

# Part I

# Editorial

## Maja Wismer

This issue of *OnCurating* is dedicated to artistic ephemera on the occasion of the exhibition project *They Printed It! Invitation cards, press releases, inserts and other forms of artistic (self-)marketing* at Kunsthalle Zurich (21 November 2015 – 7 February 2016). Along with the presentation at the Kunsthalle, which will change on a weekly basis, the project also includes seminars for university students in Zurich, a blog, and a public workshop with international participants. The first part of this issue aims to contextualize the broad category of ephemera, including the invitations, press releases, and magazine advertisements mentioned in the title, and to reflect the numerous voices of the participants in the project. The dominant format of the texts presented here is the conversation. The second part of this issue is introduced by Dorothee Richter, and it consists of a project on (self-) advertisement by contemporary artists. The project was conceived and developed by students of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). During the period of the exhibition *They Printed It!*, the visitors have the opportunity to print out these „(self-) advertisements“ in the exhibition space, and now the current readers of this issue can benefit from their digital format and explore them as the advertisement part of the journal in the printed version.

Ephemera, aside from their common trait as media of communication produced to be distributed at a specific moment in time, are a nebulous category that is defined differently depending on one's point of view. Historically, with the exception of Dada, Surrealism, and the "father" of Western contemporary art, Marcel Duchamp, ephemera became increasingly relevant after the Second World War as ambivalent products (part means of communication, part art) of artistic activities. At this time, as Clemens Krümmel wrote, the "Harpo Marx model, which presents a modern author who knows the rules of the game and thus above all creates chaos," had become established among contemporary artists who also worked outside of the studio or didn't have a studio in the first place.<sup>1</sup> Most of these ephemera were printed items that were conceived as (self-)marketing materials to be circulated—if not by mail, then by other means—and that in some cases revealed production contexts, played with areas of responsibility, and maintained networks by naming other participants (curators, sponsors, lenders, etc.) in addition to the artists themselves. Self-reflexive action in the public arena carries the same weight of credibility as the symbolic capital of an institution, a publisher, a gallery, or a private collection in the context of which something takes place. In general, implicitly or explicitly, such ephemera comment on the art world or the economic system in which artists necessarily participate if they have decided on a career in this field. In her review of the exhibition *The Design Show* curated by Jean-Noël Herlin in 1993, Roberta Smith wrote: "Invitations are style statements in a minor key, ancillary artworks of a collective sort. Designed by artists, by graphic designers, by art dealers and museum curators—usually a combination of the above—they are the advance guard for the real thing. Their merit is judged in the very act of reading one's mail."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, when ephemera not only serve to announce an exhibition, for instance, but are also the material evidence of a performance, or the work itself in the sense of conceptual art, their classification becomes unclear, and the categories are blurred. And so it is not surprising that institutional art collections have tended to avoid such materials until recently; after all, it was too much trouble to store them, especially when the respective responsibilities among curators, librarians, and archivists are unclear, not to mention the challenges that exhibiting these documents entails for modern institutions oriented toward autonomous artworks that traditionally require contemplative viewing. In 1983, the director of the Kunstmuseum Krefeld at the time, Gerhard Storck, known for his exhibitions of American conceptual art in the 1970s, remarked with frustration: "You must ask private collectors to show you this art simply due to the fact that its materials require personal care. [...] If this art consists of words, images, or symbols between a few pages of a book, then there must be someone who, after eating, and after washing his hands, opens the book up to these pages."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Storck recognized that those who were opposed to the ideals of as wide a distribution as possible associated with ephemera were private collectors. Today, by contrast, a reflective approach to ephemera is part of the system, which is conscious of the artistic or institutional credibility that is judged based on ephemera. Along with artists who see ephemera as part of their work and reflect on their exhibiting as a form of publication, like the conception of printed materials themselves—at least in regard to the presentation of historical art within institutions—the "institutional and critical neglect of artists' ephemera" noted by Steven Leiber and Todd Alden<sup>4</sup> is no longer prevalent. On the contrary, it appears as if the legacy of conceptual art, which required transparency with regard to production and distribution as part of the work, has now become established as a curatorial method. In light of the global situation, artworks that are created "cut off" from any societal context can no longer be credibly presented. The earlier in the twentieth or even the nineteenth century that art was created, the more ephemera in the exhibition space take on the role of objects that are trapped in their time and recall a historical situation through their own media of paper, illustrations, and language.<sup>5</sup>

In a discussion, David Senior, who works as a bibliographer in the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, remarks on this reorientation of museum exhibitions from the perspective of someone who has been able to discern curators' interest in artists' books and ephemera from the fact that the status of his department within the museum is changing. Rare today is an exhibition that does not reflect the integration of art into its historical time by including ephemera. The question of what the ephemera of the future will look like and whether they will continue to record the details of (art-)historical developments remains to be answered. Senior is convinced that publishing will continue to be a way for artists to present their works to the public according to their own ideas. Dealing with historical documents is one part of Senior's work. Searching for an approach to archiving that is relevant to the present with what is currently an overwhelming amount of digital ephemera in circulation is another. Printing a screenshot and placing it in a folder, as is common practice in most cases, is a strange anachronism that requires an updating of the discourse. In his own curatorial work, most recently for the acclaimed exhibition *Please Come to the Show* (New York, 2013; Liverpool, 2014), he is primarily interested in ephemera that are not only perceived as an artistically interesting product, but furthermore bear traces of their actual circulation. In his daily work with ephemera, Senior is fascinated by the idea that these objects were sent, passed around, and read—in short, that, before they were archived, ephemera had a real life out in the world.

AA Bronson, whose name, along with his work as an artist with General Idea (1967–1994), has been synonymous for twenty years with Printed Matter, Inc.—the shop that is considered by aficionados to be a reference point and meeting place for all kinds of ephemera, artists' books, and zines—speaks about how magazines and multiples were crucial to his beginnings as an artist. The geographic location of Canada in general and the long distances between cities made publishing and sending printed matter almost a necessity in order to stay current with what was happening in other places in the art world. Bronson's remarks offer a vivid illustration that ephemera have a life "outside." By sending printed matter by mail, especially with *FILE* magazine by General Idea as well as the shop Art Metropole in Toronto, Bronson and his fellow artists established an incredibly efficient and far-reaching pre-digital network on which they successfully built their international careers.

The art historian Barbara Preisig, who wrote her dissertation on ephemera of American conceptual art from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, is interested in these network strategies from a historical point of view. Her study focuses on the artistic practices of Eleanor Antin, Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Adrian Piper, and Yoko Ono. She sees the period's artistic concepts of self-marketing as on the one hand closely linked to concepts of advertising that emerged at the same time, like those that were developed and sold on Madison Avenue in New York, and on the other hand as precursors for the demands of the contemporary, post-capitalist world of work that dominates all of our jobs. Her specific interest in ephemera is based on the fact that they are usually used for self-marketing and can occasionally also be art—that is, on the ambivalence that makes these products difficult to classify and has only recently made them attractive objects for institutions.

The reprint of a text from 2001 by Anne Mœglin-Delcroix, a French art historian and expert on printed matter and artists' books, presents a wide range of artistic uses of printed matter. "Art for the Occasion," the title of her text, which appeared at the time in the standard work on the subject, *Extra Art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera, 1960–1999*, emphasizes the time-dependent quality of ephemera, the element that unites historically, geographically, and discursively different positions. Mœglin-Delcroix's text attests to her French background—an indication that the reception of ephemera in daily life depends on what mailing lists one belongs to, what exhibitions one sees, and what magazines one reads. Her text from nearly fifteen years ago shows that, even though there is currently a great deal of interest in printed matter and everything that circulates under the name of ephemera, this discussion ties in with a previous one. The current situation differs in that, in view of what is largely a continuation of these artistic concepts, the medium of print still exists, but presumably assumes a different role. After all, today communication takes place digitally, even though our perception is still influenced by which e-mail lists we belong to and what Twitter accounts we follow.

In the conversation "Unraveling the Exhibits," the curator and director of Kunsthalle Zurich Daniel Baumann, the artist Marianne Mueller, and the critic and curator Martin Jäggi talk about the reasons and impetus for the exhibition project *They Printed It! Invitation cards, press releases, inserts and other forms of artistic (self-) marketing*. The foundation of the show is the curator's collection—a relatively uncommon situation for institutional art exhibitions. This collection, as is typical of ephemera, is closely linked with his biography and at first took shape almost incidentally; since the mid-1990s Baumann has increased his collecting with regard to artistic strategies of dealing with institutional demands. Based on a series of examples, Baumann, Mueller, and Jäggi discuss artistic influences on institutional printed matter; they remark on an affinity among Swiss institutions for ambitious design,

and they analyze invitations and their digital formats as those places in art where power struggles between various players and interest groups become visible.

### Notes

1 Clemens Krümmel, "Der Tod des Autors (Spoilers!), Dokumentation, und 'Deleted Scenes'," Helmut Draxler (ed.), *Shandyismus: Autorschaft als Genre, Secession Wien, Kunsthaus Dresden, Merz Akademie Stuttgart, 2007. Exhibition catalogue*, p. 155.

2 Roberta Smith, 1993. "Art Invitations As Small Scraps Of History, Gallery View," *The New York Times*, May 16. Accessed 26.11.2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/16/arts/gallery-view-art-invitations-as-small-scraps-of-history.html>

3 Gerhard Storck, "Wahrnehmung; Aneignung; Darstellung. Die Sammlung Reiner Speck, 1983," Julian Heynen (ed.), *Gerhard Storck. Es besteht ein nicht erklärbarer Zusammenhang*, DuMont, Köln, p. 252.

4 Steven Leiber and Todd Alden, "Extra Art: Surveying Artists' Ephemera, 1960-1999," Pilar Perez (ed.), *Extra Art: A Survey of Artists' Ephemera, 1960-1999*, Smart Art Press: Distributed by RAM Publications, Santa Monica, CA, 2001. Exhibition catalogue, p. 21.

5 This method is also used for older art—for instance, with books. However, the discussion of ephemera is tied to the possibilities of technical reproducibility.

### Captions

1 Ghislain Mollet-Viéville's photo spreads and advertisements installed during the launch of the first issue of PROVENCE magazine as part of an exhibition curated by Egija Inzule and Tobias Kaspar at Cafe Hammer, Basel, June 2009.

2 Installation view, *IM FULL OF BYARS. James Lee Byars – A Homage*, Kunstmuseum Bern, 2009, Photo: Kunstmuseum Bern.

3 Clemens Krümmel, *Der Tod des Autors (Spoilers!)*, Vitrine, Helmut Draxler (ed.), *Shandyismus: Autorschaft als Genre, Secession Wien, Kunsthaus Dresden, Merz Akademie Stuttgart, 2007. Exhibition catalogue, 2007*, pp. 150/151.

4 Installation view, *Dwan, Los Angeles / New York: The Ephemera of a Gallery, 1959–1971*, Specific Object, New York, 2001.

5 Hinrich Sachs, *Don't tell me the result - I'm videoing it! Printed matter, Drucksachen, Imprimés*, Salon Verlag, Köln, 1997, pp. 14/15.

6, 7 James Lee Byars, *LETTERSHOW*, Galerie Toni Gerber, 1975, Kunstmuseum Bern, Sammlung Toni Gerber (donation), Inv. Nr. D 1996.674.

8 Installation view, *Posters Hanging in European Collections, 16 novembre – 20 décembre 1989*, Sous-sol, curatorial program, ESAV (HEAD). Photo: Claudio Merlini, Geneva.

9 Installation view, *Colección Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía*, © Photographic Archives Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

10 Installation view, *Please Come to the Show, Part I (1960–1980)*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013.

11, 12 Installation views, *The Design Show. Exhibition Invitations in the U.S.A. 1940–1992*, Exit Art, The First World, New York, 1993. Photograph: Lamay Photo. Courtesy of the Fales Library at New York University.

13 Installation view, *They Printed It! Invitation cards, press releases, inserts and other forms of artistic (self-)marketing*, Kunsthalle Zurich, 2015.

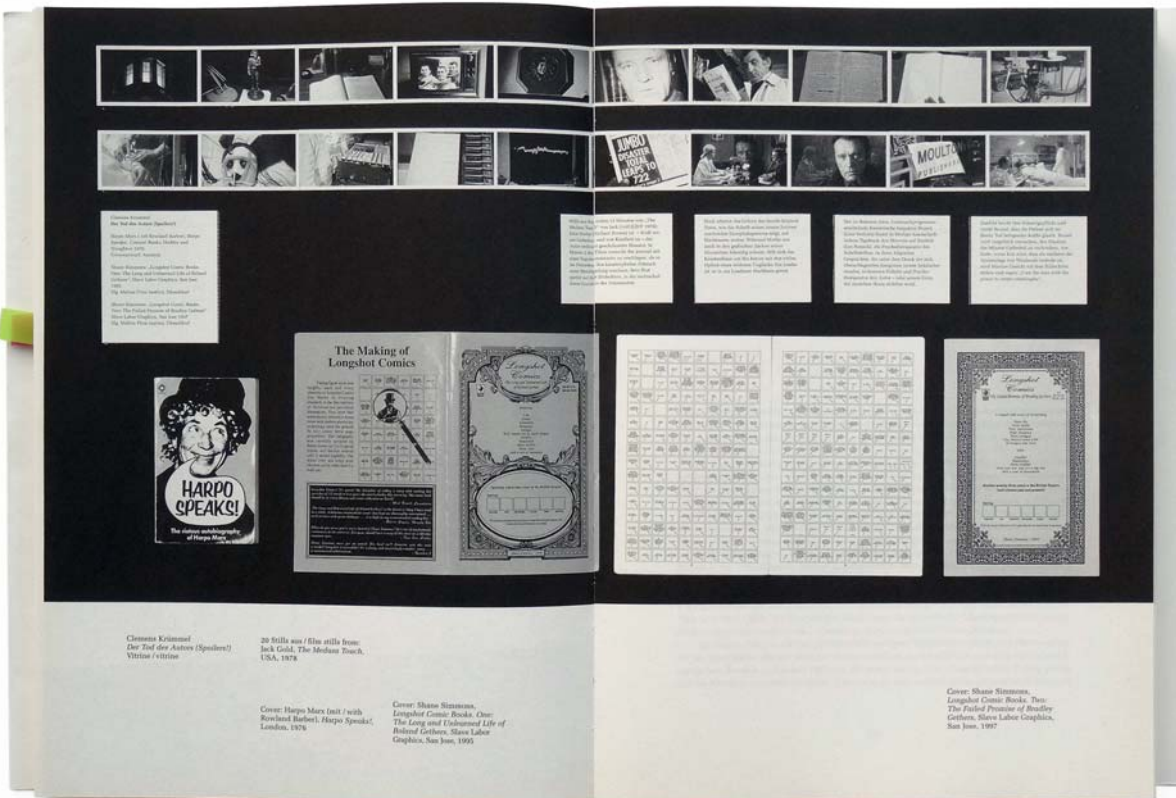




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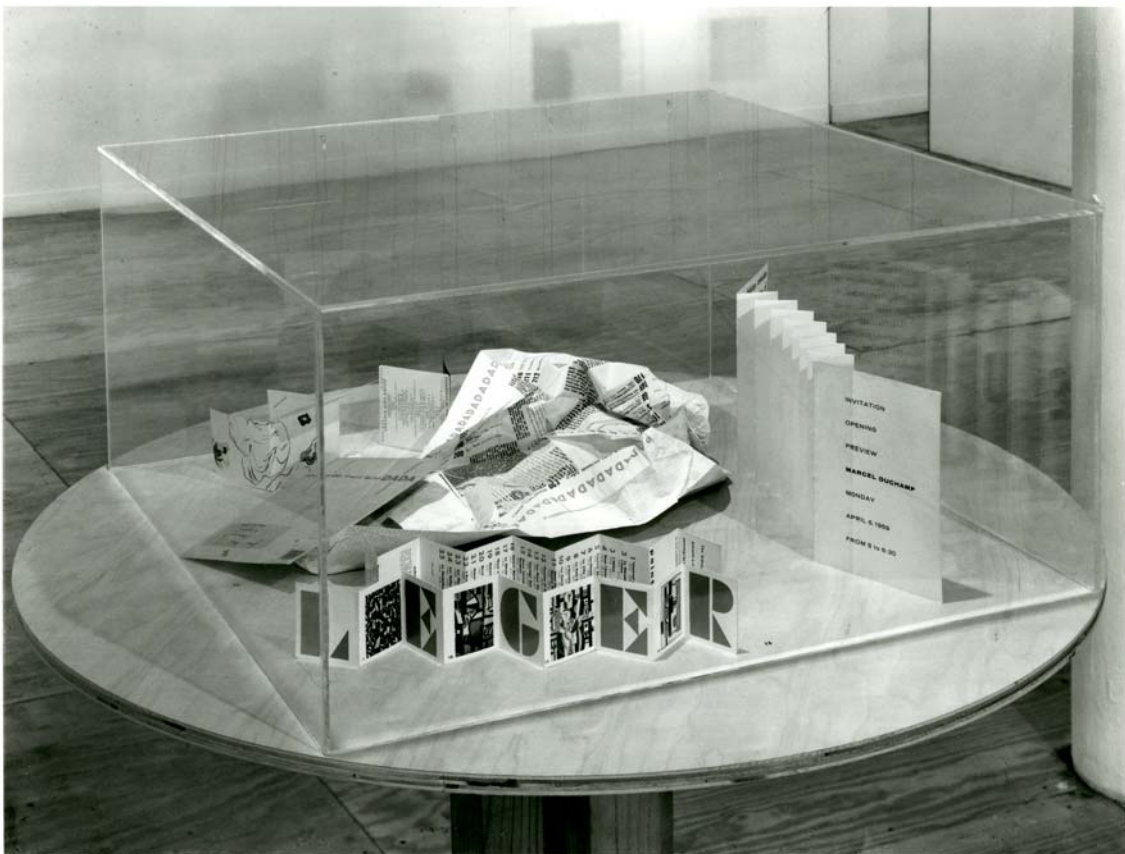


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**Maja Wismer** is a PhD candidate at the University of Basel, where she is writing a dissertation on the multiples of Joseph Beuys, discussing them as products of 1960s and 1970s West Germany. After studies in Basel and Berlin, she received her MA in art history in 2009. Beginning with her MA thesis on *The Uncanny* by Mike Kelley, her exhibition work and academic research have consistently explored how exhibitions and publications unfold as forms and translate into the public sphere. She has since worked at an international level on a variety of exhibitions and publication projects within the field of contemporary art. From 2012 through 2014, she was Renke B. and Pamela M. Thye Curatorial Fellow at the Harvard Art Museums.



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