

Bochner's Intermittent Objects: Aesthetics, Embodiment and Affect in Conceptual Art (2 volumes)

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This thesis argues for the significance of embodiment; both of subject and object in the encounter with works by Mel Bochner. It aims to contribute to the broadening accounts of historical conceptual art that have arisen since its re-evaluation began with exhibitions and critical anthologies dating from the 1990s. Over the last decade the lenses of romanticism (Heiser), systems (De Salvo), globalism (Camnitzer) and analytical aesthetics (Goldie and Schellekens, Crowther), have contributed further perspectives. // This thesis examines how Bochner's role as a critic and artist exemplified the conflation of theory and practice into conceptual art at its inception, but how this obdurate refusal of the logic of dematerialization set him apart. His engagement with analytical philosophy as it turned to linguistic models was significantly augmented by his turn to phenomenology. The resulting investigations into the play between materiality, language and the body straddle his writing and studio production. Bochner's works propose an aesthesiology to the viewer which allows for active reflection upon the constant play between our minds, our bodies and the world. Tracing the objects that comprise Bochner's early works (1966-1973) through time and space, and examining them through the institutional frames of gallery, studio, photograph and text, reveals how their spare means and intermittent existence contribute specifically to an affective response to them. // Engaging the work of Michel Serres on the body and its relationship to language, as well as with recent work in affect theory (O'Sullivan, Best, Massumi), and the theories of the aesthetics of reading and writing (Barthes, Tisserand, Scott), this thesis investigates the specific case of Bochner and argues for its relevance to the expanding critical discourse around conceptualism. It opens a space between art historical philosophical and curatorial approaches; and aims to prove that an extended account of the richness of our bodily engagement with conceptual art objects, including language, is overdue.