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Abstract Correspondence

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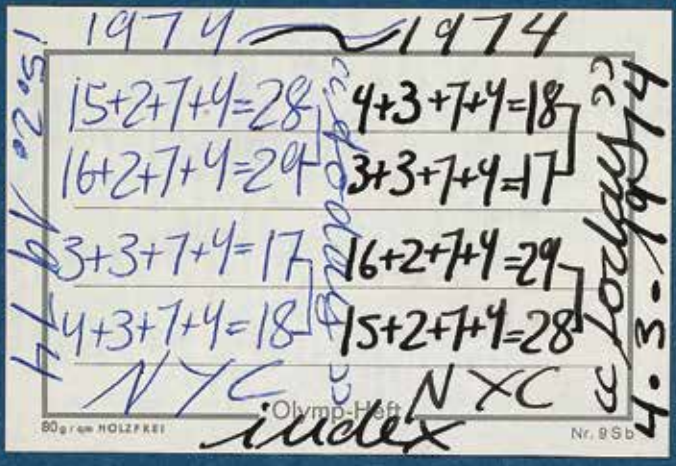
Castelli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"i can't describe so i will write":

Hanne Darboven's Abstract Correspondence

Cathleen Chaffee

"The simplest thing we could say would be that art—all art, abstract or not—reveals what the subject makes of its condition—the condition of language. It shows what the subject … invents to face the paradox of a condition on which we are dependent but which to a large, definitive extent we cannot control."[1]

– Birgit Pelzer

For many years, I have had a maxim on composition by Hanne Darboven pinned above my writing desk, a statement she repeated so often it became a kind of manifesto: "I do like to write and I don't like to read / one plus one is one two."[2] When Darboven was alive, I repeated the adage because it was affirming and even encouraging to know that she was probably sitting at a desk in Harburg, near Hamburg laying words, numbers, and symbols down on the page, diligently completing sheaves of work. The idea that made her pick up a pen each day may have required research and been difficult to conceptualize, but writing it out, giving it symbolic form, was just a matter of time. However, it was not just the amount of writing Darboven seemed to so fluidly produce that made her inspirational as a writer; it was her approach to the reader. Her artworks call out to be read but are also extraordinarily difficult to parse in any conventional sense. This quality is present even in her correspondence. Indeed, the relationship between Darboven's public work and her personal letters illustrates the radical way her writing complicated the act of reading itself.

opposite page
15/2/74 - 4/3/74. NYC "TODAY", 1974
Pen and marker on a 32-page notebook
$8^{1}/_{4}$ x $5^{3}/_{4}$ inches

I once rather naively asked Darboven if she had completed any new works recently and she corrected me: "no work is new. It's work. I work." Darboven did, of course, finish discrete tasks—books, installations, drawing series, compositions—but for the artist these were all part of her larger, ongoing work. After early training as a pianist, in which she found success came too easily to sustain ongoing study, Darboven attended art school, studied abstraction, and within a few years developed her unique graphic techniques for marking and representing time according to the Roman calendar. Fittingly, her simple systems relied on mathematical principles that are similar to the rationalism of

musical notation. Most often, this meant first translating a given set of dates into what she called "Konstruktionen" or "K" numbers. For example, January 1, 1969 – December 31, 1969 became 1/1/69 – 31/12/69 which then became a sum 1+1+6+9 – 31+12+6+9 resulting in 17K – 58K.[3]

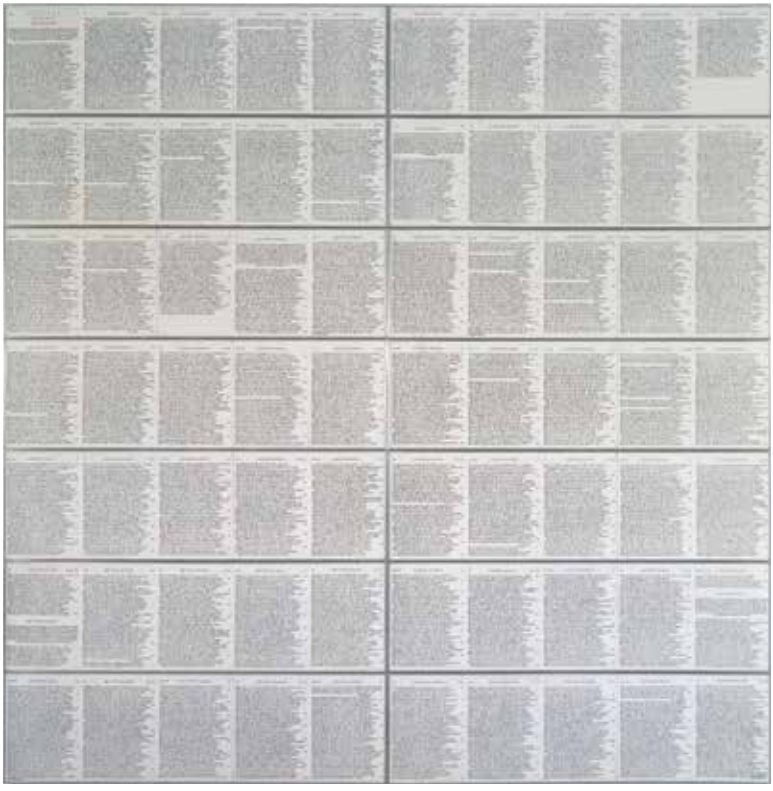


Fig. 1
Homers Odyssee, 1971
Ink on vellum
fourteen panels,
each 17 x 59 inches,
and each containing
five $16^1/_2$ x $11^1/_2$ sheets
of vellum framed
horizontally.

Throughout her career, Darboven began a work by setting herself temporal "tasks" such as the graphic representation of a particular century's K numbers. "With this method" she stated, "I must use various means—all quite subjective, I admit—to contrast and summarize. By this means, I do believe, one can achieve what critic Klaus Honnef has called 'a visualization of the flow of time.'"[4] Often, she represented a given day's K calculation with a corresponding number of rows filled by her signature wave-like script: uuuuuuu. In other works she wrote out K numbers longhand, or translated them into calendrical squares, sculpted boxes, and musical scores. In 1971 Darboven started another type of writing by hand-copying appropriated literary texts, beginning with Homer's *Odyssey* which she transcribed line-by-line onto nearly five hundred vellum sheets.[5] (Fig. 1) From 1978 she also came to include picture postcards and photographs in her drawings

and then objects in her installations—historical, cultural, and political referents that cut a sideways swath through her temporal fields. (Fig.2)

In 1973, Lucy Lippard wrote of the "sea of numbers" in Darboven's work,[6] alluding to the way her projects' scale can make her rather straightforward calculations seem like incomprehensible evocations of Immanuel Kant's mathematical sublime. Yet, even her largest multi-room installations are delimited by the A4 sheets of paper that are usually their smallest component part. Perhaps because bureaucratic correspondence has conditioned us to find legible text on such sheets, these fragments of writing draw us in to read them, thereby creating points of focus within the vastness of the work. Michael Newman has written about this "relation of parts to whole" in Darboven's installations, observing that, "either one tends to get lost in the details or, if one draws back, the visual experience of pattern and shape seems incompatible with the work's invitation to draw close and read."[7]

Fig. 2 (single sheet) *12 Months with Postcards from Today of Horses*, 1982
Pen and collage on printed calendars
twelve sheets, each 14 1/2 x 20 1/4 inches, individually framed

Interwoven with this phenomenological push/pull between legibility and aporia in Darboven's work was her unnerving skill at making viewers existentially aware of the present moment, only to force us to consider that we can no more pause time's unyielding march than we can boycott gravity. She often emphasized this by inscribing, and then crossing out the word heute ("now"). Writing ~~heute~~ at the end of many pages created an image of apparently unique singular moments being forever consigned to the past. To a certain extent, death looms over any such serial project—we watch it spooling and proliferating in seemingly-endless

Fig. 2
12 Months with Postcards from Today of Horses, 1982
Pen and collage on printed calendars
twelve sheets, each
14 1/2 x 20 1/4 inches,
individually framed

Fig. 3
Letter to Leo Castelli, November 22, 1972
Pencil and pen on brown paper
26 x 4 3/4 inches

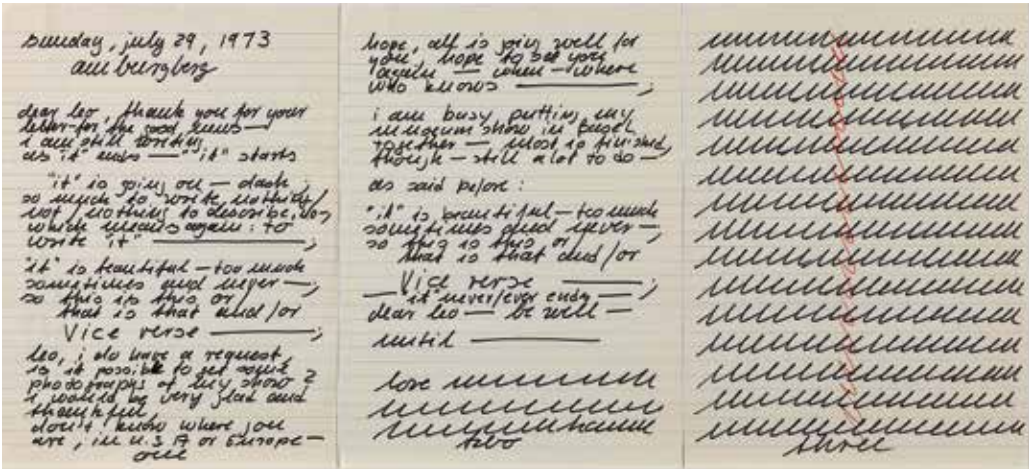
fecundity, but we know that time will bring it to a close. (Fig. 3) Darboven's 2009 death meant she was no longer marking time, and the seconds seemed to slip by a little more quickly somehow. It also brought many of her statements and lesser-known artworks into sharper focus. Each insisted on the presentness of history, and they now also represent a portion of a life whose limits are fixed.

Darboven was often portrayed as monastic in the way she applied herself, scribe-like to her writerly tasks.[8] Yet she was close to a number of her fellow German artists, including Gerhard Richter, and connected with many powerful collectors, curators, writers, and dealers, among them Lucy Lippard, Barbara Reise, Konrad Fischer, Leo Castelli (with whom she exhibited from 1973–95), and Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren of Amsterdam's Art & Project Gallery. And the formative years she spent in New York as a young artist from 1966–68 led to lifelong friendships with American artists such as Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner.[9] This generation shared a fundamental interest in undermining what Marcel Duchamp had derided as "retinal art," or art made to be looked at. Not coincidentally, they were also central to the late 1960s emergence of "post-studio practice" which often entailed a shift from the easel or sculpture studio to the writing desk or reading room—a move from art that represented or excerpted the "real" world to art that was founded first, and sometimes exclusively, in ideas.[10]

The widely divergent tactics associated with their Conceptual art included the presentation of language and other previously non-art materials and contexts as art, critiques of museological

systems, and countless challenges to the legitimacy of autonomous or expressive works of art. This was a generation of artists who were, by necessity, keenly interested in distribution networks: their slight, ephemeral, and sometimes invisible artworks demanded it. Different approaches to communicating ideas *as* artworks spread like viruses, leading to television text pieces and parasite exhibitions in magazines like *Artforum* and *Aspen* by artists such as Stephen Kaltenbach and Dan Graham. Minimalist artists had produced work simply by mailing schematic drawings to sculpture fabricators, but for Conceptual artists, the phone call or fax often became the work itself.

Fig. 4
Letter to Leo Castelli, July 29, 1973
Marker on paper
three sheets, each 11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches



A number of artists during this period also reached a wider audience by building on the extensive Fluxus precedents for correspondence art. These included Eleanor Antin, who used the postal service to "give" the sequential narrative tale of her *100 Boots* (1971) project to a large number of art world recipients, Gilbert & George who sent picture postcards of themselves in various heroic or romantic guises to a large art world mailing list, and On Kawara who mailed two different acquaintances a tourist postcard each day between 1968 and 1979. Kawara entirely removed the "hand" of the artist, stamping each of his cards with the recipient's name and address, the date, and the phrase "I GOT UP AT," along with the exact time he arose on the given day. During these years, some people received only a single card, while others (like Darboven, to whom he sent at least 98) collected many more. Starting in the 1970s and intermittently thereafter, Kawara also famously sent telegrams including only the date and the assertion "I am still alive. On Kawara." Each of these messages iterated a single detail of Kawara's life, and did so with pure, redundant facticity. They nonetheless marked Kawara's passage through time and space: his cities and calendar days changed much as Darboven's ~~heute~~ affirmed the fleet passage of time.

It makes sense, then, that a number of the best-known exhibitions of the period thematized communication, including *Art by Telephone* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1969), and *Information* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1970). Because Darboven's work of the period was inseparable from the execution of drawing, however, it would never be supplanted by an idea (Robert Barry), a theoretical text (Kosuth), or a set of written instructions (Weiner).[11] And Darboven did not pen theoretical essays, as so many of her peers associated with Conceptualism did. She was, however, the member of her generation who took the post-studio shift from artist to writer the furthest, spending four decades at a desk, pencil or pen in hand. In the midst of all of her work writing, she kept a diary and was also an incredibly avid correspondent, exchanging cards and letters almost daily with friends, dealers, and collectors.[12] (Fig. 4)

Because systematic research has not yet been conducted on Darboven's correspondence,[13] it is not possible, for example, to state how often she wrote cards in series although we know she sometimes sent almost identical drawings to collectors and friends at the New Year.[14] And at least once she mailed the same message via postcard to three or more recipients including Sol LeWitt, Art & Project Gallery, and Leo Castelli. (Fig. 5) That card's large, empty side was surrounded by an inscription of the date—"29/1/1974," and "29+1+7+4=41"—and the rest of the space filled with Darboven's redundant German and English prose: "cassius clay is / gewinnt winning / Bessie Smith is singt singing / uuuuuuu am / schreibe writing / so ways so what / am burgberg uuuu / uuuuuuu hanne."

Darboven often wrote to express heartfelt gratitude for small things, commonly sending an immediate letter to thank a friend for a phone call. On receiving

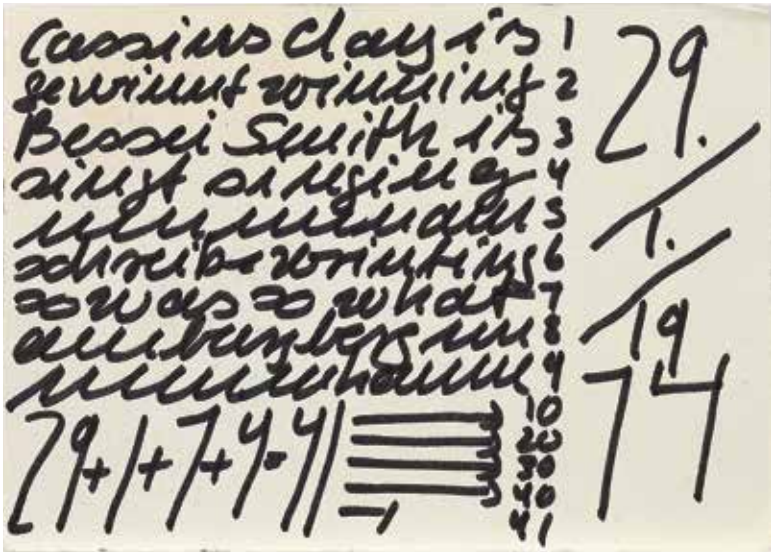


Fig. 5
Postcard to
Leo Castelli,
January 29, 1974
Marker on postcard
4 x 5 3/4 inches

a gift of a favorite pad of drawing paper from America, a work of art, or even just a card, Darboven responded by mail with warm and sincere, although non-linear prose. She was often movingly nostalgic for a time when her correspondent was nearer. To LeWitt, who famously admired her work in the 1960s and whom she credited for her introduction to the New York art world, Darboven repeatedly and effusively reminded him that his friendship was priceless: "sol accept / this note as a possible – / impossible way of from / me to thank you to thank / for all past present you / you to be sol."[15] Some of her letters were also practical—addressing details for upcoming shows, or the dates of her arrival for a visit to New York—but the majority of the notes, postcards, and drawings she sent functioned more as art-by-mail than as communiqués. Indeed, very few Conceptual artists generated writing that straddles the status of artwork and personal communication (private literature) as Darboven's letters do.[16] Kawara is one of the rare exceptions, as is the American sculptor and performance artist James Lee Byars.

In many ways, Darboven's correspondence was also an exemplary affirmation of the strict *lack* of separation between her work and her life—she did not put down her "art" pencils and pick up a ballpoint to dash off a warm letter to a friend about a beautiful sunset. Instead, as she did in a 1984 note to Leo Castelli, she filled a sheet of graph paper with rows of the exaggerated uuuuu that populate her artworks, writing simply: "sunrise/sunset to leo Sept 25, 1984 with love from hanne ~~today~~."[17] (Fig. 6) The drawing is structured like a letter, and we therefore search for legible meaning among the uuuuu even though we know them to be an abstraction. The caption also acknowledged, and even invoked her reader/beholder's expectations for "description"—for representational language or imagery; in this case, her framing text prepares us so thoroughly to see a horizon line within the graphic field that our eyes conjure it, as if we are squinting at the sun.

In 1973, Darboven penned a variation on her "i don't like to read" statement in a letter to Castelli: "i can't describe so i will write ... i go on writing writing / ja, i do like to write / [not to describe] and / don't like to read – ."[18] That same year she told *Artforum* that she worked so consistently within her mathematical system because it was "a way of writing without describing,"[19] and wrote to Sol LeWitt, "I don't describe / writing writing / there is nothing to describe / writing writing / I don't describe / I write."[20] This series of redundant and slightly varied observations (can't describe, not to describe, without describing, don't describe, there is nothing to describe) is not unique. Darboven often used similar repetition—theme and variation—in letters that show the influence of Gertrude Stein's iterative writing, which she also quoted on numerous occasions. However, this particular series of negations is, to my mind, central to one of the key functions

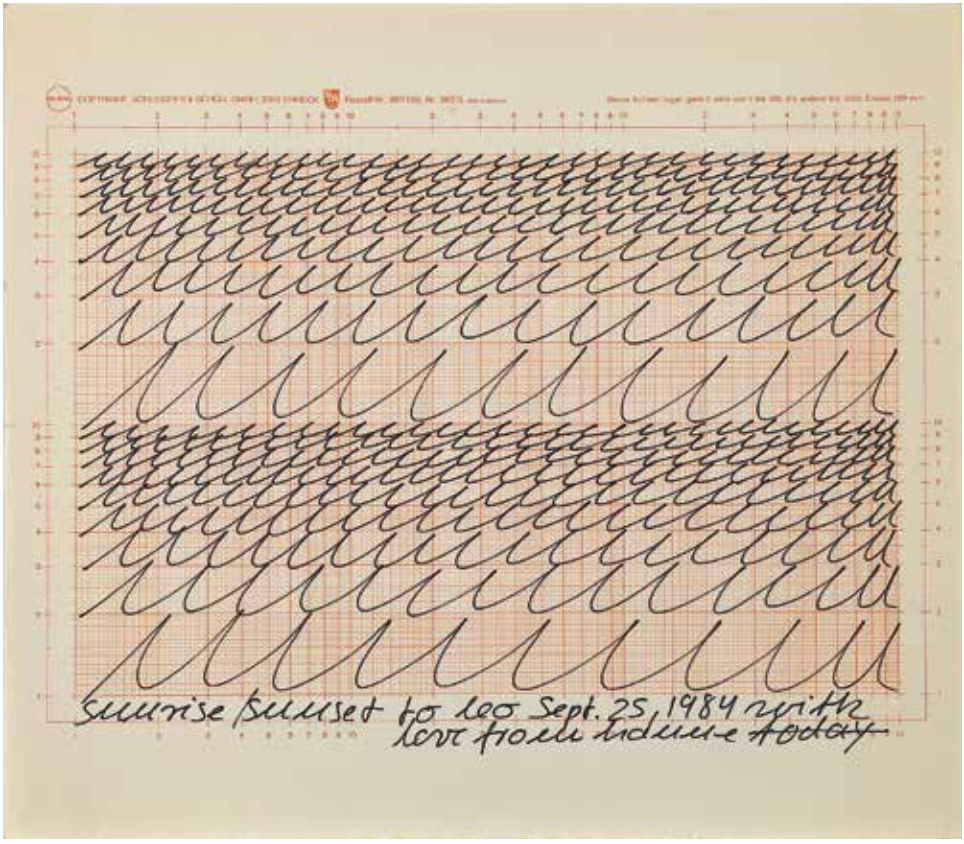


Fig. 6
Sunrise/Sunset,
September 25, 1984
Ink on graph paper
$11\frac{1}{8}$ x $13\frac{3}{4}$ inches

of her correspondence, and to the reason this material has so much yet to reveal about the relevance of Darboven's writing overall.

In the visual arts, the descriptive mode from which Darboven distanced herself tends to manifest in representational art, but in the post-World War II-era it has also included works that establish realism by excerpting reality—such as collaged images or found text. In literature, artful description entails selecting the perfect turn of phrase or telling detail to evoke a scene. Such writing gives readers the illusion of "being there." They are paradoxically immersed in the fiction as well as in the privileged sensation that they have tapped into truthfulness. Terry Eagleton has called this mimetic realism "a kind of con trick" that is most transparent when it is being most skillfully deployed. For example, "when the artist includes details that are redundant to the narrative (the precise tint and curve of a moustache, let us say) simply to signal: 'This is realism.'"[21]

Modern viewers do not assume contemporary art—especially abstract or Conceptual art—will "communicate" its message clearly. In fact, the rejection of mimesis was a fundamental tenet of many artists of Darboven's generation who

went so far as to make invisible artworks in order to avoid the kind of illusionistic space they saw most art as evoking. The language they used to underline that point was philosophical, factual, adversarial, didactic, and even poetic, but seldom ingeniously descriptive.[22] In stating, "there is nothing to describe" Darboben was not proposing that everything had already been written, but only that she would have nothing to do with reflecting, illustrating, or narrating reality.[23] As she wrote in a letter to LeWitt soon after developing her mathematical system, she wanted to: "just take / everyday's mathematical / index, a great invention, fiction. / No inquiry, no research, no / exploration, just to search into / something between everything / for a time while / time is going on. / Don't write words, numbers / in a constructive way any / more, just measure: lines."[24]

Like Cy Twombly's graffiti hieroglyphs or Chrisian Dotremont's logogrammes, the uuuuuuu scrawl Darboven so often used to illustrate her calendrical calculations is always recognizable as writing, although it is simultaneously illegible as a language. We do not exactly approach a work by Darboven thinking we are going to get a legible text. Even from a distance, it is obvious when Darboven's script contains no other letters or words. Her systematic repletion of the singular letter "u" however, cannot help but invoke the *entire* alphabet and therefore the condition of reading.[25] Craig Dworkin has written at length about similarly "illegible" works of literature, arguing that such poetic texts make us uniquely conscious of the inescapable, constitutive power of language: "the unreadable text is a temporary autonomous zone: one which refuses the permanence of its own constitution, and which calls on its readers to account for the semantic drives that they cannot, in the end, resist—and for which we must learn, as readers, to take responsibility."[26] Illegible texts like Darboven's stage the experience of reading without allowing us to be absorbed by the act. In particular, her private letters offer the clearest glimpse into what was at stake for her in making work that inscribed, but did not describe.

For example, the uuuuuuu script signifies differently on a handwritten letter than it does on Darboven's artworks. In the artworks, it symbolically represents time and reads as a marker of its passage. The letters typically replaced Darboven's strict mathematical systems with a different familiar reference—that of the personal letter or postcard. Darboven invoked the conventions of correspondence both in the physical format of her notes and by hand addressing and signing them. The difference between these two contexts is clearest, perhaps in the blank postcards and notes that Darboven largely filled with rows and rows of illegible script during the 1970s.[27] Sometimes, the only "information" on such cards was the date, the recipient's name and address, and her signature. On occasion she filled the entire area of a card with uuuuuuu simply to pass along a single detail,

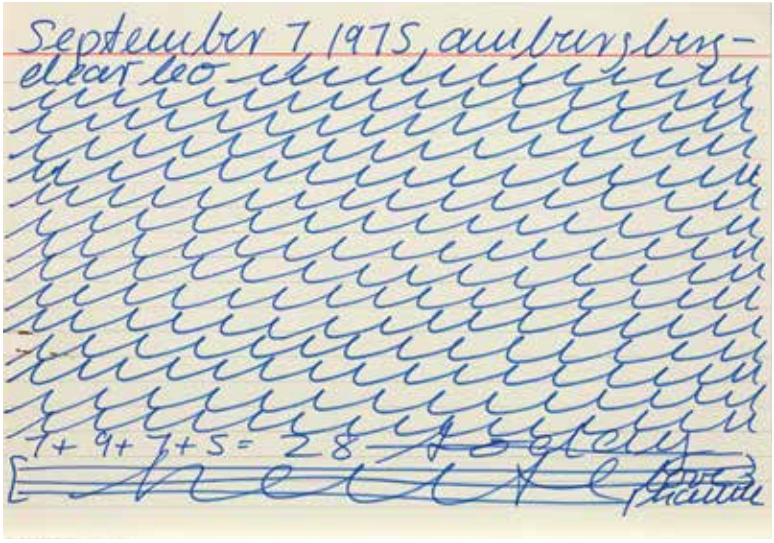
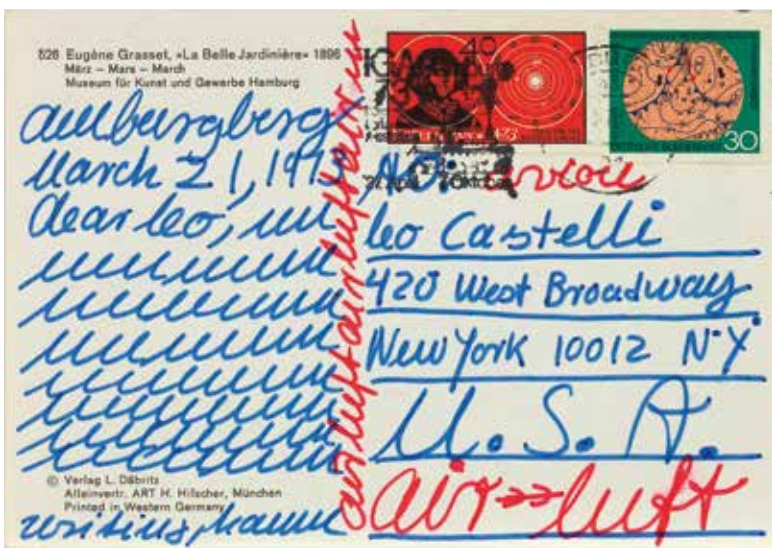


Fig. 7
Card to Leo Castelli,
September 7, 1975
Ink on index card
5 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches

like her thanks for a phone call, or travel plans: "i will leave for NYC: february 15 — uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu, see you in NYC — hanne." On September 7, 1975 she wrote "dear leo, uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu 7+9+7+5=28 ~~today~~ [~~heute~~], love hanne." (Fig. 7) Darboven sometimes even replaced closing niceties like "sincerely" with a reminder of her task at hand: "uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu uuuuuuu writing, hanne."[28] (Fig. 8) The most abstract notes contain only a salutation with the rest of the space filled by uuuuuu.[29] (Fig. 9)

Fig. 8
Postcard to
Leo Castelli,
March 21, 1973
Marker on postcard
4 x 5 3/4 inches



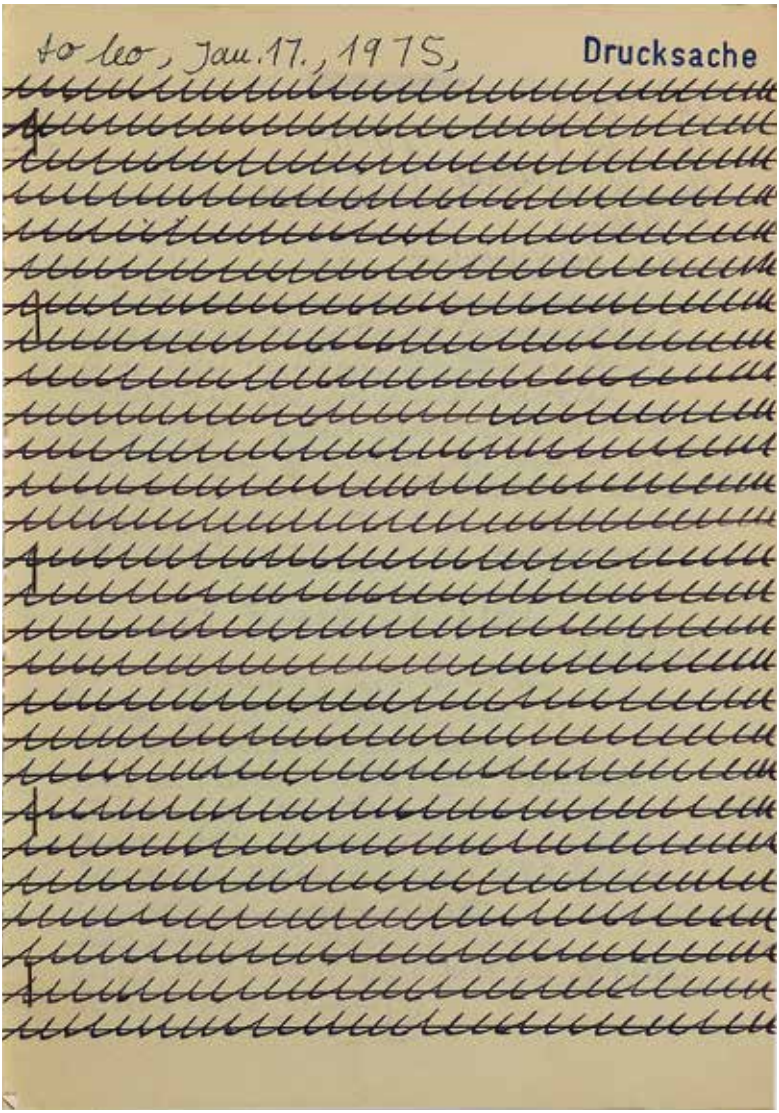


Fig. 9
Drucksache, 1975
Ink on printed paper
twelve sheets
stapled together,
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches

We have all been thoroughly conditioned to expect to read information in correspondence, as well as instructions, tender words, promises, demands, and stories. Detlef Stein has written at length about Darboven's use of picture postcards in her art: "As a rule, postcards don't convey the significant, sealed, secret messages that can be found in letters, but rather hastily written words of preferably pleasant content ... In other words, the primary content of postcards is not the text, but above all the pictures."[30] But Darboven seemed to invert this

expectation with many cards to friends. In them, she replaced images with her own abstract writing but then used the script to parody—like so much 'blah, blah, blah'—the snippets of gossip, comments on the weather, and attempts at humor that are typically found there. (Fig. 10)

By mooting illusion in the realm of personal correspondence, Darboven invented a type of writing practice that demanded to be approached and read intimately, yet never allowed the recipients of her letters to lose themselves in reading. The disjuncture between the clearly legible *tropes* of correspondence on such cards

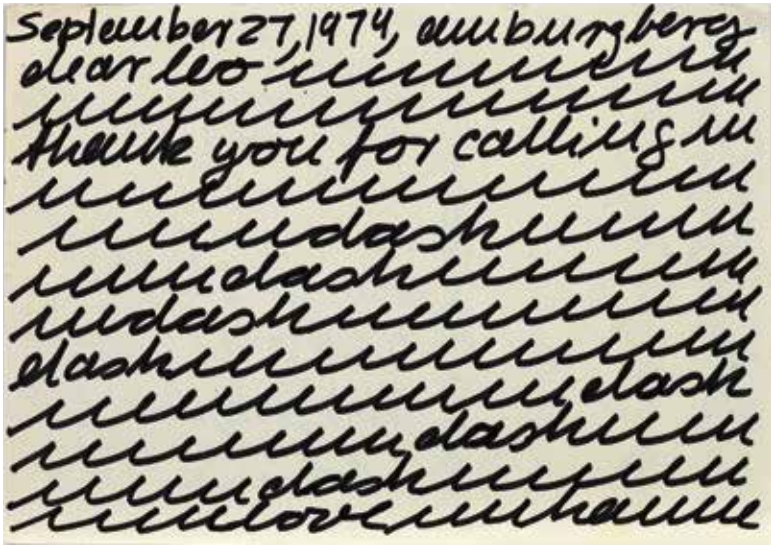
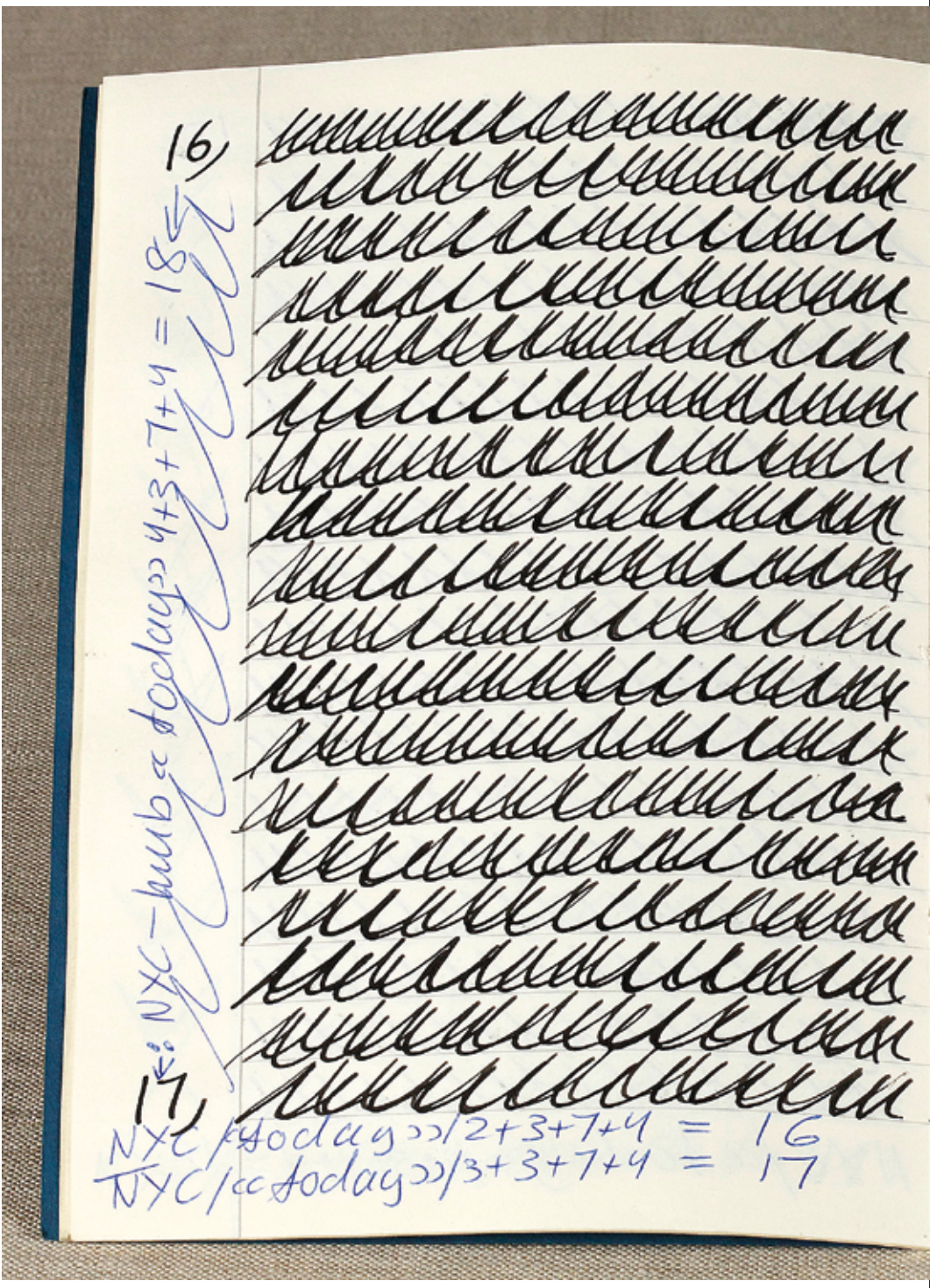
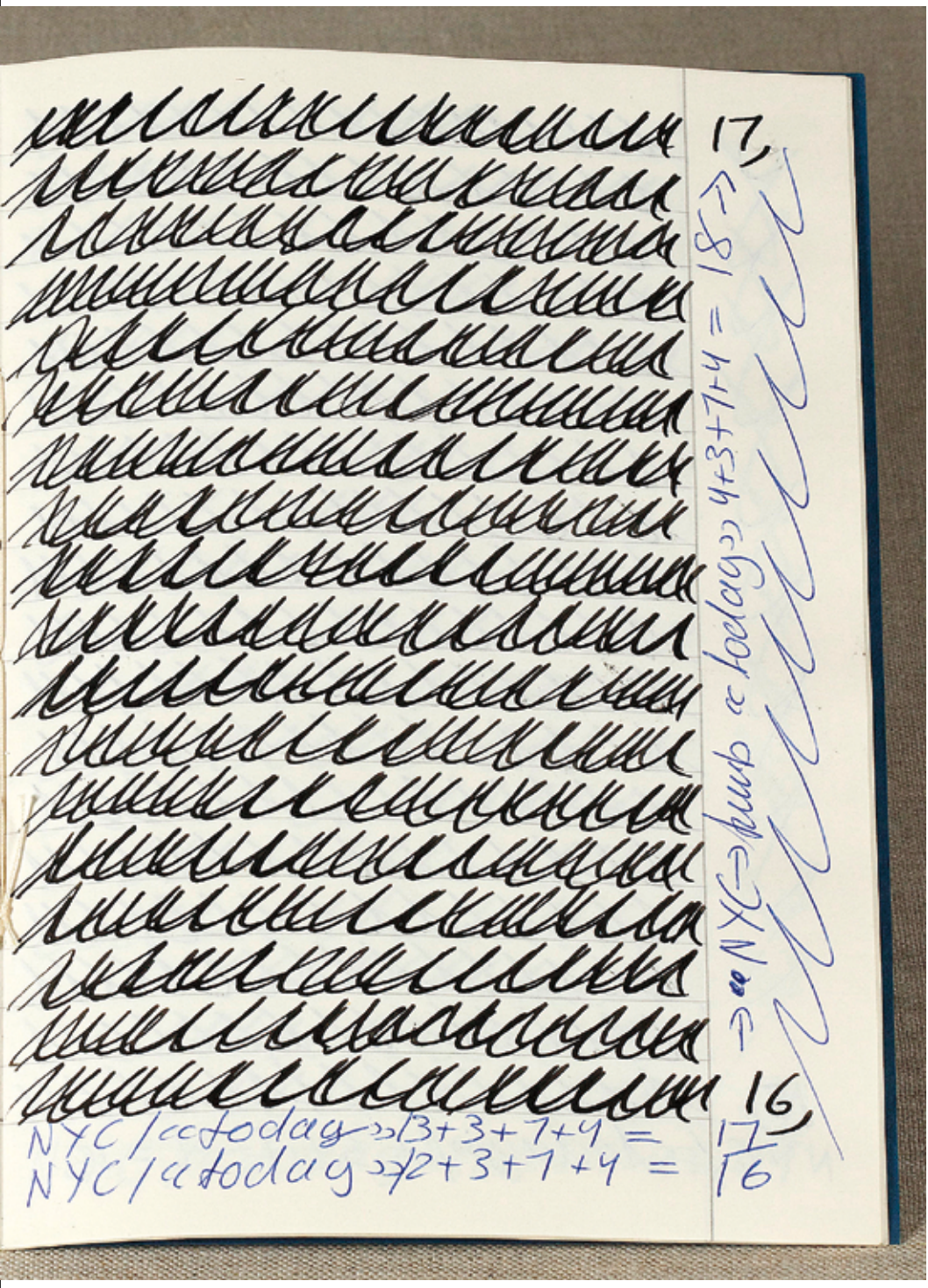


Fig. 10
Postcard to
Leo Castelli,
September 27, 1974
Marker on postcard
4 x 5 3/4 inches

and Darboven's illegible writing first causes us to become aware of our own powerfully entrenched expectations for narrative speech. Our anticipation of finding connotative language is so strong, for example, that we watch ourselves seeking it even as our reading affirms its obvious absence. This is where Darboven's correspondence and that of James Lee Byars most closely intersect, despite the many differences in their work. Like Darboven, Byars lavished attention on friends and acquaintances with letters that demonstrated an investment of time and affection. Byars also wrote in his own unique script, punctuating the cross-strokes and ends of each individual letter with hand-drawn stars, and elongating or compressing letters to conform to the dimensions of his shaped papers, which were often also on colored and translucent stock. All of these acted as strong impediments to reading, and cause his writing to fluctuate constantly between word and image.

In an interview in the 1990s, Mark Gisbourne provocatively told Darboven that her works were puzzling, like hermetically closed systems: "Some might even say elitist." Darboven's telling response was confrontational:


16)
NYC-hub « today» 4+3+7+4 = 18
17)
NYC/today»1/2+3+7+4 = 16
NYC/«today»1/3+3+7+4 = 17


17,
18 → NYC → funky → today → 4+3+7+4 =
16,
NYC / today → 3+3+7+4 = 17
NYC / today → 2+3+7+4 = 16

> There is never any sense of writing for others, everything is written for myself alone. There is the concept and the period of its execution. I feel that I don't have to defend myself—'never apologize and never explain.' This is not my saying, I took it from Carl Andre in the 1970s but now I repeat it daily which is a good thing: never, never explain.[31]

previous pages
Fig. 11
15/2/74 - 4/3/74. NYC "TODAY", 1974
Pen and marker on a 32-page notebook
$8^1/_4$ x $5^3/_4$ inches

Here, Darboven underscored an important truth about her practice: not only would *she* not explain the work, but the work does not *do* any explaining. (Fig. 11) Much of the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by the famed "linguistic turn" in theory and in art, with extraordinary scrutiny brought to bear on language's very ability to signify. In 1970, Mel Bochner famously scrawled "1. Language is not Transparent" on the wall of a gallery. Darboven's letters similarly represented the fact that language and image are both impoverished surrogates. It was in this context that she created an abstract language that signified language's own inability to adequately describe. Paradoxically, her radical choice *not* to narrate in her work became especially personal in the mailings that shared only a morphological resemblance to traditional correspondence. Darboven used the mailman's rounds to send letters that seemed designed to cast the rest of her correspondents' mail into doubt: words cannot make seen, any more than art can tenably represent reality. "Never explain" is true of Darboven's art: it does not pretend to contribute to the descriptive or explicatory functions of language.

opposite page
Fig. 12
1976, 1976
Calendar on board, $8^1/_2$ x 12 inches; and Xeroxed sheet with stamp, $8^3/_8$ x $11^3/_4$ inches

Darboven often mentioned to her correspondents that she had completed certain works or tasks. In this, as Isabelle Graw has observed, "She explicitly draws attention to the fact that individual work sheets and books contain time; the artist's lifetime. Their eventual owners can regard themselves as the possessors of a segment of her life."[32] Similarly, her letters also signified time, specifically the time she personally gave over, often with great warmth, to her correspondent. (Fig. 12) In replacing narrative communication (in a site where it could logically be expected) with an illustration of temporal investment, Darboven made her readers *know*, if only for a moment, how small a part of our relationships are maintained by connotative speech. Instead, like her letters, they are premised on shared time—the only gift that is entirely ours to give.

Darboven not only tirelessly and confidently applied herself to her task, but her writing illuminated the fact that veristic descriptions and narrative speech take one out of reality. And with the emails, texts, and tweets that occupy our every waking minute, all of us are become unprecedented writing machines, but it has not made us better readers. In fact, overcome by a distracted quest for efficiency, we often read today by aggregating and editing in interrupted fits

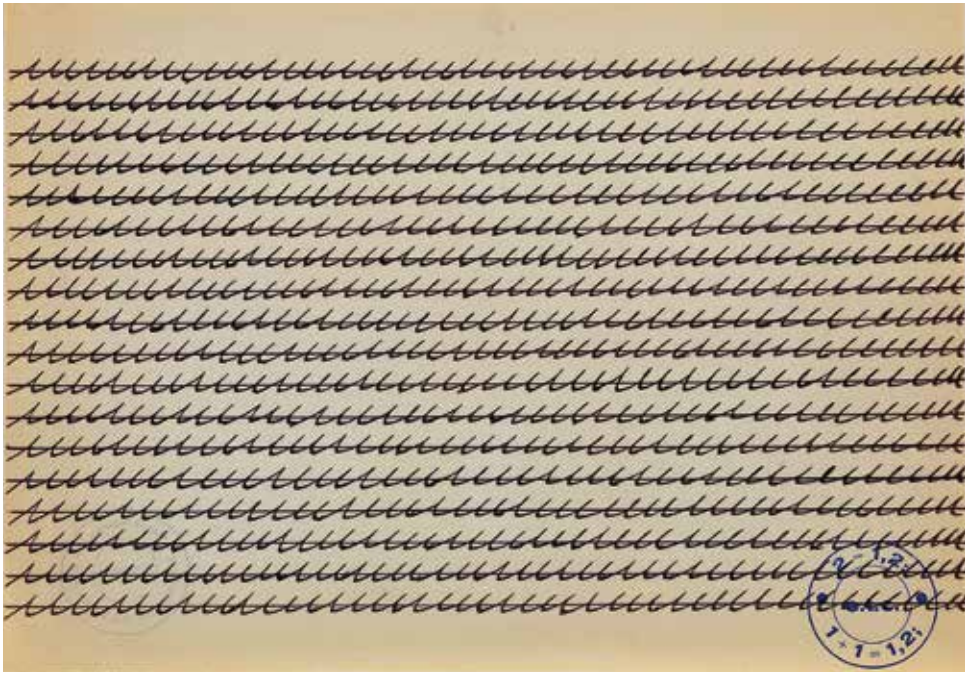
1976

JANUAR	FEBRUAR	MÄRZ	APRIL	MAI	JUNI
Do 1 Neujahr ❄	So 1 4. S. n. Epiphanias	Mo 1 ❄	Do 1	Sa 1 Maifeiertag	Di 1
Fr 2	Mo 2 Mariä Lichtmeß	Di 2 Fastnacht	Fr 2	So 2 Maienkirchtag Domini	Mi 2 II. Quatember
Sa 3	Di 3	Mi 3 Aschermittwoch	Sa 3	Mo 3	Do 3
So 4 Sonntag n. Neujahr	Mi 4	Do 4	So 4 Judika	Di 4	Fr 4
Mo 5	Do 5	Fr 5	Mo 5	Mi 5 EUROPA-Tag	Sa 5 ❄
Di 6 Epiph./Hl. Drei Könige	Fr 6	Sa 6	Di 6	Do 6	So 6 Pfingstsonntag
Mi 7	Sa 7	So 7 Invokavit	Mi 7 ❄	Fr 7 ❄	Mo 7 Pfingstmontag
Do 8	So 8 3. S. n. Epiphanias ❄	Mo 8	Do 8	Sa 8	Di 8
Fr 9 ❄	Mo 9	Di 9 ❄	Fr 9	So 9 Jubilate/Muttertag	Mi 9
Sa 10	Di 10	Mi 10 I. Quatember	Sa 10	Mo 10	Do 10
So 11 1. S. n. Epiphanias	Mi 11	Do 11	So 11 Palmsonn	Di 11 Mamertus	Fr 11
Mo 12	Do 12	Fr 12	Mo 12	Mi 12 Pankratius	Sa 12 ❄
Di 13	Fr 13	Sa 13	Di 13	Do 13 Servatius ❄	So 13 Trinitatis
Mi 14	Sa 14	So 14 Reminiscere	Mi 14 ❄	Fr 14 Bonifatius	Mo 14
Do 15	So 15 Septuagesima ❄	Mo 15	Do 15 Gründonnerstag	Sa 15	Di 15
Fr 16	Mo 16	Di 16 ❄	Fr 16 Karfreitag	So 16 Kantate	Mi 16
Sa 17 ❄	Di 17	Mi 17	Sa 17	Mo 17	Do 17 Fronleichnam
So 18 2. S. n. Epiphanias	Mi 18	Do 18	So 18 Ostersonntag	Di 18	Fr 18
Mo 19	Do 19	Fr 19 Josephstag	Mo 19 Ostermontag	Mi 19	Sa 19 ❄
Di 20	Fr 20	Sa 20 Frühlingsanfang	Di 20	Do 20 ❄	So 20 1. S. n. Trinitatis
Mi 21	Sa 21	So 21 Oculi	Mi 21 ❄	Fr 21	Mo 21 Sommeranfang
Do 22	So 22 Sexagesima ❄	Mo 22 ❄	Do 22	Sa 22	Di 22
Fr 23	Mo 23	Di 23	Fr 23	So 23 Rogate	Mi 23
Sa 24 ❄	Di 24	Mi 24	Sa 24	Mo 24	Do 24 Johannistag
So 25 3. S. n. Epiphanias	Mi 25	Do 25 Mariä Verkünd	So 25 Quasimod./ W. Sonntag	Di 25	Fr 25
Mo 26	Do 26	Fr 26	Mo 26	Mi 26	Sa 26
Di 27	Fr 27	Sa 27	Di 27	Do 27 Chr. Himmelfahrt	So 27 2. S. n. Trin (Siebenschl.) ❄
Mi 28	Sa 28	So 28 Lätare	Mi 28	Fr 28	Mo 28
Do 29	So 29 Estomihi	Mo 29	Do 29 ❄	Sa 29 ❄	Di 29 Peter u. Paul
Fr 30		Di 30 ❄	Fr 30	So 30 Exaudi	Mi 30
Sa 31 ❄		Mi 31		Mo 31	

Das Jahr 1976 hat bei Berücksichtigung der Fünftage-Woche und der bundeseinheitlichen Feiertage 253 (2) Arbeitstage und 112 (1) arbeitsfreie Tage

❄ arbeitsfreier Tag

+ Feiertag in einzelnen Bundesländern



and starts. In refusing to be descriptive, Darboven asked her readers to consider the time lost to absorption when mimetic illusion is complete, or to efficiency when reading is entirely functional. Within the lines of Darboven's non-descriptive correspondence, her recipients might have read a message that their time together—time itself—was remorselessly slipping away in mundane communication. As she wrote to Castelli on March 7, 1976: "I do feel as close to NYC as 1965 — not to describe — well — that it is — I write — I do feel as close to you as always — not to describe — well — that it is — to know each other."

The rest of us should hope to write (which is not to describe) such truth.

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1. Birgit Pelzer, "Idealities," in *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing, Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher (New York; New Haven, CT: The Drawing Center; Yale University Press, 2005), 83.
2. See, for example, Darboven's letter to Leo Castelli, November 22, 1972.
3. This was only one of several different Konstruktionen systems Darboven developed, but it was the one she used most extensively. For a discussion of Darboeven's other early systems see Vivian Bobka, "Unfathomable Surfaces," in Kira van Lil, *Hanne Darboven: Menschen Und Landschaften* (Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 1999).
4. Hanne Darboven, statement in John Anthony Thwaites, "Eight artists, two generations, singular preoccupations," *ArtNews* (October 1978): 71.
5. The relationship between this work and, for example, the proliferation of re-contextualized and repeated writing in Conceptual poetry—for example, Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*—lies, unfortunately outside the scope of this text.
6. Lucy R. Lippard, "Deep in Numbers," *ArtForum*, October 1973.
7. Michael Newman, "Remembering and Repeating: Hanne Darboven's Work," in *Robert Lehman Lectures on Contemporary Art. Vol. 2*, ed. by Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly, and Bettina Funcke (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2004), 126.
8. See, for example, Hervé Bacquet et al., *L'école dans l'art* (Editions L'Harmattan, 2011).
9. For more on Darboven's years in New York see Ortrud Westheider, *Hanne Darboven, Das Frühwerk: Hamburger Kunsthalle* (Hamburg: Christians, 1999).
10. Benjamin Buchloh described this critically in relation to the rise of artists who challenged institutions, in "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143.
11. For example, in *All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking – 1:36 P.M.; 15 June 1969, New York*, Robert Barry gave a location, time, and date stamp to a concept patently impossible to execute performatively. Joseph Kosuth's *Information Room (Special Investigation)* from 1970 was a reading room designed to generate thought as its outcome. Lawrence Weiner's *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can*, 1968 and *One quart exterior green enamel thrown on a brick wall*, 1968 were proposal statements executable by anyone.

12. Darboven's intercontinental network of galleries and collectors has been discussed in Christophe Cherix et al., *In & Out of Amsterdam* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2009); and Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed, the International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections*, ed. by Lynda Morris (London: Ridinghouse, 2009).
13. This text speculates on the phenomenological effect a category of Darboven's correspondence had on its readers; clearly a great deal more research remains to be done on the many aspects and impacts of her writing, including the effect of her letter writing on her position in the art world. To date, Darboven's letters to her family during her years in New York have been the most widely published and discussed. See Westheider, *Hanne Darboven, Das Frühwerk*; van Lil, *Hanne Darboven: Menschen Und Landschaften.* Petra Lange-Berndt recently discussed Darboven's correspondence at a conference during the 2012 Camden Arts Center exhibition of Darboven's work, and is preparing a publication on the subject with Susanne Liebelt and Dietmar Rübel.
14. There are two nearly-identical New Year's gift drawings from January 1, 1975 that Darboven sent to Herman Daled, Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren, and possibly others.
15. Letter to Sol LeWitt, May 21, 1970, Courtesy of the LeWitt Collection, Chester, CT.
16. Much has been made of the relationship between Darboven's work and her friend Sol LeWitt's statement, "if words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature, numbers are not mathematics." Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *0-9*, January 1969. Clearly, Darboven's artworks are visual art and not literature. Her correspondence, however, follows a different set of procedures entirely and benefits from being considered in both domains.
17. Such examples point to the relatively unexplored relationship between public and private in Darboven's practice more generally. She was an avid, obsessive collector, and accumulations filled her home. Only tiny selections from these collections made their way into the public realm of her art, when carefully selected examples were incorporated into installations such as *Kulturgeschichte* 1880–1983 (1980–83; Dia Art Foundation).
18. Letter to Leo Castelli, May 14, 1973.
19. Hanne Darboven, *Artforum* 12:2 Oct. 1973.
20. Letter to Sol LeWitt, October 19, 1973, Courtesy of the LeWitt Collection, Chester, CT.
21. He continued, "In such art, no waistcoat is colorless, no way of walking is without its idiosyncrasy, no visage without its memorable features. Realism is calculated contingency." Terry Eagleton, "Pork Chops and Pineapples," *London Review of Books*, October 23, 2003.
22. For a discussion of the many active functions of language within Conceptual art and its precedents see Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).
23. Joachim Kaak has argued that Darboven's rejection of art's representational function had a particularly European genealogy. See "Hanne Darboven - 7 Tafelin, II, 1972/73," in *Hanne Darboven/John Cage: Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst*, ed. by Corinna Thierolf and Joachim Kaak, Kunstwerke 4 (Ostfildern-Ruit bei Stuttgart: Hatje, 1997), 33.
24. Letter to Sol LeWitt, August 28, 1968, Courtesy of the LeWitt Collection, Chester, CT.
25. It has long been a commonplace to treat Darboven's writing as "illegible," although not in the sense I am using the term here. See, for example, Vivien Bobka's comparison of Darboven's writing with Weiner's and Kosuth's and her argument that, "Darboven's drawings do not truly offer themselves to be read as well as looked at...it is difficult to consider Darboven's ideas as linguistic entities equivalent to her diagrams." see Vivian Bobka, "Unfathomable Surfaces," in van Lil, *Hanne Darboven: Menschen Und Landschaften*, 29. Other writers have productively approached Darboven's larger installations as works that can be "read" historically. See, for example, Isabelle Graw, "Work ennobles—I'm Staying Bourgeois (Hanne Darboven)," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 247–55. See also Dan Adler, *Hanne Darboven: Cultural History, 1880-1983* (London, Eng.: Afterall Books, 2009).
26. Craig Douglas Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 155.
27. Many writers have noted Darboven's frequent use of picture postcards to evoke cultural history, both as individual images and vast, interconnected series, most strikingly in her 1985 work *Menschen und Landschaften.* See van Lil, *Hanne Darboven: Menschen Und Landschaften.* To my knowledge no one has discussed her postcards on which no image appears at all.
28. Letter to Leo Castelli, March 21, 1973
29. Letter to Leo Castelli, January 17, 1975
30. Detlef Stein, "The Power of Pictures in the Framework of History," in *Hanne Darboven: Menschen Und Landschaften* (Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 1999), 95.
31. Mark Gisbourne, "Time and Time Again: Hanne Darboven Interviewed by Mark Gisbourne," *Art Monthly*, November 1994, 6.
32. Graw, "Work ennobles—I'm Staying Bourgeois (Hanne Darboven)," 251.

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