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Flesh and Bones

Franz Erhard Walther and the Question of Craft

Regarding conceptual art, in the broadest sense of the term, the gap between theory and practice can be substantial, if not abyssal. The case of German artist Franz Erhard Walther, to whom this text is dedicated, is no exception to the rule. Although he has only been partially linked to the history of conceptualism, with his name appearing only sporadically in authoritative texts,[1] his place in the movement is indisputable. Walther not only participated in a number of events that in hindsight defined this phenomenon,[2] but he also collaborated for many years with one of the leading conceptual art dealers, Heiner Friedrich, who defended his work between 1967 and the last third of the 1970s. In addition, the question of eventually "overtaking" the art object in exchange for its "dematerialization" permeates his approach and, to a lesser extent, its acceptance and critical success.

Dieter Groll is one of the only writers thus far to have examined the hypothetical congruity between Walther's trajectory and that of conceptualism, declaring that although "the other concept of oeuvre (*der andere Werkbegriff*) is without a doubt conceptual . . . Walther's art is not conceptual art. FEW does not only carry out concepts, but always seeks out the 'sensual part' as well. He never abandons the material side of the artwork, however minor, although in its object aspect, it may only be the pretext for the actual work."[3] Living in New York in the late 1960s, Walther was nevertheless a witness to the conceptual revolution, and at the time maintained numerous ties with some of its actors. In his "drawn novel," *Sternenstaub*, for example, the artist, as Groll points out, reconsiders his discussion with the critic Ursula Meyer, who at one point envisioned including him in her book *Conceptual Art* but then abandoned the idea:[4]

> Meet Vostell at Higgins' / accompanies me to Ursula Meyer's, who is to publish a book on "conceptual art" / Meyer wonders whether the book should also include alongside pure "conceptual art," conceptual works steeped in materials or whether it should be limited to strict "conceptual art" / she visits me two weeks later in the East Broadway loft / sees the drawing-manifestos for the MoMA space / Opportunity to philosophize about the concept, manipulation [of the pieces], language / I don't belong in her book.[5]

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Although extremely close to both Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, to cite two of his New York friends, Walther maintained a critical stance toward the movement, speaking in detail about his incompatibility with conceptual art in his long interview with the writer Michael Lingner, one of the artist's exegetes, who, in contrast, insists on referring to him as a conceptualist:

> Replacing the materially formed work with the concept, that is, language, was a very beautiful idea, Walther asserted. It was an idea that cleared my mind and that suited me perfectly, because I had already been working with language for years. Conceptual art is intrinsically difficult to criticize . . . . Nevertheless, I could not accept the conclusions aimed at countering the possibilities of *material* language (Material*sprache*). I did not want to renounce the sensual side, the descriptive side, that is, of art as a mediator of real experiences. The visual analogy that helped me at the time best illustrates my attitude towards conceptual art. I would always say: they put up the scaffolding, the bones—perfect, you need the bones, otherwise the flesh won't hold. But it was necessary to add the meat.[6]

The notion of *Materialsprache* or material language to which Walther refers in this highly instructive passage sets in motion a reflection on the place occupied by craft in the artist's work. In this respect, it is relevant to return to his evolution and, in particular, to the key chapter in his trajectory that led him to appropriate a material, cloth, and a technique, sewing, which would eventually become his "trademark." It should be noted that his trajectory is composed of flashes of insight and very precocious developments, as well as a combination of circumstances that allowed him to shape an aesthetic partly dependent on extra-artistic factors and skills.

Before focusing on cloth and sewing, it is worth pointing out that one of the professional environments that encouraged the emergence of his practice very early on was that of pastry-making, in which he was immersed as a child and adolescent, because several members of his family, starting with his parents, were bakers. Walther claims that in some of his early works, he was reappropriating formal details or gestures that he had observed in that context.[7] The activities of making puff pastry or of filling or cutting out dough, for instance, not to mention the processual dimension inherent in these "actions," would soon nourish a catalogue of diverse and varied processes that Walther would apply to the approach he initiated in the second half of the 1950s. In some way, the question of craft, or at least of skill, was thus posed in his work from the very beginning, even if it was at first imagined by means of a rather unexpected re-transposition and decontextualization, which the artist realized for the first time in the 1970s, when his parents, looking through his *Werkmonographie* from 1972[8] drew his attention to the pseudomorphic qualities of works whose genealogy undeniably alluded to their professional sector.

But it was the discovery of cloth and sewing that constituted the veritable revolution from which Walther would build his mature work. This coincided with the artist meeting his

1 Johanna and Franz Erhard Walther with *Handlungsbuch I* (Handling Book I), Fulda, 1969

future (first) wife, Johanna Friess (fig. 1). He recalls their meeting in an interview made on the occasion of his exhibition at the Wiels contemporary art center:

> I was focused on developing my own concept of the artwork and the questions this raised. In the glued paper pieces, for example, the very notion of "gluing" bothered me because of its connotations of collage. The simplest thing would have been to produce works in metal or wood, but that would have been too banal. It was important for my own "hand" to be visible in the work, and I wanted to create something with a tactile materiality that could be associated with art. A neutrally rendered object couldn't achieve that. By then I had become close to Johanna, whose parents ran a "Wiener Hofschneiderei," a kind of specialist tailoring workshop in Fulda. We were in the workshop in March 1963, and lying on the table was a small cushioned pad known as a "tailor's ham," which was used when ironing the sleeve caps and shoulder sections of suits. It looked very similar to my glued paper pieces, but it had a seam around the edges. *Eureka*! It suddenly struck me that this was exactly what I'd been looking for. I'm not sure whether I started working on this idea right there and then, but I remember sitting in my studio making drawings for works that could be sewn, and Johanna immediately transformed these into sewn pieces.[9]

"Johanna immediately transformed these into sewn pieces." The modus operandi that emerges in this sentence would shape the division of labor—which started in 1963 and persists today—between the pieces' conceiver and their "fabricator." Although the delegation of a part, or even the totality, of the production of works is common in contemporary art, in approaches pertaining equally to minimalism, conceptual art, or Arte Povera, those delegations that lead to an exclusive relationship lasting nearly sixty years are exceptional; nor is Walther the only artist of his generation to have set his sights on fabrics associated with craftsmanship. For example, Alighiero Boetti, in the 1960s, also called on his wife, Annemarie Sauzeau, to "assist" him in embroidery operations before delegating the production of works to Afghan artisans starting in the 1970s. As Mark Godfrey notes:

> Boetti's method of production, of working with Afghan embroideries, had other important implications. "At this time," he later recalled, "not many artists had their work made by artisans." To the Italian audience of the period, embroidered cloths from Afghanistan were a difficult proposition. "Initial reaction was awful," Boetti said. The embroideries were "at once conceptually troubling and too pretty." This statement implies that it was not so much Boetti's hands-off approach to production, nor embroidery's association with "craft" rather than fine art per se that was problematic. In a context where Italian artists of the day were working with raw materials such as rock, glass, sacking, and coal, Boetti's embroideries could be seen as overtly feminine.[10]

It is worth noting that ten years earlier, when Walther "showed" his cloth pieces for the first time in the framework of his curriculum at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, he was confronted with the same lack of understanding and ridicule from his classmates as well as from Joseph Beuys, who exclaimed upon discovering the stitching, "So Walther has become a tailor now."[11] In addition, it is noteworthy that two facts in Godfrey's commentary on Boetti can be adapted to the Waltherian framework. The first touches on the alleged contradiction inherent in pieces that are "at once conceptually troubling and too pretty"; the other concerns sewing's gendered and "overtly feminine" dimension.[12]

Thus, Walther has always asserted an approach that combines flesh and bones, matter and concept. In his case, the importance of the former is all the more pronounced because the artist is unable to concretize the concept without the assistance of the person who initiated him in his matter and technique. He has never tried to take Johanna's place, never wanted to replace her despite the couple's problems (and breakup), and seems to have no difficulty in accepting the dependency relationship that obliges him to rely on her experience and expertise, as she alone is able to "give life" to her (ex-)husband's ideas.[13] Unlike Boetti with his multiple Afghan embroiderers, Walther developed a symbiotic relationship with Johanna. And yet the couple never *worked* in an "associative" configuration in the same way as the Bechers, Christo and Jeanne Claude, or Ilya and Emilia Kabakov.

The question of Johanna's involvement and "responsibility" for the future of the work will undoubtedly be raised in the coming years. Walther's second and current wife, Susanne, wisely decided to initiate a wide-ranging reflection that has already given rise to a fascinating discussion between the two women during a day of meetings organized by Haus der Kunst in Munich in 2020.[14] This project will result in a book of interviews between Johanna and Susanne, in which the division of labor between Walther and those who have assisted him is expected to be subject to a "rereading." In the meantime, let us again consider this approach by associating a basic concept and a *Werkbegriff* with an artisanal dimension.

It is important to emphasize that Walther has said relatively little in the many interviews he has given or in the texts or manifestos he has written about the "materiality" of "his" cloths. One interview is extremely rare in this respect. Despite its exceptional nature, however, the artist's 1987 interview with Gert Selle has almost never been quoted by his commenters and exegetes. This perceptive interlocutor asked him why his *Materialbegriff*—a term that with some difficulty can be translated as "definition of materials"—was (almost) never accompanied by indications of the fabrics used, pointing out that his works manifest an aura that, in his view, was implicitly linked to the "quality" of said materials. According to Walther, the reason for not mentioning his favorite material, a thick cotton, was justified in that this fabric is only one of the many variables with which his works are "executed," including activations, the body, time, space, language, and history. "All these moments become the materials," the artist replied, "like stone or wood for the traditional sculptor. They define my *Materialbegriff*."[15] Walther stated in this interview that he had a lack of affect for the cotton he uses, asserting that he chose it for its "neutral" quality.[16] This argument was unsatisfactory for Selle, who contradicted Walther by indicating that the cotton generates "strong tactile stimuli."[17] One may therefore find the aura of the pieces, coupled with tactile stimulations, at odds with the "concept" the artist has asserted since the early 1960s, when he developed a *Werkbegriff* indebted to a participatory approach and dependent on the copresence of spectators invited to comply with an interactive and subjective imperative.

Since Walther appropriated cloth and sewing at a time when he was consolidating his "concept," it was impossible for him to assert the tactile, formal, or visual properties of his fabrics, let alone their artisanal quality. He would have been cornered into an approach praising "specificities": of materials (and of a technique) that he sought at the time to reduce to a point of departure for an aesthetic that was to transcend the material in favor of effects (in the sense that Jauss[18] might have understood it); and of a "plurality of experiences . . . fundamental experiences of oneself, with one's ideas, one's body, polymorphous objects, with other users; experiences that facilitate introspection, self-definition, self-expansion, self-production, orientation and awareness, in which measurement, energy, thought, time, place, weight, etc., are clearly made explicit."[19] It could even be said that in this ambitious program, the cloth's artisanal dimension was removed from the equation, and that the vast majority of his commentators clearly did not consider it useful to reassess Johanna's role and position, and even less the "overtly feminine" character of his technique, despite the fact that it lies at the

heart of his undertaking. Questioning or even renegotiating the division of labor between the conceiver and the "fabricator" of the pieces would undeniably expose us to something taboo, if not an epistemological rupture in terms of Waltherian exegesis.

Considering cloth in all its materiality also, in a sense, means taking into consideration a social and economic reality that until recently has rarely been put into perspective in analyses of the artist's work. For this purpose, I refer to a text by Gregor Quack (which I will mention again later), who was concerned with rereading Walther's work, and in particular his *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), in the light of "social fabric." The *1. Werksatz* series is clearly the artist's magnum opus. Conceived between 1963 and 1969, it is composed of fifty-eight "pieces" made by Johanna. In accordance with these pieces, the "user" is invited to manipulate them alone or in the company of co-users. Again, the pieces are, in Walther's eyes, mere "instruments" enabling "self-definition," to use Kern's expression. This *instrumentarium* is essential to the success of that self-definition and one of the variables, which include time, space, my body or those of others, that enable us to complete the work's execution. In short, the pieces do not constitute the artworks. They cannot claim to enjoy the autonomy dear to certain modernist or minimalist approaches. They become works of art only after they have been activated, which of course confers on the pieces in question a status that is precarious, if not ambiguous. They are only instruments, and as such naturally evoke a musical metaphor. In this process of self-definition, both the composer (Walther) and the performers (users) are highlighted; the instrument, however indispensable it may be, is relegated to the background. Showcasing the cloth in the Waltherian enterprise, if we stay with this musical analogy, would be tantamount to mentioning the name of the luthier or excessively describing the soloist's instrument in a review of a violin concerto (which can, exceptionally, occur).

In his text, however, Quack aims to demonstrate that fabric is not a "neutral" entity, to revert to an adjective in the Waltherian lexicon whose contradictory nature has already been underlined, and to show that it concerns a "social fabric," conferring a property on his aesthetics that he had never put forth. For good reason: to think of cloth in this perspective would once again mean bringing to light "specificities" that are in many ways incompatible with Walther's approach. The fabric is not neutral. It constitutes a membrane. It protects me and allows me to interact with others. It allows me to see, but it also allows me to escape the gaze of others.

Adopting a gendered perspective without making it the focus of his argument, Quack conveniently reminds us that

> [w]e use uniforms and flags to tell friend from foe, the production and use of clothes marking both the oppression and the liberation of women, gendered dress codes have both oppressed the queer community and provided it with vehicles for free self-expression. No other class of commodity is quite as tightly intertwined with both the rise of industrial capitalism and the history of its critique as textiles. Whether they planned it or not, Franz Erhard and Johanna Walther would soon find themselves intertwined in many of these social

2 Franz Erhard Walther activating *Weste* (Vest), *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), 1963–69, element # 11, 1965, at the Rhön Mountains, 1970. Strong canvas, foam rubber, glue, ca. 76 × 64 × 7 cm, circumference ca. 190 cm

> meanings. This included, among many other factors, the reproduction of gendered divisions of textile labor. For nearly all of the cloth works they co-produced after 1963, Walther drew the shapes which Johanna, who worked as a seamstress for a local department store, would then put together with her sewing machine.[20]

Unlike Blinky Palermo, with whom he spent time in Düsseldorf, Walther did not use cloth to support a political position; his work, according to Quack, "helped to lay bare some of the basic mechanisms of social life (e.g., engagement, communication, avoidance),"[21] allowing viewers to realize "how such naked behaviors were interwoven with political ideologies and ideas."[22] "As important as the social connotations of fabrics were for Walther," Quack continues, "they do not alone explain the genesis of the work concept (*Werkbegriff*) that allowed Walther to turn his artworks into objects for use by viewers. After all, a number of the earliest textile pieces . . . still remained wall-mounted and somewhat pictorial. To fully complete Walther's turn toward the social, then, the use of fabric and his personal creativity had to coincide with external circumstances."[23] The author continues his analysis by focusing on certain pieces from the first *Werksatz* series that, for him, bear witness to Walther's "social situation," which in this case was rather lonely during the years spent developing this ensemble, given the hostile reactions it inspired. The fact that many of his pieces are the result of activities of isolation and protection, subtraction or concealment cannot be called into question,[24] nor can

3 Franz Erhard Walther activating *Plastische Rede* (Sculptural Speech), 1983. Cotton, wood, 365 × 470 × 40 cm, 6 elements. Collection Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle, Paris

the fact that the cloth largely contributes to their very real success. "To understand how the pieces in the *Work Set* can be understood both in relation to Walther's social surroundings," writes Quack,

> and as continually open to new and future uses, it is helpful to remember the multi-step nature of the fabrication of the *Work Set*. To take that process seriously is not just to acknowledge the immensely important role Johanna Walther played in her ex-husband and business partner's career, but also to sharpen our awareness of the fact that Walther himself wore various hats . . . throughout a work object's lifecycle. If pieces carry echoes of his biography, this is less because he invented them than because he was frequently the first person to wear and activate them.[25]

4 Franz Erhard Walther activating *Gelbmodellierung* (Yellow Modeling), 1980–81, at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 1988. Cotton, wood, 500 × 1190 × 60 cm, 7 elements

This last argument is fundamental, because if Walther's pieces have a universal character and at no time focus on differentiations that could orient their use in a gendered, social, or cultural direction—if they are a priori usable by any "normally" constituted adult—then the artist serves as a model, not to say test subject, for each of them. In this respect, Johanna's contribution consequently conveys an approach that suggests a kind of "haute couture," progressively adapting to the evolution of the artist's measurements and weight gain. And if clothing is only incidental in the first *Werksatz,* limited to a few pieces that make use of it, as in *Weste* from 1965 (fig. 2) or *Positionen* from 1969, it is better adapted to his person and his body, even if it is not reducible to these specific sizes, in other works conceived by Franz Erhard and Johanna Walther. Just think of *Gelbe Skulptur* (Yellow Sculpture) completed in 1979,

5 Franz Erhard Walther, *1. Werksatz* (First Work Set), 1963–69 in *Lagerform* (Storage Form), exhibition view, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 1999

Standstelle und halbierte Weste I (Standstill and Halved Vest I) from 1982, *Plastische Rede* (Plastic Speech) from 1983 (fig. 3), or *Werkstatt* (Workshop) from 1983 and 1986.

In the late 1970s, Walther embarked on a new family of works, *Wandformationen* (Wall Formations) (fig. 4), which reinforced the artisanal dimension, for an obvious reason: although practicable, they return to a mural presentation and are de facto part of a pictorial filiation that the artist had abandoned in 1963, except for his drawings and works on paper, which he continued to present on the wall. These cloth paintings can no longer be reduced to simple points of departure, nor to *instrumentaria* serving as an intermediary for (inter)action. And although they do not enjoy complete autonomy, the history of Walther's exhibitions shows that they are most often presented in a mode that does not involve any form of activity, even if the artist may lend himself here and there to demonstrations (*Werkvorführungen*) whose character is both exceptional and ritualistic. Once Walther's works departed from a participatory perspective in the 1980s, again from a fully operational theoretical point of view, the artisanal aspect and quality of his works became more visible. This is true for all the families of works sewn by Johanna from the late 1970s on—for example, *Wandformationen* (Wall For-

6 Franz Erhard Walther, *Probenähungen* (Sample Sewings), 1969–2013, exhibition view, WIELS, Brussels, 2014

mations, 1979–86), *Configurations* (1986–92), *Handlungsbahnen* (Trajectories, 1997–2003), and *Körperformen* (starting in 2006)—so many variations in which forms and colors are shown on the walls or the floor through volumes in space, but above all through cloth, which constitutes Walther's preferred support: the flesh. The commenters who, until the 1970s, were still trying to minimize the artisanal dimension of Walther's objects should now rethink their positions. Moreover, today the artist is the first to assert that he thinks primarily in terms of "images,"[26] thus affirming the retinal and "object-oriented" turn his production has taken.

I should also mention a very specific stance that Walther takes in his work, a stance that intersects with two notions inherent to his approach: *Lagerform* (storage form) and *Probenähungen* (trial sewings). Both were established in the 1960s and can overlap, depending on the situation. *Lagerform* (fig. 5) consists in saying that a practicable piece is not necessarily practiced and that its inert, resting, and passive mode, distanced from manipulation, does not make the work non-activatable. Other modalities are, in fact, generated by the pieces at rest, starting with projections that allow spectators to imagine activation without necessarily enacting it. At once dematerialized and overmaterialized, *Lagerform* thus has a unique range insofar as the absence of manipulation is accompanied by a reification of the object that is diametrically opposed to the status of activation, which, it should be remembered, would demonstrate the negation of any form of materiality. But this reification under-

lines once again the artisanal dimension concretized through the objects presented as folded and/or enclosed in cloth membranes, also made by Johanna.

The *Probenähungen* (fig. 6) series was introduced at the end of the 1960s, more or less at the end of *1. Werksatz*. From this period on, Walther decided to keep the prototypes and samples that did or did not preside over the elaboration of his pieces. A living archive of his work, the *Probenähungen*, which initially did not have the status of a work of art, generate impressive ensembles with variable geometry, like a sort of curriculum vitae of Waltherian materials and forms. Not satisfied with simply reviving abandoned, fallen elements, *Probenähungen* embody an aesthetic of recycling that enables the artist and ourselves, the spectators, to give them a second life, as well as a great deal of visibility. These samples have been kept not in Walther's studio but in Johanna's workspace, where, for years, if not decades, she has been accumulating these traces, memories of forms, ghostly presences with a precarious status, almost or not yet works: for some, unfinished. One thing is certain: they reflect and magnify the artisanal aspect specific to this approach. In the interview made for Wiels, Walther revisited this ensemble, explaining that the pieces "started around the mid-1960s, when I realized that they had a visual and material quality, a form that was interesting even in its very lack of formalization. Then this dropped off for a while . . . . The idea came to me that these could potentially be works in their own right, and Johanna must have known that too, which is why she had held onto them all."[27] This is a rare, if not exceptional, statement by the artist incorporating his ex-wife[28] into the future of an artwork. This recognition may have been the first step in a process of empowering the woman who presides over the elaboration of Walther's cloth pieces and whose level of involvement will be reevaluated in the medium or even short term, because although the skeleton was clearly shaped by Franz Erhard, it is important to remember that we owe its incarnation to Johanna's unequalled and irreplaceable skills.[29]

Translated from the French by Laurie Hurwitz

Notes

1 Although mentioned in books by Germano Celant (*Arte Povera* [Milan: Mazzotta, 1969]) and Lucy R. Lippard (*Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* [New York: Praeger, 1973]), Walther's name is absent from the catalogues *L'Art conceptuel, une perspective* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989) and *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965–1975* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995) as well as from *Conceptual Art* by Peter Osborne (London: Phaidon, 2002) and *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* by Anne Rorimer (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), to cite a few of the essential references on conceptual art. And while his work appears in Sophie Richard's *Unconcealed* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), the author did not see fit to include Walther's name in the index of this indispensable book on the international network of conceptual artists.

2 Starting with *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969 and Documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972.

3 "Weiter ist der andere Werkbegriff ohne Zweifel konzeptuell, gleichwohl ist Walthers Kunst keine Concept Kunst. FEW führt eben nicht nur Konzeption aus, sondern sucht immer auch den 'sinnlichen Teil'. Nie gibt er die materiale Seite des Kunstwerkes auf, wie marginal auch sie beschaffen und in ihrer Objektseite nur der Anlass zur eigentlichen Werkhandlung sein mag." Dieter Groll, *Der andere Werkbegriff Franz Erhard Walthers* (Cologne: Walther König, 2014), p. 73 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).

4 Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972).

5 Franz Erhard Walther, *Sternenstaub* (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 2009), p. 909 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz). Some passages from the interview between Walther and Meyer were also printed in *Franz Erhard Walther: Werkmonographie*, ed. Götz Adriani (Cologne: DuMont, 1972), pp. 271–80.

6 ". . . an die Stelle der material geformten Arbeit das Konzept, d.h. Sprache zu setzen, war als Gedanke sehr schön. Es war eine Vorstellung, die für den Kopf reinigend war und mir sehr entgegenkam, weil ich schon seit Jahren mit Sprache gearbeitet hatte. Die Concept Art ist immanent schwer kritisierbar . . . . Trotzdem habe ich die Entscheidung der Concept Art gegen die Möglichkeiten der *Material*sprache für mich nicht akzeptieren können. Ich wollte auf die sinnliche, auf die anschauliche Seite, d.h. auf die Kunst als Vermittlerin realer Erfahrungen nicht verzichten. Am besten wird meine Einstellung zur Concept Art an dem bildhaften Vergleich deutlich, der mir damals weitergeholfen hat. Ich habe immer gesagt: Die stellen das Gerüst hin, die Knochen—prima, die Knochen brauchst du, sonst hält das Fleisch nicht. Aber das Fleisch musste eben noch dazukommen." Franz Erhard Walther in *Zwischen Kern und Mantel: Franz Erhard Walther und Michael Lingner im Gespräch über Kunst* (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 1985), p. 29 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).

7 See the author's interview with the artist, "The Work Can Never Be Finished: An Interview with Franz Erhard Walther," in *Franz Erhard Walther: The Body Decides*, exh. cat. (Brussels: WIELS; Bordeaux: CAPC Musée d'art contemporain; London: Koenig Books, 2014), p. 51.

8 Adriani, *Franz Erhard Walther: Werkmonographie*.

9 Ibid., p. 58 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).

10 Mark Godfrey, "Boetti and Afghanistan," in *Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art 2012), p. 166.

11 Verhagen, "The Work Can Never Be Finished," p. 58.

12 See also Gregor Quack's analysis cited below.

13 Although Johanna was occasionally assisted in these sewing jobs, no one could ever fully replace her. If Johanna should pass away or terminate her collaboration with Franz Erhard before he stops working, the question of how to continue this enterprise, which is certainly not limited to sewing, will have to be raised.

14 This interview between Johanna and Susanne Walther has been posted online: "Susanne Walther und Johanna Walther im Gespräch | Haus der Kunst, München," museumsfernsehen.de, December 15, 2020, https://www.museumsfernsehen.de/susanne-walther-und-johanna-walther-im-gespraech-haus-der-kunst-muenchen/.

15 Franz Erhard Walther, interview by Gert Selle, *Poiesis*, no. 4 (1988): 62 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).

16 It is noteworthy that, regarding this point, Walther contradicts what he had stated previously, namely that he was "looking for a language. Something textile-tactile that could be incorporated into an art project. It couldn't be a neutral object." Verhagen, "The Work Can Never Be Finished," p. 58.

17 "[S]tarke taktile Reize." Selle, *Poiesis*, p. 62.

18 Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

19 "Vielfältige Erfahrungen . . . Grund-Erfahrungen eines Benutzers mit sich selbst, seinen Vorstellungen, seinem Körper, verschiedenen geformten Objekten, mit anderen Benutzern; Erfahrungen, die bei der Ich-Findung, der Selbst-Definition, der Selbst-Erweiterung, der "Selbstproduktion", der Orientierung und Bewusstseinsbildung helfen, indem so abstrakte Begriffe wie Mass, Energie, Denken, Zeit, Raum, Gewicht etc. anschauliches, Erleben warden." Hermann Kern, "Zeit, Energie, Prozess, Denken, Sprache—einige Aspekte der Arbeit von Franz Erhard Walther," in *Franz Erhard Walther: Diagramme zum 1. Werksatz*, exh. cat. (Munich: Kunstraum, 1976), p. 14 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).

20 Gregor Quack, "The Social Fabric—Franz Erhard Walther's Transformative Artistic Practice," in *Franz Erhard Walther: Shifting Perspectives*, exh. cat. (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2020), p. 206.

21 Ibid., p. 207.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Examples include *Ummantelung* (1964), *Für Hügel und Berge* (1965), and *Stoffröhre* (1966).

25 Quack, "The Social Fabric," p. 208.

26 "I think primarily in terms of images, shapes, and sculptural spaces," Walther cited in *Franz Erhard Walther: Shifting Perspectives*, p. 156.

27 Verhagen, "The Work Can Never Be Finished," pp. 70–71.

28 To be clear, Johanna never sought to share her ex-husband's status as an artist, let alone his fame, preferring to remain in the shadows. See Johanna's online interview with Susanne Walther.

29 I allow myself to add in this last footnote that in meetings of the Board of Directors of the Franz Erhard Walther Foundation, of which I was a member, a great deal of time is spent on questions about the fabrication, conservation, and restoration of the works. Which is to say that these questions, and especially the answers given to them, are almost exclusively about Johanna and the central and indispensable role she plays in this family business.

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