



Double portrait of Hanne Darboven, Hamburg, ca. 1988



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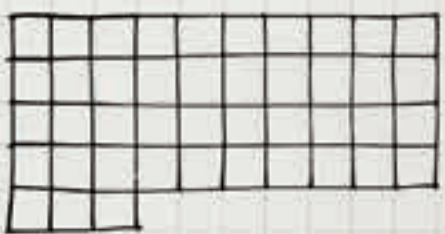
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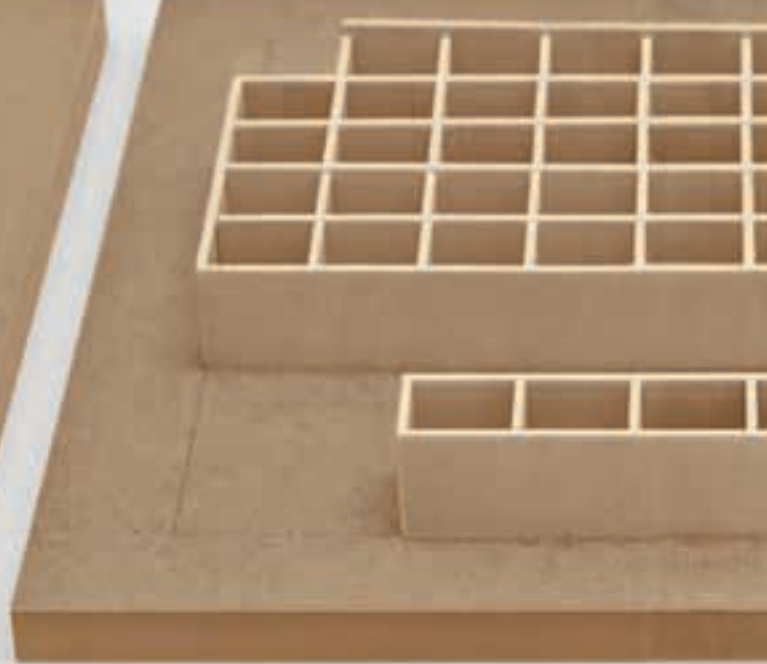


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BUNDESKUNSTHALLE // /

H A U S D E R K U N S T

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**HANNE DARBOVEN**

Edited

by

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**Enlightenment – Time Histories  
A Retrospective**





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Greetings

Albert Darboven

For many decades, I was joined to Hanne Darboven by bonds of deep friendship. I was privileged to witness the triumph of her art, regarded by many as abstruse and recalcitrant, and to see its greatness celebrated widely. Soon after her early recognition in Düsseldorf and New York, her work was in great demand by nearly all of the major museums worldwide. Despite her all-encompassing labors, she would often come by for lunch on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, which allowed us ample opportunity to discuss her work and her daily routine; she would describe her latest projects, which assumed ever greater dimensions. Things were always changing: Her artistic ambitions grew ceaselessly, and she never repeated herself. Added to the written works were collages, and at some point the collages were joined by objects. She was an incessantly creative seeker, almost to the point of obsessiveness.

A new dimension was attained when she began to systematically realize her ideas in musical form as well. During long conversations, she would share new ideas with me. To participate in these developments was a source of genuine delight. Emerging at some point during our discussions was the idea of a foundation, and at the turn of the millennium, I was able to realize this desire in accordance with her intentions. After her far too early death, the foundation—initially conceived for the promotion of young artistic and musical talent—came into possession of her entire artistic estate, in conformity with her last will and testament.

As a consequence, the focus of our foundation's work became the preservation and scholarly treatment of her artistic estate in her studio "Am Burgberg" in Hamburg-Harburg, now preserved as a cultural heritage site and diligently maintained in its original condition. We consider our second great task to be that of making her work—which is still utterly contemporary—accessible in museums.

After the marvelous presentation at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid last year, this comprehensive retrospective—a double exhibition held in the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn and the Haus der Kunst in Munich—represents the high point in the reception of Hanne Darboven's art following her death in 2009. More than a decade after the last major exhibitions in Hamburg and Hannover, Okwui Enwezor, who initiated this project together with Rein Wolfs, provides a different, novel, expanded perspective of the work of this exceptional German artist. The presentation incorporates her music, her three-dimensional work, and her objects in two thematically organized exhibitions, hence responding to the contradictions that are immanent to Hanne Darboven's work with fresh answers, and positioning her work with an astonishing lightness of touch in the current discourse on art.

In the name of the Foundation and our staff members, I would like to express my gratitude to both directors, Okwui Enwezor and Rein Wolfs, for this wonderful double project. My very special thanks in particular to the two cocurators, Anna Schneider in Munich and Susanne Kleine in Bonn, as well as to Johanna Adam in Bonn, who struggled with us through countless hours of painstakingly detailed work in order to bring this project to perfection. It is my sincerest wish that one day, art historians will recognize this exhibition as a milestone in the reception of the art of Hanne Darboven.

Albert Darboven  
Hamburg, spring 2015

Foreword

Rein Wolfs  
Director, Bundeskunsthalle

Okwui Enwezor  
Director, Haus der Kunst

Time is simultaneously simple and complex—it can be measured, but not grasped; objectively, it is characterized by precise regularity, but subjectively, it is perpetually compressed or drawn out. To describe time not as a linear process but as a surface or network of time-transcending parallelisms collides with our conceptual schemata and linguistic habits: inherent in metaphors of the stream of time, of its trickling or ticking away, of time running onward, is a conception that comprehends the phenomenon of time as a progressive force. Segmented into the categories of past, present, and future, which succeed and condition one another along an imaginary timeline, this point of view suggests a determinism that is relevant for the quantitative measurement of time, but not for integration into an expanded continuum of space and time, as characterized for example by Albert Einstein. In everyday life, where space and time are experienced as separate givens possessing utterly contrasting characters, these considerations play virtually no role. This insight, however, which is based on the investigations of classical physics, is important in the philosophical and intellectual-historical view of time.

These philosophical insights regarding time and space as indivisible parameters of the same framework of observation are reflected in the Conceptual Art of Hanne Darboven. On the one hand, this means the commonality of the two categories as ordering principles of the events of the world (after all, events are related to one another in terms of their geographical or temporal congruence), and on the other hand, this perspective points toward an implied simultaneity of past, present, and future, to the extent that all three categories are in some sense present, despite the fact that only one occupies the focus of attention. Through Hanne Darboven's conceptual approach, this parallelism becomes visually and spatially accessible to experience. Many of her works unite texts from various epochs, which often refer to past events and which hence project the point of view of the respective present onto the past. But even when the focus is on the future, it is nonetheless about the manifestation of a contemporary perspective that can develop only against the experiential horizon of past events, according to the motto "may it never happen again." The present indwells both the past and the future to the extent that present, conscious action presupposes an anticipation of results—that is to say it presupposes the future—as well as being conditioned by a cognitive process that is derived from the past. In her wide-ranging date calculations, Hanne Darboven makes no distinction between elapsed and imminent time. The series of numbers, often covering hundreds of pages, form a plane on which past, present, and future exist parallel to one another. Additional forms of systematic presentation, including lines, boxes, and wave forms that imitate cursive writing, take up this approach and contribute to illuminating the phenomenon of time in its intricacy. Time as history, time as physical force, as mathematical factor, as philosophical problem, and much more.

In the process, Darboven links thoroughly subjective, private moments with world history. She thematizes specific eras and positions events from various historical periods in a network of relationships and references. Her artistic approach is based on a maximally comprehensive, universal education as the precondition for "man's emergence from self-imposed immaturity," as she put it.

It was from these considerations that the titles of our two exhibitions—*Time Histories* in the Bundeskunsthalle, and *Enlightenment* at the Haus der Kunst—emerged. Together, they form a wide-ranging retrospective of the works of Hanne Darboven, who is seen here both as an alert observer of the political events of her own time and as a universal artist in the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment. The decision to organize the first major retrospective after her death in 2009 into parallel parts at two different locations was primarily a reflection of the great abundance and significance of her oeuvre. In a work-immanent context, moreover, this simultaneity has a special appeal. Without sacrificing the advantages of a thematic concentration that could contribute significantly to an understanding of this artist's complex conceptual cosmos, it also provides an opportunity to focus on the copious key works from all of Darboven's creative phases, from the early Minimalist works to the characteristic written series, all the way to the date calculations, the musical compositions, and the object-based works, as well as her filmic production. Both exhibitions focus on essential aspects that surface repeatedly in Hanne Darboven's

conceptual works and which are central to her oeuvre as a whole. While at the Bundeskunsthalle the emphasis is on works that address historical themes, day-to-day political events, and the history and development of society, the exhibition at the Haus der Kunst stands primarily under the sign of the Enlightenment, assembling series of works that deal with themes from cultural history, music, literature, and the (natural) sciences. Evident here is the artist's proximity to the intellectual world of the Enlightenment, as well as her explicit affirmation of a concrete political attitude.

In order to realize the ambitions and demands of this double retrospective exhibition, equally ambitious partners were indispensable. We thank the Hanne Darboven Foundation in Hamburg-Harburg for their generous support through numerous loans, and for their intensive assistance during our many visits to the archive and to the artist's former home and studio Am Burgberg. Our very special thanks go to Albert Darboven, the Foundation's chairman, as well as to Nicole Krapat, Florentine Gallwas, and Jörg Weil, who have dedicated themselves to the care and preservation of Hanne Darboven's artistic legacy. Our heartfelt thanks also go to all of our lenders, whether museums or private collectors, and to the authors of this catalogue. Last but not least, a tremendous thanks to all of our colleagues at both institutions, and in particular to the exhibition's cocurators, Susanne Kleine and Anna Schneider.





Portrait of Hanne Darboven, Hamburg, 1987



# TIME HISTORIES

**BUNDESKUNSTHALLE**

Hanne Darboven's  
Time Histories

Rein Wolfs

The concept of history in its linguistic ambiguity invariably plays an important role in Hanne Darboven's extensive body of work. The title of the exhibition *Hanne Darboven: Time Histories* reflects the polysemy of her artistic approach. On the one hand, she deals with history as a record of the examination of political, cultural, and social processes of development; on the other hand, her work is about stories as oral or written records, about narratives in a broader sense—be they accounts of actual or fictional events.

A wide range of different strands run through Hanne Darboven's oeuvre, within which these levels of meaning alternate with one another, overlap, or even give rise to one another. Darboven deliberately employs this ambiguity in her artistic language. She incorporates history in the sense of it being a record of past events directly into many of her works; indeed, in the titles of several of her works she even alludes to historical events or figures. In *Bismarckzeit* (Bismarck Time) (1978), she deals intensely with the former Prussian minister president and later imperial chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his era; however, she also links this historical period with the point in time in which she created the work. The year 1978 marked the one hundredth anniversary of Bismarck's passing of the Anti-Socialist Law and prompted Willy Brandt, the federal chancellor of the time, to recall this event in an article. By personally transcribing the article in her own handwriting, Hanne Darboven appropriated Brandt's time-transcending piece, entitled "Wir müssen wachsam sein" (We Must Be Vigilant), which correlated the persecution of socialists under Bismarck with the current situation on the domestic front. The inclusion of extensive text passages from scholarly works that deal with Bismarck and his political morals illustrates the conscious historical contextualization in Darboven's artistic work and her differentiated examination of history and current historical debates. *Bismarckzeit* is both an artistic and a political work in which developments, historicizing comparisons, and historiography coexist and are linked to become a larger narrative about Bismarck, and his era and ours. In this respect, the work is an example of Darboven's complex artistic examination of the concept of history in all of its various manifestations.

The aspects of history and politics, of story and narrative, and of sensuous experience also meet on an artistic level in the monumental work *Kinder dieser Welt* (Children of This World) (1990–96), the inspiration for which was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. The space-consuming installation is essentially a narrative stringing-together of toys, exercise books, checksum calculations, musical notations, child mannequins, and much more that marks a hopeful departure into a new era. Darboven's checksum calculations and other notes and systematic collections of historical objects are placed in an associative, playful relationship to one another, so that the theme of playing and thus the theme of children set the pattern for the organization of the work. In *Kinder dieser Welt*, the obligatory basic theme of systematic order, precision, and the continuous updating of time that is ostensibly associated with Hanne Darboven's art is pleurably and playfully linked not only with subjectivity and the sensuous experience of lifeworld, but also with a clear political stance and a concretely worded expectation. In this work, Darboven reflects the hope that arose from the geopolitical changes of 1989 in a multifarious narrative made up of collective and subjective childhood memories and descriptions. Here, the artist manifests as the narrator of a multifaceted history that describes childhood as a stage of hope and departure into a new era whose possibilities could not have been imagined just shortly prior to this. Yet in doing so, she also marks the historical meaning of that moment in time and does not shy away from the subjectively interpretive level of (artistic) commentary, which she formulates here unequivocally.

### Political Comparison

The device of juxtaposing different sets of facts or structures, the summation of their connections, and the comparison of their differences and similarities often forms the basis of Hanne Darboven's works. The work *Ost-West-Demokratie* (East-West Democracy) (1983) specifically concerns the confrontation between two political systems. During a period that marked one of the critical culminations of the Cold

War, the artist combined the systemic antitheses of West and East, of the USA and the USSR, of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, to form a hopeful synthesis: "I'm for an East-West democracy." While a million people demonstrated in Bonn against the NATO Double-Track Decision, Darboven committed herself to her—from the perspective at the time—almost utopian vision of a productive rapprochement between the East and the West. The merging together of the national flags of those two central powers, as well as of both German nations, whose mere existence was a symbol of the political dilemma, marks the artist's unequivocal positioning, which read the signs of the times yet refused to comply with the common interpretation.

Darboven also showed a clear political stance in the work *Wende* (Turning Point) (1980/81), in which she, among other things, addressed the parliamentary elections for the Bundestag on October 5, 1980. It focuses on a double interview from *Spiegel* magazine entitled "Was befähigt Sie zum Kanzler?" (What Qualifies You to Become Chancellor?), in which the fiercely adversarial candidates Helmut Schmidt (SPD) and Franz Josef Strauß (CSU) were asked the same thirty-eight questions. In this work, Darboven took a decided stand by blacking out all of Strauß's answers and thus making them illegible and invalid. The political turnaround that Strauß planned, which above all aimed at an about-face in Eastern policy and sharply criticized the existing agreements between West Germany and the Eastern bloc countries, was definitely not a political option that Hanne Darboven wanted to accept. As unequivocal as her stance is, another political dimension of her work also reveals itself, one that is implicit yet congruent, that characterizes the artist as a staunchly liberal democrat. Assuming that art and culture are to be considered integral components of a comprehensive education, she appealed for their broad accessibility in all strata of society and consciously produced a large number of copies of *Wende*, which she in part even edited into book form, like other works.

In comparison, the work *Für Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (For Rainer Werner Fassbinder) (1982/83), features a less explicit yet palpable stance. Created as a reaction to Fassbinder's unexpectedly early death, this work is primarily concerned with the culture of remembering and commemorating, as well as the passing of time, which she related directly to the director's lifetime in the checksum daily calculations. She nevertheless also connected the point in time of the event with current political events and referred, among other things, to the date of the change of government in Bonn: October 1, 1982. She marked the change in the chancellorship from Schmidt to Kohl with a very personal play on words, however: "Schmidt did not eat my goat, Kohl is eating it." Next to this she placed picture postcards from the years of the two World Wars, which ultimately also constitute the historical background from which Fassbinder's films arose. This fusion is exemplary for how Darboven was capable of rendering time and occurrences in image, writing, and number, whose meaning lies in equal measure in concrete remembering and in time-transcending thinking.

### Time Histories

The exhibition *Hanne Darboven: Time Histories* is one of a large-scale two-part retrospective. The show at the Bundeskunsthalle focuses on those works that feature a very concrete historical and political connection and deal in particular with German history—in both a narrow and a broad sense. Hanne Darboven was definitely not concerned with a German historiography or the interpretation of global events from a German point of view—she was too much of a cosmopolitan for that. But she was interested in what was happening around her and followed the news as naturally as she studied historical and scholarly literature. The goal of her own education was universal in every respect, so that for her the integration of political events and the issues of her time quite evidently belonged in a broader context, on the one hand in terms of global politics, and on the other hand in terms of culture and the history of ideas. In this way she opened up a wealth of possible avenues and perspectives on one theme, yet in their wide contextualization she did not refrain from assuming a clear political stance.

Darboven's chronicles of contemporary events are narratives, different from factual historiography. She takes texts and images—and later objects, as well—and associatively places them in relation to one another, sometimes as a decided placement in the sense of commentary, as testimony to and signs of their respective period. Together with and framed by the systematically ordering checksum calculations, history and the present are woven together to form time histories.

Filled Time:  
Hanne Darboven and the Phenomena  
of Time Histories

Thomas Ebers

At first glance, it resembles an agglomeration of pieces of paper and oversized type cases. Upon closer inspection this impression proves accurate, albeit with everything in accessible dimensions that provoke astonishment for this very reason. We find construction drawings, calculations, columns of figures, written-out poems, individual sentences, book excerpts, lexicon articles, and newspaper clippings. Photos, postcards, and objects are mounted and placed on display. Reference has been made to the fact that Darboven's *Schreibzeit* (Writing Time)—simultaneously the title of the artist's magnum opus and a characterization of her essential artistic form of expression—was also a time of collecting. This is confirmed by a look at Darboven's densely configured workshop rooms in her hometown of Hamburg-Harburg.<sup>1</sup> Type cases are generally familiar from the shelves of collectors, and they often make a Biedermeier-like impression. With the transition to modern printing techniques, both the occupation of the typesetter and his tools of the trade—lead letters and type cases—became obsolete. The lead letters could be melted down, but the type cases in which they had been stored now found their way to jumble sales and flea markets, offered for purchase as shelving that could accommodate a variety of collected items.

To begin with, then, the type cases signal an external connection between writing and collecting, a connection that is readily apparent in Hanne Darboven's later works as well. An inner connection between collecting and writing is established via reading as a link between the two, since reading is clearly related to both activities. The two following references point out this intermediary or middle position of reading:

1. Ivan Illich has described the transition from the purely ritualized recitation or reading aloud of the pages of a book to an understanding of the page as a textual media that awaits discovery: about a thousand years ago, reading was an activity far removed from today's silent absorption in the text. In identifying the caesura that marks this transition in medieval habits of reading, Illich cites the Christian theologian Hugh of Saint Victor (1097–1141). Around 1128, Hugh composed a manual of reading and interpretation, the *Didascalicon de studio legendi*. He occupied himself in particular with Saint Augustine. He “read, reread, and copied the texts of his master. Reading and writing were for him two almost indistinguishable sides of the same *studium*.”<sup>2</sup> In contradistinction to what the early Platonic critique of writing suggests, writing is a technique not of forgetting but of memorizing. Or at any rate, this is true of the act of copying out, even if not for a continuously accessible archive of texts of the kind Plato had in mind when formulating his critique: In the latter case, an archive is a technique of forgetting, given the possibility of accessing texts at any time. In contrast, the text that is copied out, and hence read, is absorbed by memory, and moreover appropriated intellectually.

2. On the other hand, reading resembles a harvesting and a gleaning that is performed “in the vineyard of the text”—to quote the title of Illich's investigation. This connection is clearer in German, where the verb *lesen*, meaning “to read,” can also mean “to pick” (i.e., grapes), and the noun *Lese* refers to the act of gathering, harvesting, or plucking, and also means “vintage.” This becomes clear when we consult Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (German Dictionary).<sup>3</sup> In addition to the act of reading and comprehending a text, the German verb *lesen* also means to choose from among a large quantity, to gather together, and is associated with connotations of ordering and composing, as well.

For an understanding of Darboven's art, it is essential to grasp why the artist became a reader in the course of her development, when at the beginning she regarded herself solely as someone who writes—as a writing or recording instrument, so to speak. This question will be pursued through various textual formulas contained in Darboven's works, brief sentences that are part of the works themselves and which simultaneously accompany them in the form of commentary. The following discussion is an attempt at a kind of metacommentary on the commentary on her own artistic production that is inherent to Darboven's work. My central argument is that with time, histories and history entered into Darboven's art.

## Triangulating Time

Even a fleeting glance at the exorbitant number of inscribed pages of which Darboven's art primarily consists testifies to the disciplined labor so indispensable to this accumulation of handwritten material. From the very first impression of Darboven's art, the viewer's attention is drawn toward this writing activity. The artist's scattered commentaries on the practice of writing have greatly contributed to this focus: in the late 1960s, during and after her time in New York, she presented and explained herself as someone who writes, not someone who reads.<sup>4</sup> This assertion should not be dismissed as mere coyness. If she explicitly negates the above-described inner connection between writing, reading, and collecting, we must be dealing with a special form of textual production: Darboven's writing constitutes a kind of explicit visualization of the passage of time that is inherent to the act of writing.<sup>5</sup> The real content of that which is written down is time itself, or more precisely: the happening, the transpiring of time (i.e., of time as such), and not of events *in* time. This form of writing is, then, diametrically opposed to reading, with its association of gathering, which strives for plenitude. Darboven's writing activity realizes the presentness of writing, and hence of the presentist self. It almost seems that she wants, in her writing activity, to take up the problem of the interpretation of time that is articulated in Book 11 of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* and to solve it through a disciplined writing practice: for Augustine, the present slips away into the—inherently imperceptible—interval that resides between the “not yet” of the future and the “no longer” of the past. In this context, the textual formula *heute* (today), which appears in many of Darboven's works, is readable as a defiant index of the present.<sup>6</sup> The ungraspable quality of the present moment is detectable in this defiance, just as it is in the well-formed sequences of rounded arches, a kind of roof tile, which appear repeatedly in Darboven's writing exercises in place of the letters that are normally formed into words. Another textual formula found in *Schreibzeit* demonstrates that Darboven was aware of this concentration on the empty now: “I do not describe, I inscribe.” Her writing activity bears a slight resemblance to the child's habit of coloring in boxes—according to a predetermined system—on gridded paper, in order to endure the boredom of the school day.<sup>7</sup> We encounter precisely this focus on the treatment of boxes, albeit those of far more finely subdivided graph paper, in the construction drawings that date from Darboven's time in New York. These drawings in turn form a point of departure and a transition to her notation and calculation system, already developed in the late 1960s, for registering days, months, and years. This system is essentially based on checksums and opens up the possibility of presenting dates textually and graphically. Here, the unit of measurement “K” refers to *Konstruktion* (construction) or *Kasten* (box).<sup>8</sup>

In this way, Darboven has provided a regulated and graphic writing system for the threatened loss, discussed by Augustine, of the present in the interval between past and future—a system whose execution and implementation requires discipline. Darboven herself characterized her artistic life as being as regimented as that of a civil servant.<sup>9</sup> And if she occupies an office in the realm of her K-art, then it is the *Katasteramt*, that is to say the land registry office, an agency devoted to surveying and measurement: Darboven measures time by means of her writing time, through the act of inscription. As a method of land surveying, triangulation presupposes that a point can be located from two different positions. Only in this way can distances be measured. By analogy, the present cannot be grasped solely through the here-and-now of the process of writing, in the absence of the positions of the future and of history. Darboven's early system of time transcription refers immanently beyond itself.

## How Many Numbers Does Time Have?

Darboven's system of recording dates is simple and—at least on the surface—seems arbitrary. No inner necessity required her to opt for the system she ultimately chose. Darboven calculates the checksums of digits of days, months, and years. First she adds up the two digits of the year (without the century)



before this sum enters into the calculation of the total. In this way, all of the date entries for a century can be formulated as numbers between 2 (01.01.00) and 61 (31.12.99). Of course, she had the option of calculating the sum of the individual digits for not only the year, but for the days and months as well. The dates for a century would then be reduced to numbers between 2 (01.01.00) and a maximum of 38 (29.09.99). Was it simply a matter of preventing the circumstance that with this system of calculation, the construction within a given month would have to proceed by ascent and descent, or are there perhaps too few numbers to represent an entire year? And why are the centuries not represented in Darboven's calculations? According to her system of calculation, the possible date indices for all the years from the inception of our time reckoning to the year 2999, far in the future, would lie between 2 (01.01.0000) and a maximum of 72 (31.12.2999) if the centuries were included. Every additional millennium would simply raise this maximum figure by 1.<sup>10</sup> But would this do justice to such a vast interval of time? The choice of a suitable writing system explores the balance between presentability and comprehensibility on the one hand, and appropriateness and precision of detail on the other. Darboven thereby thematizes the methodological problem of how history or the course of history as a whole is to be discerned from an immense stream of individual historical facts. This can be extracted from her work, so that particularly on the metahistorical level, her work is of interest to historiography.<sup>11</sup> How is a selection to be made; which individual events within the stream of time are significant? That they are or could be is alluded to by Darboven's conversion of the calculated dates into a written computation.

### A Rose Is a Rose

Darboven herself referred to her artistic activity with the textual formula "write calculate / calculate write."<sup>12</sup> Remarkable is the fact that while her system of recording time does work with numbers, they are never used to execute calculations in any genuinely technical sense. Nor is Darboven concerned with number theory or number symbolism. If, according to a further text formula, "1 + 1 = 1, 2," or "one and one is one two," then all elements remain. The parts and the whole are included in the whole. All reductionism is missing. When Darboven writes 4 as "4 4 4 4," nothing is gained: at its core, her system of notation is free of reductionism. The number 3 written as "three three three" lacks any referential context: the three simply refers to itself. This contains a tautological structure to which the artist explicitly refers in a textual formula cited from Gertrude Stein's poem "Sacred Emily" (1913): "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose . . ." From the perspective of propositional logic, this predication lacks any epistemic value. As a metaphor, however, it has expressive force.<sup>13</sup> Stein's celebrated tautological formula reappears later in her children's book *The World Is Round* (1939).<sup>14</sup> This is the story of Rose, a little girl who experiences anxiety during the night and who climbs a mountain with a blue chair: ". . . climbing a little higher everywhere and then she saw a lovely tree and she thought yes it is round but all around I am going to cut *Rose is a Rose is a Rose* and so it is there and not anywhere can I hear anything which will give me a scare."<sup>15</sup>

Posed in this context, this meaningless tautology becomes a formula for the self-reassurance and self-assertion of the individual. Darboven's tautologically structured calculated writings or written calculations thematize the individual's desire to assert herself. Along with her system of date inscription, she supplies a framework, the type cases mentioned above, whose individual compartments can be filled or even ask to be filled: filled with political articles and editorials from daily newspapers, with traces of, testimonials to, and descriptions of historical events, with handwritten poems, which are occasionally recomposed, with excerpts from literary texts, with articles from lexica. In her selection of materials, and also through her commentary, Darboven's art reveals itself as being thoroughly politically engaged, as being oriented toward the future and its shaping—for example, when she simply blackens out the remarks she dislikes from the CSU politician Franz Josef Strauß. Biographical material is incorporated in her works as well, for example in the integration of a loom at which she worked as a child in her parents' home. In light of these later works, so permeated with such materials, it becomes clear that over time, Darboven

evolved into a reading and collecting artist, hence distancing herself from her earlier self-understanding as a writing—not a reading—artist. As a result, her works have definitely preserved their historical and cultural-historical dimension, palpably in the work *Bismarckzeit* (Bismarck Time) (1978), for instance, in which she adopts the stance of a commentator on recent history through her choice of graphic and textual documents, as well as in the work *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* (Cultural History 1880–1983) (1980–1983), which overflows almost exclusively with nonarchival visual materials such as photographs, catalogues, magazines, postcards, and so on.

### From Order to Arrangement

A consideration of the scope of these works, which encompass hundreds, even thousands of sheets of paper, raises the question of whether the viewer is expected to come to terms with such magnitude by checking the calculations, by rereading: in many of Darboven's works, we are confronted with what amounts to a book or an ensemble of books whose pages, framed singly or in groups, have been mounted on the walls.<sup>16</sup> With *Ansichten ›85‹, Harburg / New York* (Views ›85‹, Harburg / New York) from 1984/85, there are 162 labeled sheets, some bearing photographs. Alongside a bronze sculpture, *Bismarckzeit* encompasses 917 sheets. *Schreibzeit* consists of a total of 2,584 sheets in its original version, and grew to encompass 4,025 sheets in the final version.

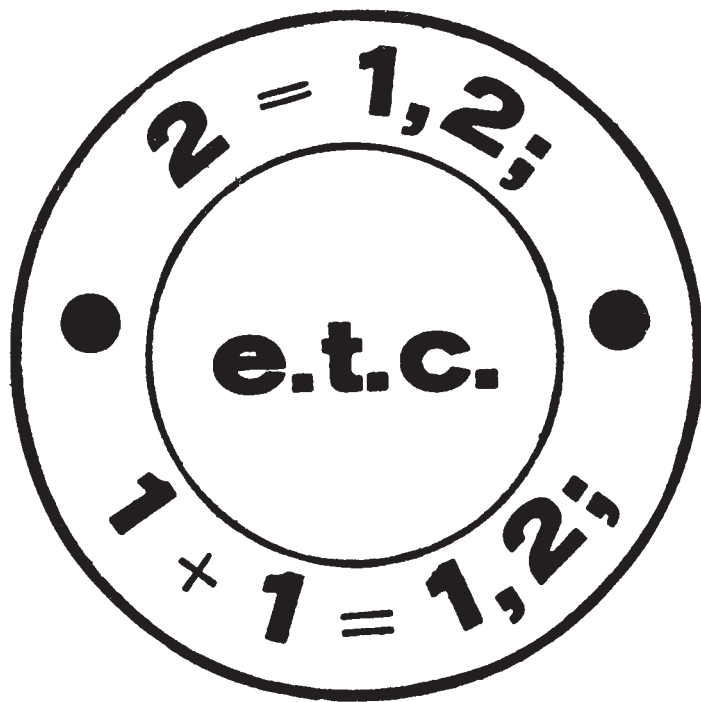
These time notations—augmented with historical, contemporary, and personal events and memories—are no more accessible to viewers than history itself. Evidently, Darboven was not concerned with conveying history as such. But differently than in her early works, she places a kind of filled time on display. She draws our attention to events occurring *in* time, not to events associated *with* a certain time. As works that recapitulate the “history of the artist's appropriations and education,”<sup>17</sup> they embody the necessity for a confrontation with the past in order to position oneself in relation to the future. A representative work is *Kinder dieser Welt* (Children of This World), produced between 1990 and 1996 in response to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Here, dolls and children's toys become the bearers of hopeful expectations for the future.<sup>18</sup> But Darboven should be regarded less as a historian, as someone who works with memory, and more as an artist whose theme is the question of the appropriation of history, its significance for the present, and the consequences of this appropriation for the future. The attempt found in the early works to secure the present—regarded by Augustine as an impalpable nothing suspended between past and future—through the act of writing is in the later works transformed into a present which contains past and future and which acquires substance only through them. Entirely in Augustine's sense, the present encompasses the past through memory, and the future through expectation. Augustine closes the reflections contained in Book 11 of his *Confessions* with an image borrowed from music. The passage strives to render comprehensible the supratemporal, synoptic perspective of an omniscient God:<sup>19</sup> “. . . nothing would be hidden of ages past or ages still to come, any more than when I am singing my canticle anything is unknown to me of what I have sung from the beginning, of what remains to me to sing to the end.”<sup>20</sup>

We are not granted omnipotence. For us, as Augustine knew, history does not resemble a familiar song whose melody is known to us through and through. Moreover, the boundaries of tonal music have meanwhile become disrupted, so that listening habits allow us to anticipate the imminent tones only to a very limited degree. Despite the discipline and rigor of her system of notation, Darboven's art calls upon us to improvise.

PS When Rose reaches the top of the mountain and sits on her blue chair, she sings: “When I wish a little wish, I wish that I was where I am.”<sup>21</sup> That doesn't prevent her from continuing to be afraid.

- 1 See Bernhard Jussen, "Geschichte Schreiben als Formproblem: Zur Edition der 'Schreibzeit,'" in *Hanne Darboven: Schreibzeit*, ed. Jussen, Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek 15 (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2000), pp. 12–42, here p. 26.
- 2 Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 9.
- 3 See <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=lesen> (accessed May 31, 2015).
- 4 See also Veit Görner, "Ich schreibe, aber ich lese nicht," in *Hanne Darboven: Ein Jahrhundert-ABC*, ed. Maik Schlüter and Veit Görner, exh. cat. (Hannover: Kestnergesellschaft, 2004).
- 5 See for example Ingrid Burgbacher-Krupka, "Konstruiert literarisch: Zum Schreibsystem," in *Hanne Darboven: Ein Reader; Texte zum Werk*, ed. Zdenek Felix (Cologne: Oktagon, 1999), p. 104.
- 6 Elke Bippus regards the textual formula *heute* (today) as a vanitas emblem. I agree with this only to the extent that the vanitas symbol is interpreted more as emptiness, and less as transitoriness. Cf. Elke Bippus, "Erinnern und Vergessen: Die 'Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983' von Hanne Darboven," in *Hanne Darboven: Ein Reader*, pp. 128–142, here p. 141.
- 7 Of course, it has also been demonstrated scientifically that casual sketching can enhance concentration and attentiveness; see Jackie Andrade, "What Does Doodling do?," in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 24 (2010), pp. 100–106. In my view, however, this effect seems to be excluded for Darboven's inscription of lines. The focus of concentration here is evidently on the activity of inscription itself.
- 8 Klaus Honnef, "Hanne Darboven," in *Hanne Darboven: Ein Reader*, pp. 9–18, here p. 11.
- 9 Such a characterization of her own life can be found in the documentary "Mein Geheimnis ist, daß ich keins habe: Hanne Darboven, ein Porträt der Künstlerin" by Walter Smerling, WDR, 1991.
- 10 Bippus has called attention to the fact that as a consequence of the absence of entries for centuries, all centuries are potentially contained in Darboven's date indices; see Bippus, "Erinnern und Vergessen," p. 130. Differently than suggested here, this disregard for the century entries is regarded as standing instead for a decision in favor of greater differentiation, and not for reduction—or stated differently: for repetition in time. In an interview, Darboven stated that history does not repeat itself; see Smerling, "Mein Geheimnis."
- 11 Jussen, "Geschichte Schreiben," pp. 28ff., mentions that the historical dimension of Darboven's works has been recognized in the field of art history, but not the methodological problems they address.
- 12 These and all of the artist's subsequent textual formulas are present in Darboven's *Schreibzeit*.
- 13 "In borderline cases, then, even tautological formulations are poetically effective as metaphors, and are capable of generating new meaning." Hans Rudi Fischer, "Die Metapher als hot topic der gegenwärtigen Forschung," in Fischer, *Eine Rose ist eine Rose: Zur Rolle und Funktion von Metaphern in Wissenschaft und Therapie* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2005), pp. 8–24, here p. 14.
- 14 Gertrude Stein's significance for Hanne Darboven is discussed in Gabriele Woithe, *Das Kunstwerk als Lebensgeschichte: Zur autobiographischen Dimension Bildender Kunst* (Berlin: Logos, 2008). In this context, the fact that Darboven's magnum opus is addressed to "everybody" can be interpreted as a reference to Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography*, "and may be an homage to Gertrude Stein"; *ibid.*, p. 180. Darboven's *Quartett >88<* (Quartet >88<) is dedicated to Rosa Luxemburg, Marie Curie, and Virginia Woolf, along with Gertrude Stein.
- 15 Gertrude Stein, *The World Is Round* (New York: William R. Scott, 1939), p. 52.
- 16 This question is found in Nina Wiedemeyer, "Buchfalten: Material Technik Gefüge der Künstlerbücher" (univ. diss., Weimar, 2011), p. 187.
- 17 Woithe, *Das Kunstwerk als Lebensgeschichte*, p. 179, regards *Schreibzeit* in particular as "a history of the artist's appropriations and education."
- 18 See *Hanne Darboven: Kinder dieser Welt*, texts by Ina Conzen et al., catalogue raisonné by Ernst A. Busche, exh. cat., Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1997).
- 19 In this connection, it should be mentioned that Darboven's implementation of her data inscription system for music beginning in the 1980s can hardly be coincidental, for since Augustine music has been the contemporary art par excellence. On Darboven's musical production, see Laurenz Lütteken's instructive explanations: "Musikalische Geschichte und bildnerische Form: Hanne Darbovens Grenzgänge," in *Hanne Darboven: Schreibzeit*, pp. 100–116.
- 20 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), p. 256.
- 21 Stein, *World is Round*, p. 61.





Of the Duration of This World:  
Hanne Darboven and Her Objects

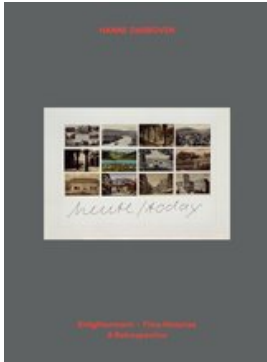
Zdenek Felix

## “The Time of Number Arranging”

Numbers, numbers, numbers. . . words, words, words. . . prints and photocopies, combined with color reproductions, hanging on the walls in countless rows alongside and above one another, always in identical black frames—many visitors to exhibitions by the German artist Hanne Darboven find it difficult to escape the impression of an enormous, overwhelming reservoir of dates and symbols. At first glance, these “notations,” handwritten as a rule, seem to be manifestations of digitally encoded data, an aesthetic quite characteristic of the impact of Darboven’s written works. The term “aesthetic” is far from inappropriate here. If we understand it to mean a canon of balanced relationships between form and concept, detail and whole, order and idea, then Hanne Darboven’s systematic overall designs are undoubtedly “aesthetically” consummate. No component of the whole deviates from the predetermined plan; all details are subordinated to the basic concept. Not unlike medieval churches, for example, her space-filling installations seem—at the risk of sounding melodramatic—positively “sublime.”

This impression is reinforced by the central theme of Darboven’s work: a preoccupation with time. If we understand the sublime as an attempt to attain the impossible, “specifically the naming of something that is unnameable, or, expressed in Kantian terms: the presentation of that which is unrepresentable (the idea),”<sup>1</sup> then Darboven’s installations are “sublime” because they are primarily concerned with an “unrepresentable idea,” namely that of time. Although the sublime is ambivalent, because “it cannot be grasped conceptually, or at most only incompletely . . . , it marks the boundary between extremes. In etymological terms, ‘sublime’ means ‘just below the uppermost threshold.’ It attests to a consciousness of this boundary. No more, but also no less. The sublime is the boundary.”<sup>2</sup> With her artistic investigations, in fact, Darboven approaches the limits of the representable, for her works address the theme of time as a decisive existential magnitude for human beings. In this regard, her concerns correspond to the latest “discoveries in brain research, molecular biology, and psychology, which suggest that an awareness of time, its perception, and all thought and memory processes occurring in human consciousness are closely linked with one another, that they are inseparable in normal experience. The experiences of time, thought, and human consciousness, then, are manifested only conjointly. In a subjectivist understanding, then, time and emotion would be closely associated. In that case, the notion of an ‘objective time’ would only be the perception of an identity, one based on memory, and striving toward security and continuity.”<sup>3</sup>

In Darboven’s work, subjective and objective perceptions of time are interlocked to form an intricate, conceptually comprehensible system. In 1967, during her “New York period” (1966–1968), after announcing the conclusion of her Constructivist investigations and turning toward conceptual strategies, stimulated by American artists such as Mel Bochner and Sol LeWitt, she discovered numbers and simple mathematical operations as a suitable field of activity. From this moment onward, numbers and their combinations served as a substitute for the earlier diagrams and construction drawings. At the same time, Darboven developed various idiosyncratic systems, which, “in the form of progressions and/or reductions,” functioned “not unlike a musical theme with variations,” as she put it.<sup>4</sup> “The chosen series of for the most part odd numbers allowed an endless progression that was never interrupted. Desired, however, was a system within which unfolding and regression would follow their own laws. In 1968, Hanne Darboven found this system through the adoption of an order of numbers that serves the measurement of time, the calendar.”<sup>5</sup> With her invention of the “checksums,” formed from the dates of the days and months, and supplemented with bisected year dates, she hit upon a flexible apparatus for her written works, those typical, systematized “notations” and “script forms” that would provide her “action,” to use her own word, with a solid structure.

**Hanne Darboven**

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A Retrospective

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"Ich schreibe, aber ich beschreibe nichts." Hanne Darboven

"Zeitgeschichten - Aufklärung" ist die erste große Retrospektive zum Werk Hanne Darbovens seit ihrem Tod im Jahr 2009. Sie vereint Schlüsselwerke aus allen Schaffensphasen. Die Publikation beleuchtet das umfangreiche, faszinierende Lebenswerk dieser wichtigen Konzeptkünstlerin in all seiner stilistischen Breite - Werke, die sich mit politischen Ereignissen, ihrem persönlichen Umfeld und deutscher Geschichte befassen sowie umfangreiche Werkserien, in denen die Künstlerin Themen aus Kulturgeschichte, Musik, Literatur und (Natur-)Wissenschaften behandelt. Neben den seriellen Berechnungen auf Papier sind zudem Teile des Hamburger Ateliers der Künstlerin zu sehen: Die Schreibtische beispielsweise erzählen von der konsequenten Arbeitsweise der Künstlerin und das sogenannte Musikzimmer, ein quasi-enzyklopädisches Archiv, gewährt zum ersten Mal Einblick in den intellektuellen Kosmos der Künstlerin und ihre kompositorische Werk- und Schreibtechnik.

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