

**Encountering
Daniel Buren**

Simon Morris

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Stu
July/Augus

On November 13th, 2019 at 3:02pm,
an email pinged into my inbox.

Date: November 13, 2019, 3:02pm
Subject: Proposal

Dear Simon

I hope term is going well for you!

I'm writing, together with Gill Partington, with a brief proposal which we can amplify should it seem of interest to you. We hope it will!

In brief, has Information as Material considered the establishment of a regular journal? Gill and I have been thinking for some time about founding an academic journal about material texts, provisionally titled *Inscription: The Journal of Material Text and Theory*. This could of course take the form of a conventional academic publication, and we've been in productive conversation with some publishers. But we've realised that the creative possibilities that Information as Material would offer would be much more compelling to us and more suited to the field we're interested in covering – a blend of the critical and the creative, working across period divides, and shaped by both archival work and theoretical reflection. Although there is (as you know) masses of energy within the field of the study of material texts, there is no dedicated peer reviewed publication. Existing discussion has so far either been parcelled out among period specific journals, where the materiality of texts is at least a broader consideration, or it takes the form of a rigorous yet also for many oft putatively technical mode of bibliography, concentrating on the minutiae of archival research and collation formulae at the expense of broader, more conceptual issues.

That's the idea, in brief. We'd be grateful for your initial thoughts, when you've a moment, and would of course be delighted to talk more.

In any case, looking forward to our paths crossing soon, whether that's in the pub, the dining hall, the book fair, or somewhere in between.

Best wishes,

Adam Swayth
Gill Partington

In life as in Art, no-string-attached offers are often too good to be true. Just occasionally, though, one comes along and over-delivers. This initial jovial enquiry definitely belongs to the second category. I bit their hands off before they could change their mind.

Adam, Gill and I started the journal in November, 2019. We found ourselves, a few months later, in March 2020, at the start of a global pandemic. Some strings you don't chose ...

Our aim for the journal was – and has remained despite these tortuous beginnings – to make a cross-platform work that functions in three distinct ways:

- (a) as a serious academic journal for critical discussion surrounding the materiality of text.
- (b) as an exhibition space for multi-media works, Vinyl records, AR digital works, artworks, prints, poems etc.
- (c) as an artist's book in its own right – 'a means of conveying art ideas from the artist to the viewer/reader' (Sol LeWitt).

We had numerous historical precedents that informed our thinking: *Fluxus I*, *Studio International*, *Aspen Magazine*, *Parkett and Convolution*. Adam has set himself the task of acquiring all ten copies of *Aspen*. To date, he has got his hands on four – they're really very collectible now.

Studio International, the journal of modern art, was particularly relevant to the concept of a journal as a space of exhibition. We were in a pandemic and all of the museums and galleries across the world had shut down. It seemed a positive response to make a journal that included a number of art editions and to send it through people's letterboxes so they could create their own museums and galleries in their homes. Admittedly, the size of our journal, 31.3 × 31.3 cm, has challenged

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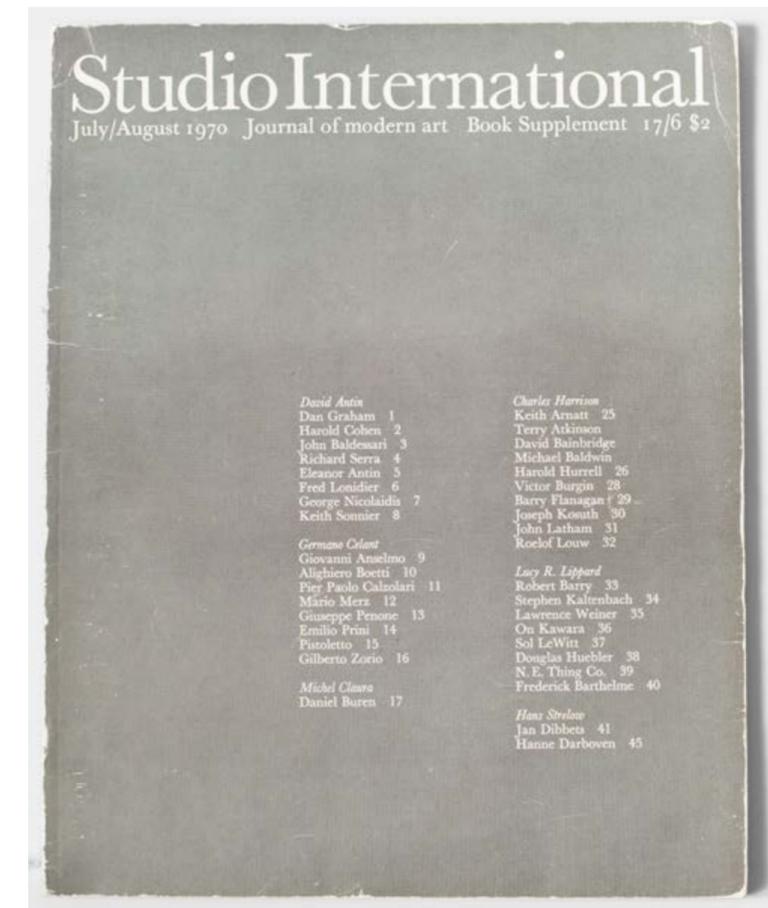
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many letterboxes; many of our flat packed galleries adorned front porches, lawns, and plant pots, waiting for their grand opening.

Using a catalogue, journal or magazine as an exhibition space is a well-tested model. The curator Seth Siegelaub skillfully demonstrated this format in the July/August issue of *Studio International* in 1970: as guest editor he invited six well-known critics to edit an 8-page section each in which to feature artists that interested them. On the contents page, it simply reads in English, French and German:

The content of the 48-page exhibition in this issue was organized by requesting six critics to each edit an 8-page section of the magazine, and in turn, to make available their section to the artist(s) that interest them. The table of contents lists the name of the artist(s) under the name of the critic who was responsible for their participation.

Seth Siegelaub, *Studio International*, July/August 1970, 180:924, (I).



These six critics – David Antin, Charles Harrison, Germano Celant, Lucy R. Lippard, Michel Claura and Hans Strelow – invited extraordinary artists and packed this issue with wonderful works. In a democratic approach, most of the critics selected eight artists and gave them one page each to present their work. However, Michel Claura chose just one artist, Daniel Buren, and gave him all eight

pages to make his mark. In those eight pages, Buren filled the space with his trademark 8.7 cm stripes in a really zingy lemon yellow. Unlike all of the other works in this issue by other artists, his piece isn't named. His name doesn't appear in any of the eight pages, there is no contextual information, just pages of colourful stripes, immediately recognisable as a Daniel Buren artwork. It was a tour de force and stood out in what was already an extraordinary collection of works by some of the best artists of the period. By the nature of much conceptual art, most of the works in that issue are reproduced photocopies, texts or black and white photographs, in a typically conceptual art aesthetic (the whole issue is quite grey in tone, much like its cover). And then Buren's work punches through the middle of the magazine like a burst of sunshine. It is the only colour used in the whole magazine, bar a small advert on page 3, in a yellow rectangle, a weird premonition heralding what is to come.

Buren has spoken about the importance of colour to him:

I have always used colour, even when it was completely rejected, and I got a lot of criticism for the vivid colours I was using. I have always thought that colour in visual art is the only thing that is totally impossible to describe and replace with words. I think it is the only way in art to speak without speaking. Everything else you can describe... For me, colour is pure thought, and therefore completely inexpressible, every bit as abstract as a mathematical formula or a philosophical concept.

Daniel Buren, *Daniel Buren: Underground* (London: Art Books Publishing Ltd., 2017), p. 78.



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GILBERTO ZORIO

(IL CONFINE E QUELLA LINEA IMMAGINARIA CHE SI CONCRETIZZA CON LA VIOLENZA)
AL CONFINE PASSO I MIEI DOCUMENTI A CELANT

(The border is that imaginary line which is
made concrete by violence)
At the border I give my documents to Celant

(La frontière est cette ligne imaginaire que
rend concrète la violence)
À la frontière je donne mes papiers à Celant

(Die Grenze bildet jene imaginäre Linie, die
durch die Gewalt konkret wird.)
An der Grenze übergebe ich meine Docu-
mente an Celant





In the last few years, I seemed to be encountering Daniel Buren artworks everywhere. I should not be surprised I guess, since he has made 2,439 exhibitions worldwide and over 700 in his native home of France. Yet they always felt serendipitous. In August 2023, I drove a friend to Nantes airport for an early flight. After dropping our friend at the airport, we drove in to the city at 6am where I was so struck by what I saw through the car windscreen, I immediately pulled the car over. The Daniel Buren permanent sculpture *Les Anneaux* on the Quai des Antilles by the Loire river is breathtakingly beautiful at night.



Photos-souvenirs: *Les Anneaux*, permanent work in situ, quai des Antilles, Nantes, 2007. 'Parcours Estuaire'.



Photo-souvenir: *Les Deux Plateaux*, permanent sculpture in situ, cour d'honneur du Palais-Royal, Paris, 1985-1986.

In February, my French wife Valérie and I were in Paris for a week. We were strolling through the Tuileries Gardens with Valérie's niece Camille, an interior architect, who told us she wanted to take us and show us a permanent work of art behind the Louvre. She took us to Daniel Buren's work *Les Deux Plateaux*, at the Cour d'Honneur du Palais Royal, 1986.

In his sculptures, Buren works to integrate visual surface and architectural space, often working with historical buildings and monuments. He has undeniably created his own visual language with stripes that are instantly recognisable as Daniel Buren artworks. He refers to the stripes as a visual tool that helps us to look more at the environment around us. A stripe fixed in size is also a useful tool to measure space.

In June 2024, I was in Germany at the University of Münster giving a talk about *Inscription* for the Book Studies course run by Prof. Dr. Corinna Norrick-Rühl. In my presentation, I showed images of the Daniel Buren intervention in *Studio International* and said how much this work had informed our thinking. One of the students then told me they had a permanent Daniel Buren sculpture in the city of Munster, *Tore*, 1987 and asked me if I would like to go and see it at lunchtime? You bet I would.

Buren moved on from representational painting to stripes in the early sixties. He started buying a cheap striped fabric from textile markets in Paris as a canvas to paint on. The stripes were approximately 8.7 cm in width. Then he became more interested in the stripes and moved beyond the painterly frame and started painting the stripes directly on to the wall. Since then, he has completed hundreds of commissions around the globe, some permanent, some temporary, some with and some without permission. He has made multiple interventions, permanent works in-situ, gallery and public commissions.

Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren et Guido Le Nocchi in front of Galerie Apollinaire, October 1968, Milan.



In this image from 1968, you can see the gallery owner Guido Le Nocchi laughing with Daniel Buren who has pasted his stripes across the entrance to the Gallery Apollinaire in Milan, therefore preventing anyone from entering the space.

The intervention also reminds us as viewers that the work of art can never be entirely isolated from its architectural context.

When Buren glued green and white striped material to the outside door of the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan in 1968 for his first solo exhibition, he effectively closed the door to the conventional exhibition area in order to open it up to questions. By covering the door with stripes, he substituted door frame for traditional frame while having replaced the traditional canvas surface area with the surface of the entry door.

Anne Rorimer, 'From Painting to Architecture' *Parkett* 66, (2002).

The gallery owner said he enjoyed the experience of doing nothing so much that he closed the gallery permanently after this exhibition.

In this issue of *Inscription*, Buren has given us his stripes as doorways or portals to each of our academic papers. We pass through his stripes to a myriad of creative reflective analytical thinking on the book as a container by a whole host of accomplished authors.

Photo-souvenir: *Les Sept Portes*, permanent work in-situ, Münster, 1987.



In this image, Buren runs his stripes through the New York loft gallery space and then straight out the window and across the avenue outside.

Photos-souvenirs: *Within and Beyond the Frame*, work in-situ, John Weber Gallery, New York, October 1973.

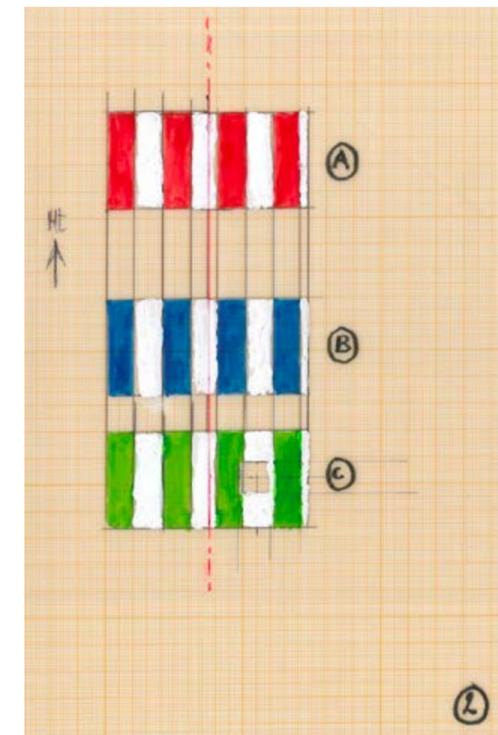


In this piece, Buren is seen covering an advertising hoarding with his trademark stripes. Selling you nothing. Giving you art. *Affichage sauvage*, work in situ, Paris, May 1969. Photo Jacques Caumont.

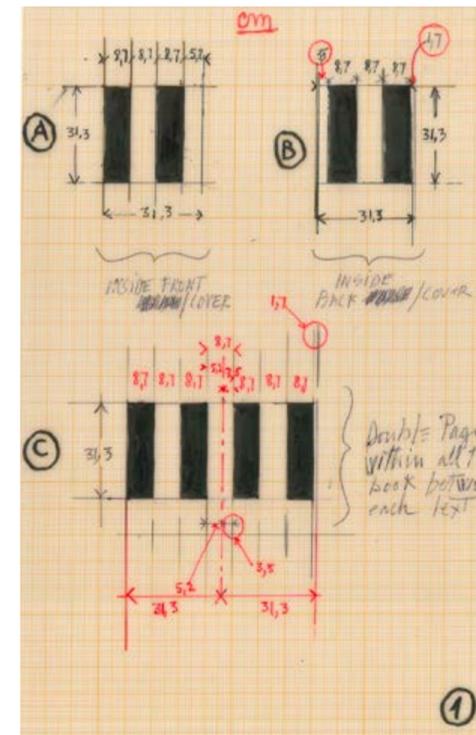


The museum, gallery or white cube is often seen as the container for works of art and Buren, like several of his contemporaries from the sixties, was expanding the potential field of critical activity for art. Since then, he has been playing in the space between painting and architecture whilst questioning the relationship between the inside and outside of the museum. In this issue of *Inscription* on the 'container', the relationship between inside and outside is a recurring theme for many of our contributors.

In February 2024, sitting in a Parisian restaurant talking excitedly about Buren's work. Camille mused for a while and then asked: 'But Simon, why don't you ask Daniel Buren if he wants to be in *Inscription*?' That, Camille, was a brilliant idea.



For this issue of *Inscription* Daniel Buren gave us the following instructions and wonderful design drawings. We're grateful for his generous participation.

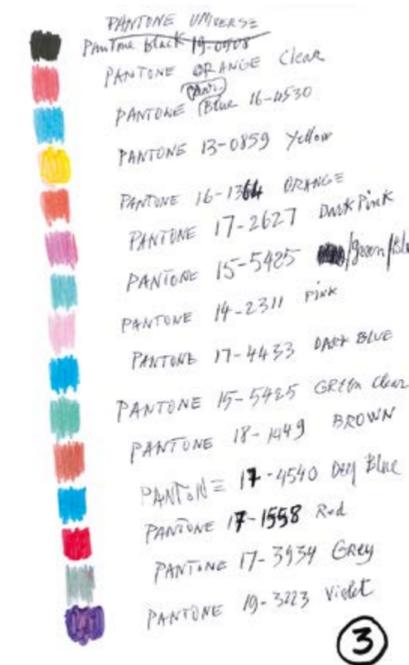


This work was made for the touring exhibition 'L'art à l'enfance' transported in a container, the Mobile Museum.

Photo-souvenir: *Déplié ça va mieux!*, travail in situ et en mouvement, Mobile Museum, France, 2011.



To find out more about Daniel Buren's art career, the film *Daniel Buren: The Eye of the Storm* can be watched at www.vimeo.com/ondemand/burenguggenheim/1040351995 [accessed 15 September 2024].



Buren also lent his stripes to a flotilla of sailing dinghies. Photo-souvenir: *Voile/Toile - Toile/Voile (Sail/Canvas - Canvas/Sail)*, situated work, 1975-2005, regatta Grasmere lake, Grasmere, July 2nd 2005.