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Between Conceptual Acts and Photography:
Dennis Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant* (1969)

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Jamin An

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Between Conceptual Acts and Photography:
Dennis Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant* (1969)

by

Jamin An

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Miwon Kwon, Chair

This paper is a study of *Gallery Transplant* [Gallery #1, A.D. White Museum of Art] (1969), a work by the American artist Dennis Oppenheim (1938–2011), which was executed for the 1969 exhibition “Earth Art” held at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art at Cornell University. The dual structure of a “conceptual act” (a term I introduce in this essay) and a photo-based panel that comprises *Gallery Transplant* inspires this paper’s critique of a prevailing discursive framework, first emergent in the early critical reception of Conceptual Art, which separates and places in opposition the concomitant use of these two elements by Oppenheim and other artists of his generation.

Hypothesizing that the dual structure of *Gallery Transplant* is an integrated, non-hierarchical relational structure, this paper offers an alternative reading of the work. Attention to the ways in which the conceptual act and photo-based panel of *Gallery Transparent* are continuous or in correspondence with each other reveals that the work's conditions of temporality and site may be differently understood. This alternative framework and account, thus, urges a reconsideration of our understanding of Conceptual Art, photography, and their coupling in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The thesis of Jamin An is approved

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2013

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Bird sanctuary; Ithaca, New York; February 1969

A hand-drawn map guides us to a frozen pond in a bird sanctuary where we will hopefully find an artwork executed by the American artist Dennis Oppenheim for the exhibition “Earth Art” held in and around Cornell University’s Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art. In search of this work entitled *Gallery Transplant*, we first encounter an ideal winter landscape: a pristine blanket of white snow stretching through clusters of naked trees.¹ Then, a quadrilateral-like shape interrupts our sense of this seamless field of powder. We find a drawing in the snow. Unlike a hurriedly drawn snow angel, however, the lines of this drawing are orthogonal, with an even steady width, and, as the title indicates, they form the contours of a gallery’s floor plan drawn here at 1:1 scale. The “transplanted” gallery is Gallery #1, located a couple miles away inside the literal site of the museum that hosts the exhibition.

Admittedly, I have just described an imaginary encounter. For Oppenheim’s *Gallery Transplant*, which the artist drew by dragging a broom through snow, existed for a limited time in 1969. Conditions including, but not limited to, the surrounding snow’s melt, another potential snowfall, or, perhaps, people and animals disrupting the form of the lines, determined the work’s duration of appearance. Commonly described as “ephemeral,” the impermanence of *Gallery Transplant* as realized outdoors challenges the conventions of a timeless and permanent art object. Moreover, the material or medium of Oppenheim’s work opens new debates as well. Since slush has replaced graphite, a field of snow has taken the place of paper, can we call this a “drawing”? Or, maybe, is *Gallery Transplant* more accurately an “act”? This brief initial look reveals an artwork that privileges values such as contingency, a blurring of artistic mediums, and

¹ Oppenheim executed a total of five gallery transplants at the “Earth Art” exhibition. This paper will primarily study the transplant of Gallery #1.

performativity in contrast with modernist values of autonomy, medium-specificity, and constativity.

Indeed, the apparent antimodernist values typically position *Gallery Transplant* within larger tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s, including Land Art and Conceptual Art. In fact, *Gallery Transplant* is typically categorized as Land Art.² But Oppenheim also recognized affinities to Conceptual Art. In 1991, the artist, in an interview with the curator Alanna Heiss, acknowledged, “My work comes from an idea, and therein lies its conceptual aspect. But it’s not the only root...”³ The notion of an “idea” at the root of *Gallery Transplant* has, for other curators and critics, been an indicator of the work’s kinship to Conceptual Art.⁴

Whether or not the work belongs to Land Art or Conceptual Art (these categories are ultimately arbitrary), for the terms of this study I will identify this element—the floor plan of Gallery #1 realized in the snow—of *Gallery Transplant* as a “conceptual act,” by which I mean a kind of artistic operation that is preliminarily conceptualized (planned), procedurally-based, spatially and temporally contingent, and performative. These characteristics can be found in artworks by other artists first emergent in the 1960s and 1970s—now variously categorized as Conceptual Art, Land Art, Performance Art, Body Art, and Institutional Critique, to name a few. By using the term conceptual act, I mean to create distance from pre-given categories in order to

² The categorization of *Gallery Transplant* as Land Art is primarily due to the fact that Oppenheim’s early work often appeared beside the works of other major artists engaged with land and that *Gallery Transplant* was made in the context of “Earth Art,” considered one of the defining exhibitions of the category.

³ Alanna Heiss, “Another Point of Entry: An Interview with Dennis Oppenheim,” in *Dennis Oppenheim: Selected Works 1967-90: And the Mind Grew Fingers*, ed. Alanna Heiss (New York: The Institute of Contemporary Art, P.S. 1, 1992), 137.

⁴ For example, the artist’s 1969 transplant of a gallery in the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) to Jersey City, New Jersey, was presented in the pioneering Conceptual Art exhibition, “Op losse Schroeven (Square Peg in Round Holes),” and more recently in the 2012 exhibition, “Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph” (The Art Institute of Chicago). See Wim Beeren, *Op losse schroeven Situaties en cryptostructuren* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1969) and Matthew Witkovsky, ed. *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964-1977* (Chicago, Illinois: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2011).

relook at *Gallery Transplant*, a work that may exceed what these terms allow us to discern. As prevailing historical claims would argue, these categorical movements are late-twentieth century tendencies that sought to destabilize and transform the institutional conventions of art practice and the art object. However, the nature of this destabilization is not yet fully understood and a closer look at *Gallery Transplant* will begin to reveal a potentially different historical account of this transformation. Though, before we can fully consider the historical position of *Gallery Transplant* and Oppenheim's conceptual act, we need to sketch out an additional element of the work.

The title *Gallery Transplant* not only names Oppenheim's conceptual act in the snow but also a panel (fig. 1).⁵ In the panel, six color photographs show different stages of the conceptual act that took place on the snow-covered frozen pond. Some of these photographs include the artist, others show flocks of birds walking in, over, and around Oppenheim's finished snow drawing. In addition to and placed underneath the photographs, Oppenheim includes text describing the outdoor element of the work, an architectural plan of the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art with the gallery in question outlined in red, and a satellite photograph of the work's larger geographic context of Ithaca, New York. This panel of *Gallery Transplant* was produced for and displayed in the interior gallery setting of "Earth Art," in the very gallery space that the work "transplants." Upon first glance the panel seems to function as a tool to mitigate the impermanence of the conceptual act outdoors—its contingency to time, site, and material.

Perhaps obviously, the photographs in the *Gallery Transplant* panel record the artist executing the conceptual act, an act fixed to its time past and place distant. The text, we could say, further tells us "what happened." Finally, the architectural plan and satellite photograph

⁵ The term, "panel," is used by the artist's archive. E-mail correspondence with Amy P. Oppenheim, 15 February 2013.

further contextualize the ephemeral conceptual act. Described in this way, Oppenheim's panel would seem to be a "document" or "documentation," a class of media (most often photo or text-based) that many would argue and would conventionally accept as a means to overcome the physical and temporal remoteness of a given thing or event, rendering it present and accessible in the here and now. However, just as I previously paused the consideration of Oppenheim's conceptual act above, I want to immediately resist the assessment of this panel, especially the photographs, as mere documents.⁶

The idea of the "document" connotes belatedness and supplementarity and belies the intimate coupling of the conceptual act and photography at the very outset of Oppenheim's project. Indeed, in Oppenheim's overall practice from 1968 to 1975, such a pairing of a conceptual act and a photo-based panel recurs consistently.⁷ To say that the panel "comes after" and to render the panel secondary to the act is to misperceive the *paired* structure of his works into a hierarchy that privileges the conceptual act over the work of the panel. To do so also closes lines of inquiry that the concomitant operations of a conceptual act and photography demand: What does the conceptual act learn or receive from photographs? What do photographs find or take from the conceptual act? The paired structure of *Gallery Transplant*, conceptual act *with* photo-based panel, demands that we look and think beyond the presumed limits of both to understand how they speak with and through one another. The gambit of the following examination is to do just that. A close reading of Dennis Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant*, in fact, proposes that we reorient our understanding of the relationship between conceptual acts and

⁶ This paper's study of the panel centers around the photographs because they are not only predominant in the panel itself but Oppenheim's own published discussions and reflections on the panel element concern issues of photography and the increasing use of the medium in the late 1960s by him and other artists.

⁷ For other examples, see *Landslide* (1968), *Contour Lines Scribed in Swamp Grass* (1968), and *Identity Stretch* (1970/1975).

photographs as non-hierarchical (as co-extensive, not one before the other), a reorientation that opens onto greater destabilizing implications for our standing conceptions of artists and art practices, generally, of the 1960s and 1970s.

Towards my argument, I first consider and question the dominant art historical discursive framework of opposition and hierarchy that represses and/or instrumentalizes the use of photography by artists associated with Conceptual Art. It is within the category of Conceptual Art that critics and art historians have searched and settled upon this structural logic, a logic that I also show determines the basis for the critical reception of and previous claims made for *Gallery Transplant*. Following the review of this discourse, I hypothesize that an analogical framework enables an alternative reading of *Gallery Transplant*.

An analogical framework, in contrast with the predominant oppositional and hierarchical framework, imagines that the dual structure of a conceptual act and photo-based panel are equal terms and align with each other in mutually reinforcing ways, towards a shared function and proposition.⁸ With this alternative framework of analogical relation, I offer a reading of *Gallery Transplant* that pays close attention to the work's temporal and site conditions. The analogical structural reading of *Gallery Transplant* reveals a work marked by a temporal condition of finitude and tied to a non-sovereign site. This alternative reading contrasts with the claims previously made for *Gallery Transplant*, claims that rely upon broader ossified historical conceptions regarding the 1960s and 1970s, and reveals the pressing need to reconsider our understanding of this complex historical period.

⁸ My intervention takes inspiration from Kaja Silverman's recent study of analogy as an organizing principle of Being and human relations. In her study, the German artist Gerhard Richter is her primary example, an artist whose own sense of his work is explicitly analogical (between painting and photography). Oppenheim's practice is not self-consciously analogical, however, as inspiration, I see Silverman's framework as a model for shifting how we conceive of the relations between artistic media or elements, from oppositions of difference to resemblances of lesser or greater sameness. See Kaja Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2-4.

Conceptual Acts and Photography at Odds

In a 1970 interview published in the first issue of the magazine *Avalanche*,⁹ Oppenheim offered the following reflection on his conceptual acts and photography:

One day the photograph is going to become even more important than it is now—there'll be a heightened respect for photographers. Let's assume that art has moved away from its manual phase and that now it's more concerned with the location of material and with speculation. So the work of art now has to be visited or abstracted from a photograph, rather than made. I don't think the photograph could have had the same richness of meaning in the past as it has now. But I'm not particularly an advocate of the photograph.¹⁰

The artist's comment is rife with ambivalence. He is uncertain how to make sense of the structural relationship that underlies his own work. On one hand, Oppenheim intuits photography's increasing significance, that works of art are no longer made but "visited" or "abstracted" from photographs. On the other hand, he wants to qualify photography's significance through a categorical and hierarchical opposition that he draws between what he does, "art that has moved away from its manual phase [Conceptual Art]," versus photography, simply the means by which, according to the artist, the new work of art is accessed. While the artist senses a sea change, a kind of photographic turn—"I don't think the photograph could have had the same *richness of meaning* in the past as it has now," Oppenheim says—he immediately turns back, away from the medium. The artist would have us believe that he is surely not a photographer.

The early critical reception and prevailing historical literature on Conceptual Art and photography similarly struggle with the same dilemma of how to describe the dual occurrence of

⁹ Willoughby, Sharp, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," *Avalanche* 1, Fall 1970: 48-70. In an oral history conducted in 2006, Willoughby Sharp explains how he considered this first issue of *Avalanche* as both an exhibition catalogue for the "Earth Art" exhibition from a year prior and an exhibition in itself. See Willoughby Sharp, "Willoughby Sharp on the 'Earth Art' Exhibition at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1969," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, eds. Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012), 37.

¹⁰ Sharp, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," 70.

an art of “speculation” (Conceptual Art or Idea Art as it was called earlier on) and photography. The following literature review shows how the critical and historical discourse settled upon an oppositional relation between conceptual acts and photographs, privileging the former and marginalizing the latter. While Oppenheim senses that the emergence of new forms of art-making include rich and novel uses of photography, the prevailing critical and historical framework positions the two terms as different and, therefore, irreconcilable entities.

In the earliest attempts at describing and defining the project of Conceptual Art, artists and critics such as Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard privileged the immaterial “idea” as the defining character of Conceptual Art. Their accounts resisted or refused recognition of the prevalent use of photographs to manifest this new idea-based art form. LeWitt wrote in his 1967 essay, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”: “In conceptual art the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”¹¹ The anti-expressionist critique of LeWitt’s conceptualism aimed to displace art practice away from the artwork’s traditional regimes of production and visibility. Observing a trend she and the critic John Chandler called the “dematerialization of the art object,” Lucy Lippard, like LeWitt, imagined an “object’s becoming wholly obsolete” giving way to an “art as idea and art as action.”¹² While LeWitt and Lippard did not deny that these immaterial ideas are more often than not realized in some material form, they conceived this “perfunctory affair” as neutral, mechanistic, or *a posteriori*, therefore, not definitional. Materiality could only be a means, no

¹¹ Sol LeWitt, “Paragraph on Conceptual Art,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist’s Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 822.

¹² Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art,” in Lucy Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971), 255.

longer an end, and so the photograph existed outside their critical attention, not registered as a materiality in itself. The materiality that Lippard acknowledged were, for her, tools that transmit or translate: "...the emphasis on diagrams and projects, on models and working drawings rather than finished pieces, is usually accompanied by the existence of the finished pieces, and these are finally successful only if the idea—original or not—has been successfully translated into visual terms."¹³ LeWitt similarly wrote, "Ideas may also be stated with numbers, photographs, or words or any way the artist chooses, the form being unimportant."¹⁴ Defined by material and perceptual withdrawal, LeWitt and Lippard's notions of Conceptual Art excluded the novel uses of photography or, as Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* would remind us, for both LeWitt and Lippard, "a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that [they see]."¹⁵ Blind to the photograph, their accounts of Conceptual Art repressed the fact of photography as an integral, defining condition and neglected questions concerning how and why the advent of Conceptual Art was tied to the proliferation of photographs. In typical assessments of *Gallery Transplant*, the repression of photography determined an interpretation that elevated the conceptual act as the essence of the work.

For many of the work's previous interlocutors, to know *Gallery Transplant* was to only identify its root idea, insofar as the idea was apparently the key characteristic of any conceptually driven work. The critic Thomas McEvilley wrote in a catalogue essay for Oppenheim's 1991 retrospective that "Oppenheim took the dimensions of a gallery, then marked off a similarly

¹³ Ibid., 272.

¹⁴ LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 826.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.

bounded space outdoors.”¹⁶ More recently, curatorial commentary made in the exhibition, “Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph” on Oppenheim’s transplant of a gallery in the Stedelijk Museum asserted: “In the series of Transplants begun in 1968, Oppenheim transferred the footprint of a well-known space (often but not exclusively in the world of art) to a plot of land in an outdoor location bearing no formal relationship to the site of origin” (fig. 6).¹⁷ Such comments are not technically inaccurate but remain partial because they do not recognize the fact of Oppenheim’s panel, the very means through which we can even imagine a conceptual act. For these commentators, the photo-based panel is left unmentioned, outside the sphere of the work of art. Such approaches not only repress the photo-based panel but further delimit the site and time of the work as well. Even though *Gallery Transplant* clearly functions according to a dialectic of indoor (both the source of the drawn form and where the panel is installed) and outdoor spaces (where the idea was acted out or made manifest), interpretations focusing on the supposed root idea of the work locates the site of *Gallery Transplant* exclusively outdoors. Such assessments also only describe the artist’s physical realization of the idea (note the emphasis on verbalized constructions: Oppenheim “marked off” or “transferred the footprint”), isolating and privileging the temporality of the work in relation to the idea’s literal point of execution by the artist—neglecting the complex temporality proposed in and through the panel.

When the critical discourse has acknowledged photography, the medium is positioned customarily as a secondary, documentary tool. Conceptual Art’s emphasis on the idea necessarily determined the instrumentalization of photography, most apparent in the discourse of documentation. In Ursula Meyer’s, *Conceptual Art* (1972) and Gregory Battcock’s, *Idea Art: A*

¹⁶ Thomas McEvelley, “The Rightness of Wrongness: Modernism and Its Alter-Ego in the Work of Dennis Oppenheim,” in *Dennis Oppenheim: Selected Works 1967-90: And the Mind Grew Fingers*, ed. Alanna Heiss (New York: The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1, 1992), 17.

¹⁷ Witkovsky, *Light Years*, 231.

Critical Anthology (1973), photography escapes critical treatment when rarely mentioned. While Meyer notes that photography has expanded from its original function to reproduce artworks, she shares LeWitt and Lippard's instrumentalized conception of the photograph, calling it a "container," Meyer writes: "The aspect of documentation has become increasingly important for Conceptual Art. The camera as well as the Xerox machine can be used as dumb recording devices. Conceptual artists...have used meaningless, everyday occurrences, maps, snapshots, diagrams as 'containers' for their conceptions."¹⁸ This instrumentalization of photography as a "dumb" or "meaningless" container continues in the claims made by Seth Siegelau, a dealer and curator who was intimately involved in the emergence of Conceptual Art as an artistic genre or category.

In a 1970 interview with Charles Harrison, the dealer explains how photographic-based forms like the artist's book and catalogue are "the most neutral means to present the new art."¹⁹ While Siegelau's innovative exhibition formats, including his "network of booksellers" and "mailing lists," allowed Conceptual Art to grow into a major international phenomenon, the dealer understood these forms as symptomatic of a new art practice in which presentation and context, situational terms outside the idea, had no bearing, the dealer explains:

It's a question of where an artist will give up his choice. This is a vitally important difference between the new work and what has preceded it. Whereas painters have generally never specified how much light their paintings should be seen by, what size wall they should be hung on—they have left it up to you *implicitly*—this new body of work *explicitly* denies any responsibility for its presentation. All you need to see a painting is light. This new work doesn't even con[c]ern itself with that. The question of what environment you see the work in has nothing to do with what has been done.²⁰

¹⁸ Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), 11-12.

¹⁹ Charles Harrison, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large: A Conversation with Seth Siegelau," in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), 168.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 171 and 168-169.

Following Siegelau's logic, Oppenheim's choice to produce a panel and install that panel in a gallery ("what environment you see the work in") are arbitrary decisions, "nothing to do" with the work's reception. The discourse of documentation may have acknowledged the photograph but still remained "blind" to it, discounting its phenomenal fact, specificity, and contribution.²¹

Thus, when observers have paid attention to the *Gallery Transplant* panel as secondary documentation, they have done so in order to illusorily transcend their temporal and physical distance from the conceptual act depicted in the photograph, convinced of the panel's neutrality and arbitrariness. This is an operation exemplified by a 1969 essay, published in *Artforum*, by Jean-Louis Bourgeois. Writing in the same year Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant* appeared, the critic and writer was sensitive to the shock and suspicion triggered by photographs. Early on in Bourgeois' essay, "Dennis Oppenheim: A Presence in the Countryside," the writer reflects upon the confusion many felt before the confounding appearance of photographs:

When shown in the gallery, such photos tend to trouble not only the casually curious but the devoted gallery-goer as well. One reason is that in a gallery everyone expects to find works of art. When you get 'stuck' with photos of art instead—whether of masterpieces or junk doesn't matter—it hurts. Going to a gallery and finding 'only' photos is a little like going to a warehouse and finding only pornography. You feel gypped.²²

In spite of feeling gypped, Bourgeois chose not to dismiss Oppenheim's panel outright, attempting to perform a sincere reading of the *Gallery Transplant* vis-à-vis the panel. His reading, however, in spite of its sincerity, reveals that the prevailing critical option was to

²¹ Seth Siegelau is most well known for his term, "primary information," the dealer explained the term in his interview with Harrison: "The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc., and in some cases the 'exhibition' can be the 'catalogue.'" Though the elevation ("primary") of the photo-based forms (magazines, catalogues) may be interpreted as the opposite of repression or instrumentalization, Siegelau's belief that these forms in which Conceptual Art was manifest were "neutral" is consistent with the instrumentalizing logic underlying Meyer's "container" and the discourse of documentation generally. Indeed, Siegelau finishes his explanation of "primary information" by adding, "Whether the artist chooses to present the work as a book or magazine or through an interview or with sticker labels or on billboards, it is not to be mistaken for the 'art' ('subject matter?')." See *Ibid.*, 168.

²² Jean-Louis Bourgeois, "Dennis Oppenheim: A Presence in the Countryside," *Artforum*, October 1969, 35.

differentiate the photograph as a documentary tool, as a dumb container that delivers the site (outside) and time (lost and anterior) of the conceptual act to the viewer. The sense of fanciful movement and flight, by way of the photograph, in Bourgeois' reading of a *Gallery Transparent* panel especially dramatizes the critic's instrumentalization of photography:

One of a series of five "Gallery Transplants" done for a museum show at Cornell consists of floor plan, map, and photos. One of the transplanted spaces is a room in the museum itself. Its outline is marked heavily in the plan, which represents an entire floor of the museum. When looking at the plan, the eye "climbs" to adjust the bird's eye view that the plan, if it does not portray, at least suggests. In this section of the piece the eye, figuratively, has reached a height of 200 feet. In the next section (reading clockwise) the map, the eye soars to a height of several miles. How else could it be witness to the vast panorama which the map suggests? Then it narrows its focus to a large, unusual "X" on the map and (continuing clockwise goes on to a photo, where it finds its perspective reduced to the view of a man alone in rather desolate country, working with what seems to be a shovel. The eye has "landed." In the second photo, its view lowered to the foreground—to the closest and therefore most immediate perspective of the piece—it finds like magic, on open ground, the outline of the room it had left behind. It has reached the piece's second space. From actuality to plan to map to photo, Oppenheim has traced the eye's path from room to room-outline, from museum to lonely landscape.²³

The panel, as documentation, leaves us at a "lonely landscape" not only with regard to the outdoor site and singular time of *Gallery Transplant* but also a discursive landscape that excludes a full consideration of the panel—how the panel may have a specific perceptual experience unto itself, not solely determined by the conceptual act. While Bourgeois' photographic reading may offer an exhilarating phenomenological account, his reading chooses to focus solely upon the "unreality" of the photograph—the privileging of the conceptual act made *illusorily* present through the "here-now" of the photographic depiction. His reading neglects facing the "real" of the photograph that sits beside its unreality, what Roland Barthes describes as the "having-been-there," the photograph's "always stupefying evidence of *this is how it was.*" Bourgeois' belief in the "magical character of the photographic image," that the photo-based panel could give him unmediated, neutral access to the conceptual act, leaves his

²³ Ibid., 36.

interpretation without the panel itself, its reality in the gallery and its relation to a conceptual act in the past.²⁴

While such early literature on Conceptual Art and photography predominantly repressed and/or instrumentalized the use of photographs, two accounts by Lawrence Alloway and Nancy Foote need to be mentioned for they attempted to take photography more seriously and construct a more relational assessment of its pairing with conceptual acts.²⁵ Written for a collection of photographic artist's books organized by Multiples, Inc. (New York) in 1970, Alloway's essay, "Artists and Photographs" sought to describe photographic strategies shared by artists such as Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, and Oppenheim. Quoting the philosopher Max Bense, Alloway echoed commentators like LeWitt and Siegelau by situating the photograph as primarily an informational supplement or "channel art" (Bense's term). Using Oppenheim as an exemplar, Alloway wrote, "Dennis Oppenheim classifies photographic documentation as a 'secondary statement...after the fact,' the fact being, of course, the work out in the field...the area of the photograph is simply the size of the sample of information transmitted, a glimpse."²⁶

The photograph's documentary status in Alloway's assessment "provide[s] the coordinates of absent works of art," and "distribute[s] and make[s] consultable the work of art

²⁴ In the essay, "Rhetoric of the Image," (1977) Roland Barthes asserts the photograph should be described as a "real-unreality," he writes, "...its unreality is that of the *here-now*, for the photograph is never experienced as illusion, is in no way a *presence* (claims as to the magical character of the photographic image must be deflated); its reality that of the *having-been-there*, for in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of *this is how it was...*" Barthes' project highlights the psychic operations of this double sense of the photograph and also wants to cast suspicion on the partial photographic reading that focuses only on the "here-now," on which the discourse of documentation also wants to focus. See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44.

²⁵ Most well known for his writings and curatorial work in Pop Art, Lawrence Alloway was an English curator and art critic active in London and New York in the 1960s. Writer and critic Nancy Foote was an editor and frequent contributor to *Artforum* in the 1970s.

²⁶ Lawrence Alloway, "Artists and Photographs," *Studio International*, April 1970, 163.

that is inaccessible...or ephemeral.”²⁷ The critic’s contribution is to suggest an aesthetic argument for such a photographic function: “One thing everybody has in common should be noted: there is an anti-expertise, anti-glamorous quality about all the photographs here. Their factual appearance is maintained through even the most problematic relationships.”²⁸ In Alloway’s text, we find an important origin for prevailing narratives that describe the use of photography in Conceptual Art as deskilled, deadpan, amateurish, factual, and/or indifferent.²⁹ Alloway’s acknowledgment of the proliferation of photographic practices is noteworthy but his argument is ultimately an extension that tries to aestheticize the discourse of documentation. Alloway’s anti-aesthetic argument, however, still represses an inquiry into the paired structural condition of the conceptual act and photograph.

Writing six years later, Nancy Foote’s essay “The Anti-Photographers” shared Alloway’s attention to the sense of the anti-aesthetic and unremarkable qualities of the photographs accompanying conceptual works but is important, here, for a set of interpretive possibilities that she articulates at the close of the essay, possibilities that signal a departure from the critical repression of photography.³⁰ Published in the September 1976 issue of *Artforum* dedicated to photography, Foote’s essay primarily sought to distinguish conceptual art photography from fine art photography. She reiterated documentary and informational notions of the conceptual

²⁷ Ibid., 163.

²⁸ Ibid., 162-163.

²⁹ This is the direction Jeff Wall takes up in his 1993 essay, “‘Marks of Indifference’: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” Wall’s project is to describe photography’s modernist turn by arguing that Conceptual Art is photography’s modernist de-skilling. His essay’s aim is tangential and will not be fully addressed in this paper; see Jeff Wall, “‘Marks of Indifference’: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1995), 247-267. The art historian Benjamin Buchloh also takes up the “deadpan” or de-skilled photograph as evidence of Conceptual Art’s “aesthetics of administration.” See Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (1990): 119-124.

³⁰ Nancy Foote, “The Anti-Photographers,” *Artforum*, September 1976, 46-54.

photograph by examining various “snapshot-like,” “amateur,” and “nonchalan[t]” strategies including but not limited to collection, sequencing, and seriality.³¹ While the primary impulse of her essay was to describe an anti-aesthetic photography (extending Alloway’s aesthetic claims), she concluded with a line of inquiry that suggested a direction away from the prevailing repression of the photograph operative in major narratives of Conceptual Art:

Photography obviously cannot claim sole credit for the rise of the prevailing ephemeral art styles; nor is it fair to say that conceptual art is produced purely to be photographed. It isn’t. But there can be little doubt that photography’s role has extended far beyond its original archival function, entering into dialogue with artistic ideas in mutually reinforcing ways...If photography has encouraged such transitory indulgences [impermanent and ephemeral works], it has also in many cases helped shape their character.³²

Foote’s closing thought challenges her reader still to ask, “How might photography shape the character of Conceptual Art?” Her statement challenged the discursive logic we have traced thus far that determined the function of photography according to the prevailing characteristics and needs of Conceptual Art.

Rosalind Krauss’s highly influential essay, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America” (1977), provides a final major viewpoint regarding the relation between Conceptual Art and photography.³³ This essay on one hand embraced Nancy Foote’s challenge that asks what photography has given Conceptual Art. However, “Notes on the Index,” still resisted the framework of “mutually reinforcing” operations by insisting on indexicality as almost an ontological logic of photography (at the expense of the specific operations and characteristics of the conceptual act).

³¹ Ibid., 48-51.

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” *October* 3 (1977): 68-81 and Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America Part 2,” *October* 4 (1977): 58-67.

Confronting what she saw as an extreme heterogeneity of 1970s art, including Conceptual Art and related categories such as Body Art, Land Art, Performance, and Video Art, Krauss sought to find a point of synthesis amidst this prevailing state of pluralism. In her essay, she pointed to “the pervasiveness of the photograph as a means of representation” and extended the observation to claim that artists of the 1970s collectively employ photography’s logic of the index. By index she referred at once to C.S. Peirce’s semiotic category—“An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object”³⁴—and to Roland Barthes’ discussions of the analogical character of the photograph—“the photograph (in its literal state), by virtue of its absolutely analogical nature, seems to constitute a message without a code.”³⁵ For Krauss, when an artist like Oppenheim draws a floor plan of a gallery onto a surface of snow outdoors, he is operating according to the indexical logic of photography, making present what is tied to the index; Krauss explained:

The connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photograph is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system. In the photograph’s distance from what could be called syntax one finds the mute presence of an uncoded event. And it is this kind of presence that abstract artists now seek to employ.³⁶

Therefore, it would be argued, the gallery is made present outside, by the indexical trace of its architectural plan rendered in the snow. According to Krauss’s argument, the operation of the conceptual act is less a translation of an idea and more like a photograph; her essay sought to convert the conceptual act (Conceptual Art and other related tendencies) into a photographic operation. Paradoxically, however, Krauss elevated photographic logic without an attention to

³⁴ Charles Sanders Peirce, “A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic,” in *The Essential Peirce 2* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 291-292.

³⁵ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 42-43.

³⁶ Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America Part 2,” 59–60.

the photograph itself, as demonstrated by the following claims that assert *Gallery Transplant* is a form of institutional critique.

Krauss's notion of the index provides the theoretical ground for the prevailing assessment that argues when Oppenheim transplants the gallery outside, the artist "negates" or "rejects" the gallery; that *Gallery Transplant* is a work that critiques the institution of art. Returning to Thomas McEvelley's interpretation of *Gallery Transplant*, the critic reads a kind of institutional critique in Oppenheim's transplant: "A cognitive reversal is involved; the real world index ironically was derived from the gallery, and then transposed to the outside world as a rejection of the reality of the gallery."³⁷ For McEvelley, the indexical mark of the gallery's floor plan displaces the "reality of the gallery" to its opposite, the "outside world." This displacement signals, McEvelley argues, Oppenheim's "rejection" of the gallery and the institutional conventions signified by its architectural design. Rosalind Krauss's indexical logic of photography that argues photographs correspond to and make present the referent they are tied to provides the theoretical basis for McEvelley's notion that Oppenheim has moved the gallery. The curatorial remarks on Oppenheim's transplants in *Light Years* also echo this line of reasoning: "The placement of the work itself [the conceptual act of *Gallery Transplant*] outdoors amounts to a rejection of existing art-world institutions as suitable physical or administrative locations for showing art..."³⁸ As these examples suggest, even with Krauss's development of a photographic framework, we remain outside, still unable to specifically account for the panel element of *Gallery Transplant*.

³⁷ McEvelley, "The Rightness of Wrongness: Modernism and Its Alter-Ego in the Work of Dennis Oppenheim," 17.

³⁸ Witkovsky, *Light Years*, 231. For another related example, see "Annotated Checklist of the Exhibition," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, eds. Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012), 225.

Krauss's "Notes on the Index" remains a powerful conceptual framework and an important corrective to the prevailing repression of photography in discourses of Conceptual Art. I would argue, however, that her argument overcorrects and in turn obscures the paired operations of the conceptual act and the photograph. While Krauss inverts the discursive logic that excluded photography, her photographic framework performs an equally non-relational reading. For example, could we rightly say that the act of drawing *Gallery #1* in the snow, a mark that will eventually disappear, indicates *Gallery Transplant* is about the "pure installation of presence"?³⁹ What kind of "presence" does the panel seen in *Gallery #1* construct?

The prevailing critical and historical accounts of Conceptual Art and photography primarily repress photography's constitutive status and construct a normative reading of the photograph as an instrumental medium of documentation. As I have also tried to demonstrate, this prevailing framework that privileges the conceptual act of *Gallery Transplant* conditions an assessment of the work's site, temporality, and stakes that excludes the original fact of the photo-based panel installed in the interior gallery that the conceptual act transplants. According to the prevailing framework provided by the standing literature, *Gallery Transplant* is a work outside, with a temporal frame bounded by the event in which the artist executed his idea in 1969, and it is a work that rejects and negates art's institutional context.

Rejecting the oppositional positioning of Conceptual Art and photography would enable a consideration of new, pressing questions for *Gallery Transplant* that grapple with Oppenheim's concomitant use of the panel, such as: What site relationship does the panel construct between *Gallery #1*, where the viewer sees *Gallery Transplant*, and its transplantation outside? If the photograph is, generally, a still image of a brief moment of time, what sense of time does

³⁹ Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," 80.

Oppenheim give us in the panel? How do the conditions of site and temporality constructed by the panel elaborate, challenge, or share with the conditions constructed by the conceptual act? These are questions predicated upon a relational structure in which terms may remain equal, like analogy.⁴⁰ Unlike the oppositional relation that splits conceptual act and photography into a hierarchy, an analogical relation remains simultaneously open to both the difference between the conceptual act and photography and to the possibility that each “points toward, and finds itself, within the other.”⁴¹ To shift from an oppositional to an analogical relational structure, we must ask: How do the conceptual act and panel of Oppenheim’s *Gallery Transplant* share or align with each other in Oppenheim’s *Gallery Transplant*?

Between Conceptual Acts and Photography

In spite of Oppenheim’s own ambivalence and incoherent sense of the paired structural condition of his practice, he, in fact, suggested in a 1969 interview with Patricia Norvell that a kind of analogical operation is in play with his work, in which the conceptual act and panel correspond with each other. Or put another way, the conceptual act and the photo-based panel’s relation could be that of correspondence:

The aspect of the documentation that I would tend to reject is that it's taking us back into an object, or into a rigid static kind of form which is exactly what the new work doesn't imply. A good part of the processing pieces that I've done are pieces that involve following the processes of [how] a particular medi[um] move[s] in time and place.⁴²

⁴⁰ Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴² Dennis Oppenheim and Patricia Norvell, “Dennis Oppenheim, March 29, 1969,” in *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, and Weiner by Patricia Norvell*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2001), 23.

Here, Oppenheim reveals a sense that the photograph and his conceptual act might, or at least should, move with each other, rhyme with one another. Rejecting the normative notion of photography as a document that provides evidence, installs presence, as Krauss argued, or “tak[es] us back into an object” as Oppenheim himself put it here, the artist wanted the conceptual act and photograph to share in his practice’s development of “processing pieces,” artworks that investigate “[how] a particular medi[um] move[s] in time and place.” In what follows, I take up Oppenheim’s suggestion and examine *Gallery Transplant* through an analogical framework in order to demonstrate how the conceptual act and panel work together in a shared study of temporality and site in flux.

A Temporal Condition of Finitude

The text on the photographic panel of *Gallery Transplant* ends with the following information, “Duration: 24 hours” (fig. 3). In some of the other transplants Oppenheim executed for “Earth Art,” the duration is noted as a “Duration of limits” and includes other spans of time, from “4 hours” to “4 days.” Duration, the time during which something continues, points to a major condition of *Gallery Transplant*: temporality. Firstly, in our introductory look at *Gallery Transplant*, a specific evaluation of time was revealed by the pronouncement of the work’s impermanent or ephemeral character. That the work did not or could not seemingly exist for time eternal seems for many interpreters of *Gallery Transplant* the characteristic temporal condition of the work. *Gallery Transplant*, one would conventionally state, poses a recalcitrant challenge to temporal conventions of permanence by “being ephemeral.” Secondly, in our review of the critical and historical literature, we saw that the particular period of time privileged by the oppositional interpretive framework of Conceptual Art versus photography was the specific time in which the artist executed or authored the conceptual act. But, when we use the word

“ephemeral,” what kind of time do we really mean? What *experience* of temporality does “impermanence” describe? Close attention to the materials of *Gallery Transplant*, the form of the “transplant,” and the sense of time in the work’s panel, reveals an alternative temporal condition that exceeds both the prevailing term ephemerality and questions the limited sense of temporal experience the term implies. I suggest *Gallery Transplant* operates according to a sense of time that is finite. By which I mean, a temporal state of finitude in which the work is always in the present moment by accepting and embracing its continual renewal from a past and its inevitable end in the future.

While it may seem strange to speak of the “materials” of *Gallery Transplant*, there is an important specificity to Oppenheim’s choice of what earth/land elements to use in the “Earth Art” exhibition. All but one work Oppenheim executed in Ithaca, in and around the time of the “Earth Art” exhibition, uses snow and ice.⁴³ In fact, the distinction of Oppenheim’s choice is especially apparent when we acknowledge that the exhibition’s curator, Willoughby Sharp, mandated that all the participating artists should touch dirt.⁴⁴

Unlike dirt, when Oppenheim draws in snow (fig. 4), cuts into ice (fig. 7), or sites the conceptual act on a frozen pond (figs. 1 and 8), the act is immediately fixed to a temporal condition that is discretely bounded and overtly dynamic. The chemical transformations determined by the relatively unstable element of H₂O mobilized in an outdoor environment (compared to Sharp’s mandatory dirt), materially constitute a work that is marked by constant change (progressive melting or accumulation of snow/ice) and end (the melting of the snow or

⁴³ Oppenheim executed several works between December 1968 and February 1969 in and near Cornell University. Oppenheim’s *Accumulation Cut* (1969) was the “outdoor” project the artist executed for “Earth Art.” In his oral history, curator Willoughby Sharp recalls Oppenheim’s *Annual Rings* (1968).

⁴⁴ Willoughby Sharp explained in an oral history: “[I] said in no uncertain words that each artist in the show had to touch dirt.” See Sharp, “Willoughby Sharp on the ‘Earth Art’ Exhibition at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1969,” 39. The transplant of *Gallery #9* is the one work in which Oppenheim obviously touched dirt.

ice to water).⁴⁵ If it can be said that the material's persistent change and certain end condition a temporal experience, it is the experience of being in the present, for the fact of chemical transformation with the snow/ice reveals a material that barely holds onto a past form and must remain open to its future (chemical) states. Subsequently, this dynamic of temporality in the work highlights the present of the work; in the sense that presentness is acutely sensible when the work is *within* changing temporality, open to the situatedness of moving temporal experience. Finitude's temporal organization of a slippery past, emphatic present, and inevitable future is further expressed in the particular way the conceptual act of *Gallery Transplant* is realized, the form of the transplant drawing itself.

Admittedly, a drawing in the snow, as I have sometimes called the conceptual act of *Gallery Transplant*, may be misleading, counter-intuitively describing the actual physical event of the act. In the case of *Gallery Transplant*, Oppenheim executes the drawing through a mode of subtraction, rather than the typically additive mode one may associate with drawing. With a broom, Oppenheim sweeps away snow to delineate the floor plan lines of Gallery #1 (fig. 4). For contrast, instead of subtracting snow to create the lines of the floor plan of Gallery #4, Oppenheim creates the interior space that the lines of Gallery #4 enclose (fig. 10). In transplanted Gallery #4, the lines of the gallery's plan are sensible at the edge of the subtraction, from the overall depression in the snow. In both cases, the temporal experience could be described by finitude not only with regard to the properties of the act's material but also with the act's environmentally contingent form.

⁴⁵ This is not to say dirt does not have a temporality. In fact, the relationship between temporality and material was important not only for Oppenheim but also Robert Smithson who was interested in the geological time of earthen matter, generally. My emphasis on snow and ice is the materials' smaller, immediately sensible, scale of time that Oppenheim's choice reveals. Oppenheim and Smithson discuss geological time in Sharp, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," 66-69. See also Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum* (September 1968).

The subtractive construction of *Gallery Transplant* creates a vulnerable form. By vulnerable, I mean that the lines created by subtraction emphatically open the transplant form to its environment. The transplant's subtractive form ties the lines that delineate the plan of Gallery #1 to its snowy surrounds; the transplant, we could say, finds its formal definition nonessentially, through lines that are determined by its surrounding environment and the inevitable changes to that situation of the snow-covered frozen pond. Such a vulnerable form is consistent with and underscores the work's material attention to the unstable and temporal properties of snow and ice. The vulnerability of the transplantation created by subtraction firmly conditions the conceptual act of *Gallery Transplant* according to its temporally present situation, a situation always moving from its past state and towards a future becoming.

Materially and structurally described in this way, it becomes increasingly difficult to say there is a precise "when" of *Gallery Transplant*. Oppenheim's dynamic material and vulnerable form conditions a conceptual act that can only be described by perpetual change. Indeed, we could even say that the "transplant" continues to act well beyond the initial event of the transplantation in the snow by the artist. Recognizing the temporal finitude of the material and form of the conceptual act, we must acknowledge that no point of time in the work can be privileged over the other. Of course, there is a discrete moment of the execution and end of the transplant, but even these points in time bear little distinction if we acknowledge that the transplant is defined by change. The temporal dynamic constructed by the material of the conceptual act and how the transplant is formally realized press us to recognize that every point of time in the work is specific and partial and therefore, no more or no less the correct time of the work. The condition of change pressures us to neither privilege the act's realization nor end, for such an evaluation of time would differentiate and put points of time in opposition, an ordering

that would contradict the specificity and partialness of the work's temporality. The temporal condition of finitude, predicated upon change, instead privileges the present time of the transplant, every moment being a present that is simply of greater or lesser similarity to the receding past and inevitable future that are behind and in front of that temporal point. This privileging of presentness that I identify in the work's temporal condition of finitude is as well the kind of temporality discernable in the *Gallery Transplant* panel.

We started the question of temporality with text found in the *Gallery Transplant* panel. How to evaluate the panel's temporality and relation to the conceptual act must also consider the six photographs placed above the text that take up the majority of the space of the panel (fig. 5). With their ordered layout, three rows by two columns, the photographs, upon first glance, look like a sequence. As if one should read the images from left to right and top to bottom, according to the documentary logic that argued photographs point to the conceptual act, the photographic sequence, should capture the linear time of the act's existence. A sequential reading of the six photographs of *Gallery Transplant*, however, is quickly thwarted.

Comparing the lines in the "first" and "second" photographs, note the missing notched line in the second photograph that reveals the second photograph in fact came before the first in which the notched line is drawn. We learn that the photographs are not organized according to any proper sense of linear, sequential time. Indeed, even closer attention to the textual temporal information that the panel provides reveals how the photo-based panel cannot point to any literal time.

Again, the element of "Duration" in the textual component discloses the time in which the conceptual act spanned: twenty-four hours. Unlike a documentary photographic logic that purports to point to a conceptual act, the time in Oppenheim's panel is a length of time, rather

than a specific point. This text, “24 hours,” tells us very little, in fact, about the literal instantiation of the conceptual act. Rather than seeking to describe the “when” of the conceptual act or work of art, the textual time component in *Gallery Transplant* panel describes a kind of time, quantitatively speaking, in which the act of transplantation temporally stretched and lived. If the six photos are not a sequence of time, what relation do they have to the “24 hours” disclosed by the panel’s text?

How we could describe the time or temporal condition of the panel’s photographs might be more easily resolved by first looking at another transplant in which Oppenheim provided only one photograph (fig. 9). Similar to Gallery #1, the transplantation of Gallery #6 delineates the gallery’s floor plan lines by subtraction of snow. The text states that the “Duration of Limits” for this transplant was, “4 hours.” Perhaps obviously, we must first remind ourselves that the panel’s photograph is a still image that does not capture a length of time beyond the mere slivers of time determined by the camera’s shutter speed. We can reason, then, the single photograph is not the “4 hours” disclosed by the text. Instead, we must realize that the deployment of a single photograph with a description of a time span intentionally thwarts the pursuit of a discrete point in time. Without the ability to designate a specific “when,” the photograph bears the characteristics of a mutable form contingent upon the photograph’s viewer rather than a documentary form tied to its depicted referent. The panel jettisons photography’s supposed indexicality to a specific anterior point in time and transfers that nominative determination to the contingent viewer.⁴⁶ With only a length of time disclosed by the text, we place the photograph in

⁴⁶ In her study of Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, Margaret Olin arrives at a related reconsideration of indexicality that inspires my reading of the panel’s photographs. Olin argues the “mistakes” that the Barthes of *Camera Lucida* (the narrator) are not simply errors but evidence of a different kind of indexicality, Olin asserts, “Relations to people can be as one-sided as relations to photographs. Even people do not determine our response to them through preexisting essences. We endow them with attributes we need them to have...One might say that not only do we misidentify them, we misidentify *with* them. A reading of *Camera Lucida* suggests that the most significant

some time within the conceptual act's durational span, a placement that may change depending on the next viewer, subsequently, a placement that is specific and partial and has no lesser or greater authority over the next viewer's time placement.

With the photograph's temporal specificity and partialness, determined by the viewer's own determination of the photograph's time, we find the photo-based panel shares the same privileging of presentness that characterizes the temporality of the conceptual act. Returning to the transplant of Gallery #1, the proliferation of multiple photographs in the panel only accentuates the sense of temporality liberated from linear, documentary time; without a viable sequence or the ability to determine the point in time of each photograph, the multiple photographs provide an opportunity to experience temporality via relation, via multiple presents that must be seen in their greater or lesser resemblance to each other. The time I believe the photographs depict is neither more nor less correct than the time you designate. Indeed, our partial designations signal that such a pursuit of precise determination is futile. The six photographs in the *Gallery Transplant* panel are simply moments that resemble each other and occurred within the conceptual act's time span of twenty-four hours. The panel, like the material and formal constitution of the conceptual act, resists ordered time in distinction and opposition but rather sees temporality as firmly in and of the present, a present in dynamic relation with moments of the receding past and emergent future.

This temporal condition of finitude, which I argue the conceptual act and panel of *Gallery Transplant* share, forces a reconsideration of what we mean when we say a work of art like *Gallery Transplant* is ephemeral. When we do so, I would argue, we speak outside of

indexical power of the photograph may consequently lie not in the relation between the photograph and its subject but in the relation between the photograph and its beholder, or user, in what I would like to call a 'performative index,' or an 'index of identification.'" See Margaret Olin, "Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's 'Mistaken' Identification," *Representations* 80 (2002): 114-115.

temporality, at the expense of the specificity of the work. What do we mean by impermanent? Impermanent implies two points in time: the artwork's creation and the artwork no longer extant. Ephemeral, perhaps less mechanical, predetermines a specific quality of time: short, transient, and temporary, bookended, like impermanence, by the creation and end of the conceptual act. However, this oppositional structure of time forecloses a consideration of time as moving or experienced, the notion of temporality proposed by *Gallery Transplant*. An artwork that we say is ephemeral or impermanent is for the most part little else. These are interpretations of time that are against experience and instead function like declarations, such as when we commonly say, "The work is ephemeral." Such a conception has little room for thinking of time that spans and is defined by points of time in analogical relation.

The temporal condition of finitude that continually highlights an experience in the present, a present that is defined by its dynamic relation with a past and future, exceeds the evaluation and sense of temporality delimited by notions of impermanence and ephemerality. Moreover, in its integral relation with a past and future, the presentness of *Gallery Transplant* shows that the temporality of the work reveals points of time to be specific and partial. Naturally, it is in the face of the vulnerability that specific and partial experiences of time necessitate that determinations of ephemerality and impermanence have been deployed, in order to totalize the temporal condition of finitude *Gallery Transplant* constructs.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Scholars in the field of performance studies have sustained debate surrounding the ontology of ephemerality and performance, in particular, Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan. Phelan first articulated an ontological framework that argues performance "becomes itself through disappearance." Through a deconstructionist critique, Auslander challenges Phelan's ontological project arguing ephemerality or "liveness" in fact is a term conjoined with mediatized culture as its opposite. The questions regarding ephemerality that I propose here are related to but not directly addressed to the term's contestation in performance studies. I am interested in the particular ways contemporary art history has used the term "ephemeral" at the expense of other forms of description. The temporal condition of finitude, as I sketch it out here, is not an ontological framework, rather, it is an alternative descriptive framework. For more on the related discussion, see Philip Auslander, "Live Performance in a Mediatized Culture," in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008) and Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London:

Gallery #1: A Non-Sovereign Site

The title *Gallery Transplant* immediately identifies a potential site of the work, the gallery (i.e. Gallery #1). Further, the gallery is a site, indicated by the word “transplant,” that undergoes a change through the conceptual act Oppenheim executes. However, as the panel discloses and my investigation of temporality reasoned, such a conceptual act of transplantation was barely, if at all, a certain gesture, bounded by a “duration of limits” and subject to a permanent state of change.⁴⁸ Moreover, the prevailing claims for *Gallery Transplant* firmly established the site of the work outside on the snow-covered frozen pond. These claims argued that Gallery #1, where Oppenheim installed the panel, is a setting for documentation, outside the operation of the work of art. I want to begin working out these contradictory claims and rethink the site condition of *Gallery Transplant* by first posing the deceptively simple question: “Where is the work of art?” or as is often phrased, “What is the artwork’s site?”

The need to complicate the site claims for the work is first pressed by curator Willoughby Sharp’s second prerequisite of sites for the artists participating in the “Earth Art” exhibition. Devising a very early example of a project-based curatorial framework, Sharp organized the exhibition without prior knowledge of the artists’ contributions. He instead gave the artists both the dirt material prerequisite for their projects and the requirement to execute projects in two

Routledge, 1993), 146-166.

⁴⁸ The word “transplant” itself seems suggestive for the underpinnings of Oppenheim’s project. The year 1969 was the tail end of a time period in which widespread popular attention was given to the first successful heart transplant in 1967. Etymologically, the word transplant came into greater use in this time period because of the procedure’s success. Interestingly, the two years following the first successful heart transplant saw a spike in the number of procedures performed (with other organs as well). However, the spike was followed by a dramatic decline because of continual failures post-operation in which surgeons found many bodies were unable to sustain the transplant. To my knowledge, other artists do not use the word “transplant” during this historical period, the term seems particular to Oppenheim. In that vein, the occurrence of medical transplant failures seems coincident with the finite qualities of the conceptual act of transplantation, qualities of boundedness that are not highlighted by most of the work’s previous interlocutors.

kinds of spaces: *inside* the galleries of the A. D. White Museum of Art and *outside*, in an around Cornell University's campus.⁴⁹ While several artists created separate and discrete projects for the interior and exterior environments, Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant* treats the two kinds of exhibition environments with finer distinction. Schematically stated, with *Gallery Transplant*, we confront a work sited outside on a frozen pond, composed of a conceptual act based on the site of interior Gallery #1, and experienced vis-à-vis a panel installed in that very "transplanted" gallery. As this schematic scan suggests, the work's site condition resists settling Sharp's indoor and outdoor galleries in opposition.

Most likely, very few people saw *Gallery Transplant* in the bird sanctuary. With a limited duration of a day, nearly all viewers of *Gallery Transplant* saw the work as one would now, as a panel hung in a museum gallery (fig. 1). And again, in the case of the "Earth Art" exhibition the viewer was in the very gallery the work "transplanted." This is a particular encounter and experience of the work's site that I want to closely consider in order to elucidate how *Gallery Transplant* renders the gallery it "transplants" non-sovereign, a site defined non-essentially from a point of identification outside itself.

The six photographs that dominate the *Gallery Transplant* panel are at the crux of the work's site operation (fig. 5). Nearly all of the photographs share the same vantage point of the architectural plan drawing in the snow-covered pond: from an above and oblique angle. Within the frame of the photographs, it could be said that we see two sites at once: the bird sanctuary and Gallery #1, as signified by its plan form. In the phenomenal encounter before the

⁴⁹ In their study of the "Earth Art" exhibition for the 2012 exhibition, "Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974," Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon describe Sharp's organizing principle as a "model of a *spatial relay* between inside the museum and outside 'in the world.'" They conclude that Sharp's dualistic paradigm of inside and outside reveals that Land Art, even in its early manifestations, "did not reject so much as highlight the museum's physical and conceptual limits," debunking conventional claims that Land Art rejects the gallery system; see Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, "Ends of the Earth and Back," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, eds. Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012), 22-23. I will resist the oppositional relation that still underlies the notion of "spatial relay."

photographs we also grapple with multiple sites experienced simultaneously: we stand in the gallery the work transplanted and see, in the photographs, the appearance of that gallery outside. In other words, when we behold the photographs in the panel, Gallery #1 seems to be in at least two places at once: in the photographs and surrounding us. How do we reconcile these two instantiations of the same gallery that sandwich the photographs? We can begin to do so by putting the double instantiation in time.

While the simultaneous appearances of Gallery #1, triggered by the photographs, seem on one hand phenomenally real, this simultaneity is a kind of photographic illusion. In the literal sense, we stand in Gallery #1 and the photographs actually depict Gallery #1 as manifest in a time past, prior to the present instance. We must remind ourselves, against the pull of the documentary impulse, that the photographs cannot literally say, “here is Gallery #1” rather, they say, “this was Gallery #1.” Reading the photograph’s depiction of Gallery #1 as a past state requires the realization that the photograph, as Susan Sontag reminds us, is a “pseudo-presence and a token of absence.”⁵⁰ The panel’s photographs are a kind of souvenir, a token of some thing and some time past. The Gallery #1 site we see in the photographs is something that has happened, and as the twenty-four hours durational limit clarifies, is no longer.

The photographs in Oppenheim’s panel set in motion a complex negotiation between what seems and what was. On one hand, the depictions in the photographs seem to suggest Gallery #1 is transplanted. Such a documentary logic drove the preceding claims that argued the site of the work is outside and that in being outside the work rejects the gallery institution. On the other hand, when we resist instrumentalizing the photograph, we confront, instead, the notion that Gallery #1 was transplanted, the photographs evoke the absence of the transplantation, the

⁵⁰ Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave,” in *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973), 16.

absence of the conceptual act. However, transplanted Gallery #1, in another sense, is not absent, for when we stand in front of the photographs, we stand in the transplantation's corresponding gallery space. Insofar as the gallery space corresponds with the transplantation, we can begin to recognize that the actual gallery space, in which we stand, is a rearticulated form of the past transplantation that the photograph depicts. The photographs set up a relation of resemblance where we are led to ask, "How is the Gallery #1 space like its form previously transplanted outside?" Phrased differently, the panel presses us to find what was in what is: "What of the previously transplanted form of Gallery #1 can be found or be described by what it is now, the built gallery space?"

When the panel's photographs spur us to find what was in what is, we are led to describe the built gallery space according to a transplant constituted by elements considered opposite of built space—nature, outdoors, non-durable materials of snow and ice. This is an operation of non-essential identification where Gallery #1 is defined according to its other, the transplant Oppenheim executed. With such an operation, the gallery space is no longer secured by any internal self-definition but must open itself externally. The conceptual act and panel of *Gallery Transplant* renders Gallery #1 non-sovereign, proposing that to understand the gallery is to see its resemblance through its supposed opposite, the space outside of the museum.

Indeed, the operation of a non-essential identification undercuts the claims that *Gallery Transplant* critiques the institution through its "rejection" of the gallery and museum. This was an evaluation that asserted the site of the work was outside, a conclusion that relied upon the notion that the internal and external environments are fundamentally opposed. Close attention to the panel reveals if there is any critique of the institution at stake in Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant*, that critique is provisional and situational. In *Gallery Transplant*, the oppositional

terms of the internal and external environment are not autonomous but put in contingent and dynamic relation, suggesting that any critique of the gallery must not turn away from the gallery but hold it in suspension with its difference.

Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art; Ithaca, New York, 1969

In the Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University, one can find a small group of photographs from the “Earth Art” exhibition. The photographic record of the show, as captured by Cornell’s Publications Photography, provides glimpses of primarily the exhibition’s installation. The group includes photos of cranes digging into the earthen ground outside the A.D. White Museum building and of artists, such as Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer, contemplating and executing their projects. One photograph captures Oppenheim as well, an image that I want to consider in more detail for the close of this paper (fig. 11).

A brief scan of any of Oppenheim’s exhibition catalogues reveal that the artist working is a recurring, seemingly necessary, photographic depiction. Published photographs of Oppenheim show him digging, cutting, sifting, diving, and very often thinking. Thinking, perhaps, is how we could begin to describe the photo of Oppenheim standing in the galleries of the A. D. White Museum. A striking feature of this photograph is the likeness of his physical gesture with characteristic images we have of the artist—slightly slouched, face bewildered, and conveying a sense of ambivalence (fig. 4). Yet, this is a photo that one would be hard pressed to find published in his catalogues, alongside his works or in his work’s panels themselves.⁵¹

In spite of this photograph’s shared qualities with more recognizable ones, the site and time of this photo render it unfamiliar, harder to account for within the predominant sense of

⁵¹ Many of the ancillary photos of Oppenheim found in his exhibition catalogues are ones found in his panels.

Oppenheim's practice. Here, the artist works not outside the museum but inside the galleries and not at the time of the conceptual act's execution but afterwards.⁵² Within this alternative site and time, panels and individual photographs surround Oppenheim. The framed panels lean against the gallery's wall, not yet hung. The photos we are familiar with—Oppenheim working in the snow, images of gallery transplants—are strewn across the floor before the artist. Insofar as the prevailing critical and historical discourse marginalized the panel coupled with the conceptual act in Oppenheim's work, this photograph is made unfamiliar by that inability to consider the panel an integral part of his artistic work.

However, like this paper's critique of the discursive logic that separates and instrumentalizes photography from the conceptual act, this image of Oppenheim also alternatively argues that photographs were not "always invisible" to the artist, that they need to be looked at *with* the conceptual act.⁵³ Indeed, the crease that halves the photo nearest to the camera urges us to see the photograph as itself. In this unfamiliar image, we find Oppenheim negotiating the space between conceptual acts and photography, a space of analogical relation that this paper's study of *Gallery Transplant* has endeavored to recover. In doing so, I offered a reading of the work that puts the conceptual act and panel in equal relation and shifted the evaluation of the work's time from ephemerality towards finitude and the determination of the work's site strictly outside to a complex integration of interior gallery and external space. Finally, as this rare image of Oppenheim once more suggests, analogical relation is only possible when our historical framework resists marginalizing the photograph as mere documentation and seeing the *paired* conceptual act and panel as the shared basis of *Gallery Transplant*.

⁵² To the extent that I am aware, this photo has not been used in any publication.

⁵³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969. Gelatin-silver prints, hand-marked floor plan, hand-stamped aerial map, and text.

Floor plan of Gallery #1, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., transplanted to a pond site in a bird sanctuary, Ithaca, N.Y. Activated surface: snow/ice.

Duration: 24 hours.

60 x 40 in.

Figure 2. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969, detail.

Figure 3. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969, detail.

Figure 4. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969, detail.

Figure 5. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969, detail.

Figure 6. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969. Gelatin silver print, photographic text, hand-stamped topographic map, hand-marked photographic floor plan. Floor specifications Gallery #3, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, transplanted to Jersey City, New Jersey. Surface: Snow, dirt, gravel. Duration: 4 weeks. 60 x 40 in.

Figure 7. Dennis Oppenheim, *Accumulation Cut*, Beebe Lake, Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969.

Figure 8. Dennis Oppenheim, *Annual Rings*, Frozen St. John River, US/Canadian border, December 1968.

Figure 9. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969. Gelatin-silver prints and hand-marked floor plan.

Floor plan of Gallery #6, sculpture room: Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., transplanted to campus grounds. Activated surface: snow/grass.

Duration of limits: 4 hours.

60 x 40 in.

Figure 10. Dennis Oppenheim, *Gallery Transplant*, 1969. Gelatin-silver prints, hand-marked floor plan, and hand-stamped aerial map. Floor plan of Gallery #4, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., transplanted to bird pond. Activated surface: snow/ice. Duration: 24 hours. 60 x 40 in.

Figure 11. *Earth artists at A.D. White Museum, February 1969.* (Cornell University. Publications Photography).

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