cease to
be authentic and become merely a “lifeless facsimile.”

However, whilst these scholars all converge in their shared respect for the artist’s intent, deferring to the artist’s own authority can be difficult for many museums, both in practical terms and in relation to the conceptual meaning of the work. Sloggett emphasizes that artist’s statements are often not enough to ascertain the meaning of a work. Firstly, unless a dialogue takes place between artist and conservator where the latter can ascertain all issues that can occur in the work’s life, the conservator will often have to infer or assume certain responses to the work’s changing materiality. Another issue is that works of art, especially conceptual works, are not bound by the artist’s own intended meaning. Rather they can present concepts and critical meanings that the artist did not foresee or comment on when presenting the work to the public; they are by virtue of their conceptualism made to be open-ended. As conceptual works are not bounded solely within their material properties, their meanings can change over time. Just as the functional pre-museum object is divorced from its purpose or utility, and read as aesthetic or culturally significant in today’s museum, so can a conceptual work be read differently in the future. However, both the utility and the aesthetic value of the pre-museum object is dependent on its material properties, and thus not in conflict with conversations of preservation. In contrast, the conceptual work of art must be understood in terms of dynamic materiality, dependent on conceptual gestures that may or may not be lost if the material changes. The conservator can thus be faced with the problem of whether to impose their own authority onto the work, and preserve materials without deferring to the artist’s explicit intentions.

173 Chiantore, Rava, and Dell’Aquila. Conserving Contemporary Art, 174.
Kawara’s production presents a unique set of challenges in terms of its preservation in museum collections; the artist’s lack of public statements creates little guidance for those who are tasked to ensure the work’s continued existence. Whilst the literature on conservation clearly favors preservation guided by artist’s statements, Kawara leaves no overt intentionality in his works; the works exist without the artist’s known agency as he has removed his own affective presence from the work. The removal of affective presence interior to the work, combined with Kawara’s refusal to speak in public, leads to a distinct lack of authorized preservation solutions from the artist. Conservators and curators are thus taxed with preserving the work for the future on their own authority and assumptions.

The materials of *I Got Up* and *I Am Still Alive*, Kawara’s correspondence series, are atypical forms of art created by real world materials and respectively chosen by or facilitated by the artist’s production process. The preservation of Kawara’s postcards or telegrams are determined by the professionals who decide their material future. Unlike conceptual art materials that confirm to traditional art forms such as sculpture or painting, these works hold little to no trace of the artist’s labor. It is here appropriate to again mention Robert Rauschenberg’s *This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So* (1961) (Fig. 10) as the antecedent to these works. Rauschenberg’s portrait consists of a telegram, sent to Iris Clert for the inauguration of her eponymous gallery in Paris. Rauschenberg’s portrait redefines the portrait as a conceptual gesture, destabilizing the genre of portraiture through the typographic correspondence material. Like Kawara’s works of mail art, Rauschenberg defies aesthetic considerations such as figurative representation and the artist’s hand to proclaim his own gesture as the work of art. In this manner, the artist’s conceptual process takes precedence over conventions of laborious art-making. Like Rauschenberg’s portrait, *I Got Up* and *I Am Still Alive* would hold the same material properties if they were duplicated, and any facsimile would not necessarily be distinguishable from the original material. Whilst the appearance of
the telegram could differ in a facsimile created through a correspondence company, it would still be produced through the same real world system. Besides, the appearance of the telegrams was not controlled by Kawara himself, but created by some unknown third party working for the telegraph network. Similarly, any postcard identical to the originals chosen by Kawara for *I Got Up* could be stamped with the same time and date, and yield the same visual experience to the viewer.

One could of course argue that whilst the materials used in these correspondence series can be duplicated, they would not be *authentic* works by Kawara. However, the fact remains that certain works by Kawara, including *I Got Up*, have been duplicated and circulated in the art market as artist’s copies and multiples. Kawara’s volumes of text on paper, *One Million Years* (1970-98), *I Met* (1968-1979), and *I Went* (1968-1979), all exist in limited editions sold and produced by publishing house Michèle Didier in collaboration with the artist. A limited edition of twelve volumes, 90 copies numbered and signed and 10 artist’s copies, extend the work’s material presence. Neither Kawara’s original conceptual materials nor these duplicates were directly created by the artist’s labor. However, unlike the originals, these duplicates were manufactured for immediate sale and were therefore never embedded in living networks. The other central difference between these duplicates and the original postcards is their form; the original materials of *I Got Up* are stamped and sent through postal services by the artist, whilst the duplicates exist as photocopies and are bound in volumes. These volumes are listed on the sales website as “produced and published in 2007 by mfc-michèle didier,” yet, like the original postcards, these materials are also authenticated by Kawara. Thus if such a duplicate work were to enter a museum collection, the collection

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would have an authentic copy of the work even if it had not passed through the same processes and real-world systems as the original materials. The duplicate materials may be different from the originals, but they are still authenticated. We must therefore pose the question as to whether this attested authenticity by the artist allows the copies to be understood as the conceptual equals of the original materials.

Whilst duplicates are authenticated by the artist, the hand-made nature of the original materials used in *I Got Up* prevents their conceptual value from being equal to their facsimiles. The original postcards were selected and touched by the artist, subsequently stamped, and sent to the mailboxes of others in order to become part of living networks. The original materials therefore carry an aura of the artist’s process, which is not insignificant to the conceptual gesture of the work. The duplicate works do not contain trace of the artist’s hand, nor were they produced within the framework of the day stamped on the postcard (Fig. 41). They therefore lack not only the aura of the artist’s process and participation in living networks, but also the multi-layered temporality of the primary materials. Without their transformation in the postal system the duplicates can never hold the same conceptual properties of travel and communication as the original materials. The preservation of the original materials of *I Got Up* is therefore not made redundant by the existence of duplicates. Rather a conservator may be given extra incentive to preserve these materials by virtue of their added conceptual value produced by Kawara’s strict systems of art-making.

Unlike these unorthodox materials, the paintings of Kawara’s *Today* series lend themselves to traditional conservation practices by virtue of their conventional medium. Traditional art objects are often stabilized or restored in conservation processes, with the intent to retain the object’s original appearance and material authenticity, or to stabilize objects that have changed over time. Whilst their conceptual gesture is imperative to their art value, the Date Paintings’ very nature as paintings allow conservators to approach them with
the intent to prevent their material degradation. Kawara’s paintings are matte and not
varnished, and thus very susceptible to deterioration. If the canvas began to crackle and show
unevenness, its monochromatic appearance would be damaged and its visual unity
interrupted, and by extension its unity with the rest of the series would be interrupted. Their
conventional art form thus situates the Date Paintings within a framework of traditional
conservation practices.

Each canvas in the *Today* series is inherently a unique object, and as a product of
Kawara’s temporally delimited physical labor and process it retains an aura of authenticity
and permanence. The fact that Kawara ground the pigments, primed the canvas, and painted
the singular date strengthens this auratic quality. If a painting was destroyed it seems
inherently wrong to create a facsimile and accept this new canvas as the original painting’s
equal. Unlike Kawara’s other conceptual materials the painted canvases of the series are
imbued with an aura of material labor, perhaps due to their dual status as paintings and
process. The artist’s system of production, painting a date within the temporal boundaries of
that moment in time, is embodied in the painted canvas. A reproduction would thus remove
the gesture of temporally bounded labor from the conceptual work. The materiality of the
*Today* series is therefore imperative to our understanding of the work, and without the
authentic materials the philosophical meaning of the work as process may be lost.

Christian Scheidemann, a conservator who has never met Kawara, claims that the
artist’s labor is an imperative part of the *Today* series. Writing in *On Kawara: Tribute*
Scheidemann notes that “to the conservator’s eyes, the *Today* series go far beyond the
conceptual gesture of writing dates on a stretched canvas.”\(^{177}\) He expounds on the importance
of Kawara’s process to argue that these works “represent an artist who – with the utmost

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attention and experience – chooses the finest materials, custom-made frames, first-quality Belgian canvas, and the finest acrylic paint available.”¹⁷⁸ The careful choices made by the artist are evident in the painted canvases, and they attest to an attention to materiality that is not at odds with the conceptual gesture. Rather, the emphasis on hand-made material perfection is in itself a conceptual gesture, inextricably tying to the canvas the hours that make up the artist’s daily life. Unlike the ready-made materials of I Got Up or I Am Still Alive, the fact of Kawara working with materials selected and produced with clear intent and time-consuming labor, emphasizes the physical process of creation. Whilst the original postcards carry conceptual value by virtue of the material participation in postal systems, the utmost perfection and the preservation of their original material state is not of great importance. The original postcards only matter in so far as they can effectively communicate and embody the conceptual gesture imbued within them by Kawara and their participation in networks of correspondence. In contrast, the continued appreciation of the Date Paintings demand exact preservation of their original state; without the perfection of the painted canvas, the artist’s conceptual gesture, evidenced in the laborious creation process, is lost.

The Conceptual Objectified

In Society of the Spectacle, a seminal Situationist theory which argues that our society is mediated by objects and images, French theorist Guy Debord posits that the modern spectacle is “a Weltanschauung which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified.”¹⁷⁹ Debord claims that the structure of our society is mediated and colonized by commodity objects, and that our social life has degraded from “being into having” and “having into appearing.”¹⁸⁰ The transformation of social structures

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., “thesis 17.”
from active and “being” to static and “appearing,” crystallizes the simplification and commodification of complex cultural works when they enter certain social dynamics. Debord’s notion of the spectacle as materialized Weltanschaung – as philosophy of life – can be found in the tense encounter between the conceptual artwork and art world structures; as materials of conceptual works are translated into commodities, objects whose value is bound to their material, they are equalized with “all former moments of art.”181 The museum public now has the possibility of consuming all art of the past as one whole, and experience art history in its totality. Debord argues that in our contemporary museum age “artistic communication no longer exists.” He posits that direct interactions between artist and public through the work of art is negated by the framework of art history, which burdens and overwhelms the singular relationship between one work and its audience.182 Each work in the museum has thus lost its “specific conditions of communication” with its viewer, only to be made equal to all other works of the past in an process of art historic subsumption.183 This loss of a work’s unique complexities occurs once the work of art is enfolded into the museum and joins the “collection of souvenirs” that is the permanent collection.184

When understood in terms of Debor’s theory of the spectacle, the collection and display of conceptual art materials in museums negates the conceptual gestures and philosophical properties of the individual work. If we return to the works of Kawara, the selection of constituent materials from his serial works and the equation of these slices with the complete work, objectifies the materials of the artist’s conceptual gesture. Each constituent object in the Today series and I Got Up is transformed into a collectible; an object with an individual market value, a unique exhibition history, collected by the museum and projected into the future seperately from the rest of the serial work’s materials. Part of

181 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, “thesis 189.”
182 Ibid., “thesis 189.”
183 Ibid., “thesis 189.”
184 Ibid., “thesis 189.”
Kawara’s conceptual gesture is the recording of the artist’s own history within the materials that are part of each work. Yet as a constituent object becomes collectible it is divorced from the artist’s self-made history, only to become a relic of the artist’s production situated within an art history told through objects. Museums are institutions of cultural history-making; as conceptual materials are collected they become objects localised in an art historical past, preserved and projected into the future. Through this process of translation, the materials of conceptual art are removed from a context and history of the artist’s making, to one constructed by museums.

However, whilst Kawara’s conceptual materials may be objectified, their situation in the museum’s interpretive and historicizing framework also positions them to disrupt these very systems. From the dates painted on the canvases of the Today series, to the times inscribed on the postcards of I Got Up and the telegrams of I Am Still Alive, Kawara’s materials are the temporal markers of the artist’s existence. By embodying their own time these works present mind as matter, as the material records or condensations of the artist’s existence. When divorced from the rest of the series, living networks, and Kawara’s self-made history, each materialization becomes objectified, and now only announces its own temporality. Upon entering the museum, the simplicity of this gesture serves to amplify the many impositions placed upon it by this very framework. By negating all external referents but time itself, Kawara’s conceptual art objects ultimately become tabula rasa when objectified; their newly restricted interpretation underscoring the imposition of institutional chronologies, categories, and interpretive frameworks. The inclusion in the museum transforms the material and conceptual status of the object into a site of institutional critique. Thus, even as these objects are subsumed and altered within new interpretive frameworks, they retain some level of agency with which to reveal, resist, and unwrite the external properties and narratives imposed upon them. The afterlife of Kawara’s art objects may
therefore not be the death of their conceptual gesture. Rather, they may have gained new conceptual meaning.
As posited by Nancy, and quoted at the beginning of this thesis, the problem raised by On Kawara’s practice is “How can we expose what is unexposable?”\textsuperscript{185} Now we may suggest that this question has implications that extend beyond how the artist materialized his own time and self-existence. On their journey through life, the objects of Kawara’s production reveal a multiplicity of meanings and structures. They are inherently adaptable by virtue of their limited referential network and obfuscation of the artist’s identity, and as such are able to gain new meaning and status as they transition from site to site. Their intersection of simple materiality and complex conceptualism allow for infinite interpretations by the public, the art world, and history.

Kawara’s ideas are not trying to escape or resist the confines of their visual realization, but they operate through their materiality. As such the materiality of the works is irreducible to aesthetic or visual characteristics, but have value insofar as they facilitate and create the conceptual meaning of the work. By creating works of art that negate the value of the individual material through emphasis on conceptual gestures, seriality, and unchanging production, the materials are freed from the convention of the entity of the autonomous object for appreciation. Thus, by allowing the material to take on cognitive significance within its very materiality, each material breaks down the boundaries of the self-contained object and invites new interpretations. This rupturing of material boundaries opens the floodgates of multiple meanings; each object becomes a site of numerous temporalities, negotiations, challenges, connections, and disruptions as it moves through different contexts and environments.

\textsuperscript{185} Nancy and Sparks, \textit{Multiple Arts: The Muses II}, 192.
Kawara created an entire system of art that was not only for public consideration and consumption, but also existed as a personal archive and ecosystem of living networks. Consequently, the impossibility of collecting, exhibiting, or archiving these complex systems and active processes has resulted in the consecration of individual objects. The continuous redefinition of the conceptual work occurred by a series of phase changes, as the work was translated from idea, to enactment, to a consecrated and archived object. In the artist’s studio and in living networks, the materials of the *Today* series, and correspondence series *I Got Up* and *I Am Still Alive* become embroiled in networks of associated meanings. The processes of Kawara’s execution of the painted canvas and the participation and realization of postcards and telegrams in real-world postal systems, contextualizes and rethinks the intrinsic properties material. Through adapting traditional and non-traditional forms of art, Kawara transforms both material and concept through one another, altering the conventions of the medium to shape the conceptual gesture.

This dependent and fulfilling relationship between materiality and conceptuality is unequivocally altered when the work enters the art world. Upon their reception in auction houses and exhibitions conceptual art objects are no longer merely the locus of this relationship, but also index to the work’s movements and engagement with the art world. External properties of value and category are ascribed to the object, producing problems and contradictions in its conceptual and material status. Finally, with the entrance into the permanent museum collection, and the relocation of each material entity to a new interpretive framework, the intersection of materiality and concept gives rise to institutional critique. As a Date Painting, a postcard or a telegram is removed from Kawara’s own relationships, temporality, and history, the agency of its conceptual materiality emerges. Removed from their original context, the quotidian materiality of each individual object reveals nothing but the impositions of history and interpretation placed upon it by the institution. Thus, whilst the
status of Kawara’s materials is altered as they transition from studio, to market and exhibition, to museum collections, the objects are never divorced from the conceptual. By realizing the conceptual through the material and making the material conceptual, Kawara’s production presents mind as matter, offering the material as both embodiment and agent of the conceptual work.
bibliography


Figures

Figure 1: Action shot of On Kawara as a young man, n.d.

Figure 2: On Kawara, selection of canvases from the *Today* series, 1966-2013.
Figure 3: On Kawara, selection of postcards from *I Got Up*, 1968-1979, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.
Figure 4: On Kawara, APR 16 1977, New York, from I Met, 1968-79.
Figure 5: On Kawara, 3 FEV 1969, Rio de Janeiro, from I Went, 1968–79.
Figure 6: On Kawara, MAR 24 1970, from I Read, 1968-1979.

Figure 8: On Kawara, *One Million Years Volume*, 1970-1998.
Figure 9: On Kawara *One Million Years*, Installation View at David Zwirner, 2009.

Figure 10: Robert Rauschenberg, *This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So*, 1961.
Figure 11: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965, Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 12: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.
Figure 13: Yoko Ono, *Painting to Be Stepped On*, 1960/61.

Figure 14: On Kawara, *JAN. 4, 1966*, 1966.
Figure 15: On Kawara, 24 FEV. 1969, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1969.
Figure 16: Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting*, 1960.

Figure 17: Frank Stella, *Zambesi*, 1959.

Figure 20: Twitter account by Pall Thayer, On Kawara, I Am Still Alive, continuous from 2009, Screenshot March 31, 2017.
Both Michael Baldwin and myself accept the day we have each been allocated. The work will be sent to you within the next two weeks. It will comprise three or four sheets of typewritten 'work' from each of us.

Both Terry Atkinson and myself accept the day we have each been allocated. The work will be sent to you within the next two weeks. It will comprise three or four sheets of typewritten 'work' from each of us.
My project may be one of two possible things, or both things.

1. **Overturning Rocks.** I will select a site or network of sites, I don’t know where yet, and photograph what is under the rocks. Next I will trace the trail on a map, and show the points where I overturned the rocks.

2. **Mirror Trails.** I will select a trail and photograph a mirror on the trail at various indeterminate intervals. The trail will be traced on a map.

*Figure 23: Robert Smithson, My project may be one of two possible things, “One Month,” March 28, 1969.*
STEPHEN KAL TENBACH, New York

Every art expression has a effect.

Every effect is a causative force producing another effect.

The chain of influence can diminish in power.

The power of the chain can increase.

The chain can branch at every link.

The chain and its branches can develop in any direction.

The direction and strength of the chain may be determined at every link by an artist who has the desire to do so.

Desire often results from an understanding of the process.

Understanding may be gained through observation of existing chains.

The critical opinion expressed as a result of this show provides opportunity for observation of a secondary link.

Figure 24: Stephen Kaltenbach, Every Art Expression Has a Effect, "One Month," March 16, 1969.
1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built. 
Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

L.W.

Figure 25: Lawrence Weiner, *Statement of Intent*, January Show, 1969.

Figure 26: Lawrence Weiner, *An Object tossed from one country to another*, “One Month”, March 30, 1969.
Figure 27: On Kawara, *Journals, 1972, 1966-2013.*


Figure 32: Installation View: One Million Years Calendars, On Kawara—Silence, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 6–May 3, 2015.

Figure 33: Installation View: One Million Years Live Reading, On Kawara—Silence, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 6–May 3, 2015.

Figure 36: On Kawara, selection from *I Got Up*, 1970, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 37: Classification of *I Got Up*, Online Collection Record, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 38: On Kawara, *18 MAI 2000*, 2000, Dia Art Foundation.

Figure 39: Dia:Beacon, On Kawara Gallery.
Figure 40: Joseph Beuys, *Fettbatterie*, 1963, Tate.

Figure 41: On Kawara, *I Got Up*, 2008, Michèle Didier.