

4,492,040

(L. Lippard)

557,087 Seattle (1969)

955,000 Vancouver (1970)

2,972,453 ... Buenos Aires (1970)

7,500 Valencia (1973/4)

ISBN: 978-1-927354-00-1

New Documents, 2012

Jay R. Lippard



9 781927 354001

In the Cards

(L. Lippard)

In 1958, my first job out of college was as a page at the Museum of Modern Art Library when there were still "card catalogues"; later I wrote bibliographies, indexes, and translations for the MoMA Publications Department. By 1969 I was an occasional writer of "experimental" fiction as well as a freelance art "critic." So the notion of a bibliographical structure and loose catalogue cards for 557,087 and its successors made autobiographical sense. It was a form that put both my words and the exhibitions themselves in motion. The cards could be randomly shuffled, rearranged by preference, or discarded in bits and pieces. They allowed for new work when 557,087 in Seattle became 955,000 in Vancouver, where

three artists and forty-two cards were added. The card catalogues were sort of a collaborative collage with the artists—not glued down, but flexible, changing, open-ended, unpredictable. I was trying (like many others) to mix up art with life.

The card strategy also worked well for the next two number shows: 2,972,453 in Buenos Aires and c. 7,500 in Valencia, California. These were far more "dematerialized" because they were shipped by ordinary mail, and I did not personally install them. Like the artwork they described, the catalogues were cheap and easy to transport. They treated each artist exactly the same—something I've insisted on in every show I've organized. The "democratizing" instinct was an integral part of

the 1960s *modus vivendi*. In Buenos Aires I did not include anyone who was in the Seattle and Vancouver museum shows, hoping to expand the network to younger artists I had not known before. However, the perils of such loose organization surfaced there. As I wrote in *Six Years*, the forty-three 4×6-inch index cards were "misprinted" by the Centro de Arte y Comunicación "in defiance of the organizer's and artists' wishes."¹ A note was apparently added by CAYC director Jorge Gluzberg (whom I had met in Argentina in 1968), claiming co-curator status. Neither I nor any of the artists, so far as I know, ever saw the show, and I have no idea what the installation looked like.

There were also some logistical challenges. The

cards came in a small manila envelope and cost around \$3. Seth Siegelau, who handled the printing and distribution for the first two shows, recalls that they caused problems for booksellers, not only due to the low price and small scale, but because of the "high chances of a missing element . . . it is just one hassle after another with such things. Someone comes in, takes one card out, and you never know it is gone; then someone buys it."² (Life could *interfere* with art, and commerce.) Not uncommonly, there was also the problem of the artists giving me their cards months before the show went up and changing their minds about what to contribute. In some cases grandiose schemes didn't pan out because of (very)

limited funds. Or something new occurred to the artist in the interim. Or the card was never meant to relate to the work on the ground at all.

The exhibitions themselves suffered similar challenges. It was understood all along that there was no money to fly the artists to Seattle, so several “materialized” works in 557,087 were constructed (though not “created”) by me and my assistants. In the end, several pieces never came together thanks to weather, poor construction, and other mishaps, among them the Sol LeWitt white cube with drawings on it, which was made so poorly that we withdrew it. (I can’t imagine a museum show in today’s highly professionalized times that would simply leave out works because of such haphazard conditions.)

In a city of hills, it wasn’t easy to comply with Robert Smithson’s instructions for making his piece: “400 square snapshots of Seattle Horizons—should be empty, plain, vacant, surd, common, ordinary blank dull level beaches, unoccupied uninhabited, deserted fields, scanty lots, houseless typical average roads, sandbars, remote lakes, distant timeless sites—use Kodak Instamatic 804. 8 rows of 50 ganged on wall.” Bob seemed happy enough with the finished piece, but he made it a point to come to Vancouver in January 1970 for the next version of the show and oversee the execution of *Glue Pour* in person.

Then there was just plain miscommunication, like Carl Andre’s request for “timber”

which I interpreted as a log rather than milled lumber. I managed to get “timber” donated by Weyerhaeuser and had it chopped up into the specified lengths to be lined up over gently rolling ground. It looked great. Andre was nice about it, but he called it “Lucy’s piece,” which lent a certain credence to the notion that the curator had become the artist—something I heartily denied since it implied that curators were not naturally creative—and when they were, they were no longer curators, but artists.

For instance, reviewer Peter Plagens complained about 557,087 that there was “a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other

artists,”³ missing the richness of the exhibition, which included works as diverse as Eva Hesse’s *Accretion* and Robert Ryman’s white painting, as well as land art, textual, and virtually invisible pieces. In any case, style was no longer an issue, though context was. I prefer Erika Suderburg’s take on the *Six Years* era: “a period-specific autocritique of art criticism as act.”⁴

Both 557,087 and 955,000 extended far out into the respective cities. There may have been previous exhibitions dispersed on this scale, or these may have been the first to escape the museum to this extent, interrupting public life in many ways and many places. A couple of years later I wrote in *Six Years* that 557,087 “was conceived as

an exercise in ‘anti-taste,’ as a compendium of varied work so large that the public would have to make up its own mind about ideas to which it had not been previously exposed.”⁵

By 1973 there was definitely a need for c. 7,500 because, I’m ashamed to say, there were only six women (Hesse, Adrian Piper, Christine Kozlov, Rosemarie Castoro, Hanne Darboven, and Eleanor Antin) in the previous shows, plus Ingrid Baxter and Liliana Porter—half of N.E. Thing Co. and a third of the New York Graphic Workshop, respectively. By then I was a rabid feminist and very sick of hearing people say there were “no women who make important art, monumental sculpture, conceptual art, etc.” c. 7,500 was the only

number show that traveled (to seven venues). I only saw it three times, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, ICA Boston, and Smith College (where one piece was drastically misinstalled; who knows what went on elsewhere). Traveling of course unraveled the logic (such as it was) behind the titles; it would have been fun to rename each exhibition for the population of each venue, but I couldn’t insist that the catalogue cards be reprinted, though in retrospect they might have been renamed with a simple sticker.

This reprinting project (and its marvelous title, thanks to Jeff Khonsary) comes as a pleasant surprise, though I’m not sure why the card packets are so appealing forty-odd

years after their original appearance. Perhaps it’s because museum catalogues these days are usually full-color and indistinguishable from books. These modest black-and-white index cards with blurry halftones may signal a proto-DIY approach for today’s Do-It-Yourself generation of artists and activists. (However, as I write at the end of 2011, even New York’s *Occupy Wall Street Journal* has color and is professionally produced, though other Occupy publications are grungier.) Maybe nostalgia plays a role, or the fame accrued in the ensuing years by so many then-little-known artists. Forty-odd years later, in such a changed aesthetic and political context, something in the cards remains relevant.

—1. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 203.

—2. Seth Siegelaub in an interview with Jo Melvin, *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, (London: Afterall, 2012), 256.

—3. Peter Plagens, “557,087,” *Artforum*, November 1969, 67.

—4. Erika Suderburg, ed., *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 20.

—5. Lippard, *Six Years*, 111.

4,492,040

Curator: Lucy R. Lippard
Editor: Jeff Khonsary
Copyeditor: Jaclyn Arndt
Design: The Future
Production: Victoria Lum
and Dirk Wright
Printed in Belgium
Edition of 1,000

Published by:
New Documents
Vancouver, Canada
Los Angeles, USA
www.new-documents.org

New Documents (1)
ISBN: 978-1927354001

© 2012 New Documents,
the author, and the artists

Support provided by:
BC Arts Council,
Vancouver Art Gallery,
Seattle Art Museum

Special thanks to:
Daina Augaitis, Cheryl
Siegel, Martha Wilson, Eric
Fredericksen, Vincent Bonin,
Jordan Strom, Catharina
Manchanda, Scott Ponik

Additional thanks to:
Afterall Books, Franklin Fur-
nace Archive, Inc., Indepen-
dent Curators International

Available through:
D.A.P. (USA/Canada)
Motto Books (Europe)

Presenting partners:
Seattle Art Museum
Vancouver Art Gallery