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For Lucy

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Introduction

These essays trace the course of my reflections on art making over the last quarter century. Perhaps a skeptical and speculative turn of mind has always presided over the work and the writing. I never set out to prove or demonstrate so much as to investigate. And I never set out to affirm so much as to negate (finding that the former flowed from the latter in any case). Change and not continuity has been the guide—Heraclitus not Anaximander lit the path. Paradox and the fugitive were always more attractive than assured style and stable position. Rupture and disruption, not any organic development, provided the dynamic. If there was a constant, perhaps it was that "rotting sack of Humanism" that has always provided a target. Within that sack, and one of the first things I set out to shatter for myself, was the unity of a subject—both with itself and with a monolithic, coherent style prescribed to flow from this ideological oppression. I rejected from the beginning the market- and media-driven prescription that the visual should be promoted to a worshipful ontology while the wordless artist, a mute fabricator of consistent artifacts, was forbidden to set foot on theoretical and critical ground. But since language saturated one side of my work since the early 1960s, it is perhaps not surprising that the discursive found a more focused practice in the writing of these essays.

I always rejected the notion that art lasts. What is alive in any given mode of art making is necessarily brief. The context that presided at its birth does not endure any more than do we remain the same. But sufficiently numerous a posteriori texts, together with those repetitive carcasses so willingly provided by the artists and so necessary to their careers, will always serve to parade the corpse along the halls of culture. If republication of these essays contributes to the necrophilia, I can only

defend myself by claiming that at least some of them were written as a coup de grace to a particular art practice I saw as dead on its feet.

It is neither reductionist nor despairing to acknowledge that all culture works to provide an acceptable mask over, and compensatory recuperation of, the death that is master of our desire. If the motives for art making are multiple but limited, the nature of its impulses remains obscure. But if art springs, as I think it does, from an economy of excess in fashioning its masks of metaphor, it arises from causes that can never be reasons. Therein lies its value. Insofar as these essays dance with a multiplicity of masks, they affirm that value.

With the exception of a few stylistic changes to improve textual clarity, these essays are printed as they were originally published.

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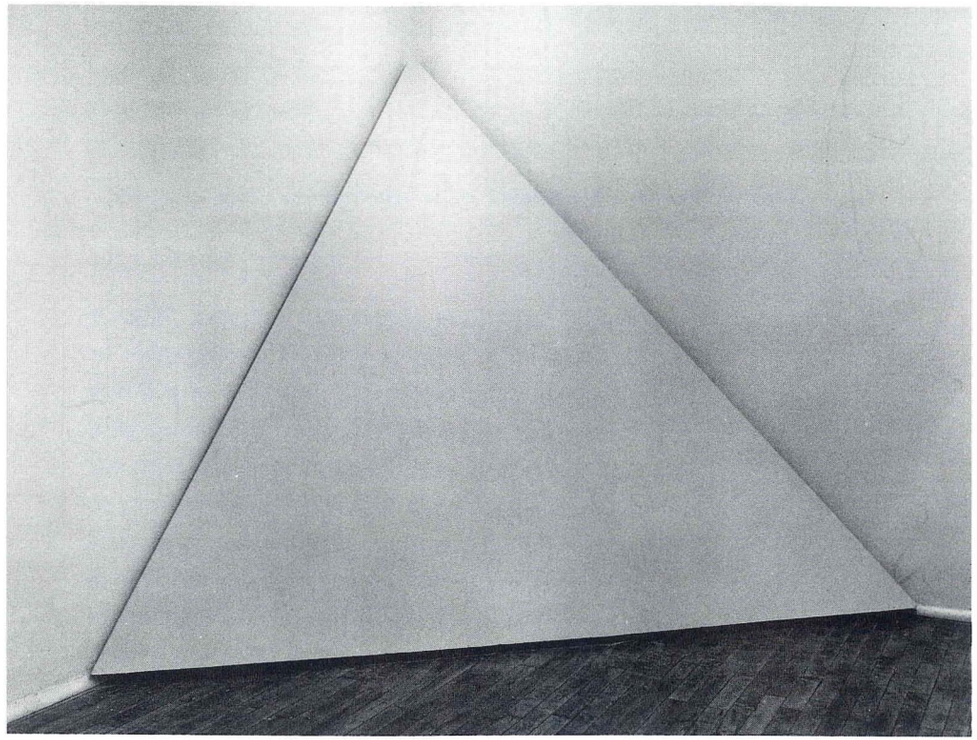
R. Morris
New York City
May 1993

1 Notes on Sculpture, Part 1

> What comes into appearance must segregate in order to appear.
> —*Goethe*

There has been little definitive writing on present-day sculpture. When it is discussed, it is often called in to support a broad iconographic or iconological point of view—after the supporting examples of painting have been exhausted. Kubler has raised the objection that iconological assertions presuppose that experiences so different as those of space and time must somehow be interchangeable.[1] It is perhaps more accurate to say, as Barbara Rose has recently written, that specific elements are held in common between the various arts today—an iconographic rather than an iconological point of view. The distinction is helpful, for the iconographer who locates shared elements and themes has a different ambition than the iconologist, who, according to Panofsky, locates a common meaning. There may indeed be a general sensibility in the arts at this time. Yet the histories and problems of each, as well as the experiences offered by each art, indicate involvements in very separate concerns. At most, the assertions of common sensibilities are generalizations that minimize differences. The climactic incident is absent in the work of John Cage and Barnett Newman. Yet it is also true that Cage has consistently supported a methodology of collage that is not present in Newman. A question to be asked of common sensibilities is to what degree they give one a purchase on the experience of the various arts from which they are drawn. Of course this is an irrelevant question for one who approaches the arts in order to find identities of elements or meanings.

In the interest of differences, it seems time that some of the distinctions sculpture has managed for itself be articulated. To begin in



1.1 Robert Morris, *Corner Piece,* 1964. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)

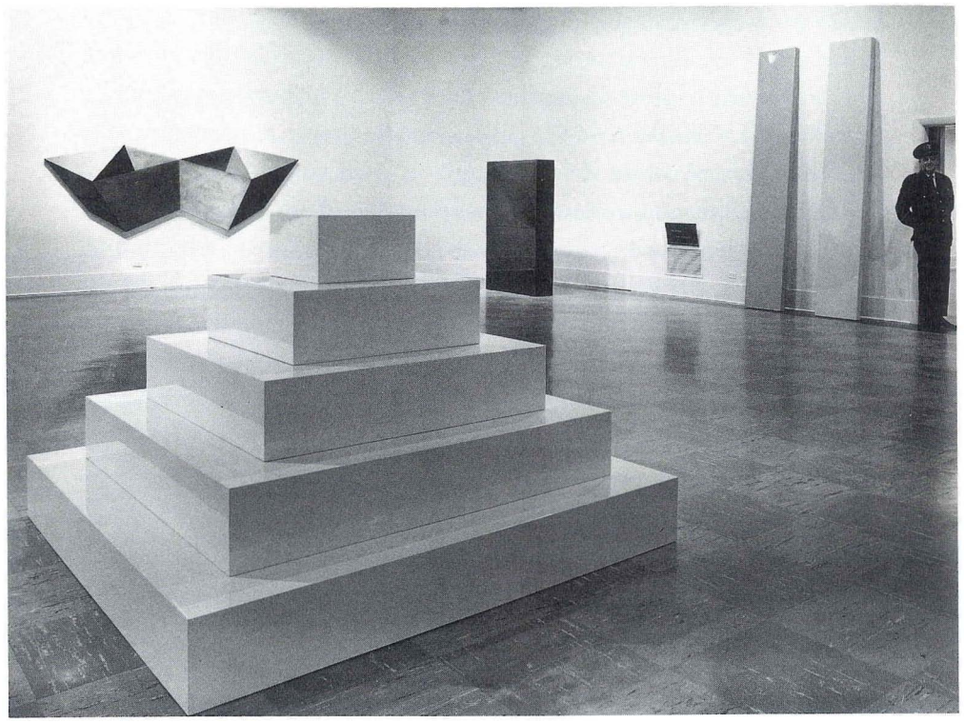
the broadest possible way, it should be stated that the concerns of sculpture have been for some time not only distinct but hostile to those of painting. The clearer the nature of the values of sculpture become, the stronger the opposition appears. Certainly the continuing realization of its nature has had nothing to do with any dialectical evolution that painting has enunciated for itself. The primary problematic concerns with which advanced painting has been occupied for about half a century have been structural. The structural element has been gradually revealed to be located within the nature of the literal qualities of the support.[2] It has been a long dialogue with a limit. Sculpture, on the other hand, never having been involved with illusionism, could not possibly have based the efforts of fifty years upon the rather pious, if somewhat contradictory, act of giving up this illusionism and approaching the object. Save for replication, which is not to be confused with illusionism, the sculptural facts of space, light, and materials have always functioned concretely and literally. Its allusions or references have not been commensurate with the indicating sensibilities of painting. If painting has sought to approach the object, it has sought equally hard to dematerialize itself on the way. Clearer distinctions between sculpture's essentially tactile nature and the optical sensibilities involved in painting need to be made.

Tatlin was perhaps the first to free sculpture from representation and establish it as an autonomous form, both by the kind of image, or rather non-image, he employed and by his literal use of materials. He, Rodchenko, and other Constructivists refuted Apollinaire's observation that "a structure becomes architecture, and not sculpture, when its elements no longer have their justification in nature." At least the earlier works of Tatlin and other Constructivists made references to neither the figure nor architecture. In subsequent years Gabo, and to a lesser extent Pevsner and Vantongerloo, perpetuated the Constructivist ideal of a non-imagistic sculpture that was independent of architecture. This autonomy was not sustained in the work of the greatest American sculptor, the late David Smith. Today there is a reassertion of the non-imagistic as an

essential condition. Although, in passing, it should be noted that this condition has been weakened by a variety of works which, while maintaining the non-imagistic, focus themselves in terms of the highly decorative, the precious, or the gigantic. There is nothing inherently wrong with these qualities; each offers a concrete experience. But they happen not to be relevant experiences for sculpture, for they unbalance complex plastic relationships just to that degree that one focuses on these qualities in otherwise non-imagistic works.

The relief has always been accepted as a viable mode. However, it cannot be accepted today as legitimate. The autonomous and literal nature of sculpture demands that it have its own, equally literal space—not a surface shared with painting. Furthermore, an object hung on the wall does not confront gravity; it timidly resists it. One of the conditions of knowing an object is supplied by the sensing of the gravitational force acting upon it in actual space. That is, space with three, not two coordinates. The ground plane, not the wall, is the necessary support for the maximum awareness of the object. One more objection to the relief is the limitation of the number of possible views the wall imposes, together with the constant of up, down, right, left.

Color, as it has been established in painting, notably by Olitski and Louis, is a quality not at all bound to stable forms. Michael Fried has pointed out that one of their major efforts has been, in fact, to free color of drawn shape. They have done this by either enervating drawing (Louis) or eliminating it totally (recent Olitski), thereby establishing an autonomy for color that was only indicated by Pollock. This transcendence of color over shape in painting is cited here because it demonstrates that it is the most optical element in an optical medium. It is this essentially optical, immaterial, noncontainable, nontactile nature of color that is inconsistent with the physical nature of sculpture. The qualities of scale, proportion, shape, mass are physical. Each of these qualities is made visible by the adjustment of an obdurate, literal mass. Color does not have this characteristic. It is additive. Obviously things exist as colored. The objection



1.2 John McCracken, *Yellow Pyramid*. (Courtesy of *Artforum*.)

is raised against the use of color that emphasizes the optical and in so doing subverts the physical. The more neutral hues that do not call attention to themselves allow for the maximum focus on those essential physical decisions that inform sculptural works. Ultimately the consideration of the nature of sculptural surfaces is the consideration of light, the least physical element, but one that is as actual as the space itself. For unlike paintings, which are always lit in an optimum way, sculpture undergoes changes by the incidence of light. David Smith in the "Cubi"

works has been one of the few to confront sculptural surfaces in terms of light.

Mondrian went so far as to claim that "Sensations are not transmissible, or rather, their purely qualitative properties are not transmissible. The same, however, does not apply to relations between sensations . . . Consequently only relations between sensations can have an objective value . . ." This may be ambiguous in terms of perceptual facts, but in terms of looking at art it is descriptive of the condition that obtains. It obtains because art objects have clearly divisible parts that set up the relationships. Such a condition suggests the alternative question: could a work exist that has only one property? Obviously not, since nothing exists that has only one property. A single, pure sensation cannot be transmissible precisely because one perceives simultaneously more than one as parts in any given situation: if color, then also dimension; if flatness, then texture, etc. However, certain forms do exist that, if they do not negate the numerous relative sensations of color to texture, scale to mass, etc., they do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shapes. Such are the simpler forms that create strong gestalt sensations. Their parts are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation. In terms of solids, or forms applicable to sculpture, these gestalts are the simpler polyhedrons. It is necessary to consider for a moment the nature of three-dimensional gestalts as they occur in the apprehension of the various types of polyhedrons. In the simpler regular polyhedrons such as cubes and pyramids, one need not move around the object for the sense of the whole, the gestalt, to occur. One sees and immediately "believes" that the pattern within one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object. Belief in this sense is both a kind of faith in spatial extension and a visualization of that extension. In other words, it is those aspects of apprehension that are not coexistent with the visual field but rather the result of the experience of the visual field. The more specific nature of this belief and how it is formed involve perceptual theories of "constancy

of shape," "tendencies toward simplicity," kinesthetic clues, memory traces, and physiological factors regarding the nature of binocular parallax vision and the structure of the retina and brain. Neither the theories nor the experiences of gestalt effects relating to three-dimensional bodies are as simple and clear as they are for two dimensions. But experience of solids establishes the fact that, as in flat forms, some configurations are dominated by wholeness, others tend to separate into parts. This becomes clearer if the other types of polyhedrons are considered. In the complex regular type there is a weakening of visualization as the number of sides increases. A sixty-four-sided figure is difficult to visualize, yet because of its regularity one senses the whole, even if seen from a single viewpoint. Simple irregular polyhedrons such as beams, inclined planes, and truncated pyramids are relatively more easy to visualize and sense as wholes. The fact that some are less familiar than the regular geometric forms does not affect the formation of a gestalt. Rather the irregularity becomes a particularizing quality. Complex irregular polyhedrons (for example, crystal formations), if they are complex and irregular enough, can frustrate visualization almost completely, in which case it is difficult to maintain that one is experiencing a gestalt. Complex irregular polyhedrons allow for divisibility of parts insofar as they create weak gestalts. They would seem to return one to the condition of works that, in Mondrian's terms, transmit relations easily in that their parts separate. Complex regular polyhedrons are more ambiguous in this respect. The simpler regular and irregular ones maintain the maximum resistance to being confronted as objects with separate parts. They seem to fail to present lines of fracture by which they could divide for easy part-to-part relationships to be established. I term these regular and irregular polyhedrons "unitary" forms. Sculpture involving unitary forms, being bound together as it is with a kind of energy provided by the gestalt, often elicits the complaint among critics that such works are beyond analysis.

Characteristic of a gestalt is that once it is established, all the information about it, qua gestalt, is exhausted. (One does not, for ex-

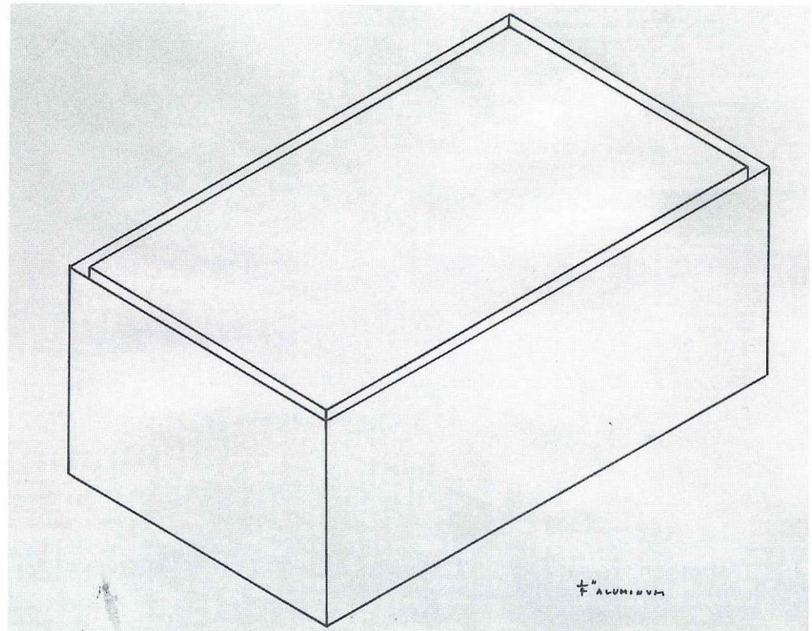
ample, seek the gestalt of a gestalt.) Furthermore, once it is established, it does not disintegrate. One is then both free of the shape and bound to it. Free or released because of the exhaustion or information about it, as shape, and bound to it because it remains constant and indivisible.

Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships. They order them. If the predominant, hieratic nature of the unitary form functions as a constant, all those particularizing relations of scale, proportion, etc., are not thereby canceled. Rather they are bound more cohesively and indivisibly together. The magnification of this single most important sculptural value, shape, together with greater unification and integration of every other essential sculptural value makes on the one hand, the multipart, inflected formats of past sculpture extraneous, and on the other, establishes both a new limit and a new freedom for sculpture.

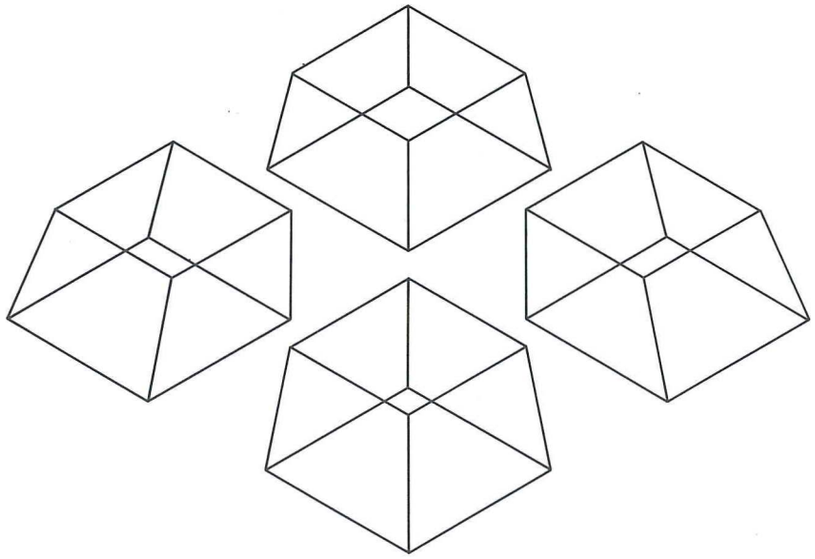
Notes

1. "Thus 'Strukturforschung' presupposes that the poets and artists of one place and time are the joint bearers of a central pattern of sensibility from which their various efforts all flow like radial expressions. This positions agrees with the iconologist's, to whom literature and art seem approximately interchangeable." George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 27.

2. Both Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried have dealt with this evolution. Fried's discussion of "deductive structure" in his catalog, "Three American Painters," deals explicitly with the role of the support in painting.



1.3 Donald Judd, *Untitled.* (Courtesy of *Artforum*.)



1.4 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1965. (Courtesy of *Artforum*.)

2 Notes on Sculpture, Part 2

Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?
A: I was not making a monument.

Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?
A: I was not making an object.

—Tony Smith's replies to questions about his six-foot steel cube.

The size range of useless three-dimensional things is a continuum between the monument and the ornament. Sculpture has generally been thought of as those objects not at the polarities but falling between. The new work being done today falls between the extremes of this size continuum. Because much of it presents an image of neither figurative nor architectonic reference, the works have been described as "structures" or "objects." The word structure applies to either anything or to how a thing is put together. Every rigid body is an object. A particular term for the new work is not as important as knowing what its values and standards are.

In the perception of relative size, the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. One knows immediately what is smaller and what is larger than himself. It is obvious yet important to take note of the fact that things smaller than ourselves are seen differently than things larger. The quality of intimacy is attached to an object in a fairly direct proportion as its size diminishes in relation to oneself. The quality of publicness is attached in

2.1 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1964. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself. This holds true so long as one is regarding the whole of a large thing and not a part. The qualities of publicness or privateness are imposed on things. This is due to our experience in dealing with objects that move away from the constant of our own size in increasing or decreasing dimension. Most ornaments from the past—Egyptian glassware, Romanesque ivories, etc.—consciously exploit the intimate mode by highly resolved surface incident. The awareness that surface incident is always attended to in small objects allows for the elaboration of fine detail to sustain itself. Large sculptures from the past that exist now only in small fragments invite our vision to perform a kind of magnification (sometimes literally performed by the photograph), which gives surface variation on these fragments the quality of detail that it never had in the original whole work. The intimate mode is essentially closed, spaceless, compressed, and exclusive.

While specific size is a condition that structures one's response in terms of the more or less public or intimate, enormous objects in the class of monuments elicit a far more specific response to size *qua* size. That is, besides providing the condition for a set of responses, large-sized objects exhibit size more specifically as an element. It is the more conscious appraisal of size in monuments that makes for the quality of "scale." The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's body size, and the object. Space between the subject and the object is implied in such a comparison. In this sense space does not exist for intimate objects. A larger object includes more of the space around itself than does a smaller one. It is necessary literally to keep one's distance from large objects in order to take the whole of any one view into one's field of vision. The smaller the object, the closer one approaches it, and therefore it has correspondingly less of a spatial field in which to exist for the viewer. It is this necessary greater distance of the object in space from our bodies, in order that it be seen at all, that structures the nonpersonal or public mode. However, it is just this distance between

object and subject that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary. Just as there is no exclusion of literal space in large objects, neither is there an exclusion of the existing light.

Things on the monumental scale then include more terms necessary for their apprehension than objects smaller than the body, namely, the literal space in which they exist and the kinesthetic demands placed upon the body.

A simple form such as a cube will necessarily be seen in a more public way as its size increases from that of our own. It accelerates the valence of intimacy as its size decreases from that of one's own body. This is true even if the surface, material, and color are held constant. In fact it is just these properties of surface, color, and material that get magnified into details as size is reduced. Properties that are not read as detail in large works become detail in small works. Structural divisions in work of any size are another form of detail. (I have discussed the use of a strong gestalt or of unitary-type forms to avoid divisiveness and set the work beyond *retardataire* Cubist esthetics in *Notes on Sculpture, Part 1.*) There is an assumption here of different kinds of things becoming equivalent. The term "detail" is used here in a special and negative sense and should be understood to refer to all factors in a work that pull it toward intimacy by allowing specific elements to separate from the whole, thus setting up relationships within the work. Objections to the emphasis on color as a medium foreign to the physicality of sculpture have also been raised previously, but in terms of its function as a detail one further objection can be raised. That is, intense color, being a specific element, detaches itself from the whole of the work to become one more internal relationship. The same can be said of emphasis on specific, sensuous material or impressively high finishes. A certain number of these intimacy-producing relations have been gotten rid of in the new sculpture. Such things as process showing through traces of the artist's hand have obviously been done away with. But one of the worst and most pretentious of these intimacy-making situations in some of the new work is the

scientistic element that shows up generally in the application of mathematical or engineering concerns to generate or inflect images. This may have worked brilliantly for Jasper Johns (and he is the prototype for this kind of thinking) in his number and alphabet paintings, in which the exhaustion of a logical system closes out and ends the image and produces the picture. But appeals to binary mathematics, tensegrity techniques, mathematically derived modules, progressions, etc., within a work are only another application of the Cubist esthetic of having reasonableness or logic for the relative parts. The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer esthetic. It is in some way more reflexive, because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.

Much of the new sculpture makes a positive value of large size. It is one of the necessary conditions of avoiding intimacy. Larger than body size has been exploited in two specific ways: either in terms of length or volume. The objection to current work of large volume as monolith is a false issue. It is false not because identifiable hollow material is used—this can become a focused detail and an objection in its own right—but because no one is dealing with obdurate solid masses, and everyone knows this. If larger than body size is necessary to the establishment of the more public mode, nevertheless it does not follow that the larger the object, the better it does this. Beyond a certain size the object can overwhelm and the gigantic scale becomes the loaded term.

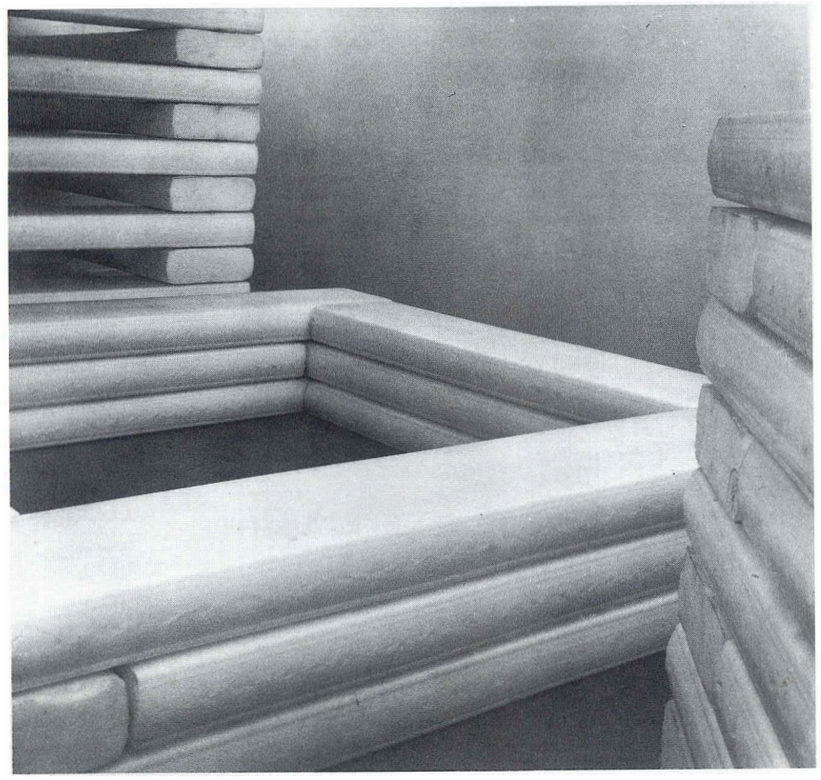
This is a delicate situation. For the space of the room itself is a structuring factor both in its cubic shape and in terms of the kinds of compression different sized and proportioned rooms can effect upon the object-subject terms. That the space of the room becomes of such importance does not mean that an environmental situation is being established. The total space is hopefully altered in certain desired ways by the presence of the object. It is not controlled in the sense of being ordered by an aggregate of objects or by some shaping of the space surrounding the viewer. These considerations raise an obvious question. Why not put the work outside and further change the terms? A real need exists to allow this next step to become practical. Architecturally designed sculpture courts are not the answer, nor is the placement of work outside cubic architectural forms. Ideally, it is a space without architecture as background and reference, which would give different terms to work with.

Although all the esthetic properties of work that exists in a more public mode have not yet been articulated, those that have been dealt with here seem to have a more variable nature than the corresponding esthetic terms of intimate works. Some of the best of the new work, being more open and neutral in terms of surface incident, is more sensitive to the varying contexts of space and light in which it exists. It reflects more acutely these two properties and is more noticeably changed by them. In some sense it takes these two things into itself, as its variation is a function of their variation. Even its most patently unalterable property, shape, does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work. Oddly, it is the strength of the constant, known shape, the gestalt, that allows this awareness to become so much more emphatic in these works than in previous sculpture. A baroque figurative bronze is different from every side. So is a six-foot cube. The constant shape of the cube held in the mind, but which the viewer never literally experiences, is an actuality against which the literal changing perspective views are related. There are

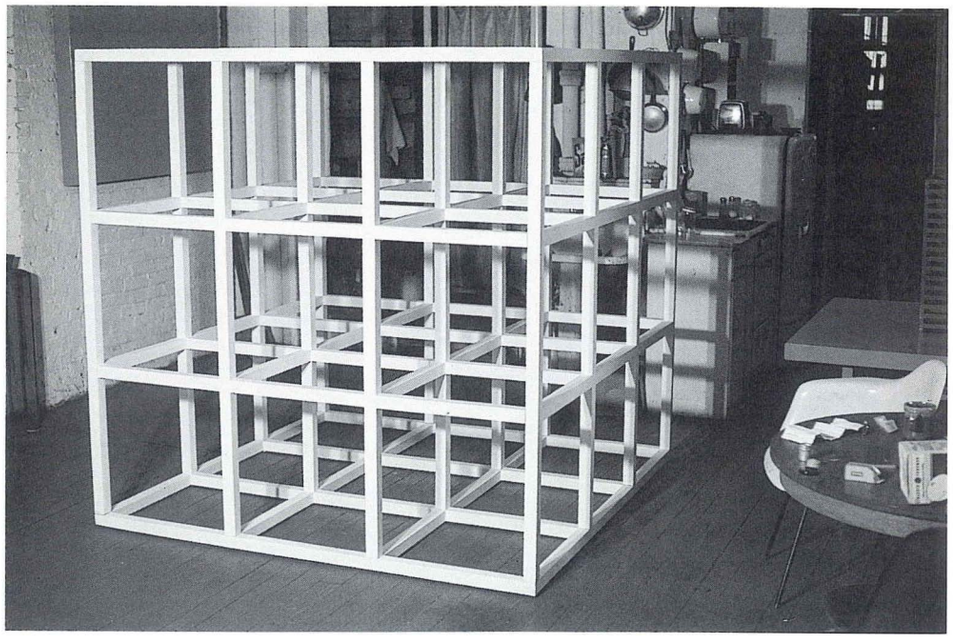
two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable. Such a division does not occur in the experience of the bronze.

While the work must be autonomous in the sense of being a self-contained unit for the formation of the gestalt, the indivisible and undissolvable whole, the major esthetic terms are not in but dependent upon this autonomous object and exist as unfixed variables that find their specific definition in the particular space and light and physical viewpoint of the spectator. Only one aspect of the work is immediate: the apprehension of the gestalt. The experience of the work necessarily exists in time. *The intention is diametrically opposed to Cubism with its concern for simultaneous views in one plane.* Some of the new work has expanded the terms of sculpture by a more emphatic focusing on the very conditions under which certain kinds of objects are seen. The object itself is carefully placed in these new conditions to be but one of the terms. The sensuous object, resplendent with compressed internal relations, has had to be rejected. That many considerations must be taken into account in order that the work keep its place as a term in the expanded situation hardly indicates a lack of interest in the object itself. But the concerns now are for more control of and/or cooperation of the entire situation. Control is necessary if the variables of object, light, space, and body are to function. The object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less *self*-important. By taking its place as a term among others, the object does not fade off into some bland, neutral, generalized, or otherwise retiring shape. At least most of the new works do not. Some, which generate images so readily by innumerably repetitive modular units, do perhaps bog down in a form of neutrality. Such work becomes dominated by its own means through the overbearing visibility of the modular unit. So much of what is positive in giving to shapes the necessary but non-dominating, noncompressed presence has not yet been articulated. Yet much of the judging of these works seems based on the sensing of the rightness of the specific, non-neutral weight of the presence of a particular shape as it bears on the other necessary terms.

2.2 Tony Smith, *Free Ride,* 1962. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; photo: D. James Dee.)



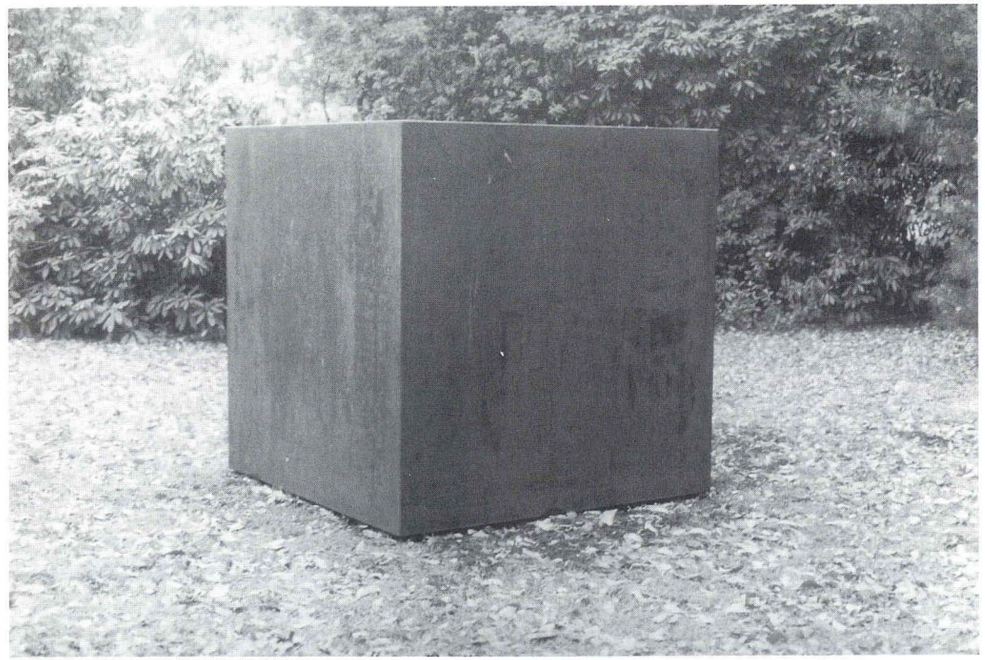
2.3 Carl Andre, *Crib, Coin, Compound,* Installation at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 1965. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.)



2.4 Sol Lewitt, *Untitled,* 1966. (Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York.)

The particular shaping, proportions, size, and surface of the specific object in question are still critical sources for the particular quality the work generates. But it is now not possible to separate these decisions, which are relevant to the object as a thing in itself, from those decisions external to its physical presence. For example, in much of the new work in which the forms have been held unitary, placement becomes critical as it never was before in establishing the particular quality of the work. A beam on its end is not the same thing as the same beam on its side.

It is not surprising that some of the new sculpture that avoids varying parts, polychrome, etc., has been called negative, boring, nihil-



2.5 Tony Smith, *Die,* 1962. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.)

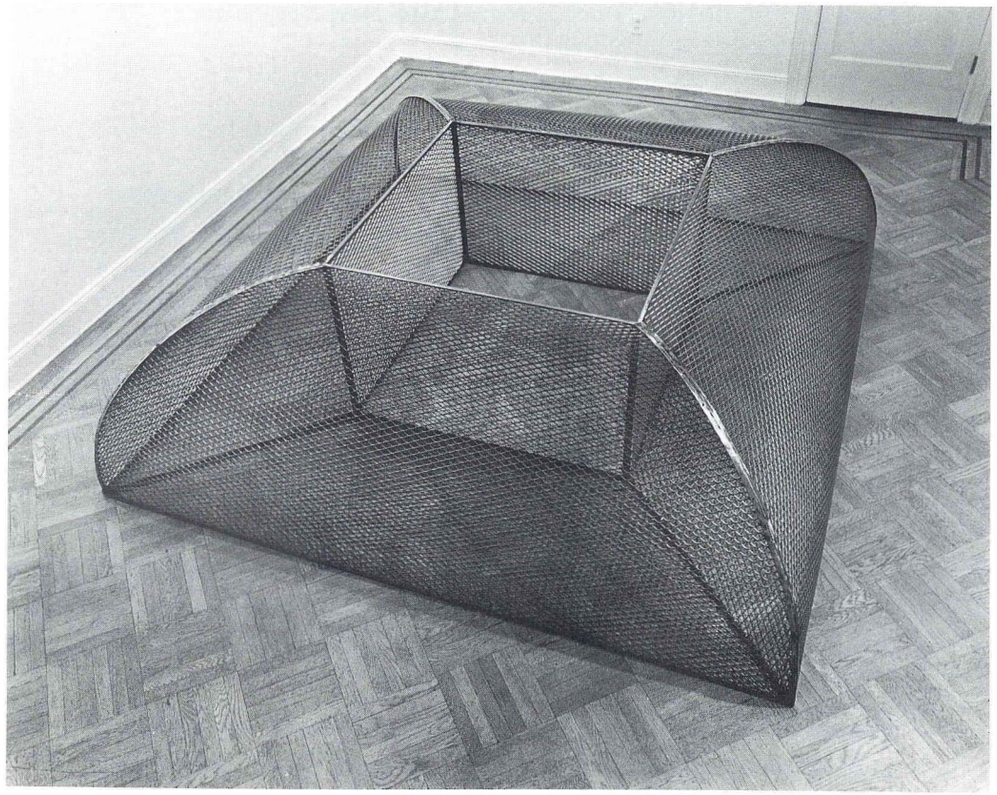
istic. These judgments arise from confronting the work with expectations structured by a Cubist esthetic in which what is to be had from the work is located strictly within the specific object. The situation is now more complex and expanded.

3 Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non Sequiturs

Seeing an object in real space may not be a very immediate experience. Aspects are experienced; the whole is assumed or constructed. Yet it is the presumption that the constructed "thing" is more real than the illusory and changing aspects afforded by varying perspective views and illumination. We have no apprehension of the totality of an object other than what has been constructed from incidental views under various conditions. Yet this process of "building" the object from immediate sense data is homogeneous: there is no point in the process where any conditions of light or perspective indicate a realm of existence different from that indicated by other views under other conditions. The presumption of constancy and consistency makes it possible to speak of "illusionism" at all. It is considered the less than general condition. In fact, illusionism in the seeing of objects is suppressed to an incidental factor.

Structures. Such work is often related to other focuses but further, or more strongly, emphasizes its "reasons" for parts, inflections, or other variables. The didacticism of projected systems or added information beyond the physical existence of the work is either explicit or implicit. Sets, series, modules, permutations, or other simple systems are often made use of. Such work often transcends its didacticism to become rigorous. Sometimes there is a puritanical skepticism of the physical in it. The lesser work is often stark and austere, rationalistic and insecure.

While most advanced three-dimensional work shares certain premises, distinctions can be made between works. Certain ambitions and intentions vary and can be named. Terms indicating tendencies can be attempted on the basis of these different aims. The terms arrived at



3.1 **Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)**

do not constitute classes of objects that are exclusive of each other, but they do locate distinct focuses.

Objects. Generally small in scale, definitively object-like, potentially handleable, often intimate. Most have high finish and emphasize surface. Those that are monistic or structurally undivided set up internal relations through juxtapositions of materials, or sometimes by high reflectiveness incorporating part of the surroundings; sometimes by transparency doing the same thing more literally. Those that are structurally divided often make use of modules or units. Some of these—especially wall-hung works—maintain some pictorial sensibilities: besides making actual the sumptuous physicality that painting could only indicate, there is often a kind of pictorial figure-ground organization. But unlike painting, the shape becomes an actual object against the equally actual wall or ground. Deeply grounded in and confident of the physical, these objects make great use of the traditional range of plastic values: light, shadow, rhythms, pulses, negative spaces, positive forms, etc. The lesser works often read as a kind of candy box art—new containers for an industrial sensuality reminiscent of the Bauhaus sensibility for refined objects of clean order and high finish. Barbara Rose has noted in her catalog, *A New Esthetic*, (Washington Gallery of Modern Art, May, 1967), that such objects might constitute a class of forms amounting to a new convention that is not sculptural in intent, but rather more like the emergence of a rich minor art—much as stained glass and mosaics differed from the conventions of painting. While often unambitious or indulgently focused on surface, the physical presence of these objects is generally strong. They coruscate with the minor brilliance of the "*objet d'art.*"

The trouble with painting is not its inescapable illusionism per se. But this inherent illusionism brings with it a nonactual elusiveness or indeterminate allusiveness. The mode has become antique. Specifically, what is antique about it is the divisiveness of experience that marks on a flat surface elicit. There are obvious cultural and historical reasons why

this happens. For a long while the duality of thing and allusion sustained itself under the force of the profuse organizational innovations within the work. But it has worn thin and its premises cease to convince. Duality of experience is not direct enough. That which has ambiguity built into it is not acceptable to an empirical and pragmatic outlook. That the mode itself—rather than lagging quality—is in default seems to be shown by the fact that some of the best painting today does not bother to emphasize actuality or literalness through shaping of the support.

At the extreme end of the size range are works on a monumental scale. Often these have a quasi-architectural focus: they can be walked through or looked up at. Some are simple in form, but most are baroque in feeling beneath a certain superficial somberness. They share a romantic attitude of domination and burdening impressiveness. They often seem to loom with a certain humanitarian sentimentality.

Sculpture. For want of a better term, that grouping of work which does not present obvious information content or singularity of focus. It is not dominated by the obviousness of looming scale, overly rich material, intimate size, didactic ordering. It neither impresses, dominates, or seduces. Elements of various focuses are often in it, but in more integrated, relative, and more powerfully organized ways. Successful work in this direction differs from both previous sculpture (and from objects) in that its focus is not singularly inward and exclusive of the context of its spatial setting. It is less introverted in respect to its surroundings. Sometimes this is achieved by literally opening up the form in order that the surroundings must of necessity be seen with the piece. (Transparency and translucency of material function in a different way in this respect, because they maintain an inner "core" that is seen through but is nevertheless closed off.) Other work makes this extroverted inclusiveness felt in other ways—sometimes through distributions of volumes, sometimes through blocking off or "reserving" amounts of space that the work does not physically occupy. Such work that deals with more or less large chunks

of space in these and other ways is misunderstood and misrepresented when it is termed "environmental" or "monumental."

It is not in the uses of new, exotic materials that the present work differs much from past work. It is not even in the nonhierarchic, noncompositional structuring, as this was clearly worked out in painting. The difference lies in the kind of order that underlies the forming of this work. This order is not based on previous art orders, but is an order so basic to culture that its obviousness makes it nearly invisible. The new three-dimensional work has grasped the cultural infrastructure of forming itself that has been in use, and developing, since Neolithic times and culminates in the technology of industrial production.

There is some justification for lumping together the various focuses and intentions of the new three-dimensional work. Morphologically there are common elements: symmetry, lack of traces of process, abstractness, nonhierarchic distribution of parts, nonanthropomorphic orientations, general wholeness. These constants probably provide the basis for a general imagery. The imagery involved is referential in a broad and special way: it does not refer to past sculptural form. Its referential connections are to manufactured objects and not to previous art. In this respect the work has affinities with Pop art. But the abstract work connects to a different level of the culture.

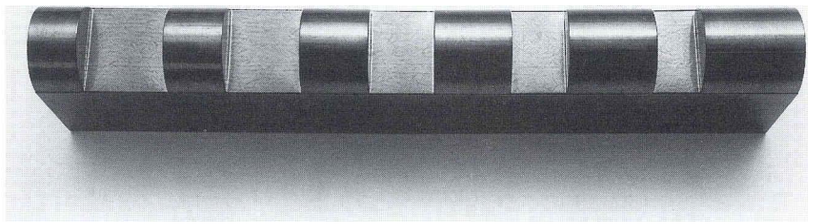
The ideas of industrial production have not, until quite recently, differed from Neolithic notions of forming—the difference has been largely a matter of increased efficiency. The basic notions are repetition and division of labor: standardization and specialization. Probably the terms will become obsolete with a thoroughgoing automation of production involving a high degree of feedback adjustments.

Much work is made outside the studio. Specialized factories and shops are used—much the same as sculpture has always utilized special craftsmen and processes. The shop methods of forming generally used are simple if compared to the techniques of advanced industrial forming. At this point the relation to machine-type production lies more in the

uses of materials than in methods of forming. That is, industrial and structural materials are often used in their more or less naked state, but the methods of forming employed are more related to assisted hand craftsmanship. Metalwork is usually bent, cut, welded. Plastic is just beginning to be explored for its structural possibilities; often it functions as surfacing over conventional supporting materials. Contact molding of reinforced plastics, while expensive, is becoming an available forming method that offers great range for direct structural uses of the material. Vacuum forming is the most accessible method for forming complex shapes from sheeting. It is still expensive. Thermoforming the better plastics—and the comparable method for metal, matched die stamping—is still beyond the means of most artists. Mostly the so-called industrial processes employed are at low levels of sophistication. This affects the image in that the most accessible types of forming lend themselves to the planar and the linear.

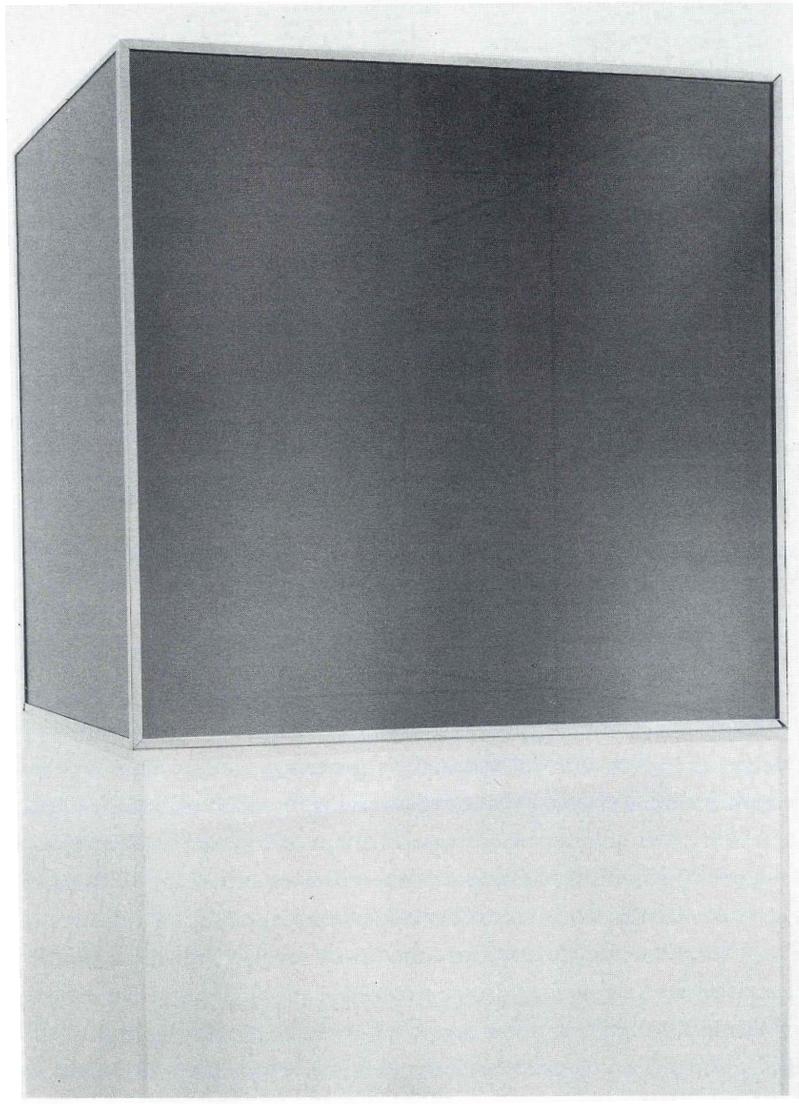
The most obvious unit, if not the paradigm, of forming up to this point is the cube or rectangular block. This, together with the right-angle grid as method of distribution and placement, offers a kind of "morpheme" and "syntax" that are central to the cultural premise of forming. There are many things that have come together to contribute to making rectangular objects and right-angle placement the most useful means of forming. The mechanics of production is one factor: from the manufacture of mud bricks to metallurgical processes involving the continuous flow of raw material that gets segmented, stacked, and shipped. The further uses of these "pieces" from continuous forms such as sheets to fabricate finished articles encourage maintenance of rectangularity to eliminate waste.

Tracing forming from continuous stock to units is one side of the picture. Building up larger wholes from the initial bits is another. The unit with the fewest sides that inherently orients itself to both plumb and level and also close packs with its members is the cubic or brick form. There is good reason why it has survived to become the "morpheme" of

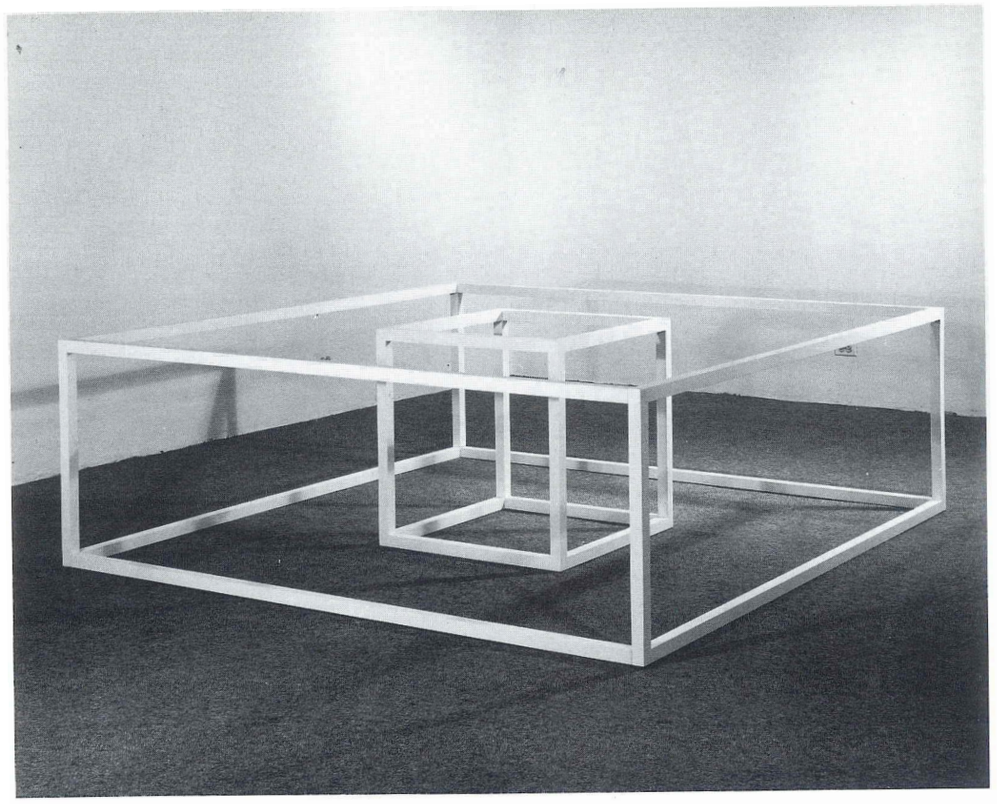


3.2 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)

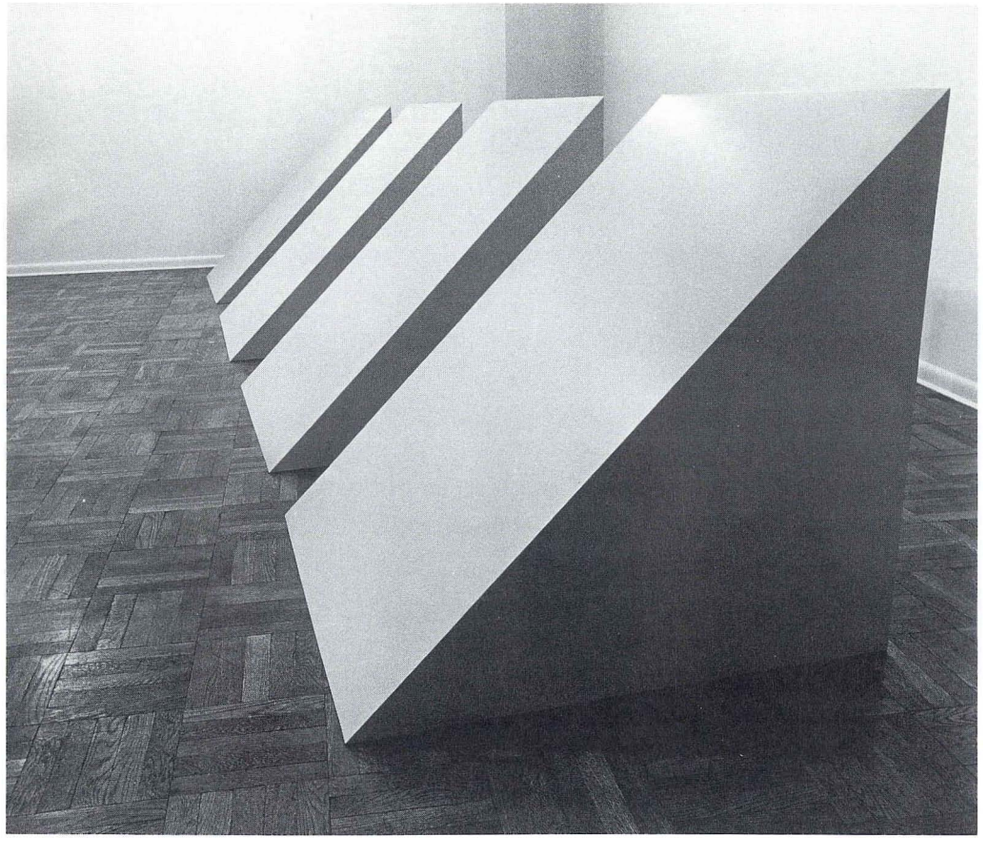
so many manufactured things. It also presents perhaps the simplest ordering of part to whole. Rectangular groupings of any number imply potential extension; they do not seem to imply incompletion, no matter how few their number or whether they are distributed as discrete units in space or placed in physical contact with each other. In the latter case the larger whole that is formed tends to be morphologically the same as the units from which it is built up. From one to many the whole is preserved so long as a grid-type ordering is used. Besides these aspects of manipulation, there are a couple of constant conditions under which this type of forming and distributing exists: a rigid base land mass and gravity. Without these two terms stability and the clear orientation of horizontal and vertical might not be so relevant. Under different conditions, other systems of physical ordering might occur. Further work in



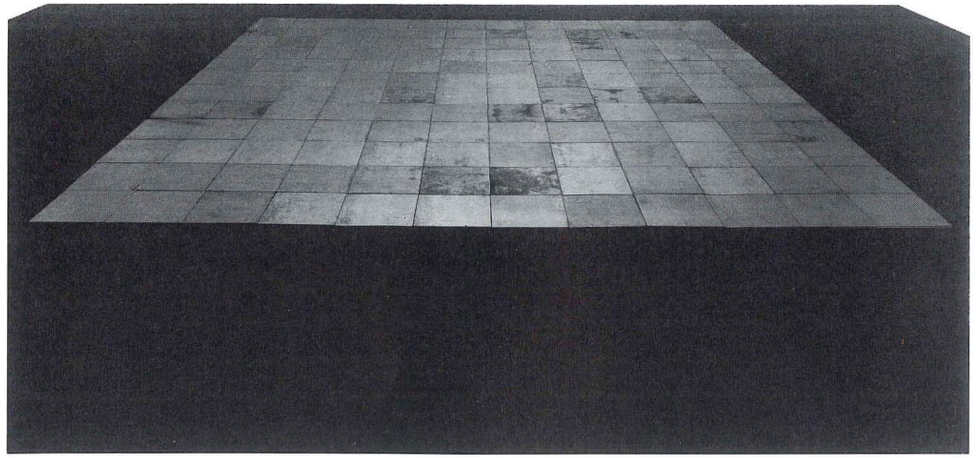
3.3 Larry Bell, *Untitled,* 1965. (Courtesy of *Artforum;* photo: Howard Harrison Studio.)



3.4 Sol Lewitt, *Untitled,* 1966. (Courtesy of *Artforum;* photo: John D. Schiff.)



3.5 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1967. (Courtesy of *Artforum.*)

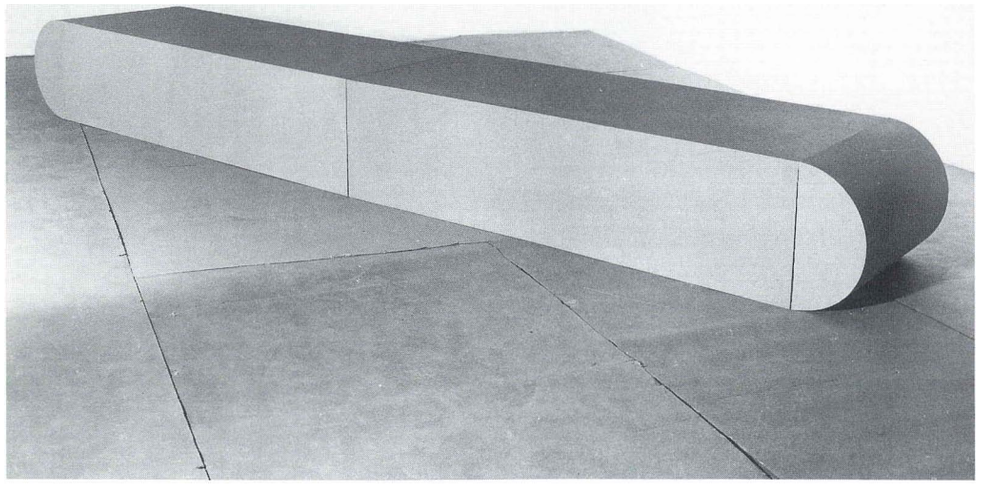


3.6 Carl Andre, *144 Pieces of Aluminum,* 1967. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; photo: Walter Russell.)

space, as well as deep ocean stations, may alter this most familiar approach to the shaping and placing of things as well as the orientation of oneself with respect to space and objects.

The forms used in present-day three-dimensional work can be found in much past art. Grid patterns show up in Magdalenian cave painting. Context, intention, and organization focus the differences. The similarity of specific forms is irrelevant.

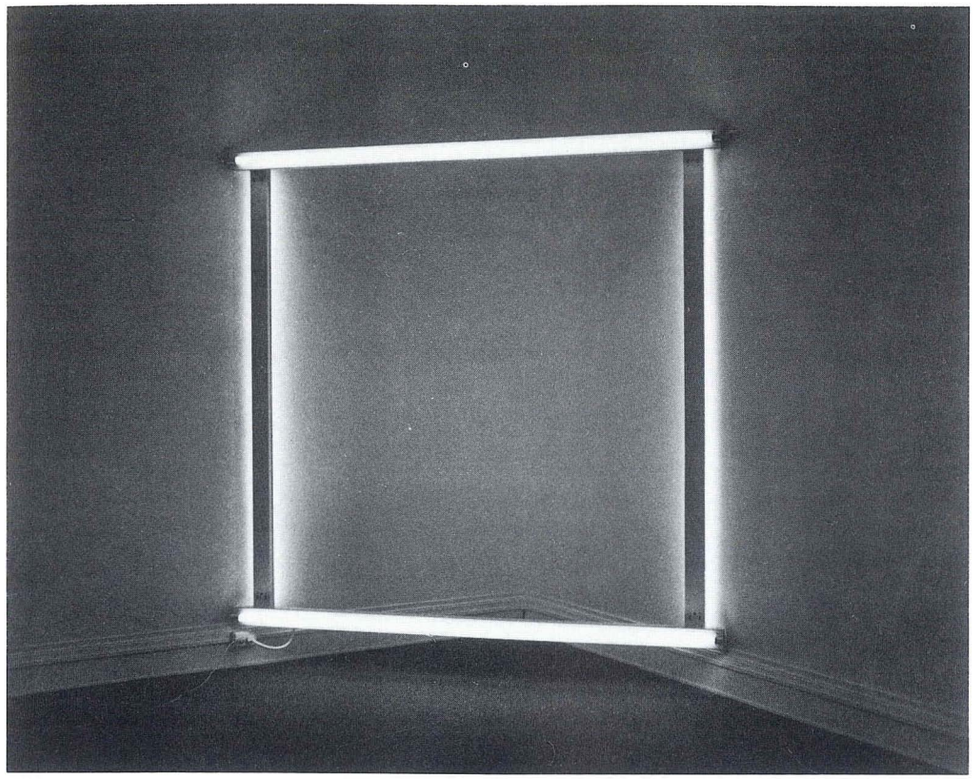
Such work that has the feel and look of openness, extendibility, accessibility, publicness, repeatability, equanimity, directness, and immediacy, and has been formed by clear decision rather than groping craft, would seem to have a few social implications, none of which are negative. Such work would undoubtedly be boring to those who long for access to an exclusive specialness, the experience that reassures their superior perception.



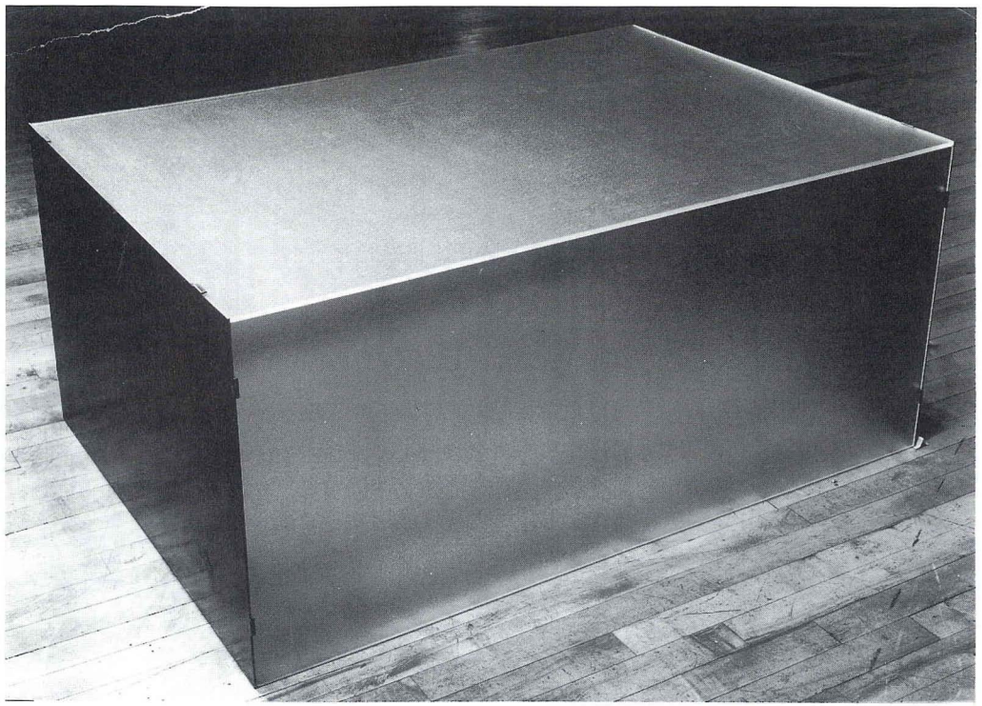
3.7 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)

The means for production seems to be an accomplished fact. Control of energy and processing of information become the central cultural task.

> According to a suggestion by N. S. Kardashev of the State Astronomical Institute . . . all civilizations can be divided into three classes according to the amount of energy they consume. The first class would comprise civilizations which in terms of their technological development are close to our civilization, the energy consumed by these civilizations being ~4.1019 erg/sec. The

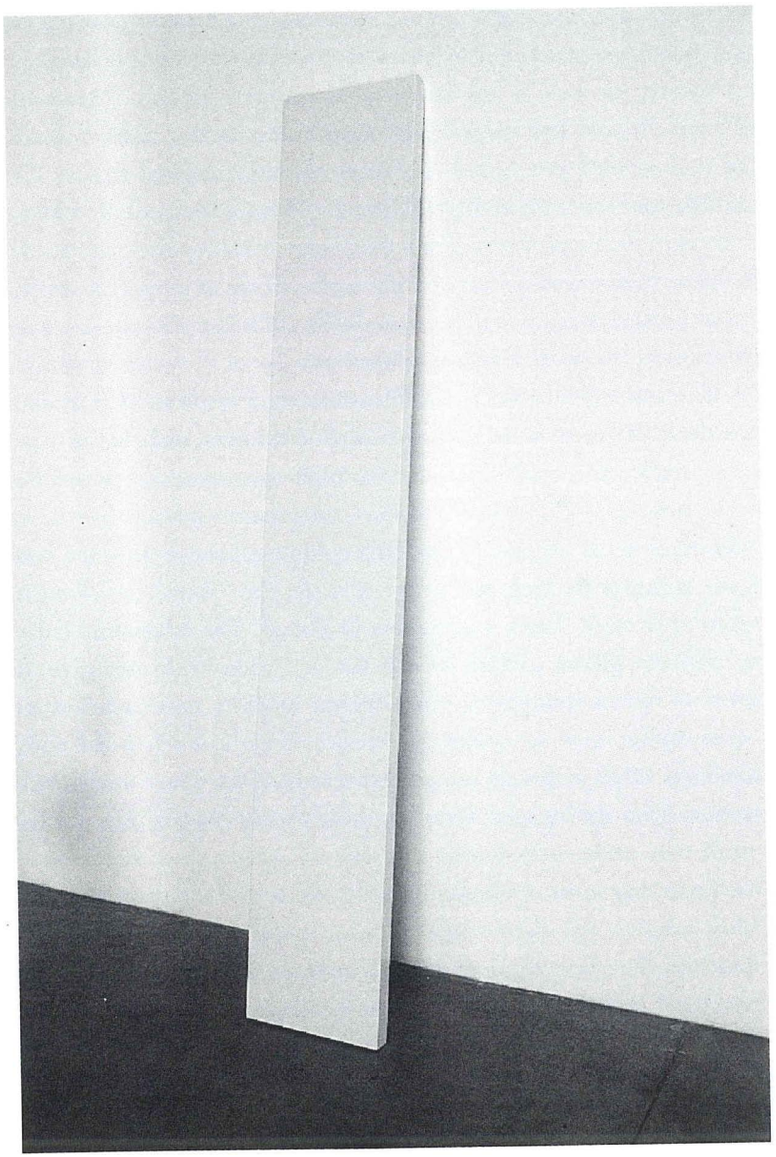


3.8 Dan Flavin, *Untitled,* 1969. (© 1992 Dan Flavin/ARS, New York; courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)



3.9 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1964. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

second class would consist of civilizations with an energy consumption of the order of ~4.1033 erg/sec. These civilizations have completely harnassed the energy of their stars. Civilizations belonging to the third class would consume as much as ~4.1044 erg/sec and control the energy supplied by an entire galaxy. (Vladimir E. Mutschall, "Soviet Long-Range Space-Exploration Program," Aerospace Technology Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., May 1966, p. 18)



'3.10 John McCracken, *Earth Speed,* 1987. (Courtesy of Fred Hoffman Gallery, Santa Monica.)

Pointing out that the new work is not based upon previous art ordering but upon a cultural infrastructure is only to indicate its most general nature, as well as its intensely intransigent nature. The work "sticks" and "holds" by virtue of its relationship to this infrastructure. But the best as well as some of the worst art uses these premises. The range for particularization and specific quality within the general order of forms is enormous and varies from the more or less specific intentions and focuses indicated above to the particular detail of a specific work. These particularities make concrete, tangible differences between works as well as focus the quality in any given work.

The rectangular unit and grid as a method of physical extension are also the most inert and least organic. For the structural forms now needed in architecture and demanded by high-speed travel, the form is obviously obsolete. The more efficient compression-tension principles generally involve the organic form of the compound curve. In some way this form indicates its high efficiency—that is, the "work" involved in the design of stressed forms is somehow projected. The compound curve works, whereas planar surfaces—both flat and round—do not give an indication of special strength through design. Surfaces under tension are anthropomorphic: they are under the stresses of work much as the body is in standing. Objects that do not project tensions state most clearly their separateness from the human. They are more clearly objects. It is not the cube itself that exclusively fulfills this role of independent object—it is only the form that most obviously does it well. Other regular forms that invariably involve the right angle at some point function with equal independence. The way these forms are oriented in space is, of course, equally critical in the maintenance of their independence. The visibility of the principles of structural efficiency can be a factor that destroys the object's independence. This visibility impinges on the autonomous quality and alludes to performance of service beyond the existence of the object. What the new art has obviously not taken from industry is this teleological focus, which makes tools and structures invariably simple. Neither does

it wish to imitate an industrial "look." This is trivial. What has been grasped is the reasonableness of certain forms that have been in use for so long.

New conditions under which things must exist are already here. So are the vastly extended controls of energy and information and new materials for forming. The possibility for future forming throws into sharp relief present forms and how they have functioned. In grasping and using the nature of made things, the new three-dimensional art has broken the tedious ring of "artiness" circumscribing each new phase of art since the Renaissance. It is still art. Anything that is used as art must be defined as art. The new work continues the convention but refuses the heritage of still another art-based order of making things. The intentions are different, the results are different, and so is the experience.

4 Anti Form

In recent object-type art the invention of new forms is not an issue. A morphology of geometric, predominantly rectangular forms has been accepted as a given premise. The engagement of the work becomes focused on the particularization of these general forms by means of varying scale, material, proportion, placement. Because of the flexibility as well as the passive, unemphasized nature of object-type shape, it is a useful means. The use of the rectangular has a long history. The right angle has been in use since the first post and lintel constructions. Its efficiency is unparalleled in building with rigid materials, stretching a piece of canvas, etc. This generalized usefulness has moved the rectangle through architecture, painting, sculpture, objects. But only in the case of object-type art have the forms of the cubic and the rectangular been brought so far forward into the final definition of the work. That is, it stands as a self-sufficient whole shape rather than as a relational element. To achieve a cubic or rectangular form is to build in the simplest, most reasonable way, but it is also to build well.

This imperative for the well-built thing solved certain problems. It got rid of asymmetrical placing and composition, for one thing. The solution also threw out all nonrigid materials. This is not the whole story of so-called Minimal or Object art. Obviously it does not account for the use of purely decorative schemes of repetitive and progressive ordering of multiple unit work. But the broad rationality of such schemes is related to the reasonableness of the well built. What remains problematic about these schemes is the fact that any order for multiple units is an imposed one that has no inherent relation to the physicality of the existing units. Permuted, progressive, symmetrical organizations have a dualistic character in relation to the matter they distribute. This is not to imply that

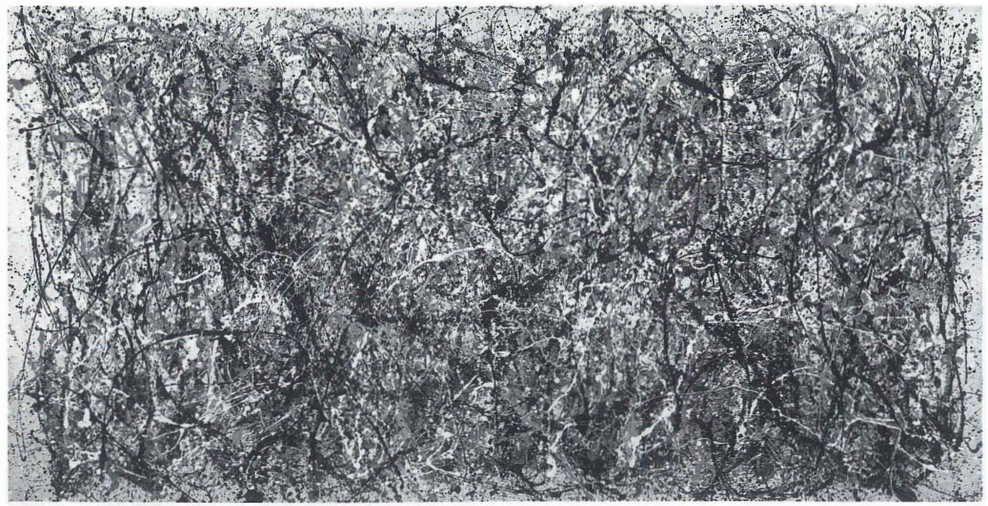
4.1 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1967. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

these simple orderings do not work. They simply separate, more or less, from what is physical by making relationships themselves another order of facts. The relationships such schemes establish are not critical from point to point as in European art. The duality is established by the fact that an order, any order, is operating beyond the physical things. Probably no art can completely resolve this. Some art, such as Pollock's, comes close.

The process of "making itself" has hardly been examined. It has only received attention in terms of some kind of mythical, romanticized polarity: the so-called action of the Abstract Expressionists and the so-called conceptualizations of the Minimalists. This does not locate any differences between the two types of work. The actual work particularizes general assumptions about forms in both cases. There are some exceptions. Both ways of working continue the European tradition of estheticizing general forms that has gone on for half a century. European art since Cubism has been a history of permuting relationships around the general premise that relationships should remain critical. American art has developed by uncovering successive alternative premises for making itself.

Of the Abstract Expressionists, only Pollock was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work. Pollock's recovery of process involved a profound rethinking of the role of both material and tools in making. The stick that drips paint is a tool that acknowledges the nature of the fluidity of paint. Like any other tool, it is still one that controls and transforms matter. But unlike the brush, it is in far greater sympathy with matter because it acknowledges the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter. In some ways Louis was even closer to matter in his use of the container itself to pour the fluid.

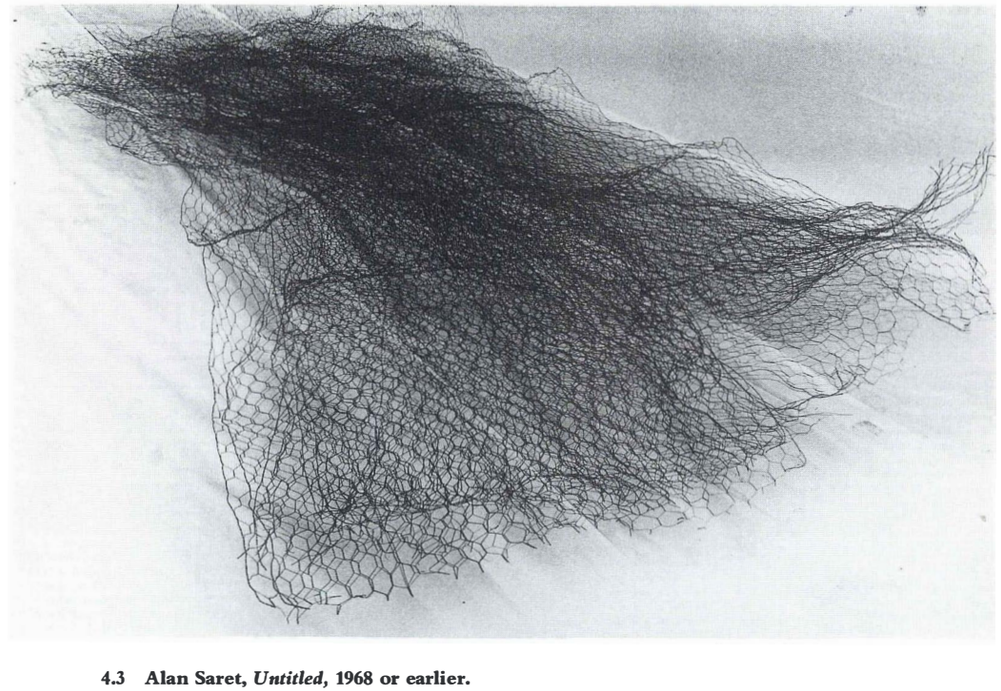
To think that painting has some inherent optical nature is ridiculous. It is equally silly to define its "thingness" as acts of logic that acknowledge the edges of the support. The optical and the physical are both there. Both Pollock and Louis were aware of both. Both used



4.2 Jackson Pollock, *One (Number 31, 1950),* 1950. Oil and enamel paint on canvas, 8′ 10″ × 17′ 5⅝″. (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection Fund (by exchange).)

directly the physical, fluid properties of paint. Their "optical" forms resulted from dealing with the properties of fluidity and the conditions of a more or less absorptive ground. The forms and the order of their work were not a priori to the means.

The visibility of process in art occurred with the saving of sketches and unfinished work in the High Renaissance. In the nineteenth century both Rodin and Rosso left traces of touch in finished work. Like the Abstract Expressionists after them, they registered the plasticity of material in autobiographical terms. It remained for Pollock and Louis to go beyond the personalism of the hand to the more direct revelation of matter itself. How Pollock broke the domination of Cubist form is tied to his investigation of means: tools, methods of making, nature of ma-



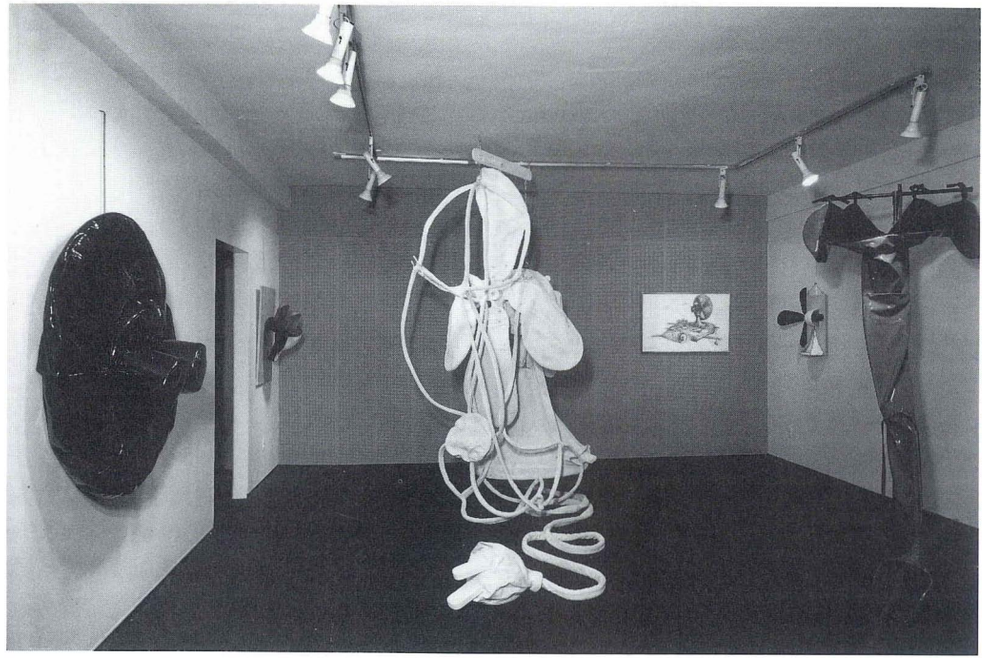
4.3 Alan Saret, *Untitled,* 1968 or earlier.

terial. Form is not perpetuated by means but by preservation of separable idealized ends. This is an anti-entropic and conservative enterprise. It accounts for Greek architecture changing from wood to marble and looking the same, or for the look of Cubist bronzes with their fragmented, faceted planes. The perpetuation of form is functioning Idealism.

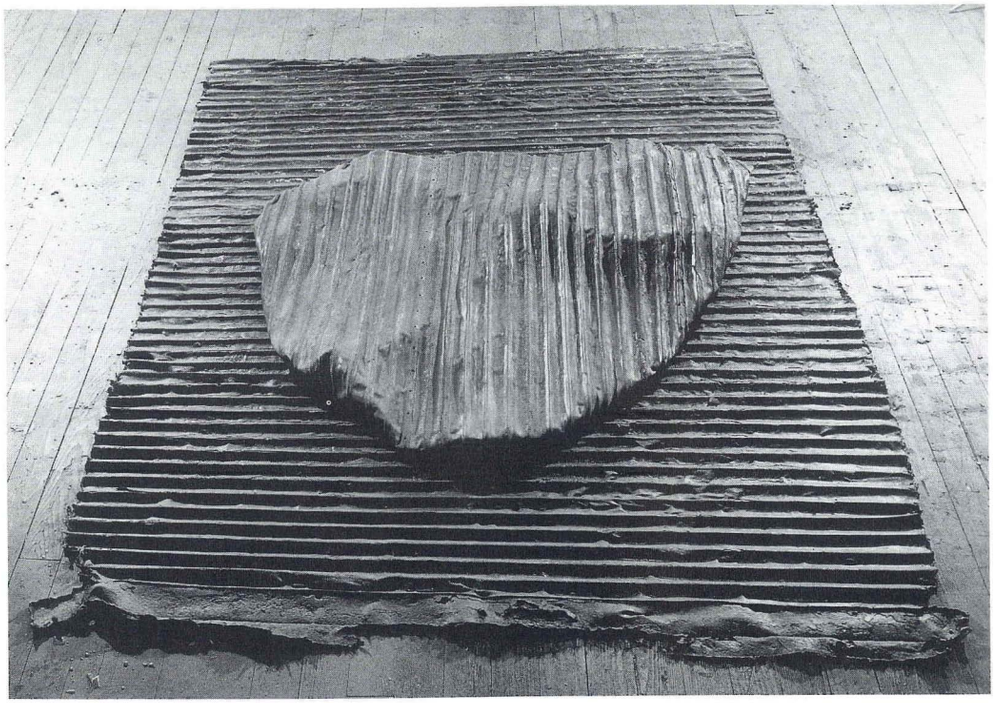
In object-type art process is not visible. Materials often are. When they are, their reasonableness is usually apparent. Rigid industrial materials go together at right angles with great ease. But it is the a priori valuation of the well built that dictates the materials. The well-built form

of objects preceded any consideration of means. Materials themselves have been limited to those that efficiently make the general object form.

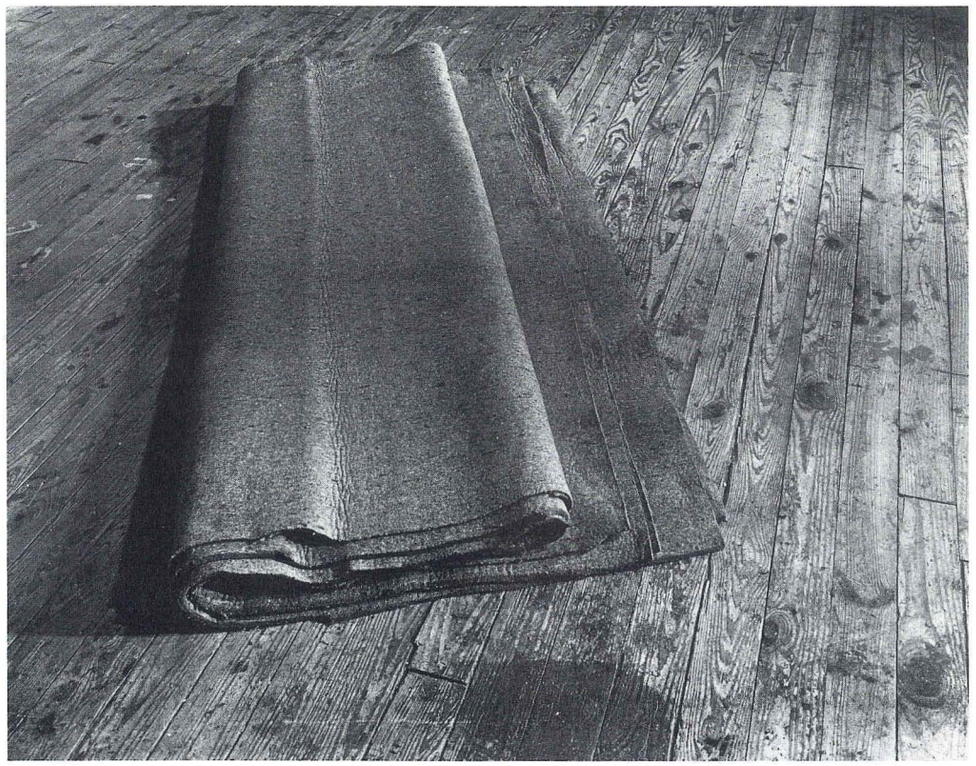
Recently, materials other than rigid industrial ones have begun to show up. Oldenburg was one of the first to use such materials. A direct investigation of the properties of these materials is in progress. This involves a reconsideration of the use of tools in relation to material. In some cases these investigations move from the making of things to the making of material itself. Sometimes a direct manipulation of a given material without the use of any tool is made. In these cases considerations of gravity become as important as those of space. The focus on matter and gravity as means results in forms that were not projected in advance. Considerations of ordering are necessarily casual and imprecise and unemphasized. Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied, as replacing will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion. It is part of the work's refusal to continue estheticizing the form by dealing with it as a prescribed end.



4.4 Claes Oldenburg, *Giant Soft Fan—Ghost Version* (center), Installation in one-person exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, 1967. (Courtesy of the artist.)



4.5 Richard Serra, *Blob*, 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: © Peter Moore.)



4.6 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1967–68. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

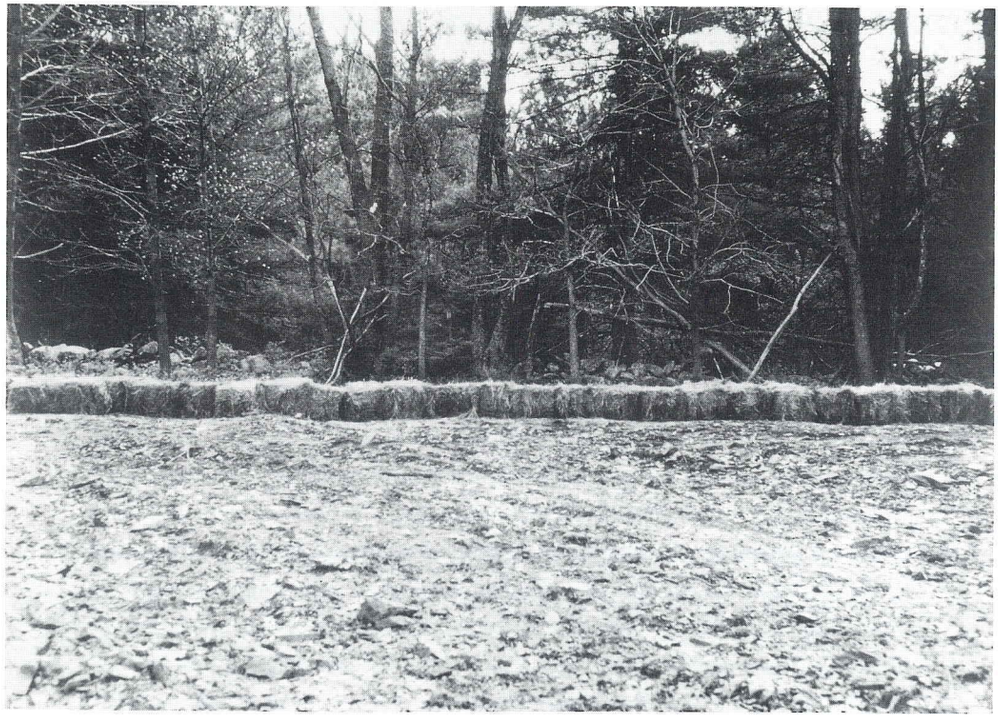
5 Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects

I

> . . . on the other hand, painterly-artistic elements were cast aside, and the materials arose from the utilitarian purpose itself, as did the form.
>
> —*K. Malevich*

Jasper Johns established a new possibility for art ordering. The Flags and Targets imply much that could not be realized in two dimensions. The works undeniably achieved a lot in their own terms. More even than in Pollock's case, the work was looked at rather than into, and painting had not done this before. Johns took painting further toward a state of non-depiction than anyone else. The Flags were not so much depictions as copies, decorative and fraudulent, rigid, stuffed, ridiculous counterfeits. That is, these works were not depictions according to past terms that had, without exception, operated within the figure-ground duality of representation. Johns took the background out of painting and isolated the thing. The background became the wall. What was previously neutral became actual, while what was previously an image became a thing.

The Flags and Targets were the first paintings to use a strict a priori ordering. One of the outcomes of this way of working was to throw a heretofore unimaged weight on the edge. This weight was not one of relational significance to the interior image (Stella later developed this relationship) so much as the assertion of a final, absolute limit that was a part of the experience of the entire work. Painting had previously been a more or less diaphanous surface that ended at the edge. Johns's



5.1 Carl Andre, *Joint*, 1968. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.)

works were definite shapes that were flat. The whole process was not one of stripping art down but of reconstituting art as an object.

Johns established new rules to the game. These were general rules and, with the exception of Stella's work, were not to be applied further to painting. The coexistence of the image with the physical extension of the object and the a priori mode of working are descriptive of three-dimensional objects—what they are and how they get made. Obviously, the acceptance of the art object as a constructed thing and its removal

from a depicting ground to a field of real space were more suitable for full development in three dimensions.

The symmetrical internal divisions of Johns, Stella, and much subsequent 1960s painting were not as new or as radical as was the holistic structural feature of making the total image congruent with the physical limits of the work. Conversely, the fully three-dimensional work of the 1960s that perpetuated symmetrical internal divisions maintained painterly, decorative concerns, as these features are applied redivisions of a more total whole. That is to say, it is a method of setting things beside each other rather than a method of construction which, by its nature, is literally a holistic tying together of material. It was the structure underlying a constructed object as art that Johns illuminated. The complete manifestation of this structure could never be realized so long as the work remained on the wall. In the most literal way, flags and targets are only half objects: both are flat, targets have only one side. Johns probably never intended the realization of the constructed object. Even the Beer Cans are depictions.

Part of the possibility for the success of the project of reconstituting objects as art had to do with the state of sculpture. It was terminally diseased with figurative allusion. The object mode in three dimensions was a new start. Whereas painting has only been able to mutate, carrying constantly the germ of depiction, sculpture stopped dead and objects began.

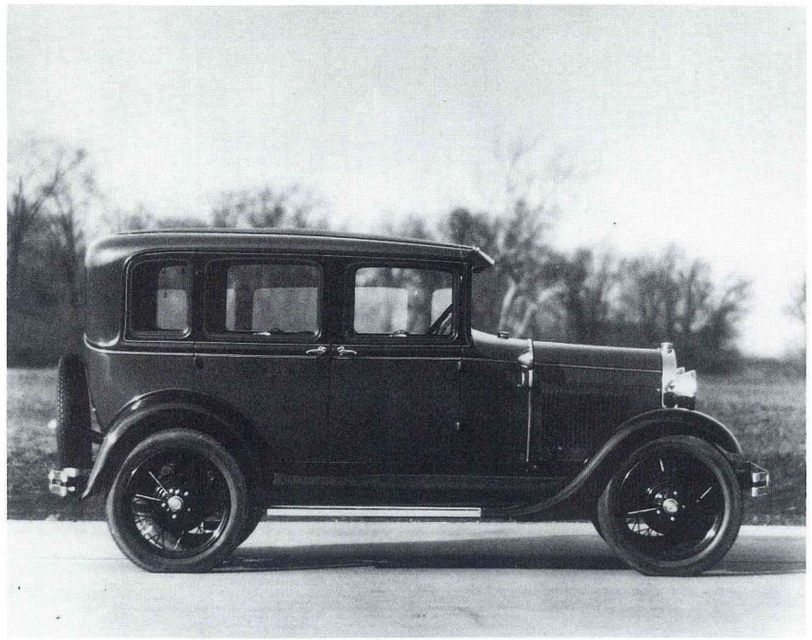
There is no question that so far as an image goes, objects removed themselves from figurative allusions. But, in a more underlying way, in a perceptual way, they did not. Probably the main thing we constantly see all at once, or as a thing, is another human figure. Without the concentration of a figure, any given sector of the world is a field. Objects are distinct and differentiated more according to this or that local interest rather than according to any general characteristics. The exception to this is probably moving objects. And this has been tied to figures again, as

they are most always in motion. The specific art object of the 1960s is not so much a metaphor for the figure as it is an existence parallel to it. It shares the perceptual response we have toward figures. This is undoubtedly why subliminal, generalized kinesthetic responses are strong in confronting object art. Such responses are often denied or repressed because they seem so patently inappropriate in the face of nonanthropomorphic forms, yet they are there. Even in subtle morphological ways, object-type art is tied to the body. Like the body, it is confined within symmetry of form and homogeneity of material: one form, one material (at the most two) has been pretty much the rule for three-dimensional art for the last few years.

Even though the object is a form not stressed at any particular focus and in its multiple unit aspect approaches a field situation, it invariably asserts a hard order of symmetry that marks it off from the heterogeneous, randomized distributions that characterize figureless sectors of the world. Symmetrical images are perceived and held in the mind with a distinctness and tenacity not brought to the perception and retention of asymmetrical forms. Once seen, the Model A and the Varga Girl can never be forgotten.

So-called Minimal art fulfilled the project of reconstituting art as objects while at the same time sharing the same perceptual conditions as figurative sculpture. Both objects and figures in real space maintain a figure-ground relation. This is not a depicted relation as in representational painting, but an actual one of differentiated subject within a neutral field. When the human figure itself is no longer viable, the continuing impulse to isolate a thing must find another subject. Structural clues for this were supplied by Johns and even certain aspects of an image were given by him—a certain public, common, general type of image. Three-dimensional work seized on the structure of construction that coincided with forms as general and as ubiquitous as the figure: geometric ones from the industrial environment.

5.2 Alberto Vargas, *Varga Girl,* August 1946 Calendar. (© 1946, 1992 The Hearst Corporation.)



5.3 Ford Model A Sedan, 1929. (From the Collections of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan.)

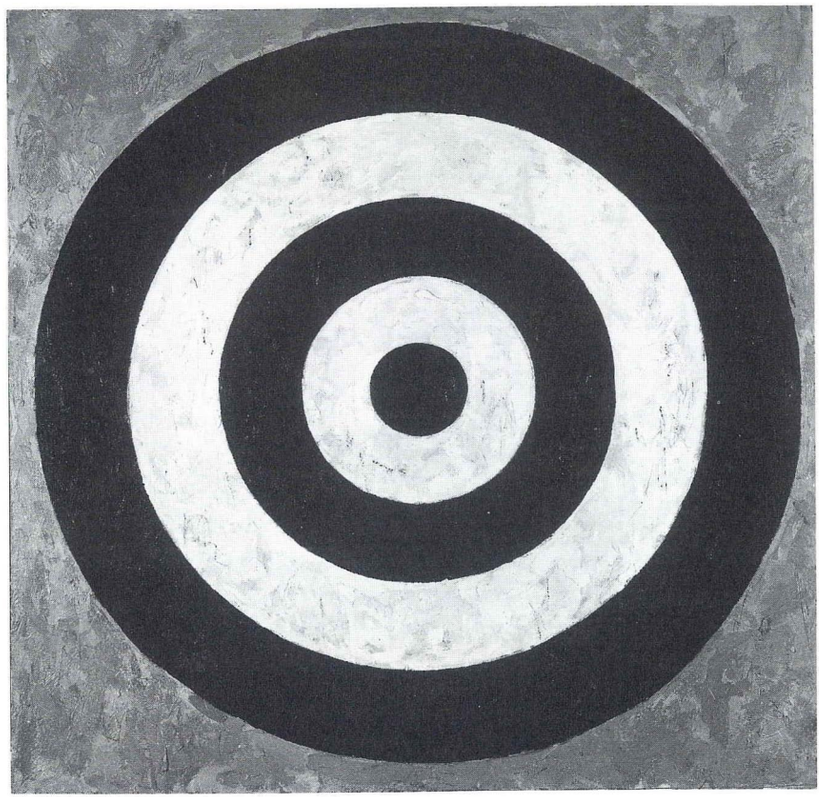
II

> Then, the field of vision assumes a peculiar structure. In the center there is the favored object, fixed by our gaze; its form seems clear, perfectly defined in all its details. Around the object, as far as the limits of the field of vision, there is a zone we do not look at, but which, nevertheless, we see with an indirect, vague, inattentive vision . . . If it is not something to which we are accustomed, we cannot say what it is, exactly, that we see in this indirect vision.
>
> —*José Ortega y Gasset*

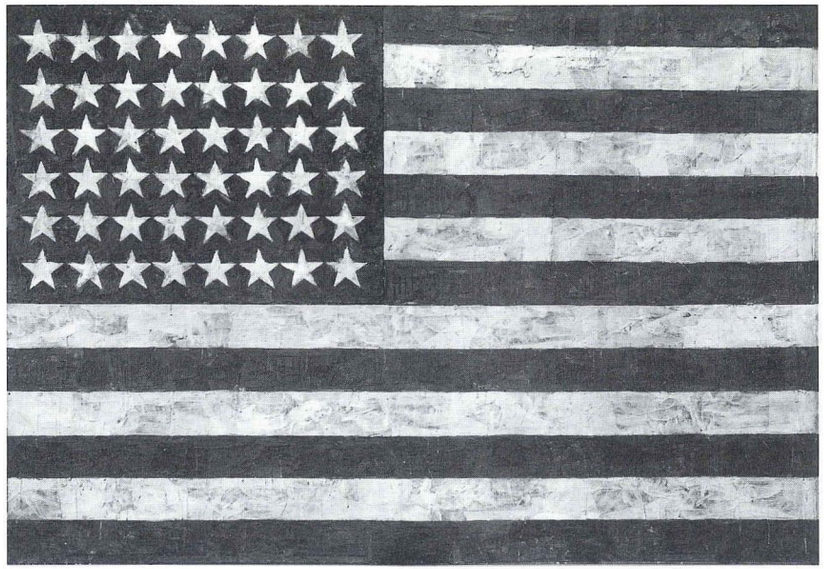
> Our attempt at focusing must give way to the vacant all-embracing stare . . .
>
> —*Anton Ehrenzweig*

If one notices one's immediate visual field, what is seen? Neither order nor disorder. Where does the field terminate? In an indeterminate peripheral zone, nonetheless actual or unexperienced for its indeterminacy, that shifts with each movement of the eyes. What are the contents of any given sector of one's visual field? A heterogeneous collection of substances and shapes, neither incomplete nor especially complete (except for the singular totality of figures or moving things). Some new art now seems to take the conditions of the visual field itself (figures excluded) and uses these as a structural basis for the art. Recent past art took the conditions within individual things—specific extension and shape and wholeness of one material—for the project of reconstituting objects as art. The difference amounts to a shift from a figure-ground perceptual set to that of the visual field. Physically, it amounts to a shift from discrete, homogeneous objects to accumulations of things or stuff, sometimes very heterogeneous. It is a shift that is on the one hand closer to the phenomenal fact of seeing the visual field, and on the other allied to the heterogeneous spread of substances that make up that field. In another era, one might have said that the difference was between a figurative and landscape mode. Fields of stuff that have no central contained focus and extend into or beyond the peripheral vision offer a kind of "landscape" mode as opposed to a self-contained type of organization offered by the specific object.

Most of the new work under discussion is still a spread of substances or things that is clearly marked off from the rest of the environment, and there is not any confusion about where the work stops. In this sense, it is discrete but not object-like. It is still separate from the environment, so in the broadest sense is figure upon a ground. Except for some outside work that removes even the frame of the room itself, here



5.4 Jasper Johns, *Target,* 1958. (© Jasper Johns/VAGA, New York 1992; collection of the artist; courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)



5.5 Jasper Johns, *Flag,* 1954–55, dated on reverse 1954. Encaustic, oil and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, 42 1/2 x 60 5/8". (© Jasper Johns/VAGA, New York 1992; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.; courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)

the "figure" is literally the "ground." But work that extends to the peripheral vision cannot be taken in as a distinct whole and in this way has a different kind of discreteness from objects. The lateral spread of some of the work subverts either a profile or plan view reading. (In the past I have spread objects or structures into a 25- or 30-foot-square area and the work was low enough to have little or no profile, and no plan view was possible even when one was in the midst of the work. But in these instances, the regularity of the shape and homogeneity of the material held the work together as a single chunk.) Recent work with a marked lateral spread and no regularized units or symmetrical intervals

5.6 **Barry Le Va, *Untitled*, 1968. (Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York.)**

tends to fracture into a continuity of details. Any overall wholeness is a secondary feature often established only by the limits of the room. It is only with this type of recent work that heterogeneity of material has become a possibility again; now any substances or mixtures of substances and the forms or states these might take—rods, particles, dust, pulpy, wet, dry, etc., are potentially useable. Previously, it was one or two materials and a single or repetitive form to contain them. Any more and the work began to engage in part-to-part and part-to-whole relationships. Even so, Minimal art, with two or three substances, gets caught in plays of relationships between transparencies and solids, voids and shadows,

and the parts separate and the work ends in a kind of demure and unadmitted composition.

Besides lateral spread, mixing of materials, and irregularity of substances, a reading other than a critical part-to-part or part-to-whole is emphasized by the indeterminate aspect of work that has physically separate parts or is loose or flexible. Implications of constant change are in such work. Previously, indeterminacy was a characteristic of perception in the presence of regularized objects—that is, each point of view gave a different reading due to perspective. In the work in question indeterminacy of arrangement of parts is a literal aspect of the physical existence of the thing.

The art under discussion relates to a mode of vision that Ehrenzweig terms variously as scanning, syncretistic, or dedifferentiated—a purposeful detachment from holistic readings in terms of gestalt-bound forms. This perceptual mode seeks significant clues out of which wholeness is sensed rather than perceived as an image and neither randomness, heterogeneity of content, or indeterminacy are sources of confusion for this mode. It might be said that the work in question does not so much acknowledge this mode as a way of seeing as it hypostatizes it into a structural feature of the work itself. By doing this, it has used a perceptual accommodation to replace specific form or image control and projection. This is behind the sudden release of materials that are soft or indeterminate or in pieces, which heretofore would not have met with the gestalt-oriented demand for an imagistic whole. It is an example of art's restructuring of perceptual relevance, which subsequently results in an almost effortless release of a flood of energetic work.

III

> Yet perception has a history; it changes during our life and even within a very short span of time; more important, perception has a different structure on different levels of mental life and varies

5.7 Robert Smithson, *Mirror Trail,* Cayuga Salt Mine Project, Ithaca, New York, 1969. (Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York.)

according to the level which is stimulated at one particular time. Only in our conscious experience has it the firm and stable structure which the gestalt psychologists postulated.

—*Anton Ehrenzweig*

. . . catastrophes of the past accompanied by electrical discharges and followed by radioactivity could have produced sudden and multiple mutations of the kind achieved today by experimenters . . . The past of mankind, and of the animal kingdoms, too, must

5.8 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1968. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.)

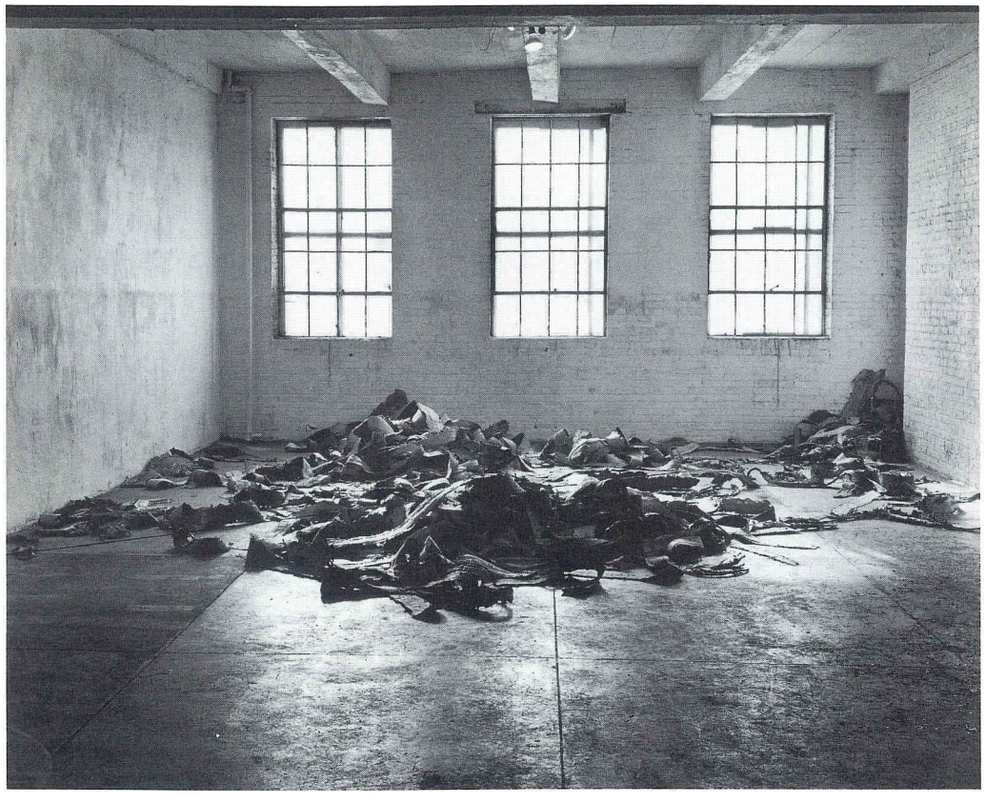
now be viewed in the light of the experience of Hiroshima and no longer from the portholes of the Beagle.

—*Immanuel Velikovsky*

Changes in form can be thought of as a vertical scale. When art changes, there are obvious form changes. Perceptual and structural changes can be thought of as a horizontal scale, a horizon even. These changes have to go with relevance rather than forms. And the sense of a new relevance is the aspect that quickly fades. Once a perceptual change is made, one does not look at it but uses it to see the world. It is only visible at the point of recognition of the change. After that, we are changed by it but have also absorbed it. The impossibility of reclaiming the volitivity of perceptual changes leaves art-historical explanations to pick the bones of dead forms. In this sense, all art dies with time and is impermanent whether it continues to exist as an object or not. A comparison of 1950s and 1960s art that throws into relief excessive organic forms opposed to austere geometric ones can only be a lifeless formal comparison. And the present moves away from Minimal art are not primarily formal ones. The changes involve a restructuring of what is relevant.

What was relevant to the 1960s was the necessity of reconstituting the object as art. Objects were an obvious first step away from illusionism, allusion, and metaphor. They are the clearest type of artificial independent entity, obviously removed and separate from the anthropomorphic. It is not especially surprising that art driving toward greater concreteness and away from the illusory would fasten on the essentially idealistic imagery of the geometric. Of all the conceivable or experienceable things, the symmetrical and geometric are most easily held in the mind as forms. The demand for images that could be mentally controlled, manipulated, and above all, isolated was on the one hand an esthetic preconception and on the other a methodological necessity. Objects provided the imagistic ground out of which 1960s art was materialized. And to construct objects

5.9 Rafael Ferrer, *Ice,* Installation in the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures and Materials* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1969. (© Photo: Peter Moore.)



5.10 Richard Serra, *Scatter Piece*, 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Harry Shunk.)

demands preconception of a whole image. Art of the 1960s was an art of depicting images. But depiction as a mode seems primitive because it involves implicitly asserting forms as being prior to substances.[1] If there is no esthetic investment in the priority of total images, then projection or depiction of form is not a necessary mode. And if the method of working does not demand prethought images, then geometry, and consequently objects, is not a preferential form and certainly not a necessary one to any method except construction.

Certain art is now using as its beginning and as its means, stuff, substances in many states—from chunks, to particles, to slime, to whatever—and prethought images are neither necessary nor possible. Alongside this approach is chance, contingency, indeterminacy—in short, the entire area of process. Ends and means are brought together in a way that never existed before in art. In a very qualified way, Abstract Expressionism brought the two together. But with the exception of a few artists, notably Pollock and Louis, the formal structure of Cubism functioned as an end toward which the activity invariably converged and in this sense was a separate end, image, or form prior to the activity. Any activity, with perhaps the exception of unfocused play, projects some more-or-less specific end, and in this sense separates the process from the achievement. But images need not be identified with ends in art. Although priorities do exist in the work under discussion, they are not preconceived imagistic ones. The priorities have to do with acknowledging and even predicting perceptual conditions for the work's existence. Such conditions are neither forms nor ends nor part of the process. Yet they are priorities and can be intentions. The work illustrated here involves itself with these considerations—that which is studio produced as well as that which deals with existing exterior zones of the world. The total separation of ends and means in the production of objects, as well as the concern to make manifest idealized mental images, throws extreme doubt on the claim that the Pragmatic attitude informs Minimal art of the 1960s. To begin

with the concrete physicality of matter rather than images allows for a change in the entire profile of three-dimensional art: from particular forms, to ways of ordering, to methods of production and, finally, to perceptual relevance.

So far all art has made manifest images, whether it arrived at them (as the art in question) or began with them. The open, lateral, random aspect of the present work does in fact provide a general sort of image. Even more than this, it recalls an aspect of Pollock's imagery by these characteristics. Elsewhere I have made mention of methodological ties to Pollock through emphasis in the work on gravity and a direct use of materials.[2] But to identify its resultant "field" aspect very closely with Pollock's work is to focus on too narrow a formalistic reading. Similar claims were made when Minimal art was identified with the forms found in previous Constructivism.

One aspect of the work worth mentioning is the implied attack on the ironic character of how art has always existed. In a broad sense art has always been an object, static and final, even though structurally it may have been a depiction or existed as a fragment. What is being attacked, however, is something more than art as icon. Under attack is the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a finished product. Duchamp, of course, attacked the Marxist notion that labor was an index of value, but Readymades are traditionally iconic art objects. What art now has in its hands is mutable stuff which need not arrive at the point of being finalized with respect to either time or space. The notion that work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object no longer has much relevance.[3]

The detachment of art's energy from the craft of tedious object production has further implications. This reclamation of process refocuses art as an energy driving to change perception. (From such a point of view the concern with "quality" in art can only be another form of consumer research—a conservative concern involved with comparisons between static, similar objects within closed sets.) The attention given to both

matter and its inseparableness from the process of change is not an emphasis on the phenomenon of means. What is revealed is that art itself is an activity of change, of disorientation and shift, of violent discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness for confusion even in the service of discovering new perceptual modes.

At the present time the culture is engaged in the hostile and deadly act of immediate acceptance of all new perceptual art moves, absorbing through institutionalized recognition every art act. The work discussed has not been excepted.

Notes

1. This reflects a certain cultural experience as much as a philosophic or artistic assertion. An advanced, technological, urban environment is a totally manufactured one. Interaction with the environment tends more and more toward information processing in one form or another and away from interactions involving transformations of matter. The very means and visibility for material transformations become more remote and recondite. Centers for production are increasingly located outside the urban environment in what are euphemistically termed "industrial parks." In these grim, remote areas the objects of daily use are produced by increasingly obscure processes, and the matter transformed is increasingly synthetic and unidentifiable. As a consequence, our immediate surroundings tend to be read as "forms" that have been punched out of unidentifiable, indestructible plastic or unfamiliar metal alloys. It is interesting to note that in an urban environment construction sites become small theatrical arenas, the only places where raw substances and the processes of their transformation are visible, and the only places where random distribution is tolerated.

2. R. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* (April 1968).

3. Barbara Rose in her forthcoming article, "Art and Politics, Part III," finds the only way of making the type of work under discussion permanent is through media's "freezing" it into a static form. Such a conclusion identifies the record with the things, but work involving indeterminacy can have any number of "records"—the work itself does not come to rest with any of them. Its physical

presence at any given point should not be confused with the record of it. The present art will be no more impermanent than older art that is already dead, having lost through time all of its relevance. Physical art that involves indeterminacy should be distinguished from "idea" art that intends to exist primarily as media (e.g., Oldenburg's monuments, Joseph Kosuth's definitions). The work under discussion has an expansive parameter that is media-like: i.e., the same work might be set up in ten different parts of the world simultaneously. Since much of the work involves nontransformed substances that are readily available or the earth itself, it can be brought into existence through specifications. Work that might exist any time and any place and then literally recede back into the world has the mobility and dispersibility of media. Both media- and performance-like, it is neither of these: it is physical; its changes are not performances.

6 Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated

Art tells us nothing about the world that we cannot find elsewhere and more reliably.

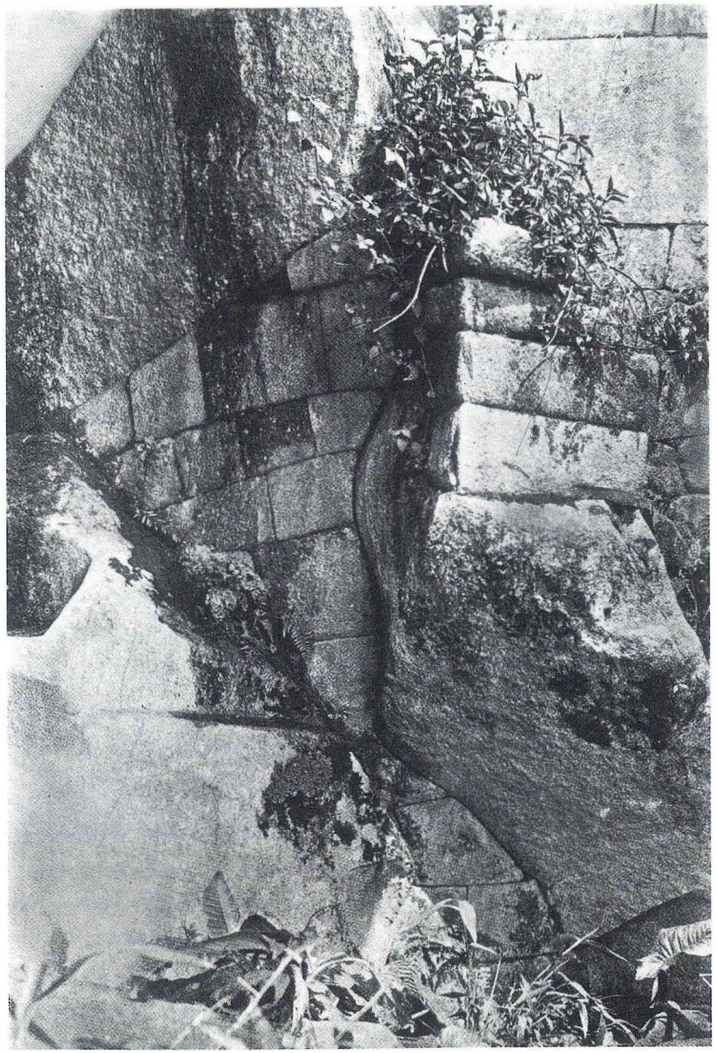
—*Morse Peckham*

Between the two extremes—a minimum of organization and a minimum of arbitrariness—we find all possible varieties.

—*Ferdinand de Saussure*

I

A variety of structural fixes have been imposed on art—stylistic, historical, social, economic, psychological. Whatever else art is, at a very simple level it is a way of making. So are a lot of other things. Oil painting and tool making are no different on this level, and both could be subsumed under the general investigation of technological processes. But it is not possible to look at both in quite the same light because their end functions are different, the former being a relation to the environment, oneself, society, established by the work itself, while a tool functions as intermediary in these relations. Perhaps partly because the end function of art is different from the intermediary function of practical products in the society, a close look at the nature of art making remains to be undertaken. Authors such as Morse Peckham[1] have looked at art as behavior, but from the point of view of discovering its possible social function. He and others divide the enterprise into two basic categories: the artist's role playing on the one hand and speculations on the general semiotic function of the art on the other. My particular focus lies partly within the former

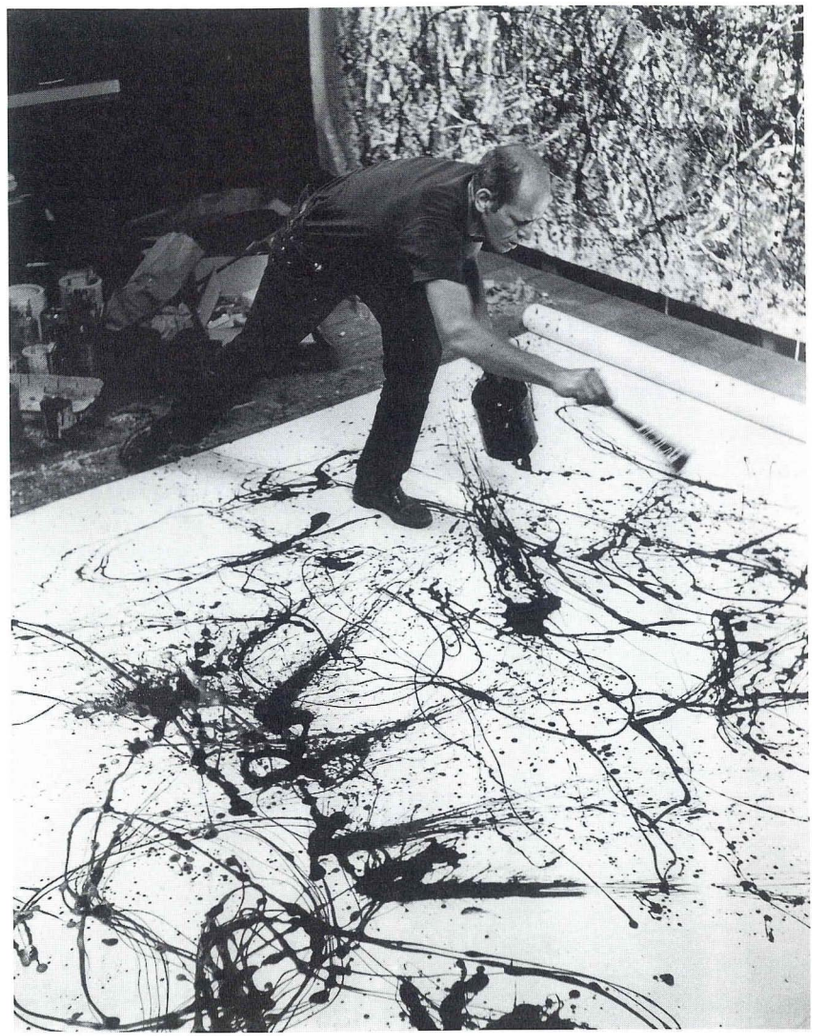


6.1 Stonework detail from Machu Picchu.

category and not at all within the latter. Psychological and social structuring of the artist's role I will merely assume as the contextual ground upon which this investigation is built. The interest here is to focus on the nature of art making of a certain kind as it exists within its social and historical framing. I think that previously, probably beginning with Vasari, such efforts have been thought of as a systemless collection of technical, anecdotal, or biographical facts that were fairly incidental to the real "work," which existed as a frozen, timeless deposit on the flypaper of culture.

Much attention has been focused on the analysis of the content of art making—its end images—but there has been little attention focused on the significance of the means. George Kubler in his examination of Machu Picchu[2] is startlingly alone among art historians in his claim that the significant meanings of this monument are to be sought in reconstructing the particular building activity—and not in a formal analysis of the architecture. I believe there are "forms" to be found within the activity of making as much as within the end products. These are forms of behavior aimed at testing the limits and possibilities involved in that particular interaction between one's actions and the materials of the environment. This amounts to the submerged side of the art iceberg. The reasons for this submersion are probably varied and run from the deep-seated tendency to separate ends and means within this culture to the simple fact that those who discuss art know almost nothing about how it gets made. For this and perhaps other reasons the issue of art making, in its allowance for interaction with the environment and oneself, has not been discussed as a distinct structural mode of behavior organized and separate enough to be recognized as a form in itself.

The body's activity as it engages in manipulating various materials according to different processes has open to it different possibilities for behavior. What the hand and arm motion can do in relation to flat surfaces is different from what hand, arms, and body movement can do in relation to objects in three dimensions. Such differences of engagement

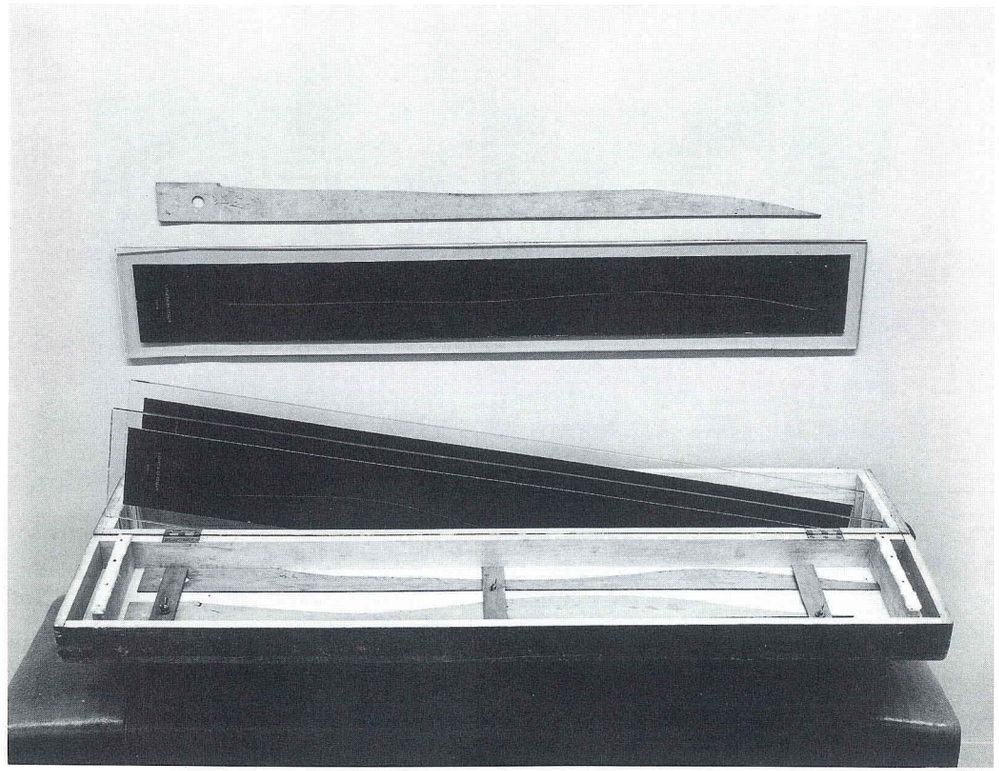


6.2 Jackson Pollock at work on #32, 1950. (Photo: Hans Namuth.)

(and their extensions with technological means) amount to different forms of behavior. In this light the artificiality of media-based distinctions (painting, sculpture, dance, etc.) falls away. There are instead some activities that interact with surfaces, some with objects and a temporal dimension, etc. To focus on the production end of art and to lift up the entire continuum of the process of making and find in it "forms" may result in anthropomorphic designations rather than art categories. Yet the observation seems justified by a certain thread of significant art which for about half a century has been continually mining and unearthing its means, and these have become progressively more visible in the finished work.

Ends and means have come progressively closer in a variety of different types of work in the twentieth century. This resolution reestablishes a bond between the artist and the environment. This reduction in alienation is an important achievement and accompanies the final secularization that is going on in art now.[3] However, what I wish to point out here is that the entire enterprise of art making provides the ground for finding the limits and possibilities of certain kinds of behavior, and that this behavior of production itself is distinct and has become so expanded and visible that it has extended the entire profile of art. This extended profile is composed of a complex of interactions involving factors of bodily possibility, the nature of materials and physical laws, the temporal dimensions of process and perception, as well as resultant static images.

Certain art since World War II has edged toward the recovery of its means by virtue of grasping a systematic method of production that was in one way or another implied in the finished product. Another way of putting it is that artists have increasingly sought to remove the arbitrary from working by finding a system according to which they could work. One of the first to do this was John Cage, who systematized the arbitrary itself by devising structures according to deliberate chance methods for ordering relationships. Cage's deliberate chance methods are both prior to and not perceptible within the physical manifestation of the work. The kind of duality at work here in splitting off the structural organization



6.3 Marcel Duchamp, *Trois Stoppages étalon*, 1913–14. Assemblage: three threads glued to three painted canvas strips, 5¼ × 47¼″, each mounted on a glass panel, 7¼ × 49⅜ × 1/4″; three wood slats, 2½ × 43 × ⅛″, 2½ × 47 x ⅛″, 2½ × 43¼ × ⅛″, shaped along one edge to match the curves of the threads; the whole fitted into a wood box, 11⅛ × 50⅞ × 9″. (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Katherine S. Dreier Bequest.)

from the physically perceived still has strains of European Idealism about it. However, for Cage such Idealism was forged into a dual moral principle: on the one hand, he democratized the art by not supplying *his* ordering of relationships; on the other, by his insertion of chance at the point of decision about relationships, he turned away the engagement with "quality"—at least at the point of structural relationships where it is usually located. It is not possible to mention Cage without bringing in Duchamp, who was the first to see that the problem was to base art making on something other than arrangements of forms according to taste. It is not surprising that the first efforts in such an enterprise would be to embrace what would seemingly deny certain aspects of preferred relationships—chance ordering. The entire stance of a priori systems according to which subsequent physical making followed or was made manifest are Idealist-oriented systems that run from Duchamp down through the logical systems of Johns and Stella to the totally physically paralyzed conclusions of Conceptual art. This has been one thread of how the systematic has been enlisted to remove the arbitrary from art activity.

Another thread of system-seeking art making, distinct enough to be called a form of making, has been built on a more phenomenological basis where order is not sought in a priori systems of mental logic, but in the "tendencies" inherent in a materials/process interaction. Pollock was the first to make a full and deliberate confrontation with what was systematic in such an interaction. Until Pollock, art making oriented toward two-dimensional surfaces had been a fairly limited act so far as the body was concerned. At most it involved the hand, wrist, and arm. Pollock's work directly involved the use of the entire body. Coupled to this was his direct investigation of the properties of the materials in terms of how paint behaves under the conditions of gravity. In seeing such work as "human behavior," several coordinates are involved: nature of materials, the restraints of gravity, the limited mobility of the body interacting with both. The work turned back toward the natural world through accident and gravity and moved the activity of making into a direct

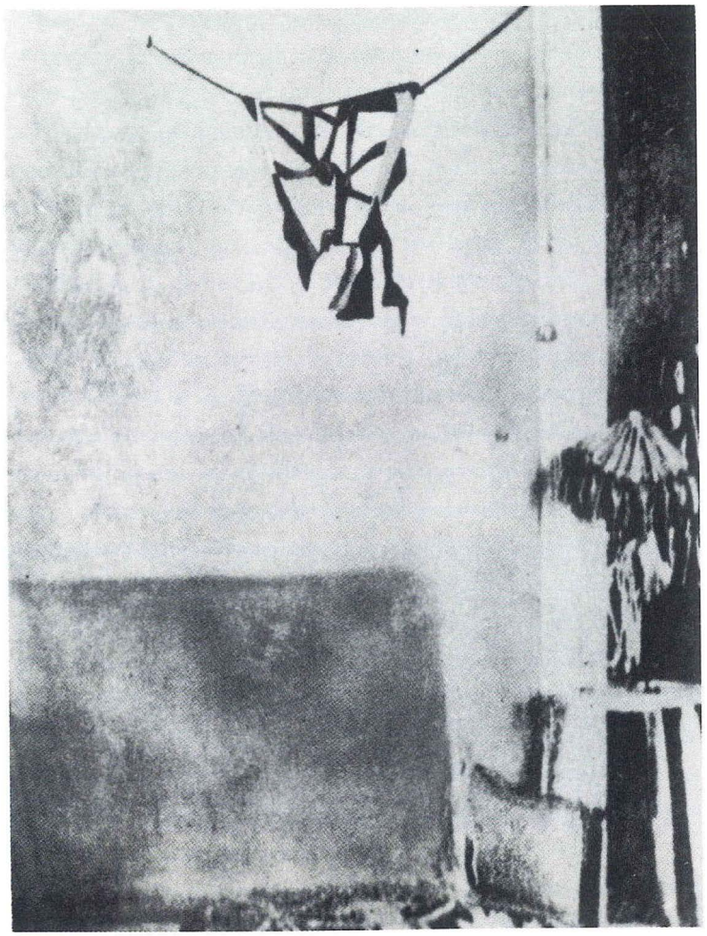
engagement with certain natural conditions. Of any artist working in two dimensions it could be said that he, more than any others, acknowledged the conditions of both accident and necessity open to that interaction of body and materials as they exist in a three-dimensional world. And all this and more is visible in the work.

II

To see a certain strain of art making as behavior that has the motivating urge to reduce the arbitrary is to do more than impute a certain psychology to artists or assert a particular historical interpretation. The very framing of the issue implies oppositions of the arbitrary and nonarbitrary. Not only have psychologists such as Morse Peckham and Anton Ehrenzweig been concerned with oppositions that lie along an axis similar to the arbitrary/nonarbitrary division, but linguists and anthropologists have been concerned with the structural "binarisms" embedded in language and operating behind myths. Support for the pervasiveness of a binary structuring is sought, ultimately, at the biological level: "Finally, some authors are confident that digitalism, which is the rival of the analogical, is itself in the purest form—binarism—a 'reproduction' of certain physiological processes, if it is true that sight and hearing, in the last analysis, function by alternating selections."[4] Even this statement, in its contrasting the analogical and the binary as alternatives, has a binary form. The linguist de Saussure sees language operating primarily according to oppositions, and it naturally follows that his theory itself comes in the form of oppositions and polarities, which he ascribes to mental activity itself. Such a Kantian outlook is seen also in Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myths. Key terms in both de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss are themselves dual: diachronic/synchronic, syntagmatic/associative, arbitrary/ motivated. I am especially concerned with the last pairing of terms for the present analysis—terms that held quite a bit of importance for de Saussure:

> Everything that relates to language as a system must, I am convinced, be approached from this viewpoint, which has scarcely received the attention of linguists: the limiting of arbitrariness. This is the best possible basis for approaching the study of language as a system. In fact, the whole system of language is based on the irrational principle of the arbitrariness of the sign, which would lead to the worst sort of complication if applied without restriction. But the mind contrives to introduce a principle of order and regularity into certain parts of the mass of signs, and this is the role of relative motivation. If the mechanism of language were entirely rational, it could be studied independently. Since the mechanism of language is but a partial correction of a system that is by nature chaotic, however, we adopt the viewpoint imposed by the very nature of language and study it as it limits arbitrariness.[5]

I cite this passage because it frames a parallel effort made here in analyzing how a certain tendency in American art has pushed toward reducing arbitrary formal rearrangements by substituting systematic methods of behaving. There is a binary swing between the arbitrary and nonarbitrary, or "motivated," which is for de Saussure a historical, evolutionary, or diachronic feature of language's development and change. Language is not plastic art, but both are forms of human behavior and the structures of one can be compared to the structures of the other. That there should be some incipient general patterning modality common to both should not be surprising. Nor is it surprising to find Ehrenzweig at other levels characterizing certain psychological perception as rhythmically alternating between "differentiation and dedifferentiation" or scattering (arbitrariness) and containment (motivation). What resolves the duality as a tendency in behavior at many levels is, for de Saussure as well as Ehrenzweig and others, the alternating passage between the two poles, a tendency toward the one and then the other. Ehrenzweig reduces



6.4 Marcel Duchamp, *Sculpture de Voyage,* 1918 (work lost).

oppositions to the basic conflict between the life and death urges or the Eros-Thanatos duality. Discontent with Freud's admission in the late writings of no longer being able to distinguish the two, Ehrenzweig reasserts their opposition but sees a constantly alternating swing between the two. "The act of expulsion (dedifferentiation) in the service of Thanatos is linked with containment (re-differentiation) in the service of Eros."[6]

Peckham speaks of the related tendencies to over- or underpattern[7] and assigns art the role of a practice run for life by providing an area within a psychically "insulated" framework where disorientation is the rule of the game in successive innovative moves. He hints at a biological foundation different from binary tendencies in his citing of the principle of "entelechy." According to this, neural firings have tendencies for repeating sequences. Entelechy is seen as a tendency to pattern, as built-in as tendencies for binary patterning in the brain—although Peckham opts for the predominance of an "analogical" thought mode to follow from entelechy tendencies. De Saussure, on the other hand, concluded from his linguistic investigations that the digital and the analogical corresponded to the two available types of mental activity.[8] The nature of the patterning is not so central to Peckham's thesis as is the assertion that it is predominantly there in mental activity and it is the function of art to interrupt this patterning. That is, art's function as an adaptive mechanism is as an antidote to the habitual. Its social value lies in its presentation of a practice area where one can embrace the disorienting experience. Because innovative art provides the most incisively disorienting art experiences, it is the most valuable, according to Peckham. Such thinking might seem to run counter to the structure of art isolated here: the accelerating tendencies toward avoiding the arbitrary would have to be identified with increased patterning. A few distinctions have to be kept in mind. Peckham's term "disorientation" is descriptive of the viewer's response, not necessarily the artist's. The term involves how art is read, or its semiotic functions. Although this is not an area to be explored here, it might be

touched on to make the focus of this investigation clearer. The semiotic function of new art in terms of the viewer's response has a diachronic structure. New art always disorients; only a posteriori is it seen to have presented orders and patterns. Duchamp in his famous single lecture[9] would not allow an easy separation between art and its audience, the artifact and its semiotic radiations. For Duchamp the semiotic is more a function of the viewer's projection, and without it the art remains unfinished. That is, the diachronic shift from disorientation to perceived order in the artifact is the progress toward a definition provided by its viewers. The final definition can never be known by the artist in advance, since the work's completion is in the hands of the viewers. Whether Duchamp, the most aristocratic of artists, was being ironic in making art a gift to democracy is impossible to know. In any case, it is not a very convincing argument. What has been left out is the degree to which the elitist corps of subsequent artists, rather than the public viewers, "complete" and define a predecessor's work by the way in which they move away from it in the future: by ignoring it, by extending its implications, or by having a dialectical relation to it. Duchamp's still cogent statement of the problem of formalism and his uses of chance are cases in point.

The features of making in innovative art need not be extended to considerations about its semiotic nature insofar as nonartists are concerned. Peckham himself has pointed out that the roles of artist and perceiver are not interchangeable. The disorienting in innovative art is the as yet unperceived new structure. All past art that is no longer disorienting gives us no evidence that patterning was ever absent, and new art is not disorienting to those who are engaged in making it. Yet another distinction has to be made here, namely that the kind of patterning involved in a search for motivated art takes place on the level of behavior that is prior to visible formal results, and it participates in a semiotic function. But these intentional acts of process revealed say nothing as to whether or not the impact of the entire experience will be disorienting for the viewer. It would seem that the making of art approaches the polar

situation of arbitrary/nonarbitrary on a synchronous front as opposed to the viewer's access to these alternatives, which is always diachronic—that is, from the experience of disorder to that of order with time. It might be said that the current art with which I am dealing presents the least amount of formalistic order with an ever greater order of the making behavior being implied. It is as though the artist wants to do the most discontinuous, irrational things in the most reasonable way. And there seems to be almost an inverse ratio at work in this progress toward the recovery of means: ever more disjunctive art acts carry ever more ordered information regarding the systematic means of production. This information is increasingly allowed into the work as part of the image.

Any process implies a system, but not all systems imply process. What is systematic about art that reduces the arbitrary comes out as information, revealing an ends-means hookup. That is, there is about the work a particular kind of systematizing that process can imply. Common to the art in question is that it searches for a definite sort of system that is made part of the work. Insofar as the system is revealed, it is revealed as information rather than esthetics. Here is the issue stated so long ago by Duchamp: art making has to be based on terms other than those of the arbitrary, formalistic, tasteful arrangements of static forms. This was a plea as well to break the hermeticism of "fine art" and to let in the world on terms other than image depiction.

III

The two modes of systematizing employed by American art over the last half century have been briefly sketched. The materials/process approach tends to predominate now. American art, unlike American thought, has occasionally had a strong idealist bias, but the a priori has so far proved unnerving and uncomfortable tools for the American artist. To pursue a more material route was, in the late 1940s, to be up against the formalism of Cubism. Pollock was the first to beat his way out of this. But all art

6.5 Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes,* detail, c. 1460.

degenerates into formalism, as Pollock himself found out. The crisis of the formalistic is periodic and perpetual, and for art to renew itself, it must go outside itself, stop playing with the given forms and methods, and find a new way of making.

Certain artists are involved in the structures I am discussing here. They form no group. The nature of the shared concerns does not mold a movement nor preclude the validity of other approaches and concerns. The term "mainstream" is political. Several present-day critics can be observed wading down one, hoping one day to float on the back of the oarsmen they have in tow. In fact, the current art swamp is awash with trickling mainstreams. Art that has or is participating in the structures

6.6 Michelangelo, *Captive from the Boboli Gardens,* (unfinished), after 1519.

articulated here is, to me, either interesting or strong or both.[10] Of the many concerns in art, the ones dealt with here have given powerful leverage in opening up possibilities, whether as mere tendencies in past work or self-conscious methods in present work. Other kinds of art making focus other concerns—the nature of color in art making would, it seems, be totally outside these investigations.

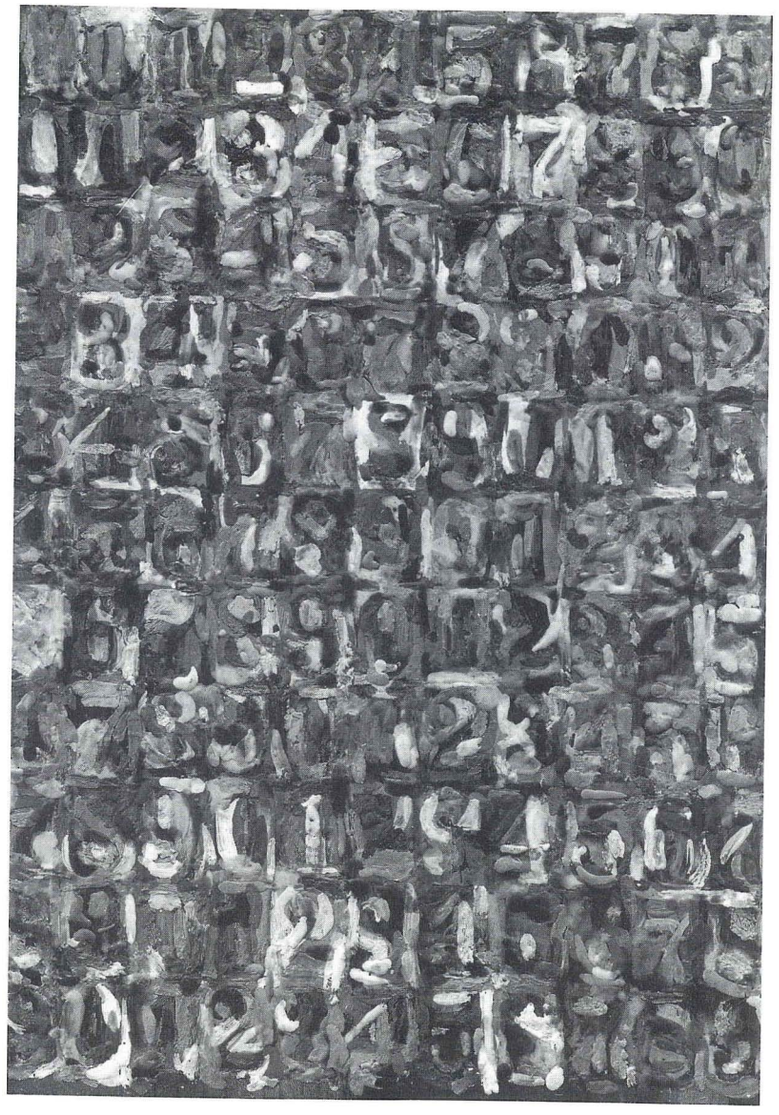
The issues here stretch back into art history, but in a particularly linear way. The concerns are partly about innovative moves that hold in common a commitment to the means of production. Duchamp, Cage, Pollock, Johns, and Stella have all been involved, in different ways, in acknowledging process. Quite a few younger artists are continuing to manifest the making process in the end image. But the tendencies to give high priority to the behavior end of making can be found in much earlier artists. Rather than modeling parts of the costume in *Judith and Holofernes,* Donatello dipped cloth in hot wax and draped it over the Judith figure. This meant that in casting, the molten bronze had to burn out the cloth as well as the wax. In the process some of the cloth separated from the wax and the bronze replaced part of the cloth, revealing its texture. This was a highly finished work, and corrections could have been made in the chasing phase had the artist wanted to cover it up. It has also been claimed that the legs of the Holofernes figure were simply cast from a model rather than worked up in the usual way.[11] Evidence of process in this work is not very apparent and could have been noticed only by the initiated. But here is an early example of a systematic, structurally different process of making being employed to replace taste and labor, and it shows up in the final work. Draping and life casting replace modeling. Michelangelo's "unfinished" marbles give far more evidence of process, but with the important difference that no structurally new method of making is implied.

What is particular to Donatello and shared by many twentieth-century artists is that some part of the systematic making process has been automated. The employment of gravity and a kind of "controlled

chance" has been shared by many since Donatello in the materials/process interaction. However it is employed, the automation serves to remove taste and the personal touch by co-opting forces, images, and processes to replace a step formerly taken in a directing or deciding way by the artist. Such moves are innovative and are located in prior means, but are revealed in the a posteriori images as information. Whether this is draping wax-soaked cloth to replace modeling, identifying prior "found" flat images with the totality of a painting, employing chance in an endless number of ways to structure relationships, constructing rather than arranging, allowing gravity to shape or complete some phase of the work—all such diverse methods involve what can only be called automation and imply the process of making back from the finished work.

Automating some stage of the making gives greater coherence to the activity itself. Working picks up some internal necessity at those points where the work makes itself, so to speak. At those points where automation is substituted for a previous "all made by hand" homologous set of steps, the artist has stepped aside for more of the world to enter into the art. This is a kind of regress into a controlled lack of control. Inserting the discontinuity of automated steps would not seem, on the face of it, to reduce the arbitrary in art making. Such controlled stepping aside actually reduces the making involvement or decisions in the production. It would seem that the artist is here turned away from the making, alienated even more from the product. But art making cannot be equated with craft time. Making art is much more about going through with something. Automating processes of the kind described open the work and the artist's interacting behavior to completing forces beyond his total personal control.

The automated process has taken a variety of forms in various artists' work. Jasper Johns focused very clearly on two possible ways for painting. One was to identify a prior flat image of a target or flag with the total physical limit of the painting. Another sequentially systematic mode that implied process was the number and alphabet works. These,



6.7 Jasper Johns, *Small Numbers in Color,* 1959. (© Jasper Johns/VAGA, New York 1992; collection of the artist; courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; photo: Rudolph Burckhardt).

and Stella's subsequent notched striped paintings, present total systems, internally coherent. Both imply a set of necessary sequential steps which, when taken, complete the work. Less painterly and far more deliberate, Stella's work of the early 1960s was some of the first to fold into a static, "constructed" object its own means of production. I have discussed elsewhere[12] how the work of both artists, with its deliberateness of execution according to an a priori plan, implies a mode of making, or form of behavior, that can be more fully realized in the making of three-dimensional objects.

So-called Minimal art of the early and mid-1960s was based on the method of construction. The structure necessary to rectilinear forming precludes any "arranging" of parts. The "how" of making was automated by accepting the method of forming necessary to rectilinear things. What is different about making objects, as opposed to applying a surface, is that it involves the body, or technological extensions of it, moving in depth in three dimensions. Not only the production of objects, but the perception of them as well involves bodily participation in movement in three dimensions. It might be said that the construction of rectilinear objects involves a split between mental and physical activity and a simultaneous underlining of the contrast: on one hand, the obviousness of the prior plan, and on the other, the extreme reasonableness of the materials used to manifest the structure. A certain strain of constructed art of the 1960s continued an emphasis on refined or colored surfaces and optical properties—essentially an art of surfaces moved into three dimensions.

Other constructed art opted for the emphasis on more traditionally sculptural values—volume, mass, density, scale, weight. The latter work tended to be placed on the floor in one's own space. This is a condition for sculptural values in materials to register most fully, as it is under this condition that we make certain kinesthetic, haptic, and reflexive identifications with things. I have discussed the nature of this perceptual bond to things in our own body space before.[13] For the argument here it

is only necessary to reiterate a few points. The body is in the world, gravity operates on it as we sense it operating on objects. The kinds of identification between the body and things initiated by certain art of the 1960s and continued today was not so much one of images as of possibilities for behavior. With the sense of weight, for example, goes the implicit sense of being able to lift. With those estimations about reasonableness of construction went, in some cases, estimations of the possibility for handling, stability or lack of it, most probable positions, etc. Objects project possibilities for action as much as they project that they themselves were acted upon. The former allows for certain subtle identifications and orientations; the latter, if emphasized, is a recovery of the time that welds together ends and means. Perception itself is highly structured and presupposes a meaningful relation to the world. The roots of such meanings are beyond consciousness and lie bound between the culture's shaping forces and the maturation of the sense organs that occurs at a preverbal stage. In any event, time for us has a direction, space a near and far, our own bodies an intimate awareness of weight and balance, up and down, motion and rest, and a general sense of the bodily limits of behavior in relation to these awarenesses. A certain strain of modern art has been involved in uncovering a more direct experience of these basic perceptual meanings, and it has not achieved this through static images, but through the experience of an interaction between the perceiving body and the world that fully admits that the terms of this interaction are temporal as well as spatial, that existence is process, that the art itself is a form of behavior that can imply a lot about what was possible and what was necessary in engaging with the world while still playing that insular game of art.

Recent three-dimensional work with its emphasis on a wide range of actual materials and locating the making of possibilities of behaving or acting on the material in relation to (rather than in control of) its existential properties brings very clearly into focus that art making is a distinct form of behavior. This is underlined even more now that the premises of

making shift from forming toward stating. Around the beginning of the 1960s the problem presented itself as to what alternatives could be found to the Abstract Expressionist mode of arranging. The Minimal presented a powerful solution: construct instead of arrange. Just as that solution can be framed in terms of an opposition (arrange/build), so can the present shift be framed dialectically: don't build . . . but what? Drop, hang, lean—in short, act. If the static noun of "form" is substituted for the dynamic verb to "act" in the priority of making, a dialectical formulation has been made. What has been underlined by recent work in the unconstructed mode is that since no two materials have the same existential properties, there is no single type of act that can easily structure one's approach to various materials. Of course the number of possibilities for the basic kinds of interactions with the materials are limited, and processes do tend to become forms that can be extrapolated from one material interaction to another. But what is clear in some recent work is that materials are not so much being brought into alignment with static a priori forms as that the material is being probed for openings that allow the artist a behavioristic access. What ties a lot of work together is its sharing of the "automated" step in the making process, which has been enlisted as a powerful ally in the recovery of means or time and in increasing the coherence of the making phase itself.

Not only in plastic art but in art that specifically exists in time there have been recent moves made to reduce that existential gap between the studio preparation and the formal presentation. Some theater and dance work now brings rehearsal and literal learning sessions for the performers into the public presentation. One could cite other instances in film and music where the making process is not behind the scenes but is the very substance of the work.

Peckham speaks of the necessity of preserving a "psychic" insulation within which the strain of disorienting art moves can be made.[14] Studios, galleries, museums, and concert halls all function as insulated settings for such experience. Much recent art that is being discussed does

not require a studio, and some recent plastic art does not even fit inside museums. In contrast to the indoor urban art of the 1960s, much present work gets more and more beyond studios and even factories. As ends and means are more unified, as process becomes part of the work instead of prior to it, one is enabled to engage more directly with the world in art making because forming is moved further into the presentation. The necessary "psychic insulation" is within one's head.

Notes

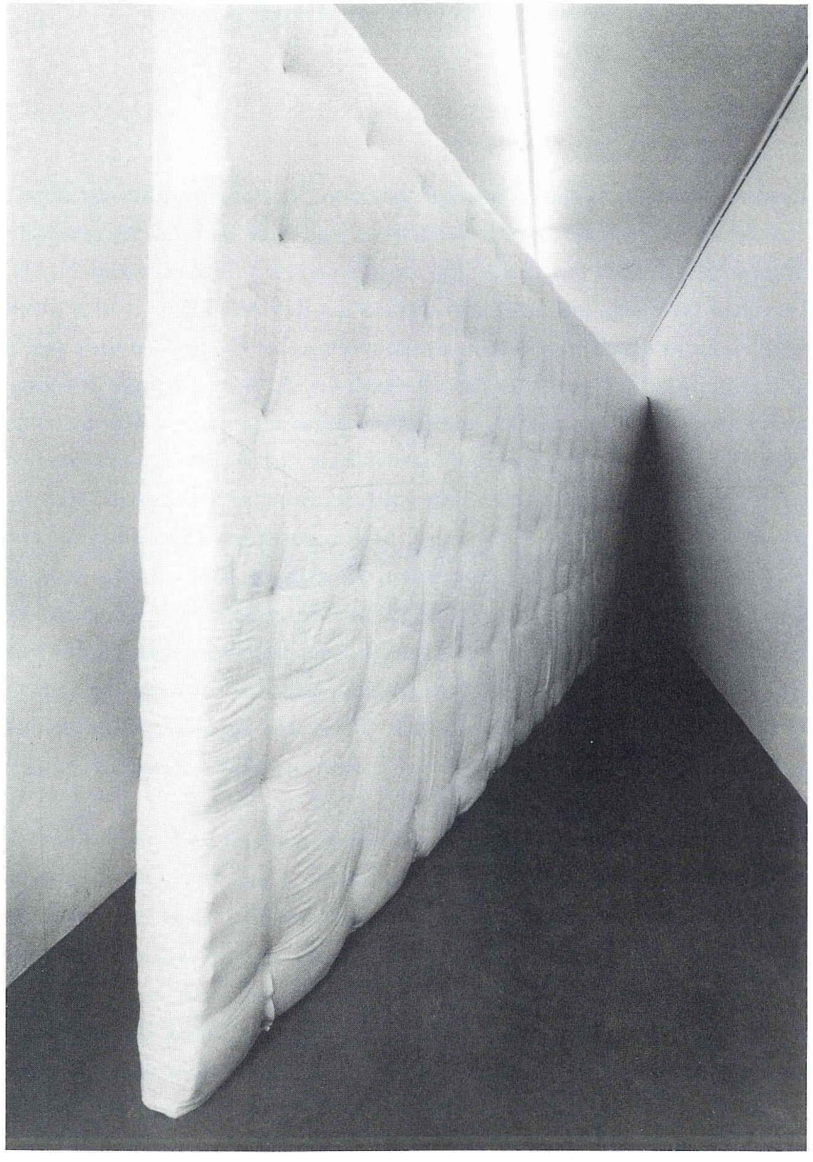
1. Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos* (New York: Schocken, 1967).
2. George Kubler, "Machu Picchu," *Perspecta* 6, 1960.
3. Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris," The Corcoran Gallery of Art (Baltimore, Md.: Garamond/Pridemark Press, 1969), p. 23.
4. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 54.
5. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 133.
6. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 220.
7. Peckham, p. 321.
8. De Saussure, p. 123.
9. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp,* (Paris: Trianon Press, 1959), p. 77.
10. No art writing can avoid carrying some political load due to the structure of the art community—i.e., the general silence of artists in print, the economics and psychology of elitist art that identifies quality with scarcity, a tendency for those who support art to be able to hear about it better than see it. Such an ambience tends to elevate (reduce?) criticism to a form of power broking. I do not wish to ignore individuals relevant to the issues here, but I want to underline the fact that the constructs presented are my own. For me to cite an established artist as an example of a structure that goes beyond his own personal work does not involve the presumption of speaking for him, promoting him, or collecting him as a follower. Obviously the ideas discussed in this article are grounded in my own work as well as in those I cite as examples. This preempts me as an artist from citing recent work by younger artists in the interest of speaking more to issues than for individuals.

11. Bruno Bearzi, *Donatello, San Ludovico* (New York: Wildenstein, n.d. [1948]), p. 27.
12. Robert Morris, "Beyond Objects," *Artforum,* Vol. VII, No. 7 (April 1969).
13. Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part II," *Artforum,* Vol. V, No. 2 (October 1966).
14. Peckham, p. 82.

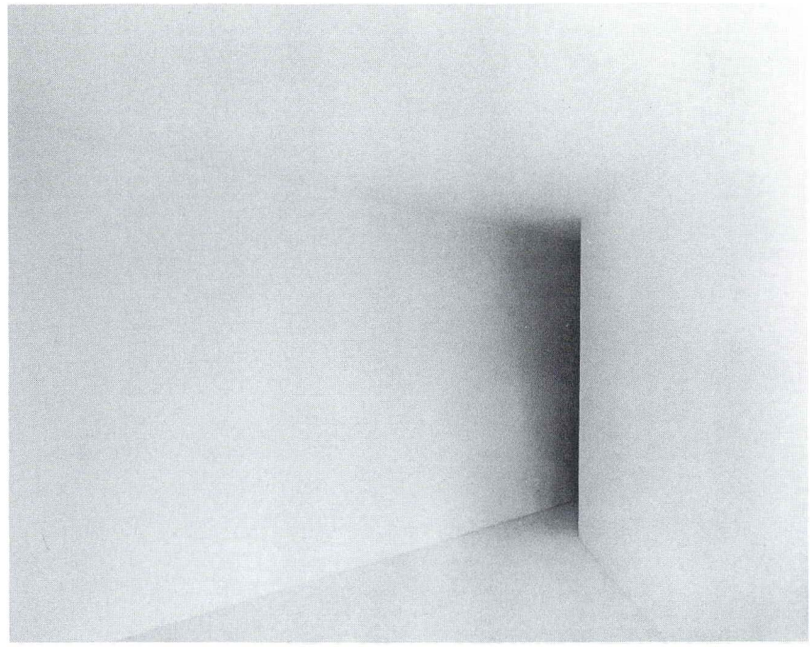
7 — The Art of Existence. Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Process

It seems a truism at this point that the static, portable, indoor art object can do no more than carry a decorative load that becomes increasingly uninteresting. One waits for the next season's polished metal boxes, stretched tie dyes, and elegantly applied liquitex references to Art Deco with about as much anticipation as one reserves for the look of next year's Oldsmobile—Ford probably has a better idea. At least a couple of routes move away from this studio- and factory-generated commodity art. One urge seems to be to employ physical materials and processes in an exterior situation where gigantic scale, vast amounts of natural materials, and the power of great quantities of energy, both natural and technological, can be brought to bear on the interaction of making. But another side to outdoor making might be referred to as "designated" art or an art of location. Such work comes under the labels of both conceptual and earth art. This work deemphasizes construction, process, and the application of transforming energies to materials. There can be located within this attitude affinities to certain forms of indoor art that are usually tagged "environmental."

The particular kind of indoor, environmental art I wish to isolate as having an affinity with some of the more or less "unmade" or designated outdoor work is that which does not present a great deal of visual incident. I do not mean to imply that the outdoor work with which I am comparing it suppresses visual incident. Even in the desert, nature is fairly busy. However, I think that as this indoor art is described, certain intentions and attitudes will emerge that tie it to certain outdoor work. Several artists on the West Coast, such as Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and recently, Bruce Nauman, are exploring situations that in overt terms are very visually pared down. And, of course, characteristic of the

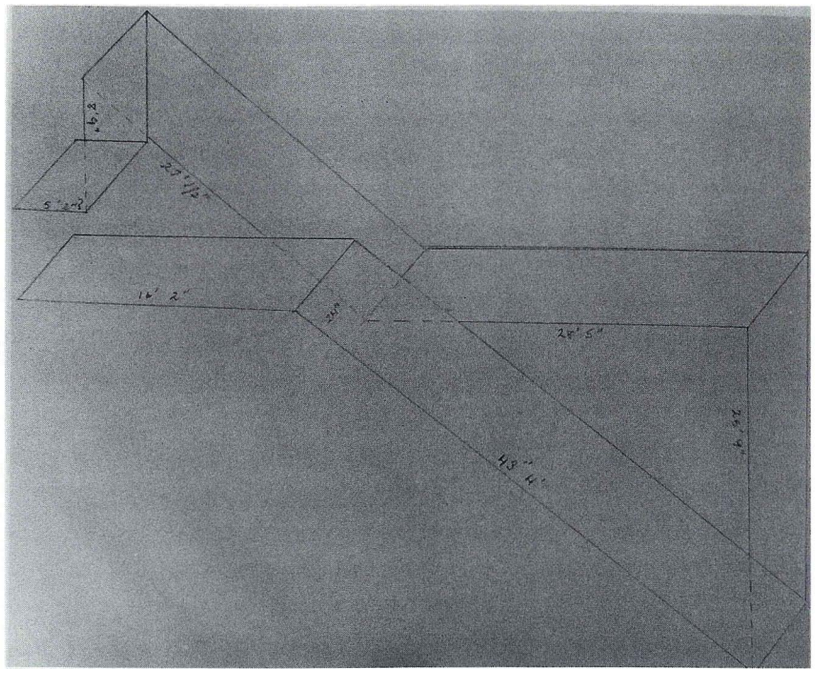


7.1 Bruce Nauman, *Acoustic Wall*, 1969. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)



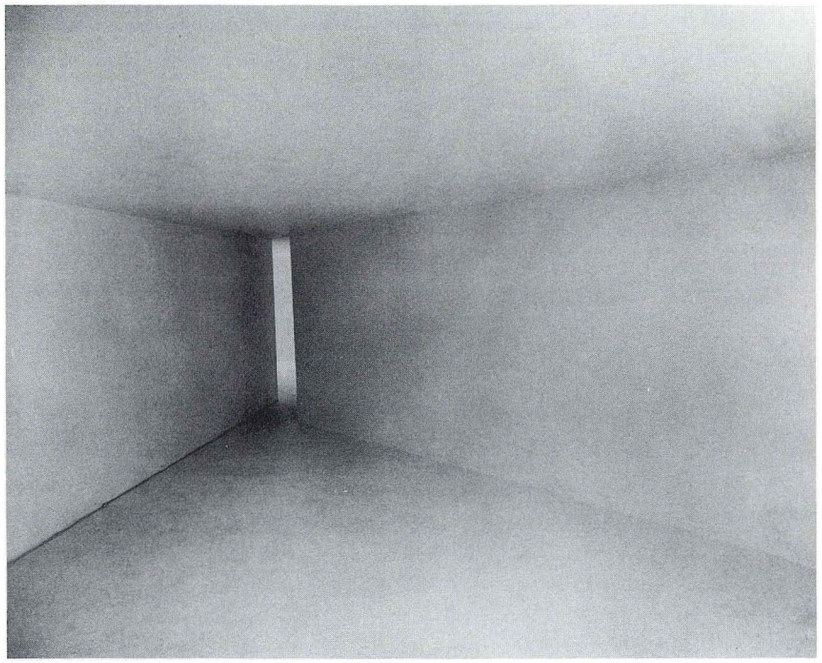
7.2 Michael Asher, Installation at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College, Claremont, California, 1970. (Photo: Frank Thomas.)

work of these artists is the total negation of any process that can be located within the source of stimuli. This does not means that process is not very much part of the work. It is, but it is located within the one who participates in the experience of this art. That is, one is thrown back onto one's awareness of such things as the duration of acclimation to a dark room (to take Bell, for example) during which a certain piece of specific visual information gradually becomes sensate. A certain duration of time is necessary for the experience of much designated outdoor art. Unless one is satisfied with the instantaneous photograph, one is required



7.3 Michael Asher, Isometric drawing of walls of installation at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College, Claremont, California, 1970.

to be there and to walk around in the work. But it is not the physical necessity of duration in order to experience—either walking, adjusting to the dark, listening carefully, etc.—that seems basic to either the outdoor or indoor mode of art in question. Rather, I think it marks itself off in another way from art so obviously involved in presenting itself as "action" taken in the world and revealed in retrospect by objects and residual or implied processes of transformation. It does this by presenting situations that elicit strong experiences of "being" rather than the implied actions of the "having done" common to much "thing" art now available.



7.4 Michael Asher, Installation at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center, Pomona College, Claremont, California, 1970. (Photo: Frank Thomas.)

The work in question seems to move away from the insolvable duality between thing and action. Nominally static and literally objectless, it seems also to have escaped from that deadly formalism that inevitably comes to be attached to the relationships found within external objects of whatever nature and provenance.

Over the last year or so I have been in contact with several younger artists—mostly working on the West Coast, some in the Midwest—who are exploring this area of what I can only call "existence art." Some are working cooperatively on projects, others are strictly individual,

and so far as I know these artists are unaware of each other's work. I will try to describe as well as I can the current projects of three of these artists. Other than a description, the only access to the work is by direct experience. The three artists described below were all rather reluctant to have photographs released because they are quite consciously striving for a non-, or at least, extra-visual situation.

Marvin Blaine is an artist working in northern Ohio. I first saw sketches of his work when I visited Oberlin College two years ago. About a year ago we made a trip together to visit the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio. Blaine had grown up around the mounds of southern Ohio. In 1967 and 1968 he made a few tentative, and as he admits, very derivative earthworks based on Indian mounds. His first efforts were on a small scale, and the artist has come to regard them as very unsatisfactory. He told me that in his high school years he had spent a summer excavating a few mounds. The process was to sink a shaft about 3 or 4 feet in diameter directly down from the top. If any finds were made, a more systematic layer-by-layer excavation was undertaken. Blaine recalls that the experience of working in these initial probing shafts—an entirely enclosed, nonarchitectural space—had impressed him more than the external form of the mounds themselves. He began to make sketches of dolmen-like forms to be covered with earth, and caves dug into bluffs.

In the fall of 1969 he and several other Oberlin students began excavating an interior space in the side of what Blaine assumes is a small natural hill. The symmetrical form of the hill had led some to suspect that it might have been a burial mound, but trial cores dug in 1966 had located nothing. Blaine says he knows of no mounds so far north in the state—the location is just outside the town of Lagrange. The land was leased from a farmer and actual work started in late August, 1969. The hill rises about 50 feet and is some 300 feet in diameter at the base. About

20 feet up the southeastern side Blaine began to excavate a rectangular tunnel about 5 feet wide, 7 feet high and sloping downward into the center of the mound at about 20°. The opening was carefully cut by hand some 3 or 4 feet into the hill, timber shoring was set in flush with the planed surface of the walls and ceiling, and a backhoe was brought in. The excavation was a rather complicated process as there was little room for the equipment to operate and the loose dirt was laboriously wheeled out in wheelbarrows. This narrow passage was maintained some 15 or 20 feet into the hill and then rather steeply drops away at about 35°. At this point the chamber proper begins as the side walls and ceiling also widen out at the end of the passageway at about the same increment. The chamber itself resembles a truncated pyramid with its base forming the back wall, which measures about 18 feet square. The inner room or chamber is perhaps 25 feet deep from where the passageway begins to dip down toward the back wall. The general effect of the interior is that of a disorienting geometric space.[1] The artist explained that a great deal of hand finishing with cutting spades was necessary because the backhoe was only capable of rough excavation.

Blaine found that he had run into a small underground spring at the bottom northwest corner of the inner room, and a sump had to be brought in to pump out the floor of the cave and keep the mud to a minimum during the finishing stage. But over a weekend it was found that the water had risen only about two feet at the back where the floor meets the wall (the lowest part of the room). Blaine decided that he would not fight this seepage, as he objected more to the mechanical pump than to the water. He built a kind of catwalk of 2 × 12-inch planks from the point where the passageway enters the room over to the back wall. There are three of these plank walkways fanning out to the back wall and supported by 4 × 4-inch timbers driven into the floor of the chamber. On entering the chamber it is difficult to tell if these walkways are level, because the entire space is so disorienting to the body and there is so little

light in the room—the only illumination being that which comes in through the passageway from the outside. Blaine informed me that the walkways slope at 10° toward the back wall, but one has the sensation that it is steeper. One can walk down these planks to the back wall and stand some 3 feet above the rectangular portion of water that collects at the back of the room. Planks had also been set down in the floor of the passageway in order to wheel out the dirt as the excavation proceeded. The last work was to remove these, square up the floor, and pour 3 inches of concrete on the floor of the passageway. Blaine was not happy with the concrete, but it seemed the only solution to the dampness and mud through which one would otherwise have to walk to get to the chamber.

By means of a transit at the top of the hill the artist had laid out a double row of stakes from the entrance down to the floor of the meadow and continuing out about 100 yards into the flat area below the hill. These stakes were laid out at precisely 37° 15′ southeast, which is the direction of the summer equinox sunrise for that latitude of the state. The stakes were sighted on as the passageway excavation progressed, so that the orientation of the slit into the hill would follow exactly that southeast/northwest declination of the equinox sunrise.

I flew out to Ohio on June 21 to be on hand for the equinox sunrise the following morning. We drove to the site about 4:30 A.M. on the 22nd and waited around outside for it to get light. In the dim predawn light we could see that there were a few clouds to the north and west, but the eastern part of the sky was clear. At about 5 A.M. Blaine, the four other students who helped, and I climbed the short rise to the opening, felt our way down the passageway with the help of the flashlights, and distributed ourselves on the three planks to await the first rays of the sun. Because there are trees on the horizon directly to the southeast, Blaine explained that he had moved the opening up the hill to be high enough so that nothing but sky could be seen from the interior. This also meant

that the sun would have already risen a few degrees above the horizon and would clear the tree line before the first rays penetrated the chamber.

At about 5:20 A.M. an intense band of yellowish light appeared about a floor or so below the top of the back wall. During the initial seconds, this was a strip no more than a couple of inches thick and extending laterally as a horizontal band about 6 or 7 feet wide directly in the center of the back wall. The strip progressed in a thickening band down the center of the wall at a pace just short of one's ability to actually perceive the increment. I was standing on the center plank; Blaine and the others occupied the planks on either side, which were about 5 feet apart at the back wall. By about 6 A.M., the rectangle of intense sunlight on the wall must have measured about 6 by 5 feet. The rest of the room was still relatively dark and the beam of light was a visible shape similar to what appears overhead in a movie theater—except of course that this was a strangely gold or yellow chunk of light. By about 8 A.M. I had moved to a side plank so as not to interfere with the rectangle of light now expanding down the wall to within about 6 feet of the center plank. I was feeling the dampness and even a slight chill. We all had coffee from a thermos, and as I looked up I noticed that the top edge of light was shrinking downward. As the sun was rising higher and was beginning to align itself with the top edge of the entrance and then to go beyond it, the rectangle of light would begin to disappear—much like someone pulling down a window shade. Blaine had calculated the angle of the opening passageway so that the rectangle of light would not quite reach the planks. At its largest, the light probably measured some 6 feet by 11 feet. By 8:30 A.M. it was beginning to diminish from the top. I don't recall how long we remained. It must have been close to 9 A.M. when we decided to go out. By then the light as a coherent rectangle at the back of the room was fading in intensity, hue, and coherence.

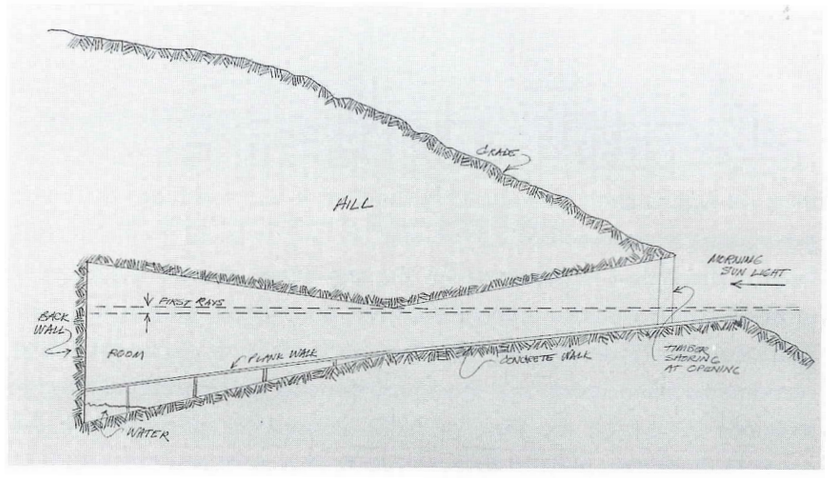
The artist said little about the work. He was unaware of a work by James Turrell I had seen the summer before in which nighttime traffic

and streetlights came in through a front window and floated across a large empty wall. Blaine was acquainted with Egyptian art and Hawkins and White's interpretation of Stonehenge as an astronomical computer. However, Blaine claims he is not an artist. He refused to give me any photographs and insists that none have been taken or will be taken of the work if he can help it.[1] Everyone who worked on the piece agreed that it was to be made only for the occasion of the equinox and that no attempt would be made to preserve the work. As there is almost no timber shoring in the ceiling and walls, Blaine expects seepage and winter frosts to cause fairly rapid deterioration. The farmer who leased the land has complained about the chamber as a hazard, and Blaine agreed to close the entrance after June. I assume that by now the work has in all probability been closed.

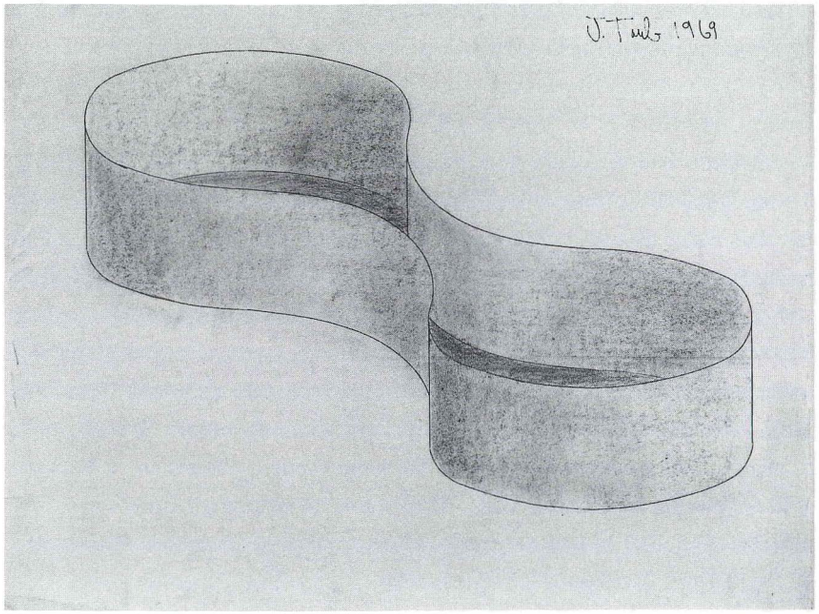
On the way to the airport the following day, the extremely taciturn Blaine revealed that he had notions for several other works that he might realize the following summer. When I inquired about how he managed to finance his projects, he candidly admitted that he "was rich enough to subsidize a few farmers for not growing their damn corn." And in what must have been an allusion to an aspect of the art world, Blaine also said that he "didn't need Minnesota Mining to pay for the dirt either." He insists that he wants nothing to do with the art world, which in his words, "is no longer about just turning over commodities, but is about people themselves getting bought and sold." A friend of Blaine's riding in the car volunteered the information that a good friend had been killed at Kent, and the five of them had decided that from now on they were going to do "pig art." "You know, pig art as art as art." No, I didn't know. It was explained that they were going to consider "what they were able to do to the pig as their art." Nobody wanted to discuss this further. Blaine simply said that the cave was a private thing and he was consciously removing these private efforts from his mind as art. The

easiest way to remove the efforts from being taken as art by others was to have no photographic memory exist.

Jason Taub is a twenty-seven-year-old artist working in San Diego. His background is in bionics and he still supports himself by doing research in this field. He says that most of his ideas for art came from failed scientific experiments or from one form or another of aborted research. After having worked with high-frequency sound perception in anechoic chambers for some two years, Taub became interested in the possibility of the perception of electromagnetic energy as art material. The artist point out that he began on the basis of scientific work carried out at Cornell. The perception of radio-frequency energy between 1 KC and 100 Gc has been explored there. Taub mentioned that various researchers, notably Fry, had been able to modulate transmitter parameters to induce

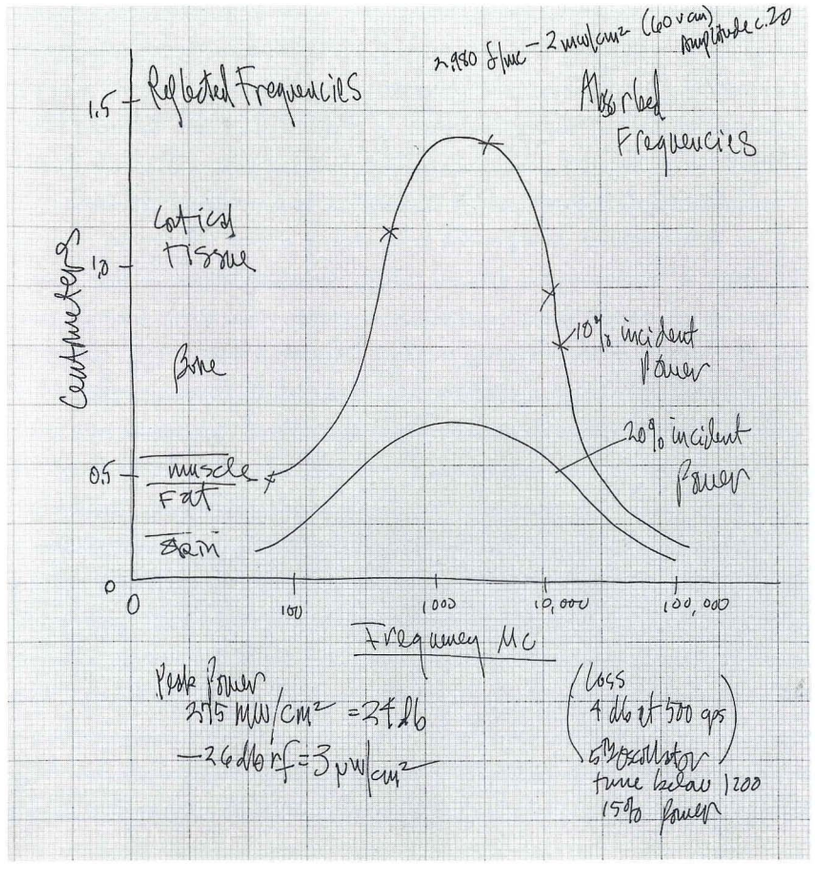


7.5 Robert Morris, *Blaine's Chamber—Cross-Section*, 1970.



7.6 Jason Taub, *Sketch for Double Room*, 1969. (Photo: John Berens.)

such perception as a sense of "severe buffeting of the head and a kind of pins-and-needles sensation around the temporal areas of the head." As these sensations could be induced in the deaf, it was concluded that these perceptions were somehow extra-audial. In conversation, Taub spun out lengthy theoretical explanations for the perception of radio frequency—most of which I neither remembered nor understood. But in the most general terms, Taub suggests that because there is an electrostatic field surrounding the neurons, it is most probable that the transmitted electromagnetic energy (in the form of radio frequencies) interacts with the magnetic field surrounding the neurons. Taub is now working on mod-



7.7 Jason Taub, page from notebook. (Photo: John Berens.)

ulating radio frequencies (rf for short) in a number of ways. He says that "theoretically there is no reason why visual effects could not also be generated by rf if in fact the perception is at the neuron level and not through the normal perceptors of the ear." He claims that the head is not much different from a radio in its ability to monitor rf—"about one order of magnitude of difference so far as sensitivity to rf goes," he says.

Taub was in the process of building a kind of double room in the shape of an hourglass when I visited him last March in San Diego. This was set up in an old warehouse near the waterfront, a huge space full of all sorts of electronic gear. Taub was framing up this enclosure, which in effect was two circular rooms about 15 feet in diameter and some 10 feet apart, connected by a passageway of two in-curving walls that were tangent with the circumferences of the circles. When I saw the work only the 2 × 3 studs were up. Taub intended to cover the inside—walls, floor, and ceiling—with a light industrial carpeting. He wanted to spray a light coating of foam over the entire exterior to dampen ambient noise, but had not figured out how to do this because metal lath would interfere with his transmitting equipment. He explained that the shape of the room was not important for the transmission of rf, as "lenses" were available to focus the rf into coherent beams, which maintained themselves up to 100 yards or so. The hourglass shape was merely to "shape the perceiver," as he put it—that is, confine him to an area that would have a relation to the type of modulated rf transmission focused on him. Also, he wanted to keep the visually distracting electronic gear out of sight, and an enclosure allowed the equipment to be set up around and outside the perceiver's room.

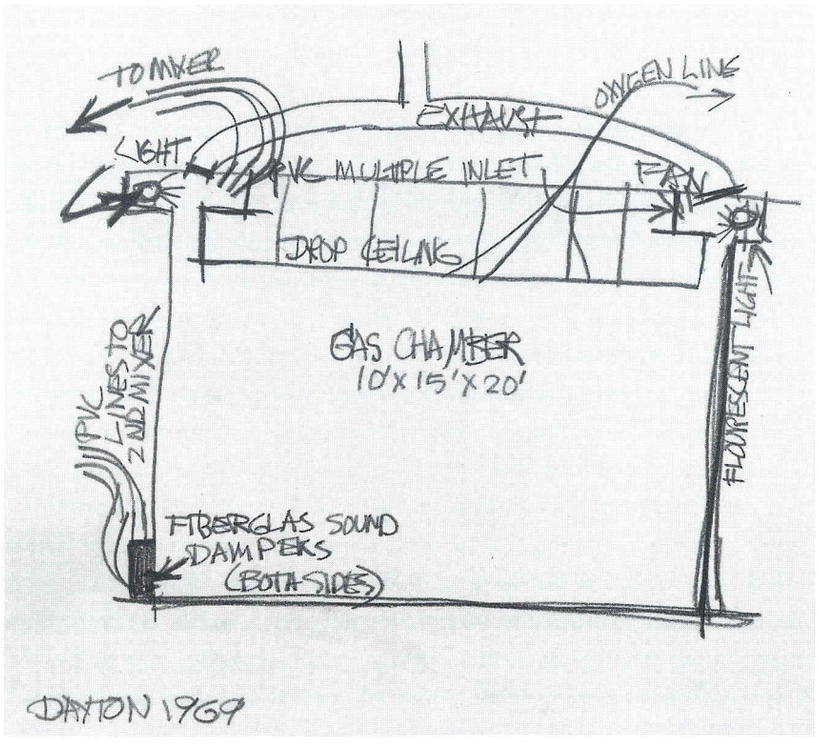
I did not know what this "shaping of the perceiver" was about until Taub turned on the equipment and invited me to enter the framed-up enclosure. As soon as I stepped into one of the circular spaces, I felt rather than heard a sound that seemed to be inside my head. It seemed similar to what one experiences when one hears a ringing in one's ears,

except the experienced sound was much lower. As I moved around in the circular framework, the sound seemed at times to come from behind me, but for the most part it was definitely within my own head. Taub had "focused" the rf from several ominous-looking black transmitters outside the enclosure in such a way that the nearer I got to the stud walls, the fainter the sensation seemed. He then suggested I walk through the narrow part of the room, but insisted that I do it quickly. I did so and sensed an increase in intensity of the sensation, something like a buzzing that changed to almost a rattling in the very center of the passageway. I found that part unpleasant, and Taub agreed that most people did, and in fact there is still some question as to the safety of experiencing that particular rf modulation. Taub claims he is still adjusting the various modulations and once the enclosure is complete, he will continue to alter the rf from time to time.

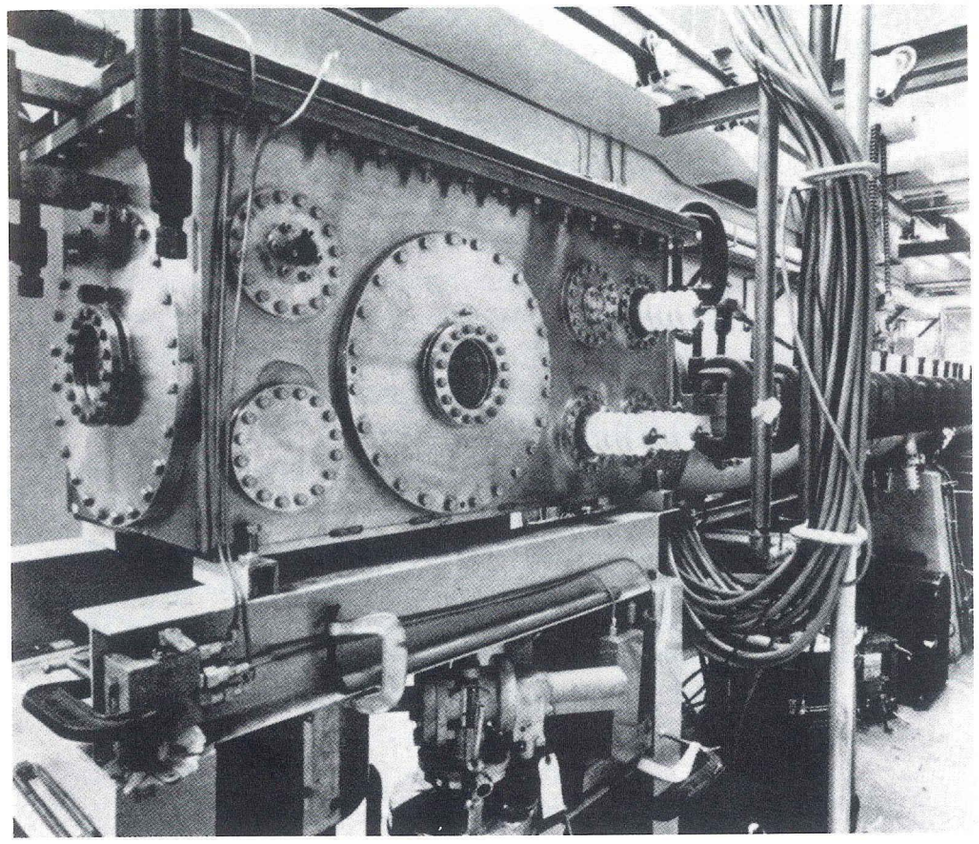
Unlike Blaine, Taub feels that what he is doing is very explicitly art. He admires Asher's work but finds it "too estheticized, like all California art." He is still dissatisfied with the necessity for the "enclosing, environmental aspect" of what he is doing. Taub showed me several sketches for enclosures that were more explicitly passageways. He discussed the possibility of setting up the rf transmitters outside in some quiet area, but the technical problems of noise and power generators have so far discouraged Taub from attempting to work outside. He suggested that the ideal surroundings for the experience would be water—some kind of large pool or tank with the perceiver fitted out with scuba gear. Taub feels that an aqueous medium would present few transmission problems while efficiently masking background noise. He is also interested in the effect of pressure at depths over 8 feet on the perception of rf. Taub himself is an expert scuba diver and once did research at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography on underwater radio signalling related to John Lily's earlier work on dolphin communication. I saw an entire notebook devoted to underwater environments that dealt with shifting artificial

currents and temperatures effected by means of strong jets of warmer and cooler water.

About three years ago Robert Dayton began doing wall pieces that involved certain chemical reactions—primarily acids attacking walls. Some of the pieces utilized glass troughs and perforated glass tubes through which nitric and sulphuric acids spilled or seeped down a wall. These



7.8 Robert Dayton, *Drawing for a Gas Chamber,* 1969. (Photo: John Berens.)



7.9 Robert Dayton, *Gas Mixing and Compressing Chamber.*

works were developed by applying other reactive chemicals to the wall beforehand. Sometimes these were inhibiting chemicals and films sprayed onto the wall before the glass sieves and spilling troughs released the attacking chemicals. Probably the most visual of these early pieces involved applying various forms of "liquid crystals" to the wall. These films of crystals are sensitive to heat and change color with temperature. The heat from the chemical reactions of the acids attacking the gypsum in the wall altered the color as the acid seeped down—the general effect was of changing halations surrounding the stains and streaks formed by the descending acid. Dayton felt these were limited by the temporal aspect, that the work was too much of a performance, and in his words, "it wasn't nice and nasty enough."

An accident with these acids (a glass tube of sulphuric acid broke as the artist was installing it) left Dayton with about one-third of his vision. He has now begun to work after a long period of eye operations and hospitalization. He claims that the ideas for his present work actually came from hospital experiences with anesthetic gases. Convinced that he would not regain his sight, he conceived of using gases as a means. To this end he has converted a large barn outside Sacramento, California, into a series of what he calls his "gas chambers."

These gas chambers are simple, square rooms built within the space of the huge barn. There are three rooms of different sizes: a small one about 10 by 12 feet with a low 8-foot ceiling, a middle-sized one about 15 by 15 feet, and a large room about 15 by 20 feet. Both larger rooms have 10-foot ceilings. All of the rooms are finished smooth inside and painted white. A small mesh border runs around top and bottom of the walls on all sides. These registers function as gas inlets. The middle room has additional inlets in the form of half-inch slits, or a kind of gap at each of the four corners where the walls do not quite meet. An 18-inch diameter mesh circle in the ceiling conceals an exhaust fan that is mounted on top of each of the rooms. Each room has a single flush door painted white. The floors, presumably concrete, are covered with a neutral

brownish-gray industrial carpeting. Each room is a physically separate entity within the larger barn. This allows Dayton free access to all exterior sides of each room in order to manipulate gas inlets, pressure gauges, mixing lines, and various tanks of compressed gases. The outside of each room presents a maze of plastic and copper tubing and gauges, which seem to be growing over the walls like some weird industrial vine. Running along a wall outside the larger room is a mass of tubes and machinery that make up a complex mixing and pressurizing chamber of Dayton's own design. Three outlet vents from the rooms join into a single flue toward the roof of the barn. Gases can be introduced nearly anywhere around the top and bottom of the walls of the first two rooms, as nozzles are placed every 18 inches. These nozzles lead directly to the registers of mesh. Dayton is not satisfied with his arrangement. Although flexible in terms of plugging in gases at nearly every point, the system does not mask the typical hissing sound of compressed gas leaving a jet. When I was there Dayton was working on a baffling device of acoustical fiberglass, which would suppress the noise and still allow the gases to pass into the room. The lighting also bothered the artist. Instead of the naked fluorescent fixtures that are now installed, he intends to drop the ceilings and install indirect lighting. The dropped ceilings would conceal a more efficient inlet and venting system as well.

It was unnerving to listen to the nearly blind artist discuss visual details of the rooms, down to the most precise kind of joint he had planned, and then comment, "Of course, I won't be able to see it when it's done, but I'll know how it looks." Another remark he made about the visual aspect of the work was that he hoped "people would not have to bother with looking any more than I am able to once they are in the room." Dayton himself is a fairly unnerving personality. He keeps his head shaved, which accentuates the deep scars on his face and neck. He also wears a monocle around his neck, which he occasionally peers through if he needs to see a detail or read a gauge. He seems to enjoy playing up a certain sinister ambience that surrounds his work. When I

was with him, he frequently squinted at me through the thick glass of his monocle and would leeringly compare the venting systems of Buchenwald and Belsen. When he first showed me the inside of the rooms, he asked if I thought shower heads as gas inlets would be unsightly.

It was with a little trepidation that I asked the artist if I could experience some of the rooms with various gases. Dayton asked me if I wanted to see a menu, and made such comments as "the chlorine is very fresh today." He decided to start me in the middle of the room with ozone—"a genuine, measured, esthetic quantity," as he put it. Standing inside the middle room, I could hear a faint hissing sound, saw nothing, but smelled the familiar, almost electrical odor. At the time I did not know whether ozone was harmful and hesitated to breathe deeply. But after a few minutes Dayton entered and I felt reassured. We stayed for about ten minutes and said nothing. I did not know if the gas was affecting me physically or not, but it was a strange, euphoric ten minutes.

I spent the entire afternoon with Dayton and his gas chambers. He insisted on giving me what he called a "retrospective gassing." After the ozone experience we went into the smaller room, where the artist introduced a couple of the first gases he had tried. These were iodine and bromine halogen vapors. First the iodine vapor was let in by the bottom registers. I sensed a vaguely violet mist rising from the baseboard area around the room. After about five minutes the entire floor was covered with a dense violet cloud. Dayton entered the room, kicked at the cloud and said, "This was the first effort. Disgusting. I'm more than half blind and I started right off thinking in color." Bromine was sent in on top of the iodine. This was brownish, and the few whiffs I got were very acrid. Unlike the iodine, which is heavier than air and sinks to the bottom of the room, the bromine swirled around, breaking up the violet cloud. I could not take it after about three minutes and left the room feeling asphyxiated. Dayton was outside, grinning, and insisting that he had put plenty of oxygen through the side vents. In the larger room Dayton went through what he called his "fart palette"—various mixtures of butyl

acetates, nitrobenzene, butyl mercaptan, etc. All of these had vaguely associative odors and were invisible. Dayton described this group as his "middle period" and as being "coarse, awkward, mawkish, and suitable only for blind basket weavers." The last gases undoubtedly presented the most interesting and unfamiliar experiences. All were invisible, some had strange, almost electrical odors related to the ozone smell. Others stung the nose. But the main effect was not one of odor. I remember my hands feeling heavy and sweaty at times. With some of the other gases I felt slightly dizzy or felt my face flushed. At one point my hearing became strange and I felt somewhat high. It was an exhausting afternoon. Dayton explained that the last gases were his own mixtures, which he could rapidly vary in his new mixer and compressor. He let me know, moreover, that they were "secret and dangerous in larger amounts."

Dayton claims he wants to build a "vaguely wholesome chamber of horrors." The first item for this project was to be a "Negative Ion Chamber." "It'll be ten times juicier than Willy Reich's Orgone Box," Dayton insisted. This chamber would get rid of "brain 5-hydroxytryptamine," and in Dayton's words, "that's really something to get rid of." I saw a number of components to this chamber that a friend of Dayton's, Sidney Boyd, was beginning to put together in a corner of the barn. They had completed a large humidifier and were waiting delivery of additional Wessix ionizers. When finished, the chamber would resemble a small closet with a kind of contoured couch in which one reclined. The sketches looked even more sinister than the exteriors of the three rooms. But according to Dayton, negative ions have been found to have a positive effect on living organisms. Dayton was ecstatic about the project, peering close up at electrical connections through his magnifying-glass monocle, leering at Boyd and rattling off comments about "brain monoamines, fluorometric analyses, and dose thresholds," none of which meant anything to me. He presented me with a stack of photostated articles from such periodicals as the *International Journal of Biometerology, Behavioral Science,* and *Aerospace Medicine* that dealt with experiments with negative

ions. In the conclusions of a couple of articles there were even some guarded, almost resentful, scientific admissions that negative ion exposure can "inhibit a conditioned emotional response of fear." Both Boyd and Dayton seemed to find the mad-scientist-cum-diabolical-artist hilarious, and as I drove away from the barn, Dayton shouted, "Screw the MOMA, but see what you can do for me at Auschwitz."

Of the three artists, Blaine is the most conventional, and his work presents at least a nominal visual aspect, which the work of Taub and Dayton does not have. All of the work involves the necessity of real time to be experienced. Blaine's technological means are primitive, whereas both Taub and Dayton employ a high level of technical means and scientific knowledge. All three artists are working outside the art system, although Taub seems eager to present his work within it. Blaine professes contempt for anything connected with the art world. I was unable to cut through Dayton's ironies and posturing to be able to determine where he stands with regard to this question. Blaine is independently wealthy, and this perhaps explains his aloofness from the art world with its commodity and high-pressure promotion atmosphere. Taub supports his work from straightforward scientific research. When I questioned Dayton about his funds, he merely said, "I knew you'd ask that sooner or later."

I am not especially interested in evaluating these artists or in judging the individual "quality" of one's work as compared to the others. What is of most interest is that these artists have found an open area in which to work at a time when there is a sense of art having become closed down and constrained. And although there is nothing startlingly new about environmental art, this work (especially that of Taub and Dayton) allows for an interaction between the work and the perceiver that functions on a new level. This is a highly physical level in which the perceiver's nervous apparatus itself is directly stimulated. One could argue that any object in one's field of vision must necessarily also stimulate the

perceiver in physiological ways. It is perhaps a matter of degree—for example, that difference between hearing the tones of a sine-wave generator and perceiving radio frequencies that are, physiologically speaking, extra-audial. But somehow the latter seems more aggressive and insistent, and at the same time the experience emphasizes very intensely that one's responses are patently within oneself. Undoubtedly this is due largely to the suppression of an objective source of stimuli that can be located externally and separate from oneself. Gases that are neither visible nor decidedly external from oneself by virtue of a strong odor, yet affect one's physical and psychological states, also establish this dual situation of the intensely physical and self-reflexive. It is the establishment of this new plane of experience, which to me seems qualitatively different from the possible responses to external objects, that seems significant.

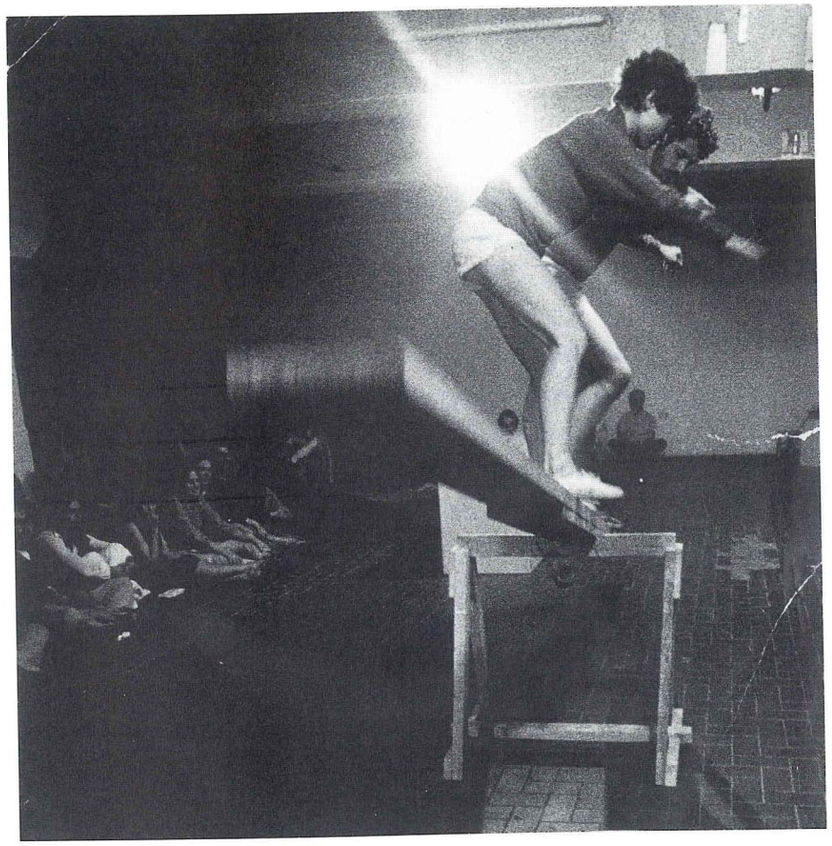
Note

1. I have illustrated a diagram I made from memory of Blaine's work. It is undoubtedly out of scale and proportion, but will hopefully add to the verbal description in presenting an overall sense of what the chamber was like. Blaine insisted on no photographs, and this diagram is perhaps also against his wishes. But the description itself would perhaps be objectionable to Blaine. I take the responsibility for the artist's ire, as I feel the experience is worth communicating.

8 Some Splashes in the Ebb Tide

> I don't know if it is my star that is on the wane or an entire constellation that is dimming.
>
> —*Carl Andre*

Works of art remain afloat on a sea of words. Those refractory facts, art works, are launched into the treacherous currents of language with its sudden undertows, backwaters, and shifting mainstreams. Works will sink out of sight, cause ripples or even occasional tidal waves. But this trackless, navigational nightmare is not without direction. For below, silently at work, is that force that waits for no man: the tidal pull toward judgment that assigns to works a certain coefficient of power measured in terms of cold cash and those slippery verbal chips to be redeemed for a piece of history. Duchamp's balanced equation of work and audience is here somewhat expanded by marine metaphors: the work and its coefficient of power are mediated by the tides and currents of the spoken, the written, the read, and the heard. To attempt a broad oceanography of the recent art enterprise would involve more than a plotting of the superficial profile of power found in the converging and interfering wave fronts of language that swirl around art. For one must also take account of those less visible currents that surge below the surface. There one finds the forces of unspoken attitudes and strategies flowing beside the undercurrents of linguistic presuppositions. If directionality can be located only at certain depths, the intended picture is one of shifts and surges below open water. And if to employ such metaphors is to risk continuing in the worst tradition of art writing—from Focillon's forms unfolding like giant, relentless ferns in a Bergsonian swamp to Kubler's electrical genetics of mutating primes and replicas—the risk is here sustained by the optimism



8.1 Simone Forti, *See-Saw,* 1961. (Courtesy of Robert Morris; photo: Claudio Abate.)

that the historicism underlying the former metaphors is absent in the present hydraulic hyperboles. It can only be hoped that any sparks of Vitalism do not survive the liquid environment. In any case, perhaps it is preferable to risk being lost at sea if the alternative is to be incarcerated in structuralism's iron triangle of the culinary.[1]

Obviously art discourse itself is not confined to those surface articulations of critical expressions. Beneath this visible face on discourse lie the extensive sets of mental procedures and analytic methodologies, the shifting thresholds of relevance that in turn mask value judgments that are themselves so deeply embedded in the sediment of historical beliefs. Only the briefest plotting of currents and dredging of sediments will be attempted here.

At its incipient, undifferentiated level, discourse is little more than a form of gossip, constantly anxious and shifting. And like gossip at its depths, it probes perplexities and searches for insecurities as much as it nominates heroes. If energized by a restless, antipoetical itch to rationalize, a greedy mental orality, a fear of loneliness reaching out for perceptual reunion, a constant repetition of reassurances in the face of threat, an endless appetite for that understandable hero, it is also compelled by a need to reduce all experience to what can be discussed across a table. But talk as mere talk is the most unstable of trivialities because it can suddenly accelerate to such great density, initiate such profound consequences. Perhaps that contradictory, palpable immateriality of the unspoken constitutes discourse at its most political and most powerful levels. But there are also levels of language that interpenetrate such incendiary potentialities to either pass by or become absorbed by the undercurrents of power. For discourse is also, at each level, a working out of a particular form of knowledge. Perhaps each springs from a different anxiety. An anxious major task of art's discourse over the last half-century has been to mediate and rationalize constant change and sameness: holding in suspension the individual identity of art facts as a sequence of shattering disjunctions, while at the same time delineating their family resemblances

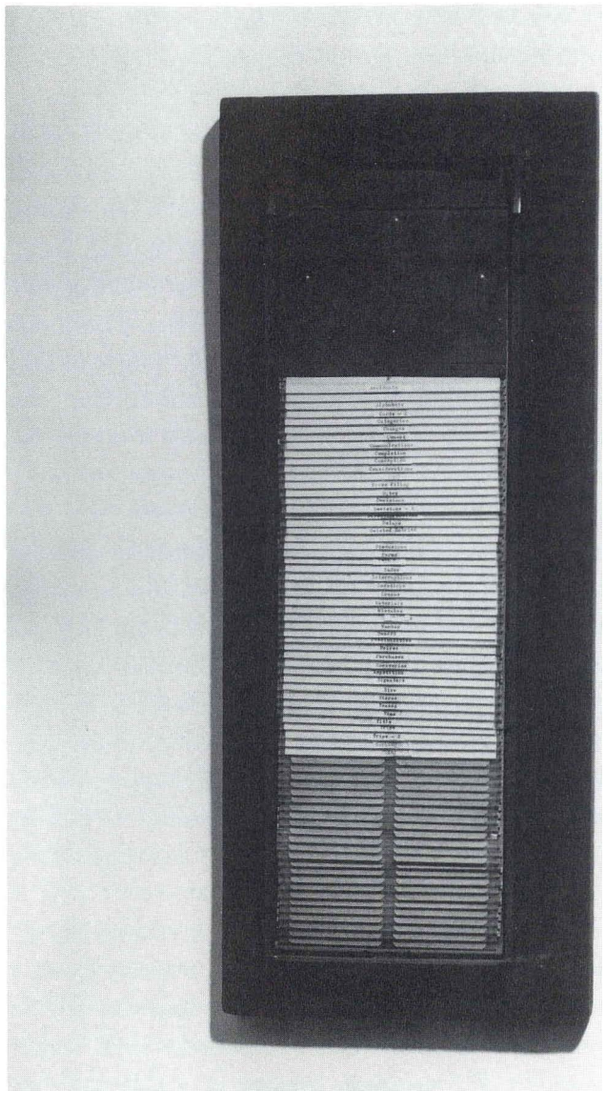
in a casual, hereditary, genealogical series. Art's vague claim to a mythical status resides in the maintenance of this contradiction.

If the identity of art facts is singular and that of discourse communal, this does not mean that discourse is given shape by unanimity. More usually it receives its shape by a slow resolution of conflicts: the opposing opinions of colleagues in an ongoing process of challenge and answer. Yet underlying agreements and assumptions are necessary—the most important of which are those epistemological ones at the sedimentary, not fully conscious level where even questions on the overall worth of the enterprise do not stir the mud.

But in what relation does this discourse stand to the art facts—those curious productions in themselves, which seem with their first appearance to be already halfway suspended into language? Even when most objectlike, they seem incapable of retaining the dumb, dense energy of things. They take on the nature of signs the minute one becomes aware of them. And art facts seem to contain the dual power to both generate and destroy speech. For as they call speech out from its own domain, it seems on approach to melt and merge with art facts, to become hallucinated and entangled, losing its ability to surround and separate. On the other hand, speech seems almost to flow from art that reflects language as much as light. Yet discourse is neither passive nor dependent, and its history is partly the history of ideas. Ambitious system building is involved. Efforts to erect monuments of material art are matched by equally looming structures formed out of the antimatter of commentary. And that art facts and discourse are at some fundamental level in deadly opposition cannot be denied: the former most usually dedicated to impulses beyond rationalizing, the latter committed to absorb by ever higher levels of abstraction every expressed art fact—to say nothing of exercising its ego-demolishing, ranking hierarchies. Yet the two are locked in symbiosis. Pulses of energy and ideas pass between the two: a dialogue that both incapacitates and sustains.

Conceivably it is our agreement about causality that not only orients us in the world, but puts the majority of people on what is believed to be the outside of a fence isolating them from others, called insane, who have more idiosyncratic views on the matter. If a sequence of events in proximity never established causality for Hulme, nor even resulted in his confinement, no doubt his enormous equanimity would have enabled him to bear what historians have not. Thus torrential, if shifting, mainstreams have so often been perceived by the larger number of critics who would have us take them as being on the outside of the fence. Those who see merely eddies and ripples documenting not the fluid surges of art's direction but merely the disturbed electrical storms within their own heads. For, without doubt, a tidal undertow has informed most art discourse: a rational, deterministic, and progressive mainstream of history connects the art facts that are borne along. By virtue of the fact that they are seen to move in one direction, their differences and their discontinuities are allowed, the twin properties of interruption and flow mediated. Most art discourse has, in one way or another, subscribed to this Hegelian oceanography. Of course, it is to the text of modernism that one must turn for its most comical and even fascistic aspects. There that grim, flat-footed, numbing catechism of the linear, the inevitable, the developmental, the immediate, the concrete, the irreducible, and the self-critically dropped pieces of abstraction provide a full-blown caricature of this defense against the discontinuous, the merely sequential, and most of all, against the unnecessary.

Within a society so guided by the mechanistic values of pragmatism, an enterprise claiming to aspire to the nonutilitarian needs a ready rationalization for its existence. And if art has not been very willing to admit that it serves classes or institutions but seeks for itself a separateness, then the assertion of a historical necessity by a dialectical unfolding within its own internal development is, if not justification, at least a strong excuse. A less politicized need for a rationale of dialectical necessity emerged from abstract art's strenuous efforts to rescue its status



8.2 Robert Morris, *Card File,* 1963. (Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.)

from that of the merely decorative. That is, it must, besides being rife with esthetic qualities, signify something beyond its existence as mere object. In short, it must assert its power as a sign if it is not to collapse into what Lévi-Strauss called the status of a "signifier without a signified." The only avenue abstract art ever had to significance led to and away from history. But a work could bathe in the historical mainstream and frolic in its bubbly significance only by demonstrating dialectical clout. A dialectical profile of necessary moves has notarized the significant in all advanced art. In effect then, the mainstream was not only an inevitable torrent, but it also virtually stopped and started forward again within the space it took to nominate the next necessary masterpiece. This is a threatened and dramatic notion of a current, to say the least, and one that was kept in motion by the most elaborate mastery of a system of verbal locks, levels, tributaries, etc. The force of the mainstream was alternately seen as unstoppable or, like the old movie serials, saved from imminent drought by the next dialectical cloudburst of an individual breakthrough: necessity was claimed both ways.

The conversion of a sequence of past events into a series of dialectical steps confers on the past more than directional progress. At the root of hypostatizing differences into thesis and antithesis, oscillations and contrasts into contradictions, lies the desperate, animistic compulsion to deny the contingency of man's acts at all costs. The uses of the past to illustrate the shape of art's change as a coherent progression informs all recent art theory. Institutionalized memory remains the primary mythical arena, dominated and terrorized by the inadmissable suspicion that time passes the more or less random processes of cultural change rather than receiving the impress of evolving systems.

The process has its political and economic basis as well, for all theories of art's recent history are also theories of scarcity in which a given "line" of works and people are posited as the significant one. Continuities can be established by building a Kublerian sequence of generative influences: primes, traits, replicas, etc. The game of building a

dialectical line allows for rationalizations of more discontinuities—in fact, it demands them. Which way one works backward into the past is not so much of consequence as is the maintenance of agreed-upon exclusive nodes along the line. One of discourse's major tasks is to see to the maintenance of exclusivity. A requirement for these few is not so much that they create a single, unique work but rather that they produce by repetition or slight variation a large amount of one kind of thing: a kind of "modulated" scarcity suitable for the present distribution systems. The latter feature is further mediated by those rankings of "quality" within such a spread.

If modernism was merely the narrowest text in recent art discourse, the historical mechanics of progress through self-critical, dialectical redefinition is ubiquitously called upon to account for the abundance of those disjunctive stylistic shifts that have been going on since the nineteenth century.[2] It might be asked whether in recent years such thinking has been confined to mere rationalization. Perhaps it even achieved the status of literally embraced doctrine. For a kind of self-conscious critical thought informs those moves that came to be known as postmodernism. Perhaps what explained programmed as well—a case of those pulses passing the membrane of commentary to animate the waves of production. As formal permutations within the classical modes of painting and sculpture reached the saturation point of critical inquisition, their imminent transcendency had been for some time in the program. Once that quantum shift consisting of the substitution of modes or formats for formal moves occurred, once the so-called dialectical game was played with proliferating formats as moves rather than the permutations of forms within formats, a certain compressed tension, previously bound by the enclosing classical modes, deflated. Deploying into the front ranks of action that critical method which had been discourse's instrument for keeping score in the battle was the first of three broad strategies that served to bring a somewhat militaristic, half-century-long campaign to an end. For this particular strategy of converting the critical into the active

had more than the ironic consequences of demolishing an oppressive discourse with its own methods. Something was being stirred in those sedimentary layers and muddying the waters.

The dawning of crisis frequently comes with a loss of innocence. Art's innocence went with having to give up a certain historical naiveté concerning the necessary. And as claims to a deterministic, dialectical tide began to recede into ideology, so did the claims to meaning for that large enterprise the discourse had kept afloat: abstract art. A flooding pluralism—from Conceptualism to body art to all kinds of performance and documentation—surged over the intricate system of necessary historical locks, past reservoirs, deep channels, and rights of way. If, at the time of occurrence, any of these new modalities claimed dialectical necessity (and Conceptualism was the only one to articulate such a claim), their initial tidal waves soon subsided to ripples. So too did much that had previously gone on within the classical confines. A trivializing of art, in retrospect, was a consequence of pluralism overthrowing linearity, for the sense of the inevitable becomes undermined, historical claims to necessity that anchor signifieds become absurdities. What was previously stiffened by a militaristic dialectic suddenly collapsed into mere individual expression. Actions previously sustained as critical moves began looking like so much production. Certain suspicions of programs of economic expansion replaced those of glittering historical conquest. Something had come loose in the anchoring of art discourse, and that looseness, felt almost as a vacuum, was discourse's inability to embed art facts into the reassuring authoritarianism of history. Art's recent history collapsed into ideology.

Animating a pluralism of modalities, however, was an underlying commonality of means that might be termed the strategy of automated making. Although it has not been emphasized, it seems impotent to recognize that this gradual, pervasive development of the automated came to infect so many areas of art and to join in the mutual task of undermining the heroic. Frank Stella[3] initiated some of the first of these structuralist strategies by converting the process of painting into a system of picture-

8.3 **Barry Le Va, Performance by the artist of *Velocity Piece #2 (Impact Run)*, 1970.**

making in which the arbitrary and incremental are abolished in favor of compulsory development. The weight of the art act is thereby shifted from judgments about termination toward decisions for initiation. The a priori idea hovers over and informs the work. Unlike the ideological levels, in the process of making, the inevitable and the necessary are both mocked and underlined. If the shadow of Duchamp clouds such acts, it also shades even the earlier work of Pollock's from a different angle. For every noticeable act of American art that emphasizes the strategies of making passes through this shadow to learn from Duchamp's uses of processes and materials. Although the art of the 1960s set systems in motion by the a priori, it was not until Conceptualism that the work ethic was surrendered. Making then looped back to close a circle initiated by the Readymade, which had employed the ultimate method of the a priori: choice alone. If these strategies of the a priori lead back to Duchamp, they touch only the operational areas of his work. With the exception of certain obvious iconographic references, there have been few efforts to mine the semantic levels of that oeuvre.

The subsequent passage of relevant making strategies from painting to sculpture in the mid-1960s had primarily to do with the expansion of this making behavior into the increased possibilities offered to the body in three dimensions. The move from virtual into actual space involved also the annexation of a number of readymade technological forming processes to replace hand forming. The body's manipulation of things—or the identifiable extension of its work potentialities by simple technologies—intersected with actual space, time, and gravity to expand definitions for self-regulating and self-competing making systems. The strategy moved into a number of modalities, each of which played a variation on this structuralist theme of surrounding a given process with systematic developmental rules to produce wholeness and self-completion. This strongly phenomenological strategy of activities seeking natural limits, regulations, and closures through the release of what was systematic in that alignment between the properties of actions and the physical tenden-

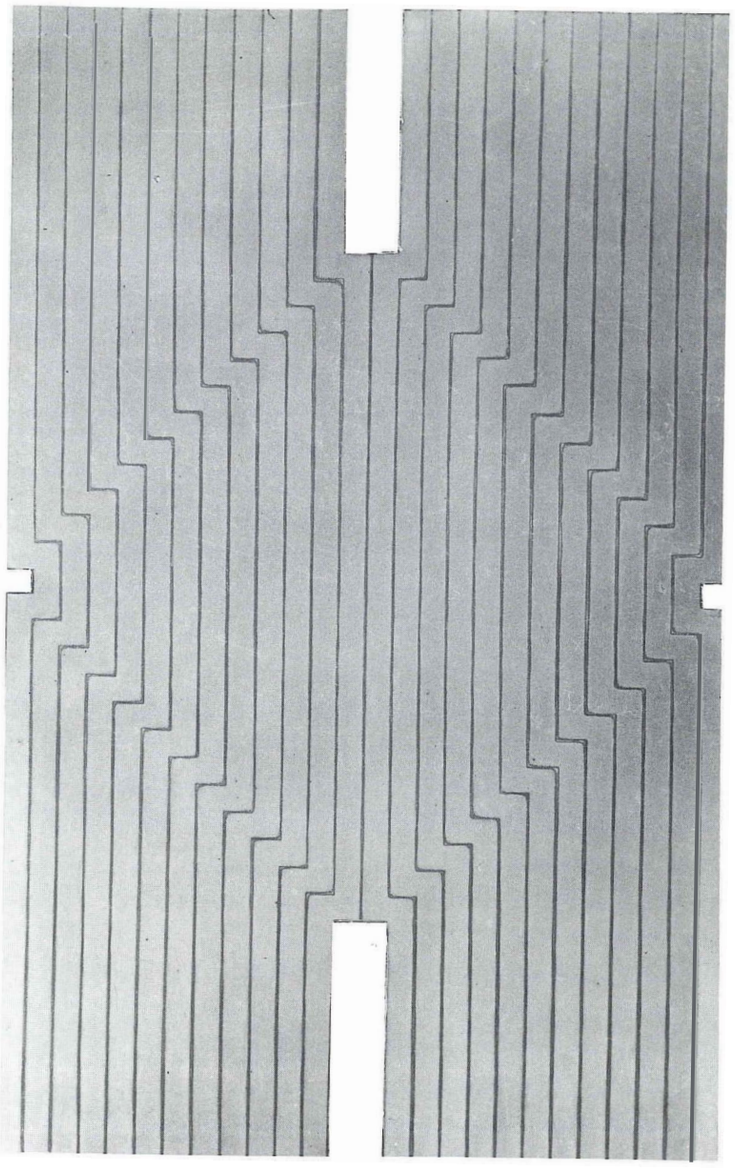
cies of a given media seemed to know neither rest nor fatigue, traversing as it did object art, Process art, all kinds of documentations of nature and culture, and all kinds of performances, including music. Perhaps it is finally tailing out as a narrative proxy in film where the final use of this self-referential device to compress form into content will expire. Certainly it is time it was retired. Undoubtedly its waning is bringing to a close those discrete risks known as formal innovations, although its exhaustion may be incapable of stemming that running high tide of formalistic productions.

If the making process once seemed to have all the notches of the handmade, that holistic phrase with its sequential nodes of idea, process, object, perception, and critical reevaluation, Stella's strategies in the striped paintings compressed the phrase, rendering irrelevant both process and reevaluation. Not only was his painting thereby driven toward a constructed object, but the making phrase itself had been made highly visible by this short-circuiting strategy, which was as abbreviated as it was systematic. Later Minimal work, being more fully three-dimensional, was not subject to the contradictions inherent in driving a flat image into the status of an object. But if its phenomenological examination of a type of making that considered real space, materials, and undisguised shop-type forming amputated no steps in the process, its very deliberate directionality—toward ever more dense objects—confined to invisibility everything in the making phrase that had to do with time. Did those subsequent branching formats of the late 1960s punch through the classical modes of painting and sculpture, and can their motivations be ascribed to programs for splitting the obdurate object along the eliminated seams of those fracturing strategies that generated its density? Or was it more a matter of seeing and using what had been left out? For art since Stella had called attention to the subtracted and unused even as it emphasized the systematic. Perhaps Leo Steinberg's seemingly astute observation that American art strove to replace love by work falls somewhat short of the mark.[4] For American art has been revealed, little by little since World

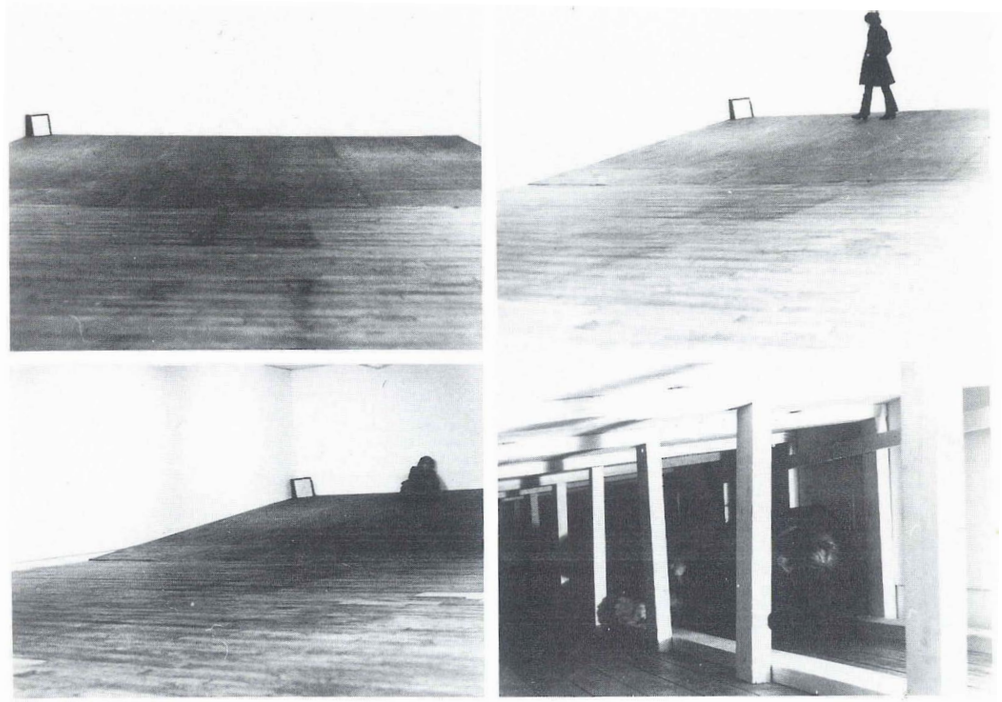
War II, as an extensive horizon of behavior—not work—in which any given realization touched but a few nodes on a vast expanse. Perhaps neither workmanlike delamination nor dialectical transcendence was required to get at these nodes. One entered at any given point. Each node opened as a separate strategy—from Conceptual, to Process, to body action, to the critical. Possibly neither the blind forces of cultural contradictions nor the alienated belligerence of art "workers" need be called on in tracing the proliferating currents of recent art modalities. Perhaps a certain analytical intelligence, available even to some artists, was at work as they reached out for the obvious options.

And as the making phrase diffracted into its separate parts, the artist began to face his activities in a different direction. If art previously had something of the character of an act taken against the world, or more accurately, against the world once removed by the isolation of the studio, it ceased to address itself to that lonely situation of rehearsal where the individual act was adjusted and finalized for subsequent presentation as communication in a gallery. Armed with an ever more tightly wound sense of the a priori, the artist turned more directly to address his audience, to release his plan energized by this or that self-completing system, without the need for rehearsal. Moving closer to his audience, the artist finally seized the act of transmission itself as subject. Objects, in one form or another, still mediated, but with all the transparency that linguistic, photographic, or personal presences could provide. No doubt Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed* achieved a kind of ultimate transparency and directness of transmission by requiring the audience to assume without proof his behavior and to fill in its contours with their own fantasy. The transmission of fantasy is possibly the ultimate reduction of the mediating object and the most inclusive use of audience. At this point the audience becomes both the artist's subject and his object.

The third set of forces eroding the foundations of art as a heroic enterprise are less distinct, more pervasive, more subtle, and even contradictory. For these forces have their locus in the very support systems

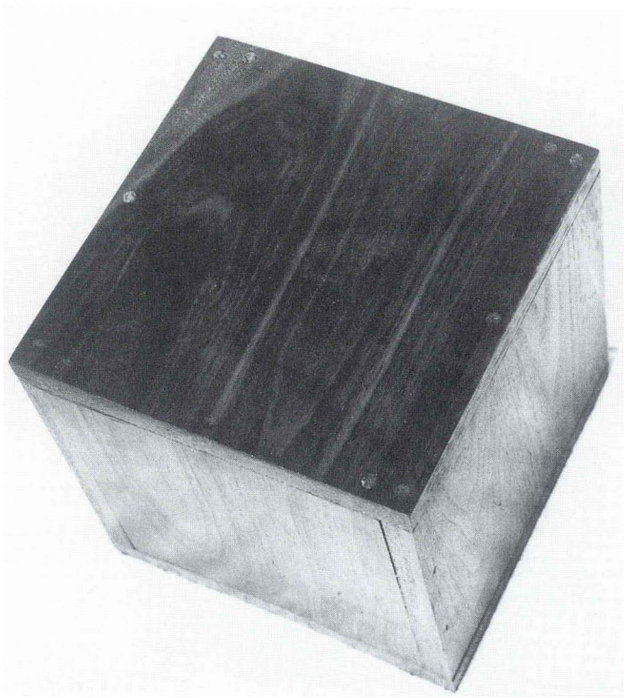


8.4 **Frank Stella, *Newstead Abbey,* 1960. (© 1992 Frank Stella/ARS, New York; courtesy of *Artforum*.)**



8.5 **Vito Acconci, *Seed Bed,* 1972. (Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York; photo: Kathy Dillon.)**

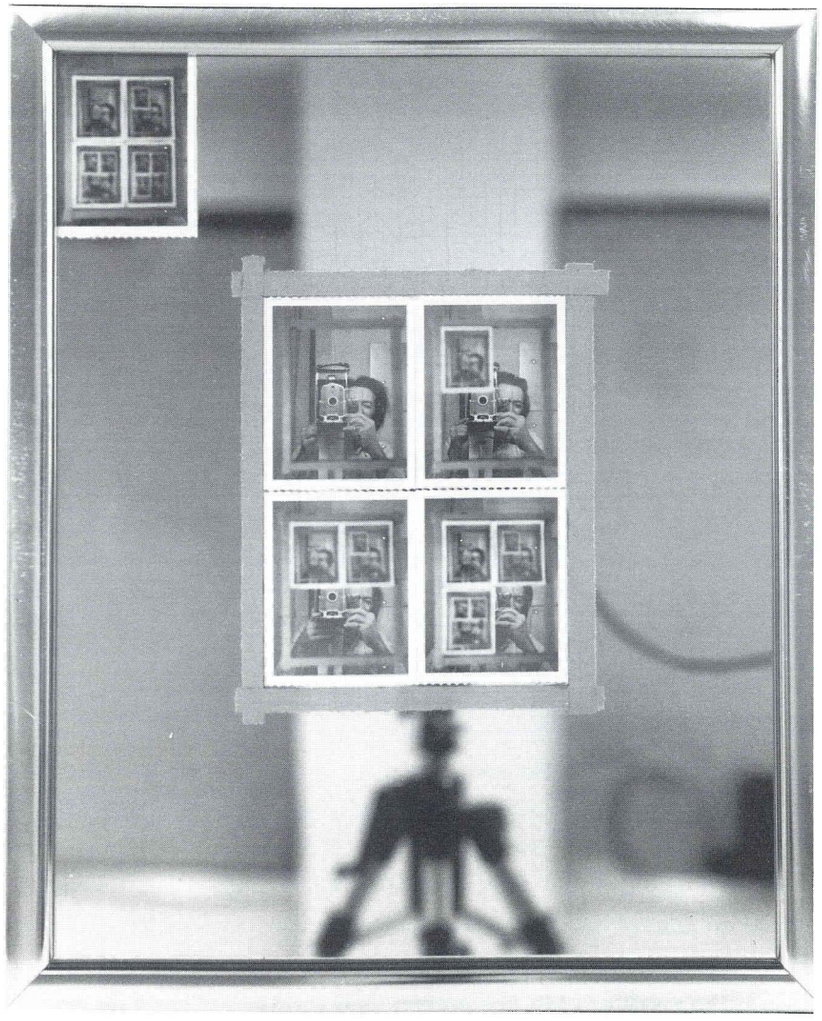
that made modern art such an illuminated chunk of the culture. The mediation of discourse is, of course, one pillar in this support. The unwinding of those formalistic features—from the abstract formalism of painting in the early part of the century to the verbal formalism of Conceptualism today—served as a perfect comfort to a middle class willing to pay for a spectacle of nonpolitical risks. Art provided reassurances that creativity was not only safe but that its monuments were bound to atrophy and perish outside the protective incubation of the various sup-



8.6 Robert Morris, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making,* 1961. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

ports guaranteed by that middle class. And if art discourse wished to assign revolutionary characteristics to this long march, could not those comfort stations of the esthetic be found at every point along the route? Art constitutes the only totemism of the bourgeoisie. It alone conjures up the only transcendent objects to be had in the midst of faceless valuables. Needless to say, the producer as well as receiver is governed by this totemism of the magical product imbued with the magical, comforting act. Mediating the rituals of exchange was one of the functions of discourse, with its gentle nudges, its slightly opaque signposts, its beckoning promises of adventures, and its accompanying superstructures of justification. Its myriad voices blended into a soft humming that regulated as well as rewarded, sustained while it saturated: a surrounding background presence of gentle voices. In short, discourse articulated an environment of class commands so inclusive as to appear directionless. Over the last half-century, advanced art has been expanded by media and enlarged museum programs and proliferating galleries to become both an extended marketplace and a cultural byword. It has been a safe, contained spectacle where one could watch the critical turn constantly back on itself, where it might not only harmlessly "purify" itself, but finally transform the critical itself into those production values under whose banner now swarm the legions of SoHo.

But if discourse reveals itself now as little more than a reflection of class commands for production or collective ideology of historicism, if art itself is pulverized and diffracted, and if other support systems convert art at every turn into entertainment and investment, what can be expected to arise from the blasted horizon of the art enterprise? Could discourse reconstitute itself? No answer. It appears demoralized. Impotent to usher art out of the cultural anterooms of the decorative, it oscillates between hysterical but half-hearted attempts to prop up one more hero and sour dismissals of large blocks of related works. At its most positive, it occasionally launches one more unneeded, safe historical text on some artist too well established to involve any risk. Discourse founders and no



8.7 **Michael Snow, *Authorization*, 1969. (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.)**

longer knows what it is supposed to mediate. If art facts always had an individual identity, that identity could only be ratified by the communal affirmation of discourse on the basis of family resemblances. The bow of discourse toward related works was a gesture of control, a nod for exclusive entry. In short, it was a political act—and one so often and so tiresomely made by condemning one type of work, or even one individual, in order to moralize about the virtues of another. Certainly no act of discourse has been an encouragement for freedom. And discourse is now at a loss with such an expanded horizon, with the plethora of individual expressions, modalities, and forms so often abandoned after a single use. Perhaps also threatening now is the slight rise in the coefficient of personal content, since what has been coherent in art discourse for a half-century has been at the expense of avoiding semantic levels. Confined to mediating the syntax of form, discourse has primarily articulated a grammar of visual lumps.

But perhaps demoralization is not total. Perhaps some see a certain hope in the possibility that art might yet undergo a seismic shift as its basis of social place and function. Only then could a coherent art arise. Such an art might be less closed, less self-involved. Given certain shifts in function, such an art might be less anxious to deliver an "experience" unique unto itself. It might be an art less concerned about productions than with services. In short, an art might yet arise that would be less about individual expression and more about public environment. Public, environmental art has been a subject of continuous discussion as an alternative to the kind of individualistic art that has predominated in the modern era. William Morris, Mondrian, Leger, and the Bauhaus took up the question in various ways. But can it be imagined today? Do its beginnings reside in dispensing spray cans to every subway rider? Or perhaps larger and finer public parks will usher it in. Certainly more abstract monuments burdening the landscape could not stir that hope. But if the imagination falters, the speculation raises a further question. Perhaps no social value can now be assigned to art in any of its forms.

Any expectation or hope for coherent art that would be broadly based in the culture is completely deluded. Art's present collapse is merely the result of overextension, and nothing can be slipped under this to shore it up. And, finally, what remains the least comforting and most interesting of facts about art is its unneededness: that indissoluble grit of its arbitrariness that is left over after all of the justifications and uses have been made for and of it. Perhaps art deserves no more support than it can manipulate for itself. If its discourse now sloshes back and forth, causing a kind of tired flood in the support systems that come to look more and more like old MGM lots, one might expect art to sink below the surface, to reappear or not reappear elsewhere. Or perhaps it won't sink, but will continue to float around, soggy, bloated, and malodorous.

It has been said that the uses and transmissions of signs and things constitute culture and sets man apart from nature. And if man's survival was based on these means, he nevertheless, exists wrapped in their alienness, homeless with his powers. It seems that until now art has served, in one way or another, to soften or temper the harshness of these means, to find access within them that would either 1) lead back to nature or 2) where subversion could be worked on them in order to reduce their strictly pragmatic, operational instrumentality. If the former effort was directed toward a reclamation of intimacy, the latter was toward a reduction of alienness. This is not to say that art functioned to naturalize culture and culturize nature. It would seem rather that art was involved in a contradictory contraction away from both polarities, even as it occupied them. For if art tempered the servile instrumentality of culture, its moves toward nature were not unmediated affirmations of some unconscious propensity for onement. For this would have been a pull toward a loss of identity, and art until now has been completely at the service of underlining man's identity. If art occupied these polar areas of perplexity—culture's instrumentalities and nature's rawness—it was an occupation for resistance, not collaboration. It was through this resistance, made within that particular space provided by art, that man returned to himself.

Through this double refusal he reconstituted himself as a transcendent agent free of the dictates of either nature or culture. If this was a form of self-flattery, these heroic refusals have a long tradition stretching back to the Renaissance.

In this drama of continuing humanism, the abstract object proved to be a final and most serviceable totem, for it combined the density of physical properties found in nature with the animistic projection that all things must, somehow, speak to man and bear signs which only his humming discourse could unlock. Abstract art perpetuated the heroic

8.8 Steve Reich, *Pendulum Music,* 1968. Performed at Loeb Student Center, New York University, November 14, 1971, by Laura Dean, Steve Paxton, Steve Reich, Richard Serra, and Michael Snow. In photo (left to right) Steve Reich and Michael Snow. (Courtesy of *Artforum;* photo: © Peter Moore.)

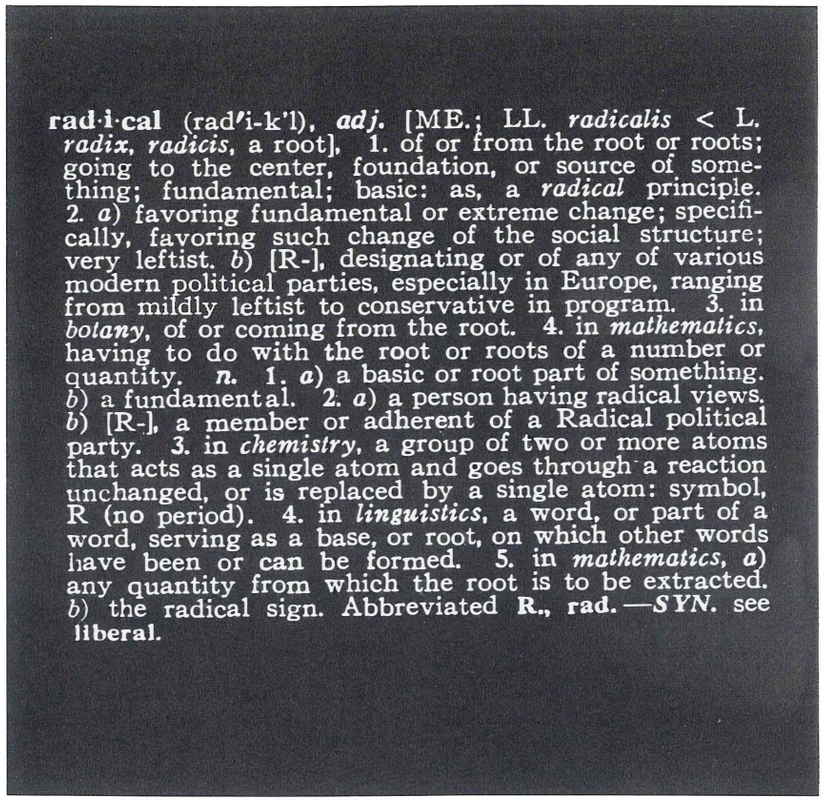
picture because it allowed man to pull toward himself the impenetrabilities of things and the transparencies of signs in a single contraction. Nothing sums up this attitude better than those bombastic expressions, Earthworks. Slightly mutated off the family line of sculpture, they perhaps represent the terminal acromegaly of abstract art in which a kind of Wagnerian geometry is imposed upon the vegetable and the mineral.

If the Readymade was at the time of its appearance an intense denial of the instrumentality of culture, the repetition of cultural appropriation as a method for producing art was just the opposite—an acquiescence to the cultural and an abandonment of personal refusal. (Duchamp obviously knew this when he "limited" the number of Readymades he would produce per year.) By means of a number of different modalities, much recent work appropriates both natural and cultural processes. What is judged as a lack of nerve, as a flaccidity and weakness in such work, is precisely its deliberate abandonment of heroic refusals. This is not to imply that the strategies of these various modalities either grew, step by step, out of the Readymade, or even that the Readymade was the first manifestation of a larger, inevitable structure. Either assertion involves the kind of historicizing to which objections have been raised. On the whole the sort of dredging operation attempted on some of the now fading attitudes and beliefs concerning the heroic and the historic, together with the attempt to plot a few of the flow patterns of some recent developments, has not been a diachronic developmental effort. Rather, a converging of complementary and even contradictory forces, a collection of related attitudes, a seeping and spreading of strategies have been sketchily charted as interpenetrating currents.

First eased in as aiding techniques in the classical modes, self-completing strategies now find their emancipated realizations in some many linguistic, documented, photographed works that appropriate the structural feature of either culture or nature. With this emancipation has come a fundamental shift at the bases underlying the making of art. The former negating, inward contraction of the nature/culture extremities as

an assertion of transcendent individual identity gives way to the agreeable embrace of either polarity. The artist as journalistic antihero ostensively locating his art replaces the Romantic artist who would draw his art out of himself as he resists absorption by either nature or culture. This new personality cuts across the need for a responsive discourse not only because he frequently uses language itself as means, but because he does not produce transcendent objects in need of language's mediation.

A phase of art ends. It foundered partly on the contradictions of a negating, critical enterprise transforming itself into one of bland production. Its success was its undoing, the notion of "professional artist" is a contradiction in terms for any avant-garde position. Other corners of the edifice crumbled because the underlying epistemology of the accompanying discourse was so rotten with historicism. What seems most to have ended is a kind of discourse for which there now seems to be no need. Art has by no means ended, only transformed itself to a position of adjustment and accommodation. Polite to a fault in dispensing its services, aware of its modest skills, it moves with all that quiet self-assurance that knowing and accepting one's place confers on actions. It is true that there is not silence surrounding this work. There is still language, some of which speaks for the work, pleased perhaps to at last relax; some speaks against it, out of nostalgia perhaps for the work, pleased perhaps for the old *Sturm und Drang*. But there is now no discourse that need speak to the work. Perhaps discourse as a communal text formed out of competing and complementary but related readings of art cannot form in the present environment of pluralities of expressions and a lost historical faith. Or, conceivably, the kinds of generalizations that would mediate and forge the apparent pluralities into a coherent text have not yet been made. If the former proves to be the case, discourse will perhaps transform itself—losing much of its former political power in the process—into a collection of divergent, personal appreciations and commentaries: a prospect as doubtful as it is hopeful.



8.9 Joseph Kosuth, *Titled (Art As Idea As Idea)*, 1968. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

9 Aligned with Nazca

I

> "I am not one of the big world, I am of the little world," was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first.
>
> —*Samuel Beckett, Murphy*

PROLOGUE—DIARY

Peru. Coastal desert, mountains, jungle. West to east in that order. Military junta on the left. Communized haciendas, nationalized utilities. Attempting to avoid Allende's unworkable democracy. In six years Pizarro got it all with 200 men and 80 horses. Half the population still Indian. Languages dying out unrecorded. One road, the Panamerican highway, south from Lima through the sand. Here and there an oasis. Where the culture began. Paracas weaving. How many knots to the square inch? Six million under the Incas at the height of the empire. But only three inventions: the foot plow, the plumb bob, and mortarless masonry. Administrators who knew of, but forbade, writing. Sand blows across the road constantly. South from Lima. Glasslike sea on the right. Andes to the left. White and black mountains. Unstable glaciers hanging off the Cordillera Blanca. Six thousand obliterated when the glacier fell on Huascaran in 1962. Spaniards "liberated" Nazca leaving no one to speak of the "lines." Lowlanders made the inventions. Empires came from the mountains. The cold heights of stubbornness. The Urus of Lake Titicaca, thinking themselves subhuman, refused to assimilate. Last Uru dead in

9.1 Looking down on a Nazca line drawing. (Courtesy of Robert Morris.)

1955. Here it is hot. Sensuality of the first oasis, Canete (147 km. south of Lima). Erotic pottery. Ripe and rotting fruit. Bought avocados. Skeleton water pots with erections in the Rafael Larco Herrera Museum. The desert slides down from the mountains to the sea. Or is it a huge beach going the other direction? Wind blows constantly, drifting sand over the road, rocking the car, opening up patches of sun in the glaring coastal fog. Eyes fatigued, taste of sand in the mouth. Highlanders different. Incas with barrel chests, two more quarts of blood. For the altitude. The cold heights of administration where walls were built, order recorded in

quipu knots, Quechua imposed. Here below, mud and the oasis. Soft wet earth for growing, making pots, adobe houses. Glistening brown nude boys in the irrigation ditches. Remembering the female mummy in the Herrera Museum. Still beautiful, full set of perfect teeth and the fine eyebrows still intact. Twinges of necrophilia in the groin. Mud pots with erections. She was from Paracas. The mummy. About three thousand years ago. The road leaves the turn off to Paracas at 234 km. and veers inland. South from Lima, only sand. The dunes become larger. Miles to the right two small whirlwinds chase one another, leaving a whitish wake in the dark desert surface. Eyes ache from the glare. Just past Ica (306 km.) the tiny figure of a woman carrying a large bundle and moving through unmarked sand toward the mountains. Her red scarf the only dot of color in the landscape. A dessicated Corot. On across the desolate Pampa de Huayuri eating dust behind a tank truck for eight kilometers. Finally the oasis of Palpa. Hand cut peeling an avocado. Ripe and dark fruit. Women staring. Different standards of beauty before. Heads bound into long, round shapes, short or high in Chavin times. Herrera female mummy. Perfect set of teeth. Hand sticky with blood and soft avocado. Trepanned skulls in the archeology museum. Sixty percent survived the operations. Gold plate replaced the removed bone. Long climb up to the Pampa Colorado. Five hundred square kilometers of tablelands where they drew the lines. Bounded by Palpa and Nazca. Two oasis. Mud and ripe fruit. Wet earth equals life. Water pots with erections for spouts. Impregnating the desert. Long lines of irrigation slits and trenches. Glistening nude boys bathing. Brown erections in the muddy water. Ditches moving off in lines. Searching for different lines here. Artificial, dry and on an uninhabitable plateau. The Nazca lines somewhere on the Pampa. Light fading now. Sand still blowing over the road. Five P.M. six kilometers outside Nazca. No lines. Missed them completely in the fading light. Try tomorrow.

9.2 Checan Ithyphallic Water Pot

Log

At 7:30 the next morning I returned to the Pampa Colorado in search of the lines I had missed the day before. I drove northwest from the town of Nazca through the ever-present thin morning fog. A pale sun was coming up over the eastern mountains. The Panamerican road moves across the plain within a few miles of the first ranges of mountains to the northeast. Further to the north are other ranges. The desert stretches away uninterrupted to the southwest, where it eventually drops into a valley.

In the early morning light, about 20 kilometers out of Nazca, I saw to the left a faint geometric rectangle stretching along an east-west axis. It was barely distinguishable in the flat, pebbly desert surface. I got out of the car and walked toward this shape for about a quarter of an hour. I seemed to approach no closer and realized the deceptiveness of distances in the immense space stretching away to the southwest. It was possible, however, to see that the shape was trapezoidal; its narrowing in the western direction seemed too extreme to be a result of perspective. It was one of the types of markings I had expected to find, the others being the narrower straight lines and the figures of animals and geometric forms.

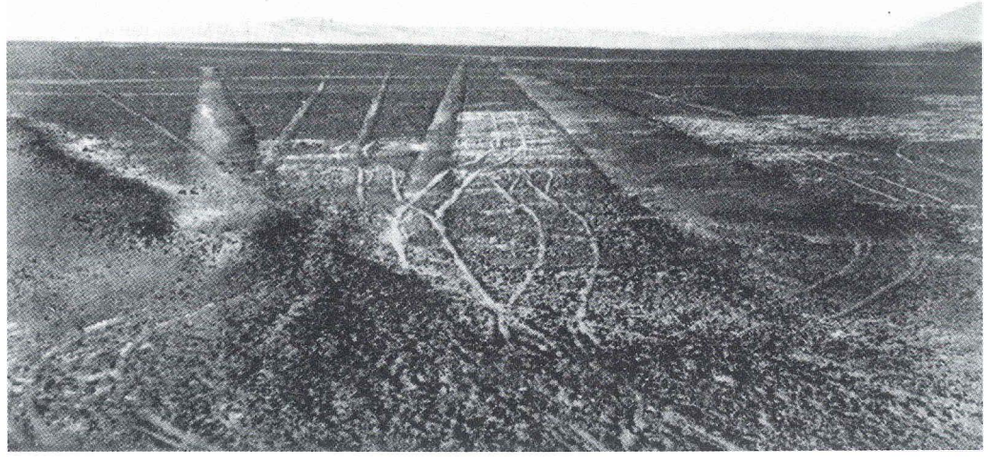
About two-thirds of the way back to Palpa two yellow signs I had completely missed the day before announced the site as an archeological area and cautioned against disturbing it. From these signs a secondary service road ran perpendicular to the highway in a southwestern direction. The surface of this road was a fine, light ocher sand approaching dust. On both sides of the road the ground was darker, nearly sienna with black mixed into it. The surface of the desert was covered with small stones of this color. The land was not absolutely flat but undulated out in all directions and rose slightly in elevation to the southwest. I began to see "lines" which the road cut through. Some of these were no more than a foot wide. Others varied from two to six feet in width. The lines had been made by removing the stones along a straight axis and

placing these along the desired width of the line as a kind of irregular curbing. The ground itself appeared to have been excavated slightly. That is, the lines were not just drawn by clearing a path through the stones, but were actual depressions or shallow incisions in the surface of the earth.

Maria Reiche speculates that the lines were made with brooms, the small stones and the darker oxidized top layer of sand being swept from side to side along the line's axis. Dr. Reiche also has an explanation for the durability of the markings:

> It seems almost incredible that ground-drawings made by superficially scratching the surface could have withstood the ravages of time and weather over such long periods. The climate is one of the driest of the globe. One could say that it rains fo. half an hour every two years. And although strong winds carry great quantities of sand, not encountering any obstacles on the vast tablelands open towards north and south, they take it further north, where at seventy miles' distance one can see huge dunes on both sides of the highway. Moreover close to the ground the air is becalmed considerably. Owing to their dark color, the surface stones absorb much heat, causing a cushion of warm air to protect the surface from strong winds. An additional factor contributing to the ground remaining undisturbed for hundreds of years is that the soil contains a certain amount of gypsum which, moistened by daily morning dew, slightly affixes every stone to its base . . .[1]

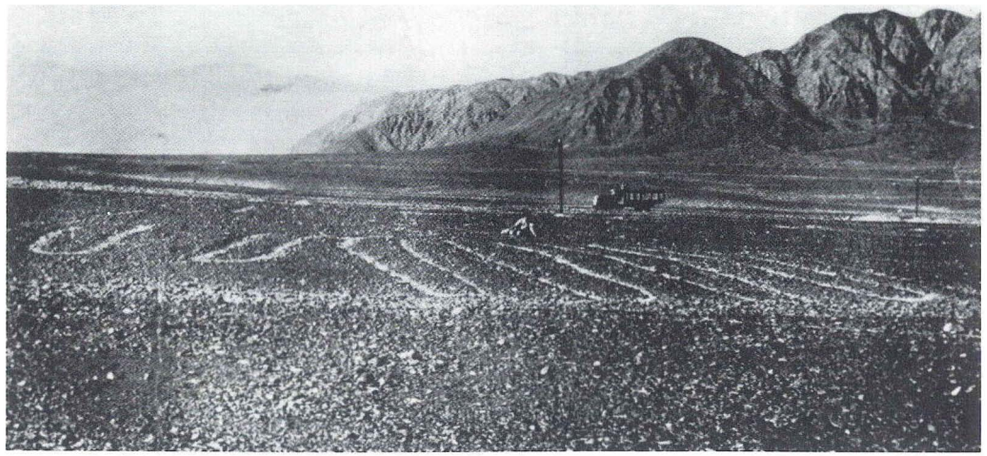
Generally, the wider the line, the greater build-up of an "edge." Where the secondary road crossed the larger plains or trapezoidal shapes, the edges were quite pronounced. Some of these areas were so wide that if one were not at a great distance from them, the two edges could not



9.3 View of Nazca lines from the ground. The irregular tracks in the foreground were made by a modern truck. (Photo: Maria Reiche.)

be seen at once—one saw only a single ridge or curbing stretching away into the distance.

I have described the two different colors of the top and underlayer of desert earth. Yet the lines do not contrast greatly in color from their surroundings. It is more the absence of stones on the pathways and the slight alignment of stones along the edges that give, at close range, the suggestion of regularity. Standing within a line and looking down at one's feet, the line hardly "reads." There are seldom enough stones at the edge to mark a distinct curb or defining edge, and the cleared area is never flat and free of stones. At close range the lines simply do not reveal themselves. It is only by positioning oneself within a line so that it stretches away to the horizon that they have any clarity. And their definition or emergence as distinct geometric figures occurs only with a mid- or long-range view, where the effect of perspective then compresses the



9.4 Partial view of a line drawing of a pair of hands. The four fingers and thumb of one hand and the thumb of the other hand can be recognized. (Photo: Paul Kosok.)

length and foreshortening reinforces the edges. Since lines are seldom perfectly straight within any local segment, it is only by looking out rather than down that, by virtue of their great length, the irregularities fade and the gestalt of linearity emerges. All this happens when one stands within a line and sees it meet the horizon perpendicularly. At that vantage point, the greatest foreshortening and compression occurs and the line is revealed with the greatest clarity.

Yet when walking across the desert, the lines come into view at various diagonals before one actually reaches them. As one approaches the line, it swings more into a 90° relation to the horizon, reaching maximum definition as one crosses it. As one leaves it and this definition

9.5 Ceremonial lines "etched" into a hillside. (Photo: Maria Reiche.)

fades, its relation to the horizon becomes more acute. Lines of all widths, some forming trapezoids, cross one another constantly and move toward all points on the compass. The crossings have a particular character. The curbings have been carefully removed at all intersections so that no one line interrupts the linearity of another. When one looks down a line it is never blocked, even though it may be crossed by innumerable others. This would seem to imply either that the lines were all made at the same time (unlikely) or that previous lines were always respected.

After an hour or so of walking and observing, one becomes very aware of how one's behavior as an observer affects the visibility and definition of the lines. Greatest definition is obtained not only by the body's positioning itself so that the line stretches out 90° to the horizon,

9.6 Aerial view of two stylized angular spirals and two sets of "pan pipes." (Photo: Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional 543:24, Lima, Peru.)

9.7 Maze of markings, south of the Ingenio Valley, continuing some fifteen to twenty miles south into the Nazca Valley. (Photo: Paul Kosok.)

but by focusing on the line at some distance. For this definition, one looks out, away, across, not close up or at. When one stands on a flat plane that stretches away as far as one can see, the horizon line is always at eye level. This is true at Nazca in every direction except the northeast, where the mountains rise. One looks out over a relatively featureless landscape of desert and realizes that exactly half of what is within one's vision is land and half sky.

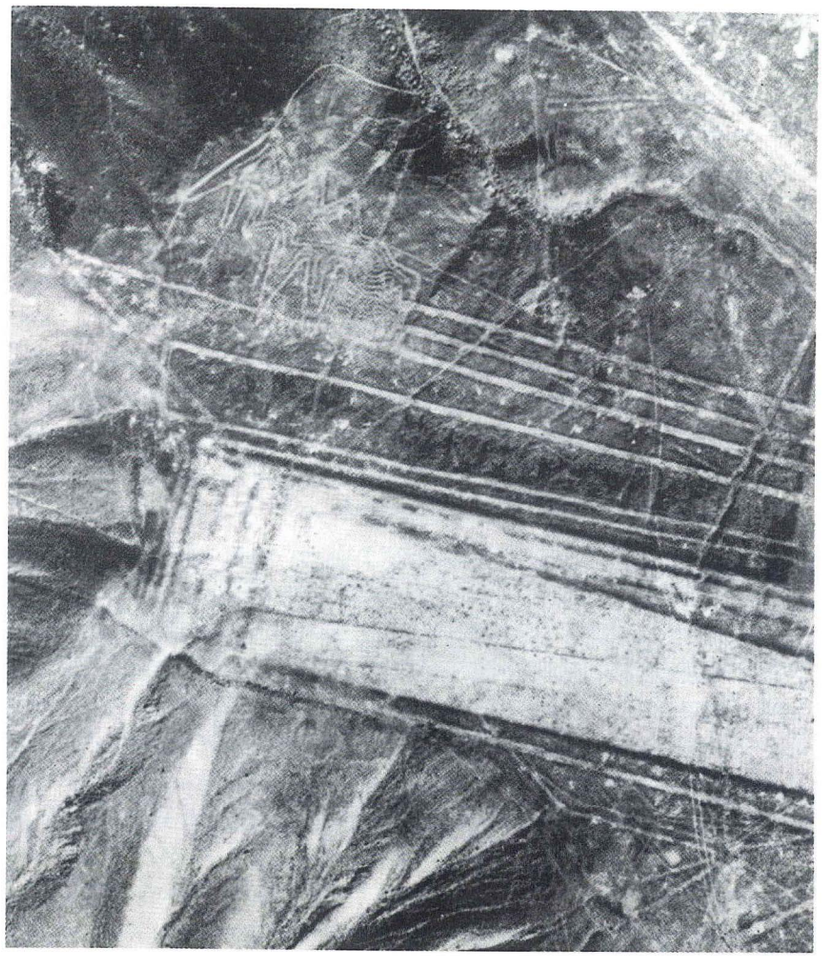
Unlike urban spaces, the ground plane is not confined to a brief flatness constantly interrupted by verticals. In a landscape like that of

Nazca the ground plane does not remain merely horizontal, for it extends up to one's vision to the height of one's eyes at the distant horizon. The opposition of street and building, floor and wall, of close-up urban seeing, is nonexistent. One sees instead always at a distance, the known flatness of the ground also becomes visible "elevation" at the horizon. The lines inscribed on the plain become visible by the lines and, conversely, the lines become visible only by virtue of the extension of that plain—literally from under one's feet up to the level of one's eyesight. The horizontal becomes vertical through extension. The lines become visible by the "tilt" of the ground plane and subsequent compression of foreshortening. The further down the line one looks, the greater its definition. Yet the greater the distance, the less definition of detail. The lines are both more general and more distinct as lines in direct proportion to the distance focused by the eye. The gestalt becomes stronger as the detail becomes weaker.

It is no wonder that everyone I spoke to in Peru advised me to contact the nearby naval air field and see the lines from the air. Comments such as "there is nothing to see from the ground," or "you are going to fly over them, aren't you?" were common from people in the United States who had seen them as well as from Peruvians. And various books speak of the "near invisibility" of the lines when viewed from the ground. Aerial photography returns us to our expected viewpoint. Looking down, the earth becomes a wall at 90° to our vision. We see them in that familiar elevation which reveals to us every cultural artifact from buildings to artworks to photographs to the print on this page.

II

> And he wondered what the artist had intended to represent (Watt knew nothing about painting), a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a



9.8 Aerial view of a detail of the Palpa Valley region, showing a "cat-demon" closely associated with a complex of roads and trapezoids. (Photo: Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional 543:24, Lima, Peru.)

> centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a center not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time (Watt knew nothing about physics) . . .
>
> —*Samuel Beckett, Watt*

What one sees on the ground at Nazca has little to do with seeing objects. For if in the urban context space is merely the absence of objects, at Nazca space as distance is rendered visible only as a function of distance. If one sees here by looking down, across, through, do the lines perhaps also point to something in that distance?

There have been various speculations as to the purposes or intentions of these lines. All assume that the lines pointed to something. The Nazca culture, equally famous for its intricate polychrome ceramics and textiles, flourished between 800 and 300 B.C. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Spaniards had "liberated" the Nazca area at the cost of killing every last Indian. None survived to report on what purposes the lines may have served. The Spanish chronicler Cieza de Leon reported in 1548 that in the desert north of Nazca were "signs pointing out the way" to travelers. But after experiencing the multidirectionality of the lines, one wonders which way. The lines were "rediscovered" in 1927 by Toribio Mexia Xesspe, who suggested in 1939 that the lines were of a ceremonial nature. One wonders what he thought about for twelve years before coming to that astonishing conclusion. Paul Kosok studied the area in 1941 on foot and with the aid of aerial photography. He theorized an astronomical-calendrical function for the markings. By 1947, Dr. Hans Horkheimer had suggested that the markings represented kinship lines connecting graves of members of various local clans. Since 1941, Dr.

Maria Reiche has been studying the lines and figures; she accepts the theory of their functioning as astronomical sight lines for sun, moon, and perhaps particular stars or constellations. Subsequent computerized correlations have thrown doubt on the speculations. The resemblance of some of the trapezoidal areas to landing strips has fired the imaginations of those who believe spaceships visited the planet centuries ago.

The ancient ceramic work of the region reveals that the early oasis cultures had an interest in depicting all forms of everyday life. On these polychrome pots, various diseases are catalogued, as are manners and costumes of all classes. Architectural forms, all possible sexual attitudes and combinations, modes of war and dance, musical instruments, ways of hunting, etc., are to be seen. The oasis cultures built with adobe. Unlike the highland Incas they erected no stone fortifications or monuments. Mud was their forte, whether it was fashioned into a pot or a house. Water was their life source, existing as they did by careful irrigation of the oasis. No doubt that is the reason for their obsession with the ithyphallic water pots, which pour by ejecting a stream of water from the erect penis. Some of these pottery figures take the form of a dead man or skeleton with an erection. Water was life, its absence death. With water the desert is made fertile, moistened for molding artifacts as well as for growing food. For the Nazcans, all things concerning life were to be found at the surface of the earth or just below it: the irrigation ditch, the crop, the adobe for building, the clay for utensils.

One can speculate that the lines in the desert were spiritual irrigation systems connecting certain places of power in the surrounding sierra to the lower plains. Many of the lines point to peaks along the northeast border of the Pampa Colorado and many of the trapezoidal ways converge on notches between peaks. It is possible to imagine that the Nazcans, with their specially devised long-handled brooms (good for sighting as well as sweeping),[2] made a trek into the crystalline highlands to attempt a record long line toward one of the peaks invested with special powers.

Whatever the intentions of these forms on the desert, they are morphically related to certain arts we see today. If Nazcan purposes were lost in the past, they can nevertheless throw our present art context into a helpful relief. Western art is an art of objects requiring different spatial settings as well as perceptions. Impressionism, for example, had no more to do with seeing into deep space than, say, the *sfumato* technique of Da Vinci. Both were concerned with representing space on a vertical plane that was seen at close range. All twentieth-century art seems compelled by a type of Cartesian projection that will net every visual experience by a vertical plane interposed between the viewer and the world. We expect to encounter objects that will block our vision at a relatively close range. Seeing is directed straight out, 90° to the wall or at an object never far from a wall. The pervasive spatial context is one of room space with its strongly accentuated divisions between vertical and horizontal and the subsequent emphasis on orientations of plumb and level. Within such a context for vision, the seemingly phenomenological dichotomy between flat and three-dimensional, marking and making, painting and sculpture, has been nurtured. Recalling for a moment the nature of the lines and their context, these sharp distinctions cannot be made.

The lines are both markings and constructed excavations that nominally occupy the horizontal but are located within a perceptual vertical as well. Much recent Western history of the plastic arts can be read only within the context of the confining rectilinear room, where space is either an illusion or limited to a few feet, and where the details of the work are never out of focus. The Cartesian grid of rectilinear room space involves a mental as well as a perceptual focus that implies simultaneous presentness of all parts.

The lines of Nazca were created for as yet unknown reasons by a culture unacquainted with the enclosing visual grid of urban space. Long before the cyclopean stone walls of the Incan Cuzco or the adobe enclosures of Chan Chan, with their high walls and gridded plan, the oasis Indians around Nazca were sighting and sweeping lines across the Pampa

Colorado. Yet common to this ancient drawing and certain recent work is an obsession with space as a palpable emptiness: for the Indians an indeterminate exterior, and in the 1970s, an interior, a bounded void, a recaptured absence.

For nearly a decade work succeeding Minimalism has been built around one form or another of rationalistic information as content. This has been a basically analytic strategy for art making. Analysis as strategy was present in earlier Minimal work in its reliance on simple systems. But if that work was an art of wholes with underlying, understated structures of information, later object art became an art of parts with visible, underlined structures of information bound together. Such work, while object-bound, moved toward diminishing the density of the physical until a point was reached where physical manifestations merely illustrated the information structure. Hanging art on order structures, algebraic classifications, topological geometries, etc., became a faintly academic exercise. But the internal analytic mode of such work mirrored the exterior analytic modes of general art strategy throughout the last ten years. The rationalization of art that began with Johns in the mid-1950s has continued to broaden to become a kind of episteme for the object-type of our time. If early 1970s object-type art located itself within that space of basic, rationalized information systems, another type of art has been emerging more recently whose mode is not that of the logical icon. Rather, it is the space of the self that the latter work explores.

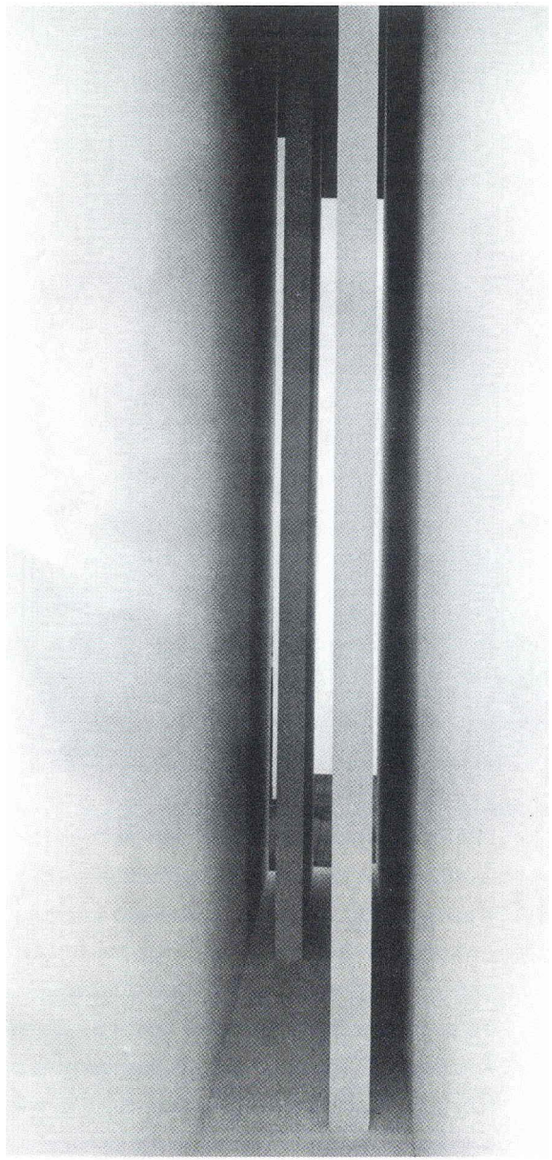
Roughly two types of basically noninformational, nonobject work can be located. On the one hand a cool, environmental work engages both interior and external space, sometimes articulated by sound or light as well as physical enclosures. Such work, always attentive to the contingencies of its setting, appears rigidly formal in comparison to the second type, which is also environmental by morphology, but much more focused on psychological phenomena. These are polarities rather than categories, and one can locate many works now being done on an axis running between these poles where spaces for the physical or psycholog-

ical self are marked out. Both modes have in common an environmental approach, a strong relation to their site or place. Both frequently have a temporal as well as a spatial dimension. Both are concerned with creating allusive contexts that refer to the self rather than generating sets of homeless objects.

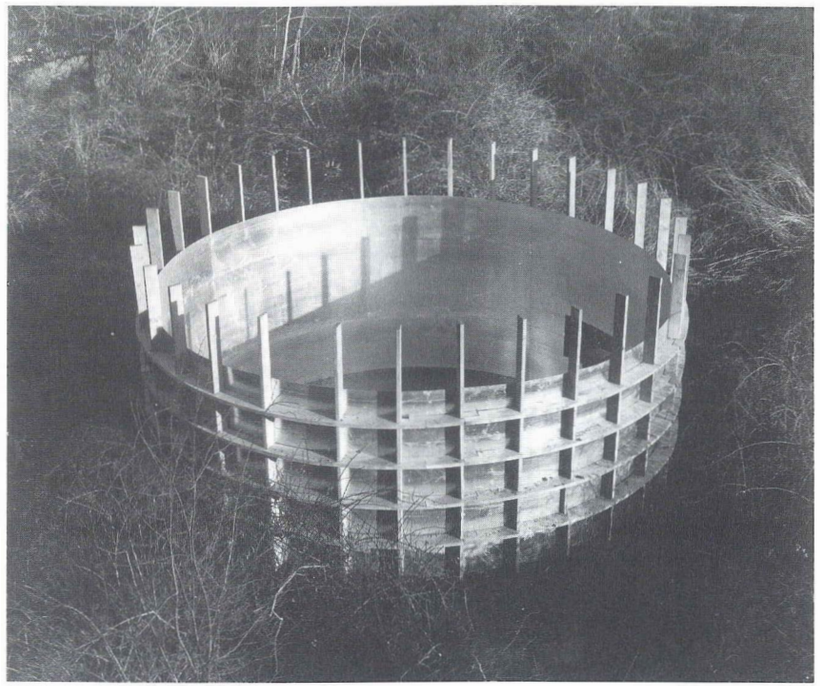
The art in question substitutes the solipsistic, even autistic, discovery in its construction of either a psychological landscape or a physical enclosure for the self. One sees in the latter category a number of works being constructed outdoors. Usually on an intimate scale and often making use of small enclosures, these are works that can be, if not handmade, at least free of the kind of bankrolling required by earlier monumental-Minimal desert Earthworks. Again these are spaces for the self—the self in relation to an enclosure and the expanse of the surrounding site.

The obsession with the self as subject is as old as self-portraiture. Previous explorations in this area, however, assumed that self's space as continuous with the world. The glooms Beckett hollowed out for himself in the post–World War II years are spaces discontinuous with the rest of the world. In those spaces a Murphy, a Malone, or a Watt endlessly and precisely permuted his limited store of ideas and meager belongings. Here counting and farting inside a greatcoat stuffed with the *Times Literary Supplement* was a world in itself. Beckett must surely be seen as the first instance of the artist fashioning out space *itself* as an extension of the self. But the spaces of and for the self now being built in the plastic arts have little to do with the dust, the grimness, or even the humor of Beckett. For if these spaces imply aloneness, they indicate none of the anxieties of isolation. An undefiant separateness and even a kind of self-confidence in the autistic permeates them.

Orders and logics are basically operations. As such they exist in time, not space. As communicated, they exist in one of two ways: written or spoken. The only "space" in which they can exist is aural. In both cases the communication is a function of time, of tracing or working through the operation. It is not surprising that the epistemological side

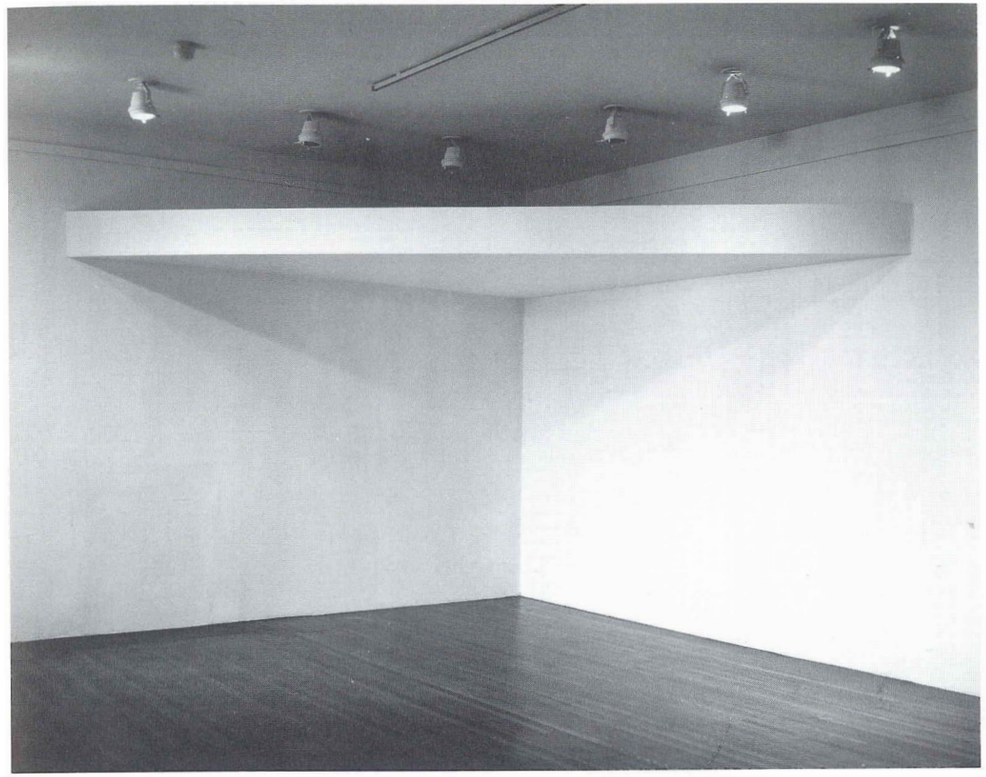


9.9 Michael Asher, Installation in *24 Young Los Angeles Artists* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1971. (Photo: Edward Cornacio.)

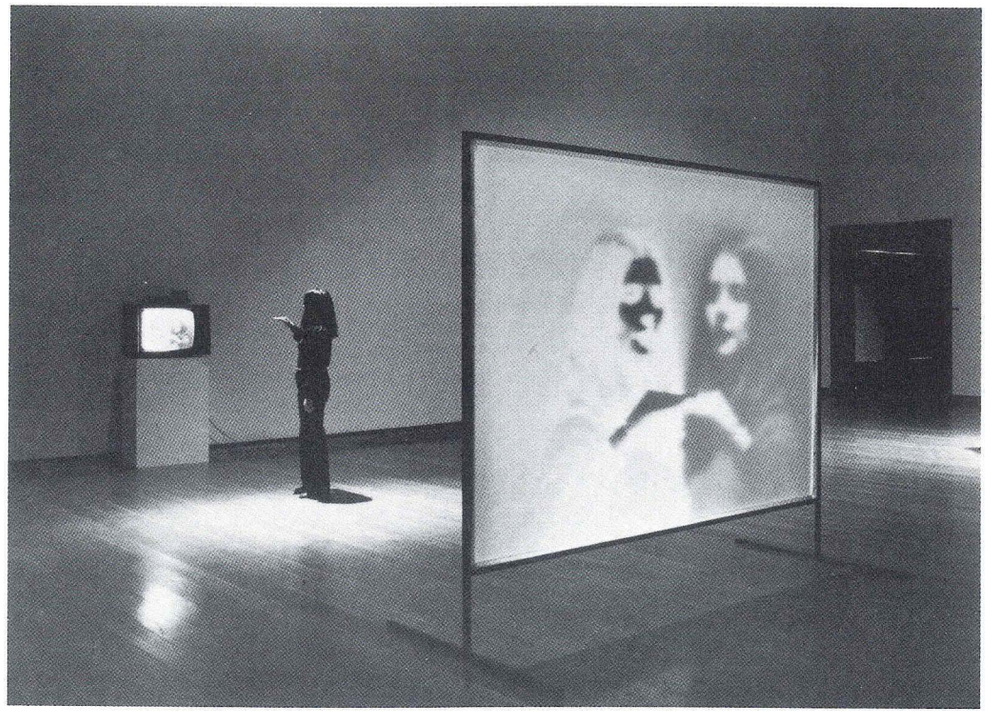


9.10 Mary Miss, *Sunken Pool*, 1974. (Courtesy of the artist.)

of early 1970s work finds its home in flat art, where all operations can be "held" in sequences of one form or another. Work that projects complex operations and information systems is invariably flat, surface-bound. Whether it is on the wall or floor, it is basically "plan view," diagrammatic. The "objects" employed in such work are reduced and function as markers or slightly thickened symbols. The most abstract mental operations are best represented on flat surfaces. Logic does not exist in the physical world but within notational systems. Flatness is the domain of



9.11 Chris Burden, *White Light/White Heat*, Feb.–March 1975. (Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; photo: eeva-inkeri.)



9.12 Peter Campus, *Negative Crossing 1974,* 1974. (Courtesy of the artist, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York; photo: Robert Lorenz.)

order. Space is basically incomprehensible, an absence of things, a nothingness that obliterates order.

The insistence on the rational placement of units in Minimal art as linear or grid extensions was borrowed from painting's ordering. Minimal art's diagrammatic aspect was derived from plans generated by drawings on flat pages. Most Minimal art was an art of flat surfaces in space. At best an object can be permuted in its positions or parts, and as such it can be rotated on its own dense axis.

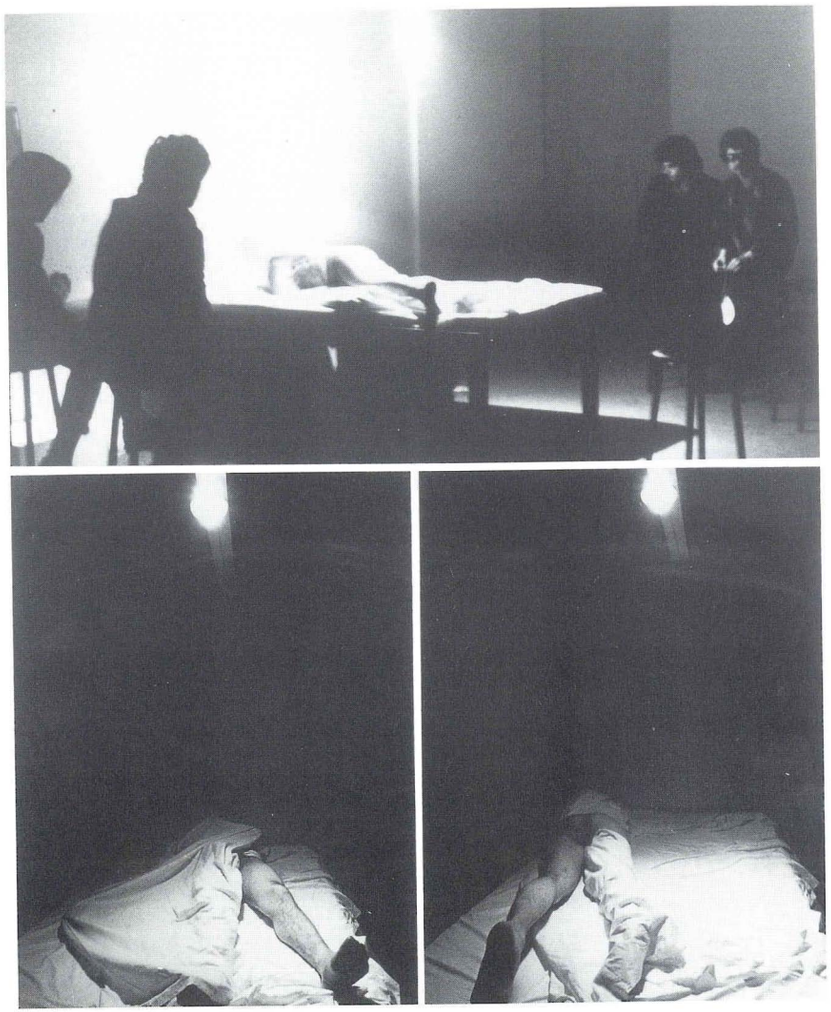
9.13 Joel Shapiro, Installation at Galleria Salvatore Ala, Milan, 1974. (Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.)

It makes sense that the type of spatial work under consideration here dispenses with systems and orders derived from notations whose home is flatness. Such work ventures into the irrationality of actual space, limiting it by enclosures, not systematic marker-notations. Our encounter with objects in space forces us to reflect on our selves, which can never become "other," which can never become objects for our external examination. In the domain of real space the subject-object dilemma can never be resolved. The problems of solipsism and autism hang in the air. Here the labyrinth form is perhaps a metonym of the search for the self,

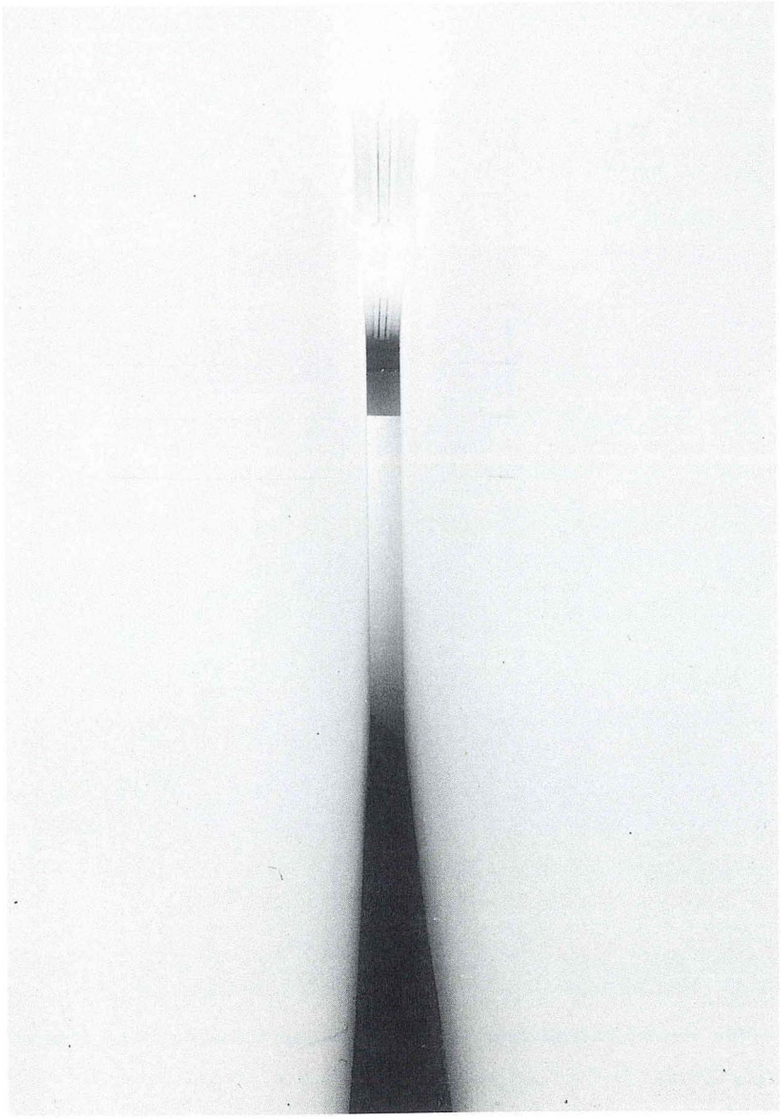
for it demands a continuous wandering, a relinquishing of the knowledge of where one is. A labyrinth is comprehensible only when seen from above, in plan view, when it has been reduced to flatness and we are outside its spatial coil. But such reductions are as foreign to the spatial experience as photographs of ourselves are to our experience of our selves.

The perception of things in depth returns us to our consciousness of our own subjectivity, which, like space itself, has no clear demarcation, no visible bounding limit. Yet neither space nor consciousness is a medium in which objects or thought are constituted. For we know space by the objects in it, as we know consciousness by the relationships of our thoughts. The illusion of space as a medium of physical absence, or consciousness as an endless mental space, is engendered by the continuousness of experience itself. Memory is a kind of temporal metonym of depth, as ever-present as it is ever-changing in a way similar to an object's appearance. An object has no stable perceptual place or size or relation to other objects. For these are a function of our own positions as perceivers. Fixity is a function of notational systems, and notational systems exist in the flat world of surfaces. Systems of notation are used by us at the distance that makes them intelligible; they are extra-spatial. At a point in time the highway sign for a curve is "seen." The subsequent curve is negotiated; lived through from beginning to end. The physical world divides for us between the flat, where notational information exists perceptually outside of space, and the spatial, where perceptual relativity is the constant.

If the physical world divides for us between surfaces and depth, it is not a natural but a cultural division, the origins of which are bound up with those of writing. If Marshak's theory is correct, the origins of writing arose from the impulse to fix the periodicity of nature—that is, to objectify particular memories as artifacts, as tools for predictability. The past had to become object in order that the future might be controlled. The act of counting invented time. The periodic recurrences of an object in space (the moon) were fixed by marks on a surface. Thus



9.14 Vito Acconci, *Reception Room,* 1973. (Courtesy of Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples.)



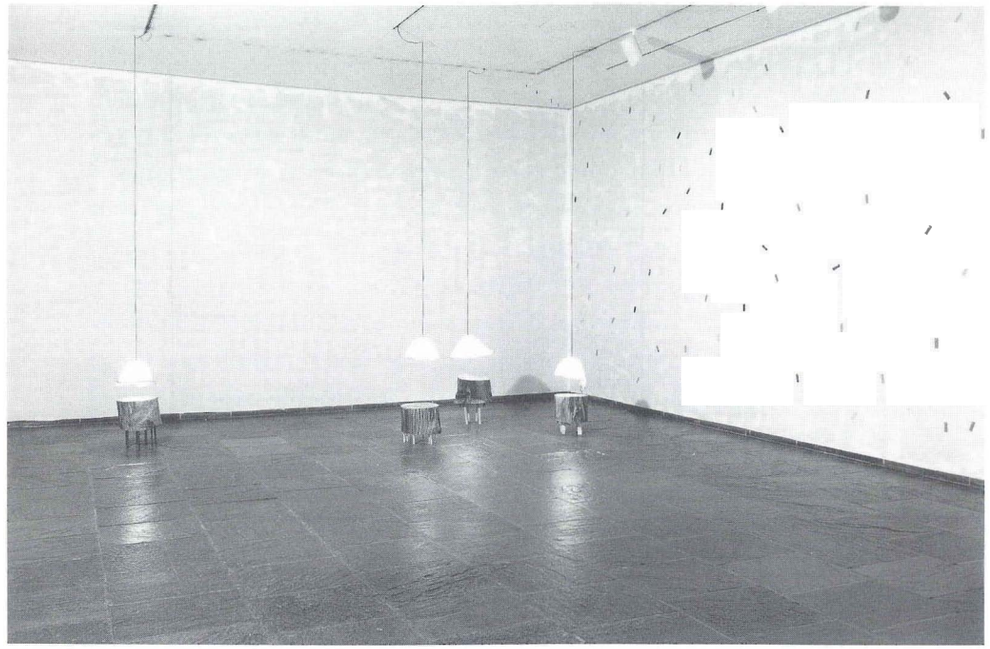
9.15 **Bruce Nauman, *Corridor With Reflected Image,* 1970. (Courtesy of the artist.)**

notation began its long march through the history of humankind, functioning not only to record and control but to shut out the physical world. A second world was invented: the world of flat surfaces where notations reigned. The differences between art that is flat and that which exists in space begin to take on more than a formal distinction, more than a convenient descriptive value. The very selection of one or the other is bound up with orientations that are as deep as culture itself.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Minimalism was that it was the only art of objects (aside from the obvious example of architecture) that ever attempted to mediate between the notational knowledge of flat concerns (systems, the diagrammatic, the logically constructed and placed, the preconceived) and the concerns of objects (the relativity of perception in depth). But mediation is a delicate and frequently brief state of affairs. Work succeeding the Minimal that had an increased involvement with information and logical orderings moved ever more into the flat modes—whether on the wall or floor. It seems that the physical density and autonomy of objects becomes compromised when ordered by more than the simplest of systems.

The tendency of later work involved with enclosed spaces for the self has a complex relation to Minimalist esthetics in that it accentuates certain attitudes about reflexiveness and the conditions of perception that were only acknowledged by the earlier work. There is now little relation to the stylistic look or systematic rationales of Minimalism. However, certain environmental concerns such as relation to site, negative spaces, and shaped enclosures are to be found in Earthworks and interior spaces fashioned in the 1960s.

In light of these remarks on the nature of the surface and the spatial, the lines of Nazca take on a deeper meaning. For here, as in Minimalism, the flat and spatial are mediated. At least in relation to my proposed theory of their functions, the lines work toward this mediation. This implies that we are willing to include in the perception of the enterprise the totality of the landscape. The mountains as well as the lines

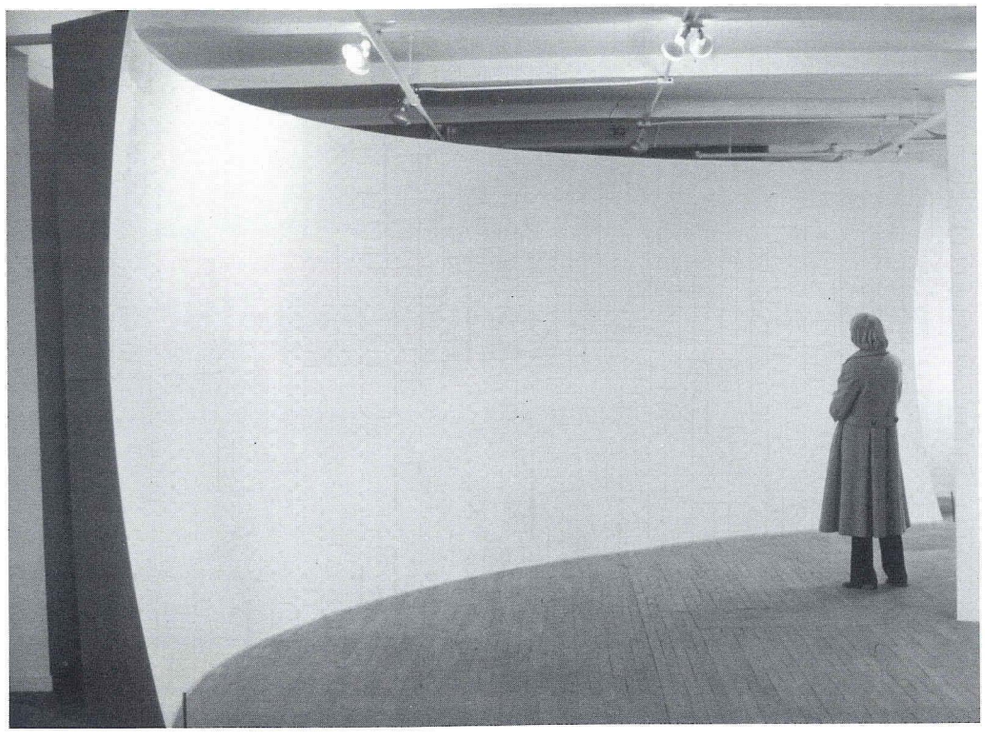


9.16 Ree Morton, *To Each Concrete Man,* Installation in the *Ree Morton* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1974. (Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.)

must be considered. Assuming that the lines point to power points in the Sierra (as well as the literal sources of water), we then have both terms: the flat and the spatial, line and mountain, the abstract figure and the concrete object, the notational abstraction and the concrete existent. Here the artifact-symbol functions to channel the powers of nature into human design. Nature's power flows through the artist's marks. His linear symbol acts as a conduit of spiritual power, it flows down to him along the lines. Analogically the actual life-giving substance, water, flows through the erect penis of the Checan water pot, which has further analogy to the

9.17 Alice Aycock, *Williams College Project,* 1974. (Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York.)

biological function of the life force of male-conceived sexuality. The site at Nazca can be seen as an instance of large-scale public art, whose claim to monumentality has to do with a unique cooperation with its site. This makes it different from other ancient monumental art that confronted and dominated people by one form or another of gigantic verticality imposed on the flatness of the earth. In spite of the distances involved in the lines at Nazca, there is something intimate and unimposing, even offhand, about the work. The lines were constructed by a process of removal. They do not impress by indicating superhuman efforts or staggering feats



9.18 Marvin Torfield, Installation view, 1974. (Courtesy of Robert Morris.)

of engineering. Rather it is the maker's care and economy and insight into the nature of a particular landscape that impresses.

The art of the 1960s was, by and large, open and had an impulse for public scale, was informed by a logic in its structure, sustained by a faith in the significance of abstract art and a belief in an historical unfolding of formal modes that was very close to a belief in progress. The art of that decade was one of dialogue: the power of the individual artist to contribute to public, relatively stable formats that critical strategies, until

late in the decade, did not crumble. Midway into the 1970s one energetic part of the art horizon has a completely different profile. Here the private replaces the public impulse. Space itself has come to have another meaning. Before it was centrifugal and tough, capable of absorbing monumental impulses. Today it is centripetal and intimate, demanding demarcation and enclosure. Deeply skeptical of experiences beyond the reach of the body, the more formal aspect of the work in question provides a place in which the perceiving self might take measure of certain aspects of its own physical existence. Equally skeptical of participating in any public art enterprise, its other side exposes a single individual's limit in examining, testing, and ultimately shaping the interior space of the self.

Notes

1. Maria Reiche, *Mystery on the Desert* (Stuttgart: Vaihingen, 1968), p. 44.

2. None has been found.

> The sword was the primary side arm before the perfection of the flintlock. For centuries two types of swords were made. Those tempered soft were flexible but held no cutting edge. Those tempered hard held an edge but were brittle and easily broken. The idea of a good sword was a contradiction in terms until around the 11th century when the Japanese brought the mutually exclusive together by forging a sheath of hard steel over a flexible core of softer temper.[1]

Since the mid-1960s a number of more or less successful options to the independent specific object have profilerated. I want to stitch a thread of connection through some of these and go back to far earlier work with it. Make a narrative. Claim a development in retrospect. Invent history. The thread of this historical narrative will pass through certain types of emptiness—focused zones of space whose aspects are qualitatively different from objects. The 1970s have produced a lot of work in which space is strongly emphasized in one way or another. I want to make some generalizations about the nature of this recent work, as well as work in the past that focuses itself spatially.

Three models need to be built here: one, an adequate description of a state of being I will call "presentness"; two, a kind of Kublerian historical development citing precedents, some of them widely separated in time and space; and three, the formal characteristics of the paradigm underlying the kind of work that now seizes presentness as its domain. These three models triangulate a kind of sculpture made today whose implications, if not always its conscious intentions, are qualitatively different from sculpture produced in the earlier twentieth century. Now

images, the past tense of reality, begin to give way to duration, the present tense of immediate spatial experience. Time is in this newer work in a way it never was in past sculpture. Modernist issues of innovation and stylistic radicalism seem to have nothing to do with these moves. More at issue perhaps is a shift in valuation of experience. And although the art in question gives up none of its knowledgeability or sophistication in this shift, it nevertheless opens more than other recent art to a surprising directness of experience. This experience is embedded in the very nature of spatial perception. Some of the thrusts of the new work are to make these perceptions more conscious and articulate.

"Mental space" has no location within the body. Yet without it there is no consciousness. Julian Jaynes suggests that mental space is the fundamental analogue-metaphor of the world, and that it was only with the linguistic development of terms for spatial interiority occurring around the second millennium B.C. that subjective consciousness as such can be said to begin. The presumably complex relationship between spatializing language and the imagistic phenomena of mental space itself is not articulated by Jaynes and is beyond the subject of this narrative.[2] Likewise the relationship between memory and immediate experience can only be stated here as an obvious occurrence. A theory of consciousness is not needed for my narrative. I only want to point out some parameters and even obvious distinctions. The experience of mental space figures in memory, reflection, imagining, fantasy—in any state of consciousness other than immediate experience. And it often accompanies direct experience: one imagines oneself behaving otherwise, being somewhere else, thinking of another person, place, time, in the midst of present activity.

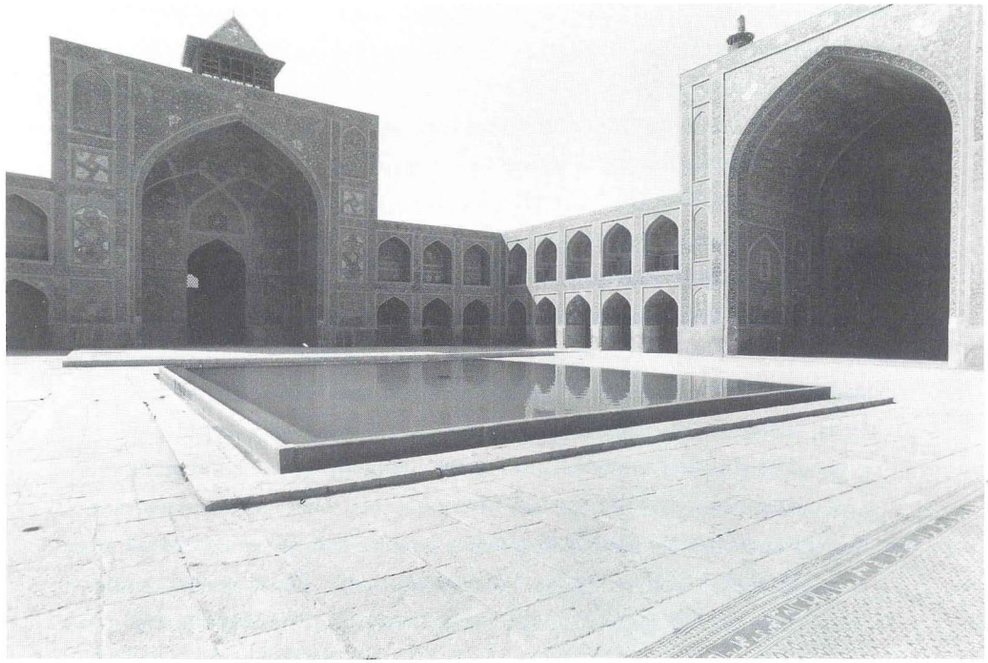
Some questions about images located in the mental space of memory: Is a friend remembered with his mouth open or closed, in motion or at rest, in full-face view or three-quarters profile? Is one's everyday living space represented in the mind as though in some sort of in-motion "filmic" changing imagery, resembling the real-time experience of walking through it? Or does it come to mind as a few sequences of

characteristic but static views? I believe that static, characteristic images tend to predominate in the scenery of memory's mental space. The binary opposition between the flow of the experienced and the stasis of the remembered seems to be a constant as far as processing imagery goes. The self's presentation to itself, a more complex operation involving the extensive use of language as well as imagery, maintains as well an opposition between the static and the dynamic. Some time ago George Herbert Mead divided the self into the "I" and the "me." The former has to do with the present-time experiencing self, consciously reacting. The latter is the self reconstituted from various remembered indices. Or as Mead put it:

> The simplest way of handling the problem would be in terms of memory. I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went into it. The "I" of this moment is present in the "me" of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a "me" in so far as I remember what I said. The "I" can be given, however, this functional relationship. It is because of the "I" that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are. . .[3]

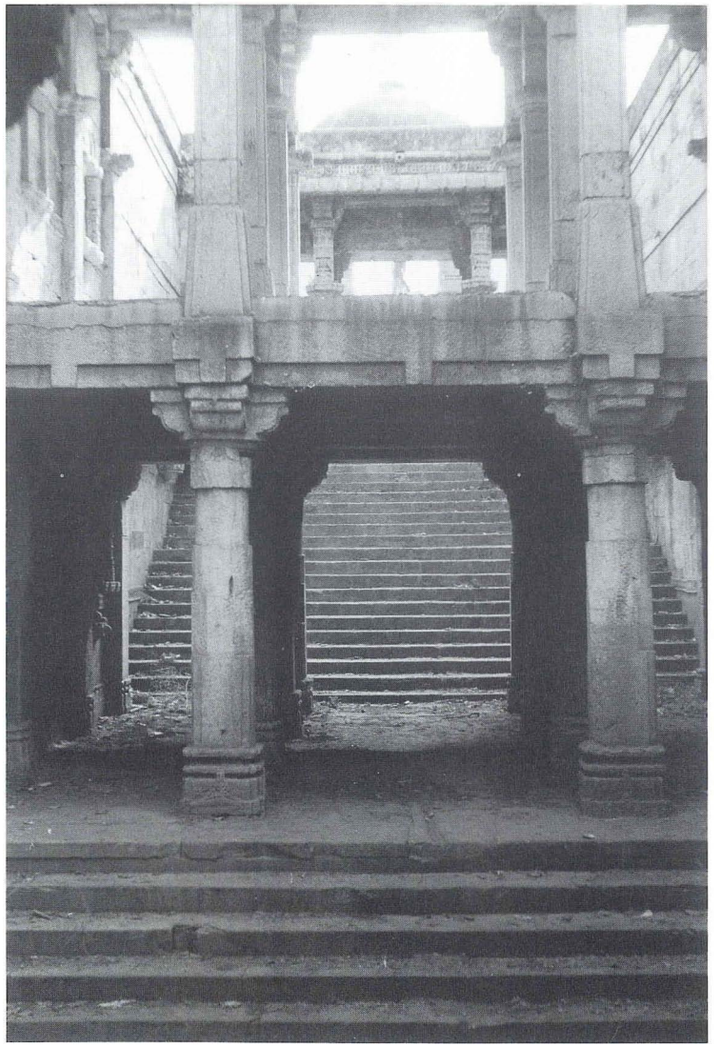
There seems to be a fundamental distinction between real-time interactive experience and every other kind. The "I" is that part of the self at the point of time's arrow which is present to the conscious self. The "me" is that reconstituted "image" of the self formed of whatever parts—language, images, judgments, etc.—that can never be coexistent with immediate experience, but accompanies it in bits and pieces.

What I want to bring together for my model of "presentness" is the intimate inseparability of the experience of physical space and that of an ongoing immediate present. Real space in not experienced except in real time. The body is in motion, the eyes make endless movements at varying focal distances, fixing on innumerable static or moving images.

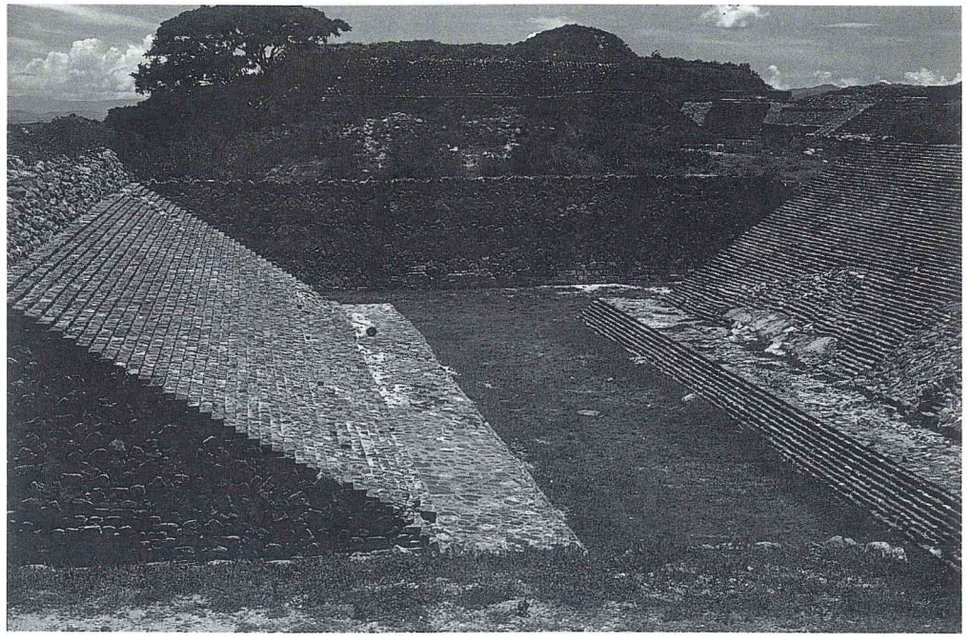


10.1 **Shah Mosque, seventeenth century, Isfahan, Iran. (Courtesy of Robert Morris.)**

Location and point of view are constantly shifting at the apex of time's flow. Language, memory, reflection, and fantasy may or may not accompany the experience. Shift to recall of the spatial experience: objects and static views flash into the mind's space. A series of stills replaces the filmic real-time experience. Shift the focus from the exterior environment to that of the self in a spatial situation, and a parallel, qualitative break in experience between the real-time "I" and the reconstituting "me" prevails. As there are two types of selves known to the self, the "I" and the "me," there are two fundamental types of perception: that of temporal space

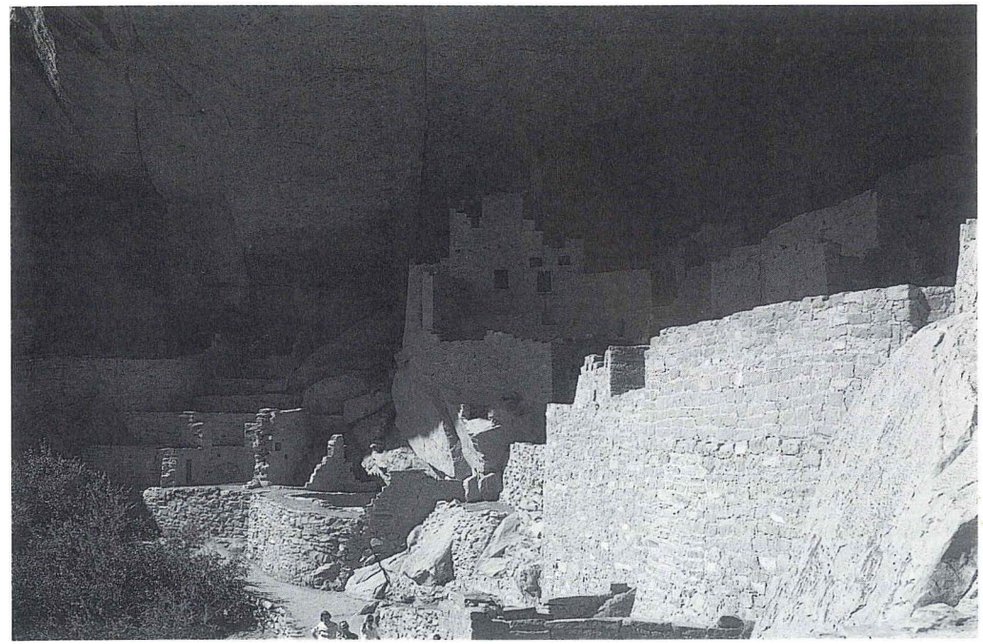


10.2 **Step Well, seventeenth century, north of Ahmadabad, India. (Courtesy of Robert Morris; photo: Marcia Hafif.)**



10.3 Zapotec ball court at Monte Alban, Oaxaca, Mexico. (Photo: David H. Thompson.)

and that of static, immediately present objects. The "I," which is essentially imageless, corresponds with the perception of space unfolding in the continuous present. The "me," a retrospective constituent, parallels the mode of object perception. Objects are obviously experienced in memory as well as in the present. Their apprehension, however, is a relatively instantaneous, all-at-once experience. The object is moreover the image par excellence of memory: static, edited to generalities, independent of the surroundings. The distinction is a thoroughgoing one dividing consciousness into binary modes: the temporal and the static.



10.4 Prehistoric Native American Cliff Dwelling, Mesa Verde, Colorado. (Photo: Philip G. Felleman.)

The distinction holds true whether consciousness is representing to itself the world, or its first division, the self.

It might be said that the constitution of culture involves the burdening of the "me" with objects. It is the mode of the relatively clear past tense. Space in this scheme has been thought of mainly as the distance between two objects. The aim of this narrative is to make space less transparent, to attempt to grasp its perceived nature ahead of those habitual cultural transformations that "know" always in the static mode of the "me."

The perception of space is one of the foremost "I" type experiences.[4] In the recall and reflection of that type of experience the "I" is transmuted into the domain of the "me." Memory is the operative element here. The dimension of time keeps the "I" and the "me" from coinciding. In the relatively immediate perception of objects—encounter followed by assessment and judgment—there is little stretch or gap between the two modes. Spatial experience, requiring physical movement and duration, invariably puts a stretch between the modes.

The heightened consciousness of art experience must always terminate in the "me" mode of judgment. Since it is so heavy on this end, so fixed by language, history, and photography, little attention has been given to making qualitative distinctions between work that begins as objects—and has less distance to go toward a "me" mode—and work located within space that has much further to go, literally and otherwise, toward judgmental summation. It is, of course, space- and time-denying photography that has been so malevolently effective in shifting an entire cultural perception away from the reality of time in art that is located in space.

In perceiving an object, one occupies a separate space—one's own space. In perceiving architectural space, one's own space is not separate but coexistent with what is perceived. In the first case one surrounds; in the second, one is surrounded. This has been an enduring polarity between sculptural and architectural experience.

What kinds of initial relationships can sculpture and architecture have had to each other? From earliest times the figure, unless it was a tiny amulet or idol, was housed. It had a place within an architectural space or was set up in an exterior relation to a building. In terms of an interior relationship, the niche frequently provided both transition to the wall and framing separation for the figure. The niche literally embeds the object in the dominating architecture. Undoubtedly, early processes of carving figures against walls by removing material around them led directly to the convention of placing figures in niches. By now, of course,

every such figure considered significant has been unhoused by the twin manias of museum collecting and photographic presentation. To what extent an opposition relation might have prevailed—architecture being intentionally subservient to independent, freestanding sculpture—is difficult to say. Some of the round temples of Athena were probably constructed just to house the central figure of the goddess. And this must have had earlier precedents. But by the time of the Renaissance the relationship of the free-standing figure to an enclosed space was (other than the accommodating niche) mostly one of coincidence. For the sake of my narrative I look for early examples where this problem of the relationship of significant, independent objects to architectural space, and vice versa, was brought out into the open and confronted.

Michelangelo worked both as architect and sculptor. Certain of his interiors took a peculiar and intense account of the separable object—the carved figure. In the Medici Chapel there is indeed a strange accommodation between the four sarcophagi figures of *Dawn, Dusk, Night,* and *Day,* and their surroundings. The two sarcophagi with their arched lids, planar surfaces, and scroll volutes reflect the cornices of the wall tabernacles above. Their supporting stanchions reflect the voluted door jambs. The whole structure is fixed firmly to the wall. But unlike precedents for the form, such as the Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato, these sarcophagi are not housed in an alcove but project from the wall like oversized fireplace mantels. This attached but jutting form, together with the details reflective of the above tabernacles, fixes the tombs more as part of the architecture than as separate coffins housed there.

The sliding and teetering massive figures above the lids seem all the more out of place for the sarcophagi being part of the wall. They seem like afterthoughts literally hanging on the architecture. Nominally reclining, these four figures have little to do with repose. Anatomically they are four contorted and strained figures. Physically they are four massive blocks of marble barely balancing on the sloping lids of the sarcophagi. While the bent knees of *Dawn* and *Dusk* acknowledge the

curving ends of the lids on which they rest, *Night* and *Day* appear to have been intended for a far longer surface.[5] Only the vertically falling braid of hair in the figure *Night* rationalizes the figure's position as consistent with the slope. But this hardly alleviates the precariousness of the figure, about a third of which hangs over the end of the lid. Yet the few details which do acknowledge gravity and slope are enough to state a purposeful, if highly strained, placement.

It is this strained placement that puts the figures in a new relationship to the space. They have been denied the dignity of the protective niche or the assertion of independence provided by a stable pedestal. Beyond their identities as figures and allegories they function as masses charged with potential kinetic energy wanting to slide out into space. Their implied force works counter to the general compression of the high well-like volume of the room as a whole. Above and beyond their nominal identities they function to establish a kind of field of force set in opposition to the enclosing chamber of the chapel itself. Here figures of extreme individuality have another level of existence altogether as they participate in the articulation of a particularly charged spatial whole—a spatial whole that has subdued and transmuted its most stressed and dramatized parts: the carved figures.

In the vestibule of the Laurentian Library, the architectural details receive a similar treatment: the stair, the volutes, and the recessed double columns all aggressively occupy the space rather than provide passive limits, transitions, or relief. The stair especially is elevated to the status of an almost independent sculpture—but it is both more and less than one. By its very exaggeration it transforms the space and does not remain merely an eccentric architectural element. The space becomes "sculptural" by the architectural details being overstressed, pulled out into the space as objects. Beginning here with another high narrow space, Michelangelo forced the architectural features, rather than the carved figure, to establish a spatial field of forces. Later Baroque work tended to accommodate and blend figuration or architectural features into undulating, deeply modeled

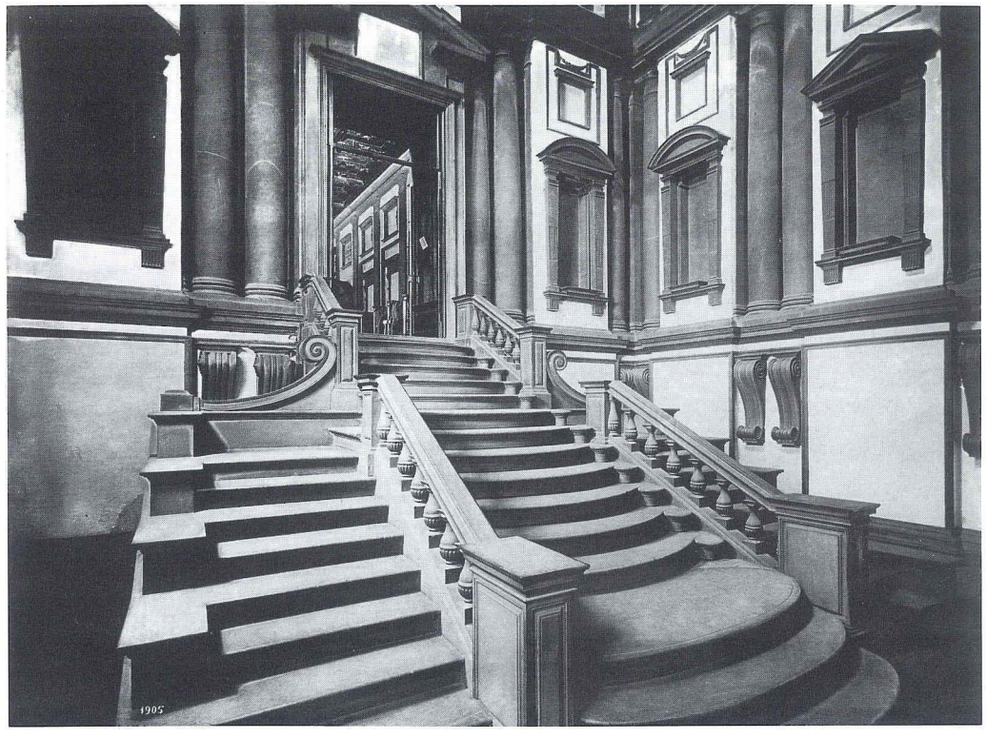
spaces. But in these early Mannerist works, constantly questioning oppositions put under stress both objects and containment to establish such charged spaces.

Anytime the object has become specific, singular, dense, articulated, and self-contained, it has already succeeded in removing itself from space. It has only various visual aspects: from this side or that, close up or farther away—unless perhaps it is disposed in the space in some way that elevates the existential fact of placement to one of "occupation," thereby charging both the object and the space around it. Precarious balance, for example, was Michelangelo's solution for the already dramatic tomb figures in the Medici Chapel. But there has also been a long history of works that chose to deal with space as depiction. Rodin's *Gates of Hell* is a good example. This 20-foot-high relief is made up of a pair of unopenable bronze doors, a transom, and bordering frame—all of which are swarming with small, agitated figures. Some of these are more fully dimensional than others, but all give the impression of either emerging from the disappearing into the congealed flux of the surface. Miniaturization and the relief were the twin strategies by which Rodin attempted to trap a depicted space in this work.

The small figures in the *Gate* wheel and pulsate and permute their positions in a seething, shallow, but ambiguous relief space. It is tiresome to thread one's way through the tumbling Ugolinos, Paolos and Francescas, etc. Every corner has some tiny Romantic tempest brewing. What is to be made of this apparently monumental failure? I think it is one of the most sustained attempts to represent "mental space." The iconography indicates a collection of beings and states strictly out of literature which inhabit the space of thought, not the exterior world. The work seems to strain to give form to figures in an imagined space; that is to say, a featureless space of indefinite depth; a kind of screen against which the imagined figures are projected. Mental space has one striking feature not shared with actual space: it doesn't exist as space. It has no dimension or location. It is one of the two main analogues of consciousness for the

world, but as it has no location except in time, it must then be also an operation. The central larger figure of the *Thinker* is the operator of the scene, which is a manifestation of his thought. Rodin said the figure "dreams. The fertile thought slowly elaborates itself within his brain. He is no longer dreamer. He is creator."[6] The architectural identity of doorway suggests transience, which in turn suggests time, the only literal dimension of thought. Oversize in comparison to the tiny figures it encloses, this architectural border in effect frames the world out. It asserts the interior analogue-world of consciousness's imagery and the nonspecified character of "imagined" interior space—in this case populated with "thoughts" one doesn't care too much to think: boring, fin de siècle thoughts. But it is that quality of a nonplace of indefinite depth, analogous not to the real world but to that of mental space, which brings my narrative near the *Gate.*

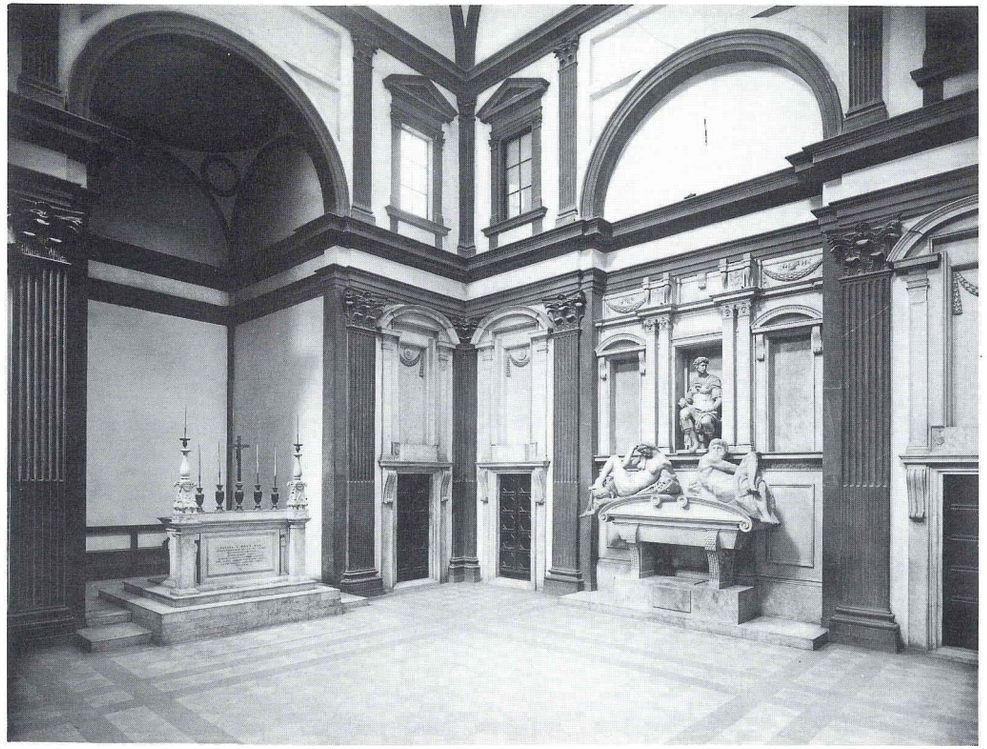
The *Balzac* is an interesting corollary to the *Gate.* Unlike the *Gate* it is a singular, static figure. A large, unambiguous hulk: a massive figure covered by a loosely hanging robe. Those features that give a body its identity, that allow one to scan it for information regarding posture, sex, activity, etc., are completely obscured by the wrap. It has no arms or legs. True, the sleeves hang down and indicate the sides of the figure. Yet the arms and hands are suspiciously somewhere else beneath the robe. One automatically moves around the figure in the attempt to glean more clues about the hidden body. The face is not so much modeled as gouged. One moves alternately close and away, finding the modeling collapses into lumps at certain distances, begins to emerge fleetingly as the gestalt of a face at a sudden change of angle. Unlike the figures on the *Gate,* this one is still, but we are constantly on the move in the act of apprehending it. Having no characteristic view, no singular profile to give it a definite gestalt, memory can't clearly imprint it. Heaving up off its high pedestal, the figure is seen against the sky rather than as part of a particular place. Located neither within a clear memory nor a literal place, it exists for us within the temporal span it takes us to see it. It approaches that model of



10.5 Michelangelo, Laurentian Library staircase, Florence, 1559–60.

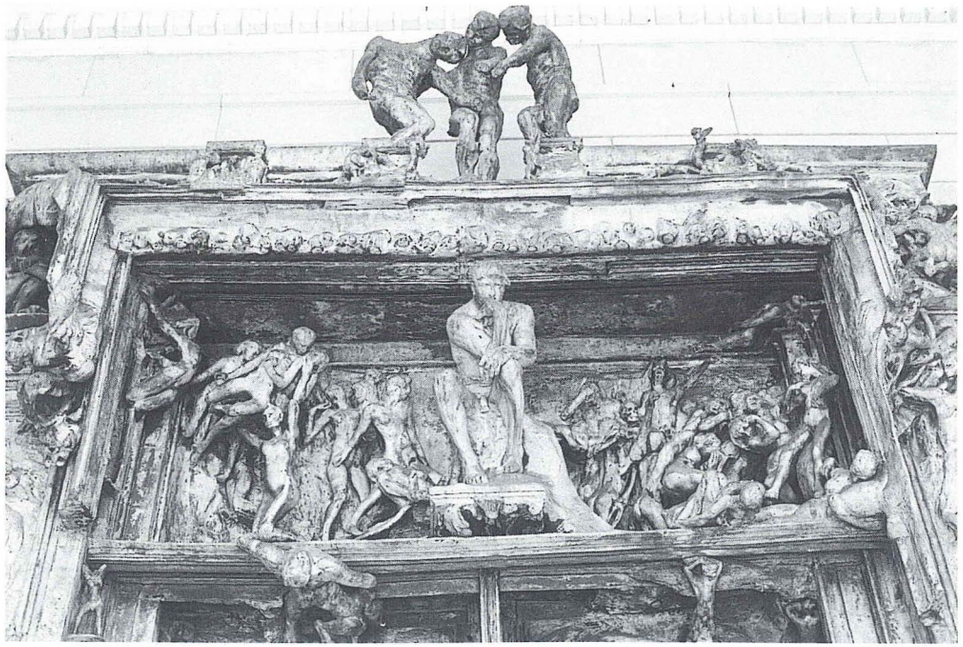
spatial work that begins to have "presentness" as its primary dimension, overshadowing the static, rememberable image of the autonomous object. The power of the *Balzac* is that while patently an object, it oscillates in the perceptual field of the viewer so that he can grasp it only temporarily in its perceptually changing aspects. Seldom has an object in the history of art so magnificently contradicted itself.

One type of structure that realigns the relationship between objects and spaces, but is always considered for what it was rather than



10.6 Michelangelo, Tomb of Giuliano de'Medici, S. Lorenzo, Florence, 1524–34.

10.7 Rodin, *Gates of Hell,* 1880–1917. (Musée Rodin, Paris.)

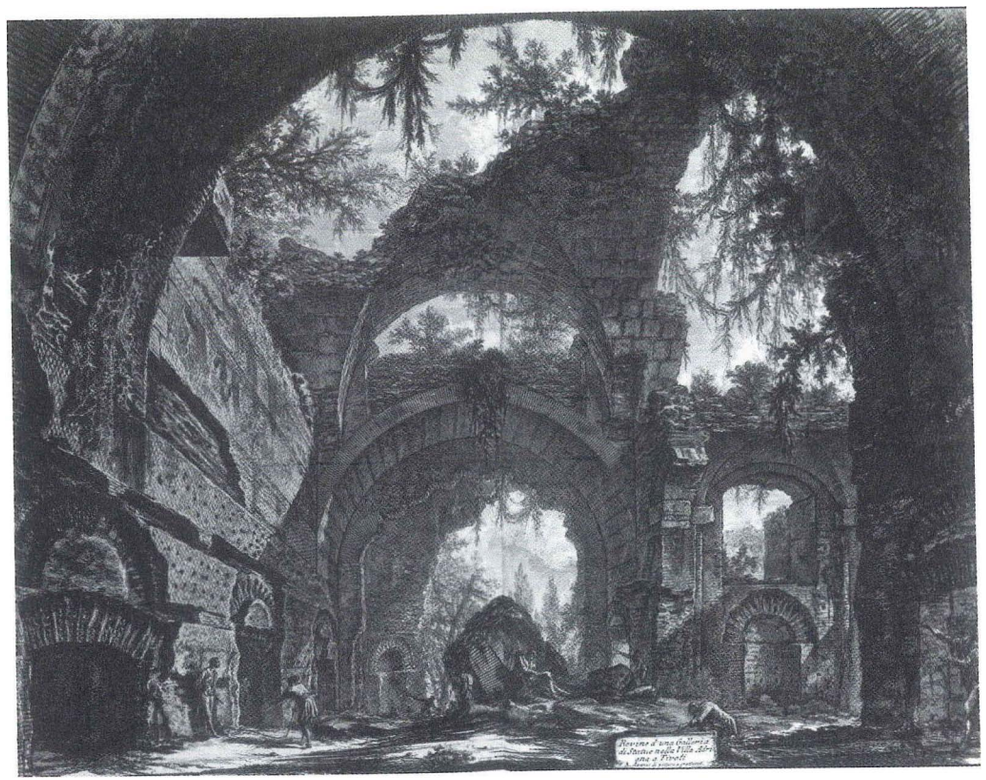


10.8 Rodin, *Gates of Hell*, detail, 1880–1917.

what it is, is the ruin. Approached in the historical-romantic sense, the ruin has an aura all its own and was carefully cultivated in the eighteenth century as an art form that has now fallen into disrepute. Much of the world's landscape is littered with more-or-less carefully curated "genuine" ruins—those of Greece and Rome exhibiting the most carefully picked-over broken stones on the face of the earth.

Approached with no reverence or historical awe, ruins are frequently exceptional spaces of unusual complexity that offer unique relations between access and barrier, the open and the closed, the diagonal and the horizontal, ground plane and wall. Such are not to be found in

10.9 Bernini, colonnade in piazza of St. Peter's, Rome, begun 1656.



10.10 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Hadrian's Villa: The Central Room of the Larger Thermae*, ca. 1770. (Courtesy of the Print Collection, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.)

structures that have escaped the twin entropic assaults of nature and the vandal. It is unfortunate that all great ruins have been so desecrated by the photograph, so reduced to banal image, and thereby so fraught with sentimentalizing historical awe. But whether the gigantic voids of the Baths of Caracalla or the tight chambers and varying levels of Mesa Verde, such places occupy a zone that is neither strictly a collection of objects nor an architectural space.

Certainly ruins are not generally regarded as sculpture. In considering these and other structures that follow, I have crossed more into the nominal domain of architecture. But sculpture has for some time been raiding architecture. Some of the contemporary sculptors illustrated here focus on space, both internal and external, as much as on the materials and objects that delimit or articulate these spaces. The sensibility triangulated by the three models being built by this narrative belongs to sculpture. Any material, imagery, or form is open to anybody who wants to use it. Michelangelo is a good example of someone who worked in the formal categories of both sculptor and architect. Probably for that reason he was able to force one into the other, to work at a third level that was both or neither.

The building as closed object that shuts out space was less adhered to in many examples of Middle and Far Eastern building types. This is especially apparent in uncovered or partially open structures—the mosque, Chinese bridge and pavilion work, the Indian step well, etc. Absent here is the totally enclosing environmental container that houses both objects and the human figure. In Central and South America, the Mayan ball courts, temple platforms, and various observatory-type constructions have the same openness to the sky. Besides a general openness, sharp transitions between horizontal and vertical planes of floor and wall are often absent. Elevations vary, projections interrupt. One's behavioral response is different, less passive than in the occupation of normal architectural space. The physical acts of seeing and experiencing these eccentric structures are more fully a function of the time, and sometimes effort,

needed for moving through them. Knowledge of their spaces is less visual and more temporal-kinesthetic than for buildings that have clear gestalts as exterior and interior shapes. Anything that is known behaviorally rather than imagistically is more time-bound, more a function of duration than what can be grasped as a static whole. Our model of presentness begins to fill out. It has its location in behavior facilitated by certain spaces that bind time more than images.

Having indicated a few historical examples for a model of art that has questioned the narrow option between container or object, and having articulated to some extent an experiential model for presentness as a spatial domain, it is possible to turn to more recent work that has sought options beyond the autonomous, timeless object.

Beginning in the late 1950s, most of the artists associated with "Happenings" also produced various kinds of environmental work. Most of these works, while attempting to avoid the object, collapsed into a kind of architectural decor. Containment replaced things, and a centrifugal focus replaced a centripetal one. But the field force of the space was generally weak. Beginning in the 1960s, quite a bit of work was done that utilized the lateral spread of the floor. The hardware employed was generally small, sometimes fragmented. Elevation, the domain of things, was avoided. The mode was a kind of relief situation moved from wall to floor. A shallow, slightly more than two-dimensional "down" space was developed that gave the viewer a kind of "double entry" by allowing him to occupy two domains simultaneously: that of the work's shallow blanket of space, and those upper regions free of art from which he commands a viewpoint outside the work. The viewer's feet are in the space of the art, but his vision operates according to the perception of objects. Some "scatter" pieces occupied the entire floor, the walls acting as limiting frame.

More recently, certain "miniature" works have maintained the lateral spread of floor space but have altered its character. The miniature or model quality of the elements charges the space with an implied

vastness compressed below the knees of the viewer. Neither the objects nor the space are their actual size. One becomes a giant in their presence. These shrunken works, while definitely object-predominant, emphasize the space to a greater degree than earlier scatter works as they depict a space that seems larger than real-size, squeezed down around the miniature representations. The whole is removed from our own space and time. It seems that these works owe something to photography, which can fascinate for the same ability to compress vastness into miniature scale. One accepts the photograph (unlike representational painting) as shrunken reality, as a kind of projection of the world. We believe it to have registered the space through which we move. Miniature three-dimensional work effects a similar dislocation—with the difference that we sense our own space around us and simultaneously feel it shrunken by the work in our presence. Space is at once both large and small. But, as with photographs, we are here the detached, voyeuristic tourist to the depicted worlds at our feet.

The recent works that have relevance to the subject proper of this narrative form no cohesive group. Some participate more fully than others in a confrontation with spatial concerns. None are miniatures, some are oversize. They have been located indoors as well as outside. Early examples of work intensely focused on space can be found in the mid-1960s. Although the spatial focus is more frequent today, it isn't always clearer than in some of the earlier works, and in many cases, recent work is only a refinement. But within the many examples of work cited here by illustration it is possible to find this spatial focus biased toward one or the other of two generic types of spaces: those articulated within contained structures and those operating in an open "field" type situation. One could almost term these "noun" and "verb" type spaces. On occasion, both types are found in a single work. Works of the former type generally present a strong outside shape as well as an interior space. In some cases the interiors of large-scale works—whether physically or only visually accessible—are little more than the results of the exterior shell.

But it is not the large object that might be hollow that reveals a shift in thinking about sculpture. It is in approaches motivated by the division and shaping of spaces—which may or may not employ enclosing structures—where directions different from and opposed to Minimalism are to be found.

It is worth observing how much and in what way Minimalism is behind spatially focused work—as well as in what way it now may present a block to its further development. From the very beginning of Minimalism there was an opposition between forms that accentuated surface and inflected details of shape, and work that opted for a stricter

10.11 Mary Miss, *Untitled*, 1973. (Courtesy of the artist.)

generality. It was the latter that opened more easily to the inclusion of space as part of, rather than separate from, the physical units. These forms were more suitable as markers and delimiters. Space was not absorbed by them as it was by the more decorative specificity of objects presenting greater finish and eccentricity of detail. This use of generality of form to include space has been extended in several directions in the 1970s. Some emphasized greater rawness of material, more size, weight, fascination with system or construction, and arrived at the somewhat opened-up monument. Other efforts, restraining an emphasis on the phenomenal aspects, moved more directly into a confrontation with space. Some, by presenting articulated interiors, have moved close to an architectural imagery. Other work opens up the extended spatial field by employing distances rather than contained interiors. In most cases the overall unifying gestalt form has usually prevailed. These have been structural options that various works have found rather than programmatically followed.

It is indicative of the power of the holistic, generalized gestalt form that it sustained most all of these developments by providing a structural unity first to objects and then for spaces. The nature of gestalt unity, however, is tied to perception, which is instantaneous—in the mind if not always in the eye. But this "all at once" information generated by the gestalt is not relevant and is probably antithetical to the behavioral, temporal nature of extended spatial experience.

It should be remembered that work that has a holistic structure originated inside gallery spaces and was later enlarged and transferred in the mid-1960s to exterior sites. It is wrong to describe gallery and museum spaces as "spatial" in the sense in which I have been using the term. Such rooms are antispatial or nonspatial in terms of any kind of behavioral experience, for they are as holistic and as immediately perceived as the objects they house. These enclosed areas were designed for the frontal confrontation of objects. The confrontation of the independent object doesn't involve space. The relationship of such objects to the room nearly always has had to do with its axial alignment to the confines of the walls.

Thus the holistic object is a positive form within the negative, but equally holistic, space of the room. The one echoes the other's form: a tight if somewhat airless solution. Claims for the independent object were actually claims for a hidden relation: that of the object to the three-dimensional rectilinear frame of the room. It might be said that such a space both preceded and generated the so-called independent object. Little wonder that the gestalt object when placed outside seldom works.

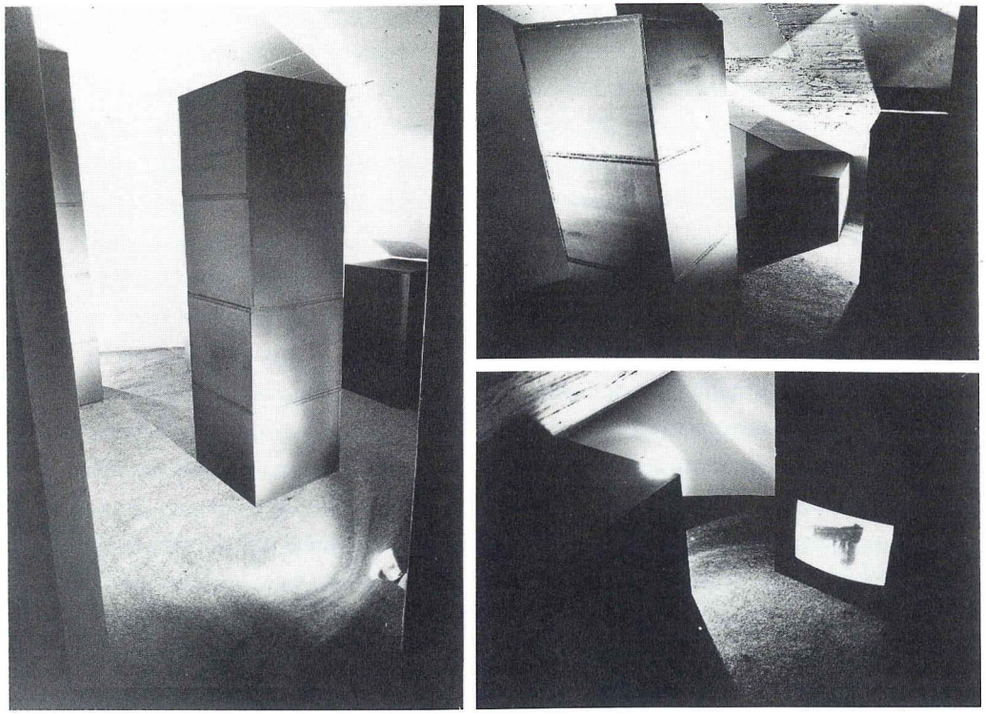
In the broadest terms, work based on the wholeness of the gestalt is work that still maintains assumptions established by classical Renaissance art: immediacy and comprehensibility from one point of view, rationalistic structure, clear limits, adjusted proportions—in short, all those characteristic that the independent object of the 1960s redefined. Despite the variations played on this theme by a lot of 1970s work, that which maintains the holistic maintains the classicism and all that implies. I pointed out Michelangelo's efforts that upset the self-satisfied stolidity of classical canons in the Laurentian Library and the Medici Tombs. I did not step into the following Baroque for precedents or Kuberlian links to work that is the subject of this narrative. But I wonder if I should have. We can be sure that no Pope Alexander VII will ever ascend to the pulpit of the National Endowment for the Arts to fund a project comparable to Bernini's Colonnades at St. Peters, where he

> turns architecture into sculpture by using the four series of great columns that move in a gradual ellipse to break a wall into constantly shifting activity. Though they are all the same, from inside they feel all different, less uniform than the parade of statues across their tops. The immensity of the interior oval creates an abrupt clash of perfect vacancy with the density at the edge, and to the pedestrian under the colonnade, crossing the huge space by circling it becomes interesting minute by minute because Bernini has broken it into a hundred separate views.[7]

The concerns of the new work in question—the coexistence of the work and viewer's space, the multiple views, the beginnings of an attack on the structure provided by the gestalt, the uses of distances and continuous deep spaces, the explorations of new relations to nature, the importance of time and the assumptions of the subjective aspects of perception—also describe the concerns of the Baroque. It would seem that much of the work most cogent to my discussion, work that pushes hardest against 1960s definitions, has to some extent moved into a Baroque sensibility and experience without, for the most part, the accompanying Baroque imagery.

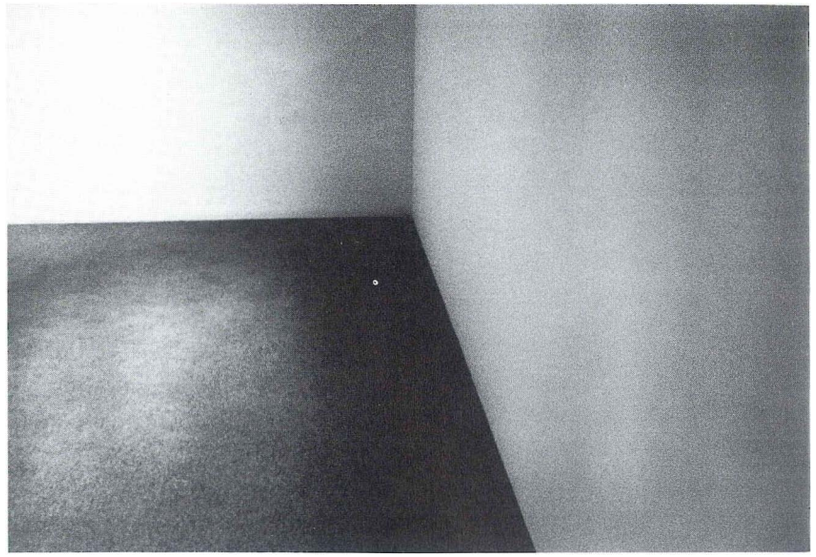
Cultural discourse involves a hierarchy of representations. These representations proceed from individual intentions to manifestations to reproductions and interpretations of those individual manifestations. At every level of transformation in this chain of broadening representations, additional "noise" enters the system. Duchamp noted those noises that intervened between the artist's intention and realization and again between the realization and the public interpretation. Every art manifestation is presumed open and available for further transformative representations in the public domain—primarily through language and photography. It might be argued that art that begins with either language or photography is subject to less noise, as amplification rather than transformation might be their fate. But these forms are as subject to transformative commentary as any others. A general theory of transformative representations is far beyond the scope of this narrative. But I want to touch on some aspects that have relevance to art that focuses itself within space.

The first level of transformative representation is metaphysical. The artist attempts to represent some aspect of what his model of possible art could or should be. Every manifestation is always more or less than the paradigm. In order that the artist be able to represent, he must be able to remember what he wants to do. Since Rodin, all modern sculpture has presupposed drawing. Especially since the 1960s, nearly all three-dimensional work has proceeded from drawing. The memory bank for



10.12 Vito Acconci, *The Object of it All,* 1977. (Courtesy of the artist.)

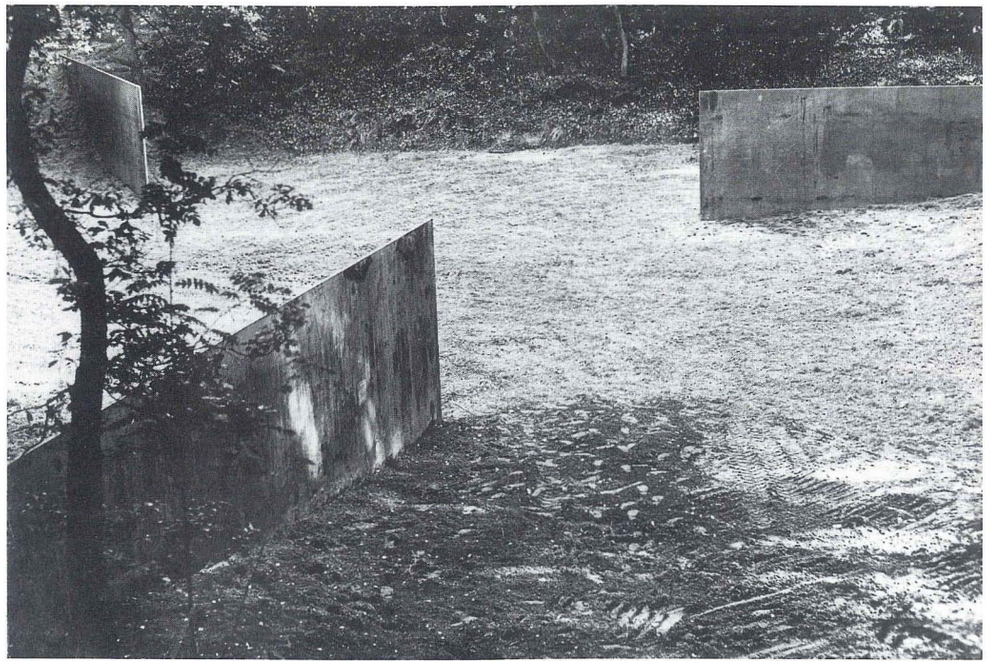
construction-type work is housed in the plan and elevational views. These memory parameters are far more suitable to objects than to spaces. Of course some sorts of materials are invariably employed to define spaces. Most but not all of the work that is the subject of this narrative is of the construction type, is frequently holistic and can be represented with traditional plan and elevation images. But the relation of this representational scheme to space is just that—schematic rather than structural, as in the case of objects. The reason for this is that no temporal encoding exists in



10.13 Robert Irwin, *Untitled,* 1973. (Courtesy of The Pace Gallery, New York; photo: Al Mozell.)

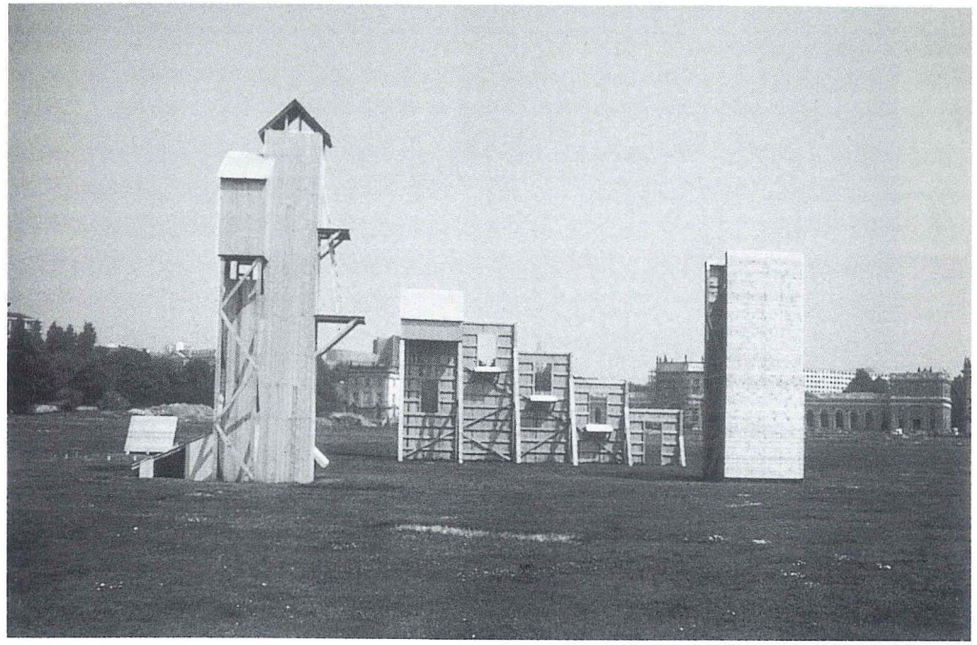
plans or elevations. One might at some time be developed, because all representations of time must be spatialized to be represented: clocks, calendars, musical scores, etc. But at this point space has no adequate form of representation or reproduction. And perhaps there is a deeper reason for this hiatus of transformative representations, for space: within the "I" modality of experience there is no memory, and this is the mode of spatial experience.

It would seem that photography has recorded everything. Space, however, has avoided its cyclopean evil eye. It could be said that the work under discussion not only resists photography as its representation, it takes a position absolutely opposed to the meaning of photography. There is probably no defense against the malevolent powers of the pho-



10.14 Richard Serra, *Spin Out (for Robert Smithson)*, 1973. (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, The Netherlands; courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

tograph to convert every visible aspect of the world into a static, consumable image.[8] If the work under discussion is opposed to photography, it doesn't escape it. How can I denounce photography and use it to illustrate this text with images I claim are irrelevant to the work proper? A further irony is that some of this kind of work is temporary and situational, made for a time and place and later dismantled. Its future existence in the culture will be strictly photographic. Walter Benjamin made the point that the "aura" of a work of art was a function of the viewer's distance. This attitude, culturally embedded in the necessity of sacred religious



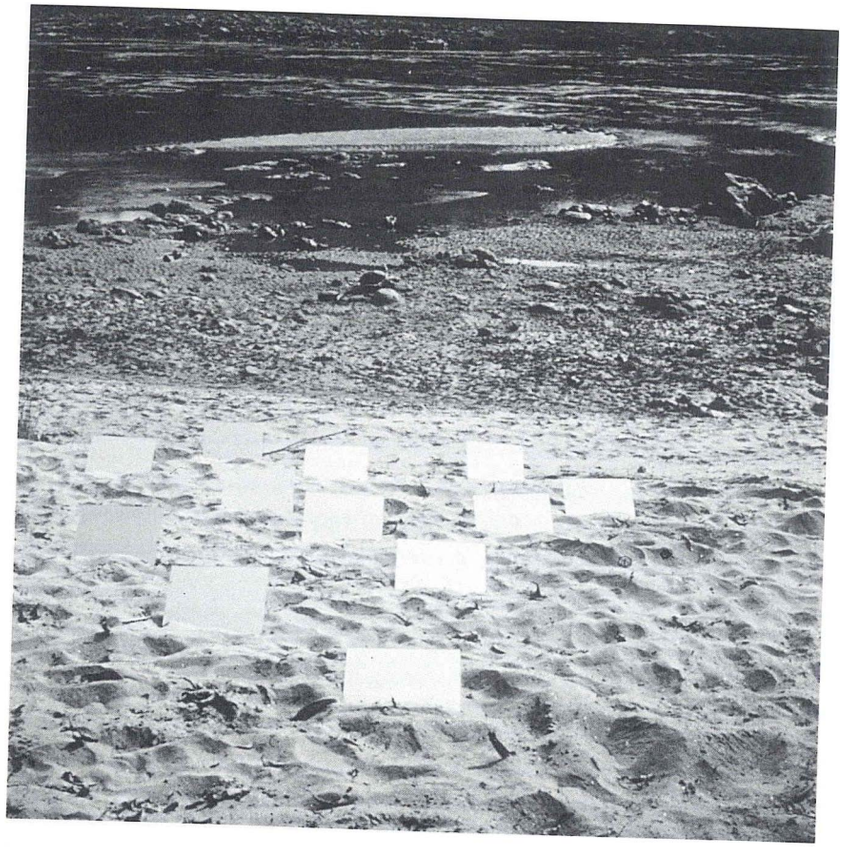
10.15 Alice Aycock, *The Beginnings of a Complex . . .*, 1977. (Courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York.)

objects remaining at a distance from the viewer, was supposedly demolished by the reproduction. The photograph, in Benjamin's opinion, the quintessential form of reproduction, amounted to a new class of art objects—those without auras. Without auras because they brought the world into the realm of the close-up. The argument was from the beginning sophistic. Loaded subject matter, for example, is brought close up via the photograph only in the touristic sense. The viewer remains completely detached and psychologically distanced. Now that the gallery distribution system has got hold of photographs, they no longer even have the status of reproductions, except in the "limited edition" sense,

which is hardly what Benjamin had in mind. In the space-oriented works under discussion here, the notion of closeness/distance is redefined. They are not experienced except by the viewer locating himself within them. Closeness dissolves into physical entry. Distance, a parameter of space, has an ever-changing function within these works.

Smithson's outside mirror pieces were quite clear early investigations of "verb-type" spaces. They defined a space through which one moved and acknowledged a double, ever-changing space available only to vision. There was an exactness as well as a perversity implied by his photographing and then immediately dismantling these works. Exact because the thrust of the work was to underline the non-rememberable "I" experience; perverse because the photograph is a denial of this experience. Defined space implies a set of tangible, physical limits, and these can be measured and photographed. The distances between these limits can be measured as well. But photography never registers distance in any rational or comprehensible way. Unlike recorded sound or photographed objects, space as yet offers no access to the transformative representations of media.

The question arises as to whether my claims about space are not a stubborn insistence that the subjective side of spatial perception be the only allowable one. As mentioned before, space can be measured and plotted, distances estimated. Stairways, small and large rooms, crowded gardens and open plains, and most every other type of space (except perhaps weightless outer space) has some degree of familiarity, and none of the types illustrated here present mysterious experiences. What I have insisted upon is that the work in question directly use a kind of experience that has in the past not been sustained in consciousness. The work locates itself within an "I" type of perception, which is the only direct and immediate access we have to spatial experience. For the sake of comprehension and rationalization, this experience has always been immediately converted into the schemata of memory. The work in question extends presentness as conscious experience. If mental space is the conscious



10.16 Robert Smithson, *Sixth Mirror Displacement,* Yucatan, 1969. (Estate of Robert Smithson; courtesy of John Weber Gallery, New York.)

analogue-metaphor of the world from the reconstitutive "me" point of view, then the experience of the work under examination lies outside this, prior to fixed memory images. The focus had to shift from objects to confront the kind of being that is conscious but prior to the reconstitutive consciousness of mental space. This latter type of awareness—being posterior to spatial experience, consonant with the perception of objects, insistent on the instantaneous rather than the temporal, confident that it operates from an objective stance—has already closed the door on the mode of experience described here. Nevertheless, the new work cited here in illustration is well on the way to articulating what being in the spatial realm can be about. This narrative has been the attempt to formulate three models—historical, formal, perceptual—which triangulate the nature of forming with space. And like all art narratives, it is an invention seeking access to history, an entropy-denying attempt at pattern formation. In this case, there is a kind of contradiction in terms in its attempt to bring the domain of the "I" untransformed into the purview of the "me." But the pursuit of the contradictory, be it in art or sword making, is the only basis for perceiving dialectical reality.

Notes

1. Frederick Wilkinson, *Swords and Daggers* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967). See pp. 50, 54 for a discussion of Japanese sword-smithing.

2. Julian Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 46 and elsewhere.

3. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 174.

4. In the strictly linguistic domain, Roland Barthes asserts that the act of writing about the self may be another mode of being from which the "me" is excluded. As he puts it, "I myself am my own symbol, I am the story which happens to me: freewheeling in language, I have nothing to compare myself to; and in this movement, the pronoun of the imaginary 'I' is *im-pertinent;* the symbolic becomes literally *immediate*. . ." The "I" here has no referent. As a signifier it coincides with the signified. Above quoted from *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 56.

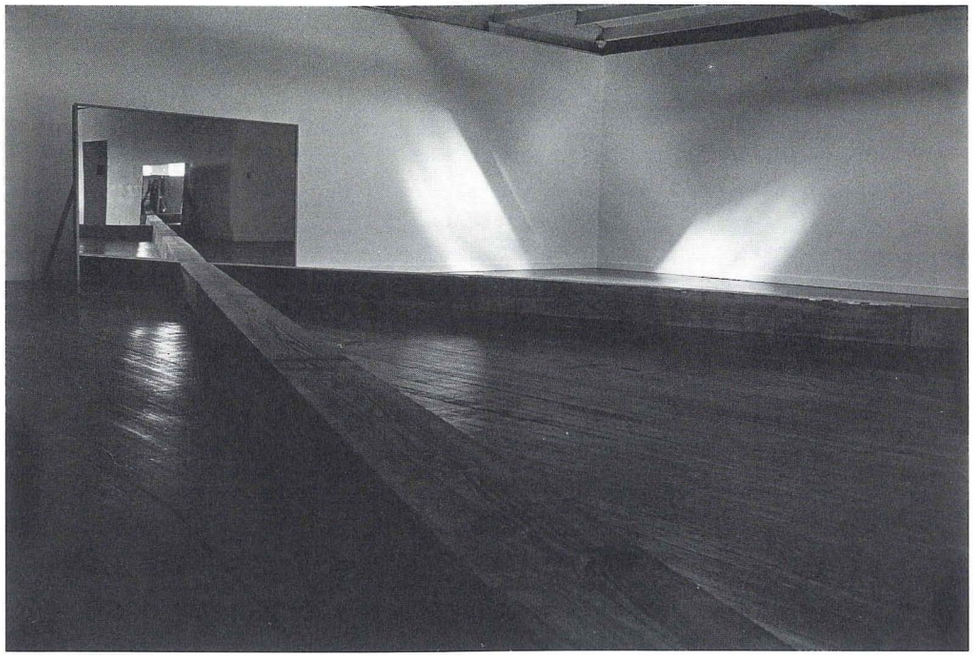
5. Michelangelo left Florence in 1534, and the New Sacristy was opened sometime around 1545. He did not therefore personally install the figures on the sarcophagi. There is an unsettled controversy as to how much the figures were altered by hands other than Michelangelo's in the setting up of the figures. But he obviously conceived of the placement and had carved the figures before he left. It seems safe to say that the startling placement is his, regardless of whether some undercarving of the figures was done at the time of the installation. See Martin Weinberger, *Michelangelo, The Sculptor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 352–365.

6. Letter written by Rodin to the critic Marcel Adam and published in an article in *Gil Blas* (Paris), July 7, 1904. Quoted by Albert E. Elsen, *Rodin* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), p. 53.

7. Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), pp. 67–68.

8. See Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1977), for her thoroughgoing analysis of the insidious trivializing of experience perpetrated by photography.

9. Having made a number of large-scale works involving extensive use of mirrors, I cannot resist a further comment confined within the appropriate humility of the footnote. Mirror spaces are present but unenterable, coexistent only visually with real space, the very term "reflection" being descriptive of both this kind of illusionistic space and mental operations. Mirror space might stand as a material metaphor for mental space, which is in turn the "me's" metaphor for the space of the world. With mirror works the "I" and the "me" come face to face—a strange triangular way for art to hold the mirror to nature.



10.17 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* Installation at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon, 1977. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

10.18 George Trakas, *Union Pass,* Installation at Documenta 6, Kassel Germany, 1977. (Courtesy of the artist.)

11 Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation

> Maybe only God can make a tree, but only that shovel, Big Muskie, can make a hole like this.
>
> —*Anonymous strip miner*

The issue of art's potential involvement in land reclamation can only be focused through a perspective on the history, conflicts, and confusion involved in that admittedly broad cluster of topics related to land abuse: technology, mining, governmental policy and regulations, ecological concerns, and public opinion. For some time there has been public concern over the effects of constantly accelerating programs for the extraction of nonrenewable resources from the land. Adverse effects on the environment range from the aesthetic to the toxic. Leaving aside for a moment the aesthetic effects, mining operations for natural resources have threatened the following: loss of topsoil; wind and water erosion; landslides; elimination of wildlife; acid, toxin, or mineralized water pollution; sedimentation; floods; loss of water table; destruction of man-made property from the effects of some of the above, plus those of blasting; other socially related degradations such as local economic losses, poisoning of livestock, etc.

With these various degradations to the environment, three basic types of mining operations have been associated: deep mining and two types of surface mining, open pit and strip. Surface mining, especially stripping operations, has the worst environmental consequences. With recent technological developments of mining equipment such as large augers and gigantic shovels and drag lines like the Gem of Egypt and the Big Muskie (the latter having a scoop capacity of over 200 cubic yards, over 300 tons), stripping has become the dominant mining operation,

especially in the extraction of coal. In the immediate future, the surface mining of coal will increase enormously. Even though in the United States the ratio is 8 to 1 in favor of deep reserves (355 billion tons versus 45 billion tons), between 1966 and 1971 the number of surface mines roughly doubled, while the number of deep mines dropped by more than one half. The reason for the shift is economic: the average cost per ton for surface-mined coal is $7.69, as opposed to $10.61 for deep-mined coal.[1]

Given the present energy policies of the nation, there can be no doubt that surface mining to produce coal- and hydrocarbon-based energy sources will continue to accelerate. Whether ecological warnings about the effects of an $88 billion crash program for synthetic fuels will in any way check the program remains to be seen. There has of course been discussion about what should be done to offset the adverse effects of mining the land, but no one has yet proposed even vague ideas for a nonlocal reclamation program that would reverse the greenhouse effect (a predicted global consequence of a crash synthetic-fuels policy).

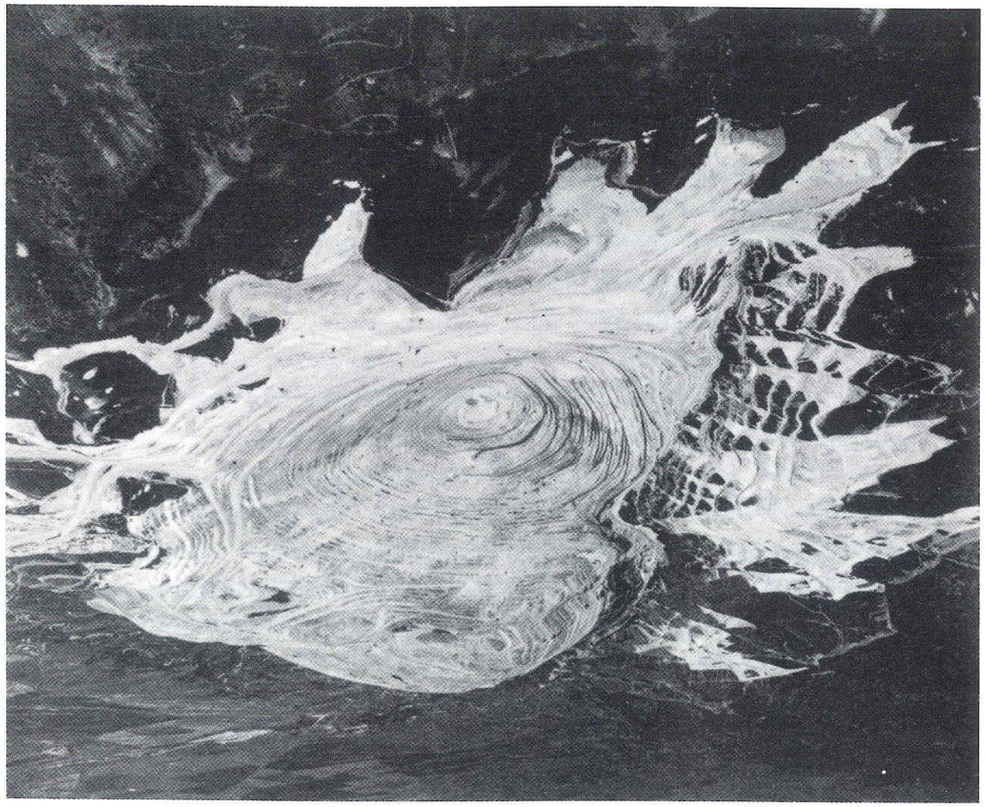
Reclamation itself has been a heated topic in terms of the criteria to be applied, how it should be enforced, and, when implemented, its effectiveness. Aesthetics has also been very much an issue: a large section of the public objects to the way surface mining affects the look of the land. A general definition for reclamation has been debated for some time. The Senate's 1973 proposed bill S.425 stated that "reclamation means the process of restoring a mined area affected by a mining operation to its original or other similarly appropriate condition, considering past and possible future uses of the area and the surrounding topography and taking into account environmental, economic, and social conditions. . ."[2] Even this generalized definition was, however, strongly objected to by such mining executives as John B. M. Place, President and Chief Executive of the Anaconda Company, when in 1973 he testified before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs:

> It is not financially or physically possible to meet these requirements. We estimate that to fill Anaconda's three open pits in Butte, Montana; Yerington, Nevada; and Twin Buttes, Arizona would cost $3 billion to $4 billion. To fill Kennecott's Bingham Pit in Utah, the nation's largest copper mine,[3] would require an estimated $7 billion and 66 years' time to complete at the rate of 400,000 tons per day. These few large open-pit mines must be recognized as permanent uses of the land, involving a permanent reshaping of the land they occupy.

Obviously, any implementation as required by a bill such as S.425 would never be undertaken with respect to these gigantic open-pit hard-rock mining sites. Yet although such sites are vast, they are far outnumbered by strip-mining operations. Stripping entails an entirely different kind of excavation and does not result in the vast terraced cavity of an open-pit hard-rock mine. The operation involves removing the overlying earth (called the overburden) from the coal seam, extracting the coal, and repiling the earth. The topographical result is an area of long rows of spoil material that end at the "high wall," or last cut. Since at present it is the most extensive mining operation, stripping has raised the most discussion as to how land should be reclaimed. Well over 200 billion acres in the United States have been mined. As of 1973, an additional 4,650 acres per week were being mined; current figures would be higher.

The larger operators generally claim to be pursuing an active reclamation program. Peabody Coal Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Kennecott Copper, began operation at Black Mesa, Arizona in the 1960s. Leased from the Navajo and Hopi Indian tribes, 400 acres a year are to be mined for thirty-five years. According to Edwin R. Phelps, President of Peabody Coal:

> Grading a reclamation follow close behind the active mining operations. We will restore vegetation to the land. We are seeding



11.1 Aerial view of Bingham Canyon open-pit copper mine, Utah. (Kennecott Copper Corporation; photo: Don Green.)

> not only native grasses but are experimenting with other species which have succeeded in our arid Colorado mines. These may furnish better forage for the sheep which are the Indian's main source of income. We are also seeding legumes to add nitrogen to the soil. We want—and we expect—to make the land more useful than it was originally.[4]

But these declared reclamation activities have not been visible to such residents of Black Mesa as Red Yazzie, who noted:

> It's terrible when they work. Since they started, people began to change. The air began to change. It is something we have not known before. The plants seem to have no life. When the wind blows our way, the coal dust covers the whole ground, the food, the animals, the hogans, the water. The dust is dirty, it is black. The sun rises, it is gray. The sun sets, yet it is still gray. I imagine the night is gray.[5]

Associated with Black Mesa are large power plants that burn the coal to generate power for Las Vegas and the Los Angeles basin. Six plants will eventually be built. One existing plant, located at Four Corners, produces 2,075 megawatts of power and "more emissions of sulfur and nitrogen oxides than are released in Los Angeles and New York City combined, plus huge quantities of particulate filth, and no one knows how much mercury and radioactive trace elements." Astronauts in space can observe the pollution plume at Four Corners as "the only evidence of man's presence in the Southwest."[6]

On August 3, 1977, President Carter signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. The law states:

> The Congress finds and declares that because of the diversity in terrain, climate, biologic, chemical and other physical conditions

> in areas subject to mining operations, the primary governmental operations, the primary governmental responsibility for developing, authorizing, issuing, and enforcing regulations for surface mining and reclamation operations subject to this act should rest with the state.

Local state legislation is, however, varied in its criteria, stringency, penalties, and enforcement. In some Eastern states fines for failing to reclaim the land are so nominal that miners prefer to pay them and ignore reclamation. In Western states laws are often vague, leaving much discretion to the mines. "In Wyoming, the coal operators are required to seal exposed seams with plant cover only 'when practical'; there are no penalties for failing to do so. The Montana statute speaks in terms of returning the land to 'useful production,' but never defines useful production."[7] William O. Douglas has gone so far as to say that "so-called restorations of strip-mining sites are largely public relations facades," and that the acid drainage from such sites defies efforts to reclaim the earth.[8] Some believe that if a truly stringent reclamation program were to be enforced, underground mining would be cheaper than strip mining. But as the mines are now operated, strip mining has a three-to-one cost advantage, with worker productivity running five to one.

For over a century the mining of nonrenewable resources, especially coal, has had adverse effects on the environment. In 1842 a report from a commission of inquiry noted:

> When cholera prevailed in that district [Tranent, in Scotland] some of the patients suffered very much indeed from want of water, and so great was the privation, that on occasion people went into the ploughed fields and gathered rain water which collected in depressions in the ground, and actually in the prints made by horses' feet. Tranent was formerly well-supplied with water of excellent quality by a spring above the village, which flows through a sand bed. The water flows into Tranent at its head . . . and is received into about ten wells, distributed throughout the village. The people supply themselves at these wells when they contain water. When the supply is small, the water pours in a very small stream only. . . . I have seen women fighting for water. The wells are sometimes frequented throughout the whole night. It was generally believed by the population that this stoppage of water was owing to its stream being diverted into a coal-pit which was sunk in the sand-bed above Tranent.[9]

The coal-mining industry has been but one example of environmental degradation resulting from industrial operations. Perhaps it has been singled out by environmentalists because its effects are so visible. But in a deeper structural way all present-day extensive industrial operations parallel the mining industry in four ways: (1) the ever-accelerating use of natural resources, most of them nonrenewable; (2) an acceleration made possible by technological advances; (3) a rationale for these accelerating operations cast in terms of increasing public demand; (4) serious environmental disturbances resulting directly or indirectly from the particular operation.

In 1868 a German biologist coined the term *ecology* to designate the totality of relations between an animal species and its environment. Only later, when it began to include that species of animal, man, would the term become controversial. In this country, the Benthamite concerns of mid-nineteenth-century England were extended and emphasized by the conservationist policies of Theodore Roosevelt, who wanted a strong central system for controlling the development of natural resources. But ironically, the great "trust buster" usually sided with big business in establishing such controls because he felt they were the most efficient means available. Out of this efficiency the rationale of big business working within government for control of water, grazing lands, timber, and mineral resources became established and entrenched. Today that view-

point is under attack; environmentalists argue for small enterprise being protected by federal bureaucracy. We are now at a point of unresolved debate concerning the extent to which natural resources are to be socialized, "and whether and to what extent the resources are to be handled by the federal, state, or local level(s)."[10]

Behind the conservationist industrialist conflict is industry's ever-accelerating demand for new materials. To account for this acceleration of demand, it is necessary to appreciate certain basics about how technology has changed industrial practice, especially since World War II. Since the end of World War II, the population of the United States has roughly doubled. Total production, however, as measured by the GNP, increased 126 percent between 1946 and 1971. Per capita production has taken an immense leap, far outstripping the rise in population.[11] It is the increased use of synthetics that lies behind almost every increase in demand for natural resources. Plastics, artificial fertilizers, fabrics, pesticides, etc., require vast increases in chemical and energy production for their manufacture. Synthetics are also associated with huge increases in pollution, sometimes at the manufacturing level of disposal of by-products (plastics) and sometimes at the level of application (fertilizers). It is, of course, the intensified application of technology that has made possible the production of artificial or synthetic products. And it is the structural nature of technological application that is intrinsically hostile to the problem of ecology. Galbraith is illuminating on this point:

> Technology means the systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical tasks. Its most important consequence, at least for the purpose of economics, is in forcing the division and subdivision of any such task into its component parts. Thus, and only thus, can organized knowledge be brought to bear on performance. Specifically, there is no way that organized knowledge can be brought to bear on production of an automobile as a whole or even on the manufacture of a body or chassis. It can only be applied if the task is so subdivided that it begins to be coterminous with some established area of scientific or engineering knowledge. Though metallurgical knowledge cannot be applied to the manufacture of the whole vehicle, it can be used in the design of the cooling system or the engine block. While knowledge of mechanical engineering cannot be brought to bear on the manufacture of the vehicle, it can be applied to the machining of the crankshaft. While chemistry cannot be applied to the composition of the car as a whole, it can be used to decide on the composition of the finish or trim. . . . Nearly all of the consequences of technology, and much of the shape of modern industry, derive from this need to divide and subdivide tasks.[12]

The structural feature of technological application is one of fragmentation: that of ecological thinking is, of course, the opposite. The very nature of the ecological concept is to consider any system as a whole. An $88 billion technological crash program to produce synthetic fuels within ten years might succeed, but from within its technological compartment it has no responsibility to address the consequences of lowering the water table in the process, or of leading to a CO_2 greenhouse effect. Endless examples have been cited of the harmful side effects of every technologically induced increase in production involving nonrenewable resources; a fairly concise and inclusive listing has been articulated by Enzensberger and is worth quoting:

> Industrialization leads to an uncontrolled growth in world population. Simultaneously the material needs of that population increase. Even given an enormous expansion in industrial production, the chances of satisfying human needs deteriorate per capita.

The industrial process has up to now been nourished from sources of energy that are not in the main self-renewing; among these are fossil fuels as well as supplies of fissile material like uranium. In a determinable space of time these supplies will be exhausted; their replacement through what are basically new sources of energy (such as atomic fusion) is theoretically conceivable, but not yet practically realizable.

The industrial process is also dependent on the employment of mineral raw materials—above all metals—which are not self-renewing either; their exploitation is advancing so rapidly that the exhaustion of deposits can be foreseen.

Water requirements of the industrial process have reached a point where they can no longer be satisfied by the natural circulation of water. As a result, the reserves of water in the ground are being attacked; this must lead to disturbances in the present cycle of evaporation and precipitation and to climactic changes. The only possible solution is the desalination of sea water; but this is so energy-intensive that it would accelerate the process described above.

A further limiting factor is the production of foodstuffs. Neither the area of land suitable for cultivation nor the yield per acre can be arbitrarily increased. Attempts to increase the productivity of farming lead, beyond a certain point, to new ecological imbalances—for example, erosion, pollution through poisonous substances, reductions in genetic variability. The production of food from the sea comes up against ecological limits of another kind.

A further factor—but only one factor among a number of others—is the notorious "pollution of the earth." This category is misleading insofar as it presupposes a "clean" world. This has naturally never existed and is moreover ecologically neither conceivable nor desirable. What is

actually meant are disequilibriums and dysfunctionings of all kinds in the metabolism between nature and human society occurring as the unintentional side effects of the industrial process. The polycausal linking of these effects is of unimaginable complexity. Poisoning caused by harmful substances—physiological damage from pesticides, radioactive isotopes, detergents, pharmaceutical preparation, food additives, artificial manures, trace quantities of lead and mercury, fluoride, carcinogens, gene mutants, and a vast quantity of other substances are only another facet of the same question. The changes in the atmosphere and in the resources of land and water traceable to metabolic causes such as production of smog, changes in climate, irreversible changes to rivers and lakes, and oceanographic changes must also be taken into account.

> Scientific research into yet another factor does not appear to have got beyond the preliminary stages. There are no established critical quantifications of what is called "psychic pollution." Under this heading come: increasing exposure to excessive noise and other irritants, the physical effects of overpopulation, as well as other stress factors that are difficult to locate.
>
> A final critical limit is presented by "thermal pollution." The laws of thermodynamics show that, even in principle, this limit cannot be crossed. Heat is emitted by all processes involving the conversion of energy. The consequences for the global supply of heat have not been made sufficiently clear.[13]

Listing of the consequences of industrialization, or understanding of technology as industry's means, or tracing of the history of environmental degradation since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution—none of these factors in itself explains the incredible acceleration in per capita production and consumption that is so out of proportion with the population increase. For this explanation, one must turn to the social values that underlie the demand for such production.

The overwhelming emphasis in the industrialized corporate capitalist state is on the production and consumption of commodities. This production/consumption cycle takes not only more and more natural resources, but ever more energy to transform raw materials into commodities. So long as the production and distribution of these commodities is administered from above by corporate interest, they will be constantly proliferating. For production is driven by the profit motive, even while rationalized as serving public needs—needs induced by relentless advertising in every medium. As socialism, or the organization of production by the producers for the sake of positive social values rather than through increased commodity production for profit, is nowhere on the horizon, appeals to the citizen consumer to conserve and in general to modify his behavior with regard to consumption is, as Enzensberger has pointed out, "not only useless but cynical. To ask the individual wage earner to differentiate between his 'real' and his 'artificial' needs is to mistake the real situation. Both are so closely connected that they constitute a relationship which is subjectively and objectively indivisible. Hunger for commodities, in all its blindness, is a product of the production of commodities."[14] Because the scale of commodity ownership, production, and consumption prevails as the index of well-being in this country, it is in fact identified with the "free way of life." And here we confront an ideology and lifestyle so entrenched in the fabric of American existence, so much an expected right, that it is difficult to imagine anything short of the inevitable coming disaster of shortages turning people's minds and values in another direction. Given the prevailing consumer ideology, the machines will not stop until there is nothing more to put into the hoppers. Then what? Riots? Class wars for survival?

A less pessimistic view of the uses and consequences of technology is, of course, held by some. A benign and hopeful view maintains that "anything that is possible within the laws of physics can be achieved by sufficiently advanced technology."[15] Intergalactic colonies to mine resources on the planets in a future when "it will not be meaningful to

distinguish between machines and biological forms,"[16] are envisioned. "The general conclusion is that technology could extend the lifetime of intelligent organization billions of times longer than that of cosmic organization."[17] Such a point of view assumes, perhaps naively, that "once it is realized that all activity and organization depend on minimizing the increases in entropy, then the uncontrolled dissipation of energy resources will stop. This is already happening on Earth, and its importance will grow in time."[18] Many do not share the optimism of this statement. Those eons ahead when the stars have long since died, but organized intelligences continue to flourish by capturing and growing black holes as gravitational energy sources, will indeed have made our present concerns look primeval. But that doesn't lessen the present crisis, and the present crisis is thoroughgoing and pervasive. The problems of pollution, diminishing resources and scarcities, inflation and unemployment, and the high cost of energy are not only not going to diminish in the near future, but they are, as Barry Commoner has pointed out, interlocking, mutually reinforcing, and accelerating. They will persist so long as two things endure: the present outmoded and workable set of government institutions and the economic order of capitalism. The latter, unaided by even the most feeble of ideological oppositions, is showing unheralded but unmistakable signs of collapse.[19]

> It was revealed to me that those things are good which yet are corrupted which neither if they were supremely good nor unless they were good could be corrupted.
>
> —*James Joyce,* Ulysses

The production of artworks in this late industrial age has for the most part been circumscribed and structured by the commodity market. Beyond this, most artistic careers follow the contours of a consumer-

oriented market: a style is established within which yearly variations occur. These variations do not threaten the style's identity but change subsequent production enough to make it identifiably new. Such a pattern then comes to be seen as natural and value-free rather than a condition of art distribution and sales. Strictures for change under different social conditions might emphasize disjunctive change, or not change at all. The modes for all change, or nonchange, in production, including art, may be limited to three: static, incremental, and disjunctive. But that one or more do in fact exist in every culture seems apparent. A given rate change for art production provides a context and coherence beyond a strictly economic referent: it provides the infrastructure for the culture's art history. Beyond this, the mode of art paralleling commodity production with its basic yearly style variation yields good as well as bad art. Although this has proven obviously more economically sound for artists than either the static or disjunctive modes, it is probably safe to say that the disjunctive, when effective, for whatever reasons, has been granted greater cultural value, either in terms of individuals or movements. (It has been suggested that there may be something genetic in both risk-taking and its approval.[20]) The disjunctive condition itself often ushers in the mode of commodity production in which incremental variations are practiced by "second-generation" artists. Today the description of this phenomenon often polarizes "innovators" into one camp and those who produce "quality" items into the other.

It is interesting to examine site-specific works produced for the last ten to fifteen years, in the light of these modes. Whatever innovative or disjunctive threshold they might once have had has long since passed. On the other hand, site-specific works can hardly be described as commodity production items. They seem to assume the role of a service function rather than that of object production. Yet the majority of those artists showing a sustained interest in site-specific work—in either realized or proposed projects—conform to the "established style variation" mode characteristic of commodity object production. This is not surprising: the

constraining parameter for change mediates cultural production in general.

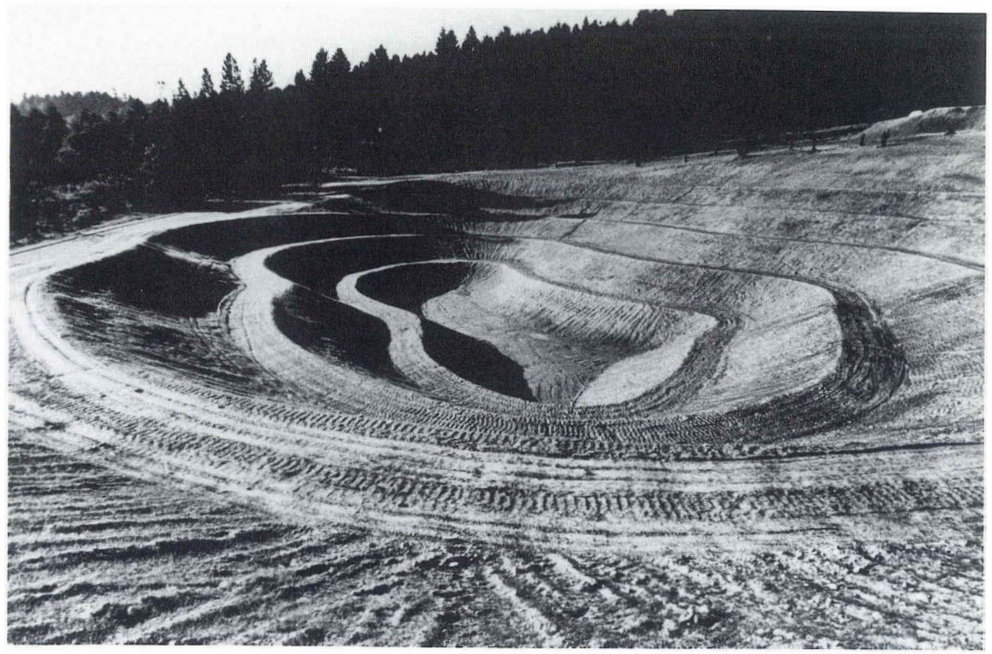
Although site-specific works have been produced now for over a decade, their sponsorship has been erratic and the budgets generally below what is required for truly ambitious works. There has certainly been no one source of sponsorship: various museums, private individuals, international exhibitions, local communities—these and others have from time to time made site works possible, but often just barely. The works sponsored have more often than not been temporary. But now on the horizon there is potential for widespread sponsorship of outdoor earth and site-specific works. Local, state, federal, and industrial funding is on tap. They key that fits the lock to the bank is "land reclamation." Art functioning as land reclamation has a potential sponsorship in millions of dollars and a possible location over hundreds of thousands of acres throughout the country.

A number of issues, or perhaps pseudo- or nonissues, are raised by this possible ménage à trois between art, government, and industry. One of these is not an issue, and that is the objection to art's "serving" as land reclamation, that it would somehow lose its "freedom" in so doing. Art has always served. Sometimes the service has been more visible—service to a patron, or to a governmental propaganda campaign. Sometimes the service is less visible, as when art meshes with and reinforces commodity consumption or remains "abstract" while fulfilling a government commission. Context can also be read as service; it binds the political load of any work of art. In a deeper way, however, context is content. The issue of art as land reclamation is of course blurred by appeals by industry to the "public need" for more natural resources, and thus more mines and environmental entropy that need cleaning up. Although minerals have been mined and used since the end of the Stone Age, the present-day escalation of mineral requirements and the energy needed for accelerating production is not so much an index of public need as of corporate administration. In a complex society, where everything is

interconnected, it is not possible to decide which commodity, therefore which technology, therefore which resource, therefore which mine is essential and therefore worthy of reclamation. It might then seem that to practice art as land reclamation is to promote the continuing acceleration of the resource-energy-commodity-consumption cycle, as reclamation—defined aesthetically, economically, geophysically—functions to make acceptable original acts of resource extraction.

Insofar as site works participate in art as land reclamation, they would seem to have no choice but to serve a public-relations function for mining interests in particular and the accelerating technological-consumerist program in general. Participation, however, would seem to be no different from exhibition in any art gallery, which ipso facto participates in the commodity structure. None of the historical monumental works known today would have been made if the artists had refused to work (many, of course, had no option to refuse) because of either questionable sponsorship or disagreement with the ends to which the art was used. It is an illusion that artists have ever had anything to say about the functions of their works.

Although my project at Johnson Pit No. 30 in King County, Washington is to my knowledge the first instance of the hiring of an artist to produce art billed as land reclamation, the idea is far from new.[21] The coal industry has in fact given the aesthetics of reclamation some attention: "While esthetics is a frequent subject of discussion among reclamation officials, regulatory agencies, and environmentalists, esthetic quality and the criteria and standards by which it is evaluated seem to be one of the least understood facets of surface mining."[22] The *Coal Age Operating Handbook of Surface Mining* notes a research effort (source of funding not given) centered at the University of Massachusetts involving the engineering firm of Skelly and Loy and two University of Massachusetts faculty members, Robert Mallary, a designer and sculptor, and Ervin Zube, who deals with the "psychology of landscape assessment."[23] Although the overwhelming local feeling regarding reclamation, according



11.2 Robert Morris, *Untitled,* 1979. (Collection of the Kings County Arts Commission, Seattle, Washington; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

to this research effort, is to "return it to the previous contour," in Appalachia one of the prevailing surface mining techniques involves the removal of the tops of mountains. The major thrust of the group's "systems approach" is aimed at dealing with reclamation that retains the flattened mountains of such sites. The research group notes with no trace of irony that "operators at mountain top removal mine sites are tending to favor this flat-top approach."[24] (Why wouldn't they, since it would be virtually impossible to rebuild the tops of mountains?) The group has proposed such striking aesthetic formulations as the following: "Leav[ing]

11.3 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1979. (Collection of the Kings County Arts Commission, Seattle, Washington; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

a few strategically located portions of the site untouched and unmined."[25] Such approaches are obviously nothing but coal-mining public relations.

What would *not* function as public relations, as any aesthetic effort made during or after mining operations functions to make the operations more acceptable to the public? Such aesthetic efforts are incapable of signaling any protest against the escalating use of nonrenewable minerals and energy sources. What, one wonders, could be done for the Kennecott Bingham site, the ultimate site-specific work of such raging, ambiguous energy, so redolent with formal power and social threat, that no existing

earthwork should even be compared to it? It should stand unregenerate as a powerful monument to a one-day nonexistent resource. Other sites come to mind as well: those in Butte, Montana; the abandoned quarry at Marble, Colorado; some of the Vermont granite quarries; and a few of the deep-shaft coal and diamond mines qualify as significant monuments of the twentieth century. Are their implications any less sinister than those of the Great Pyramids? All great monuments celebrate the leading faith of the age—or, in retrospect, the prevailing idiocy. In one form or another, technology has produced the monuments of the twentieth century: the mines, the rocket assembly buildings so vast that weather forms inside, the Four Corners Power Complex, the dams of the 1930s, the linear and circular accelerators of the 1950s and 1960s, the radiotelescope arrays of the 1960s and 1970s, and soon, the tunnel complex for the new MX missile. All these structures are testimony to faith in science and technology, the practice of which has brought the world to a point of crisis that nobody knows how to resolve. Art's greatest efforts are by comparison very definitely epiphenomena. Until now there could be no comparison. But the terms change when the U.S. Bureau of Mines contributes to an artist's reclaiming the land.[26] Art must then stand accused of contributing its energy to forces that are patently, cumulatively destructive.

Or is art beyond good and evil? It can and does flourish in the worst moral climates. Perhaps because it is amoral, it can deal with all manner of social extremes. It is an enterprise whose nature invites the investigation of extremes. Art erodes whatever seeks to contain and use it and inevitably seeps into the most contrary recesses, touches the most repressed nerve, finds and sustains the contradictory without effort. Art has always been a very destructive force, the best example being its capacity constantly to self-destruct, as in the sinking of modernism once it became a set of established rules that rationalized procedure, a lifestyle. Art has always been dependent upon and served one set of forces or another with little regard for the morality of those forces (pharaoh, pope, nobility, capitalism). It makes little difference what forces make use of

art. Art is always propaganda—for someone. History, which is always *someone's* history, invariably attempts to neutralize art (according to someone's history, Speer was a better artist than Géricault). Artists who deeply believe in social causes most often make the worst art.

If the only rule is that art must use what uses it, then one should not be put off by the generally high level of idiocy, politics, and propaganda attached to public monuments—especially if one is in the business of erecting them. Should the government/industry sponsorship of art as land reclamation be enthusiastically welcomed by artists? Every large strip mine could support an artist in residence.[27] Flattened mountain tops await the aesthetic touch. Dank and noxious acres of spoil piles cry out for some redeeming sculptural shape. Bottomless industrial pits yawn for creative filling—or deepening. There must be crews out there, straining and tense in the seats of their D-8 Caterpillars, waiting for that confident artist to stride over the ravaged ground and give the command, "Gentlemen, start your engines, and let us definitively conclude the twentieth century."

Notes

This text is a revised version of the keynote address for a symposium, "Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture," sponsored by the King County (Washington) Arts Commission. It was delivered on July 31, 1979.

1. Data presented by Louise Dunlap of the Environmental Policy Center before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, March 1973. U.S. Government Printing Office, "Regulations of Surface Mining Operation," p. 900.

2. Bill S.425, introduced by Senators Jackson, Mansfield, Metcalf, and Moss, January 18, 1973, pp. 4–5.

3. This mine "expanded to engulf the entire town at Bingham Canyon, whose population was formerly 10,000. A few lone protestors objected to the demise of the town on the ground there should be no form of private corporation, no matter how big, powerful enough to liquidate a government, no matter how small. But the mining company ultimately prevailed." William O. Douglas, *The Three Hundred Years War* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 122.

4. Statement of Edwin R. Phelps, President, Peabody Coal Company, before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, March 14, 1973. "Regulations of Surface Mining Operations," p. 180.

5. Suzanne Gordon, *Black Mesa, the Angel of Death* (The John Day Company, 1973), p. 47.

6. Ibid., p. 12.

7. Douglas, p. 118.

8. Ibid., p. 120.

9. Quoted in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "A Critique of Political Ecology," in *Political Ecology,* eds. Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway (New York: Times Books, 1979), p. 379.

10. Cockburn and Ridgeway, p. 9.

11. Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York, Knopf, 1971), p. 138.

12. Quoted in Commoner, p. 184.

13. Enzensberger, p. 373.

14. Ibid., p. 391.

15. Paul Davies, *The Runaway Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 173.

16. Ibid., p. 174.

17. Ibid., p. 177.

18. Ibid., p. 175.

19. See Barry Commoner, "Capital Crisis," *The Poverty of Power* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 221–249.

20. David Barash, *The Whispering Within* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 59.

21. I have had discussions with West Virginia mining interests about art projects on mined land. See also *The Writings of Robert Smithson,* ed. Nancy Holt (New York, New York University Press, 1979), pp. 220–221.

22. Nicholas P. Chironis, *Coal Age Operating Handbook of Surface Mining* (New York, Coal Age Mining Information Services, 1978), p. 278.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 279.

25. Ibid., p. 281.

26. The U.S. Bureau of Mines contributed $39,000 for my project in King County, Washington.

27. Smithson envisioned the possibility of the artist acting as a "mediator" between ecological and industrial interests. Although it is still conceivable that art works as land reclamation might achieve ecological approval and the support of a harassed coal industry (and even eager governmental money), the notion of "mediation" loses all meaning in this situation. Given the known consequences of present industrial energy resource policies, it would seem that any cooperation could only function to disguise and abet misguided and disastrous policies.

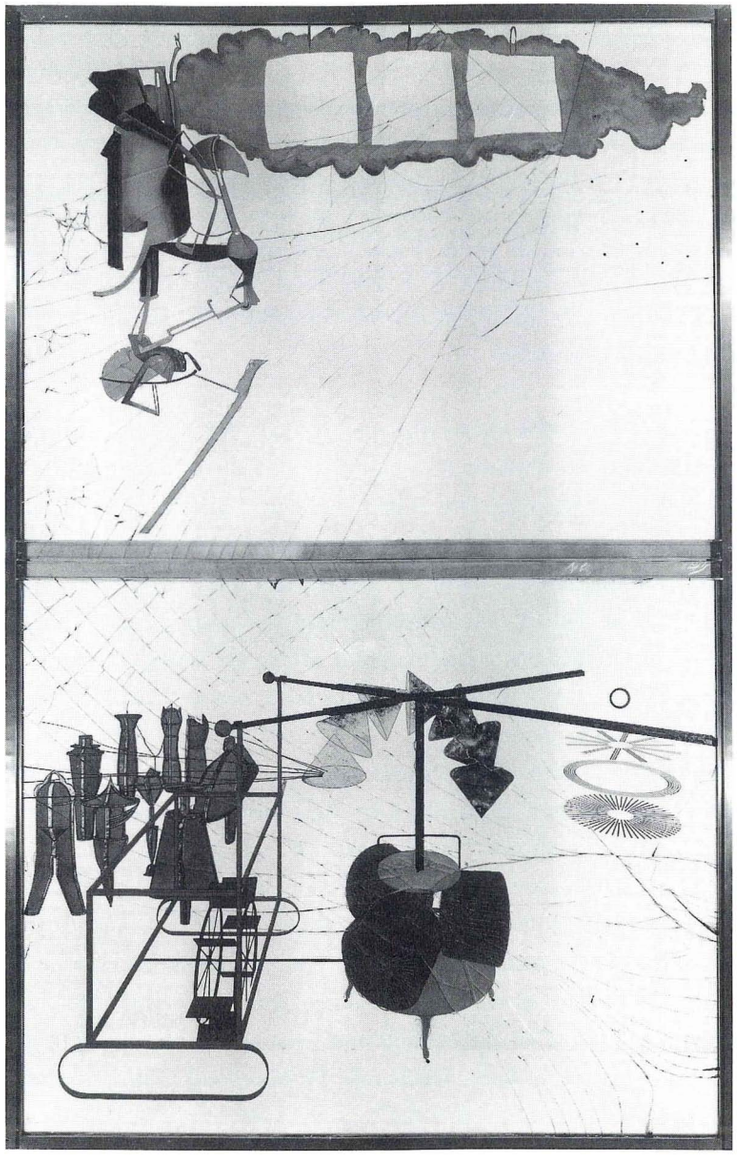
12 American Quartet

> But perhaps only a malignant end can follow the systematic belief that all communities are one community; that all truth is one truth; that all experience is compatible with all other; that total knowledge is possible; that all that is potential can exist as actual.
>
> —*J. Robert Oppenheimer*

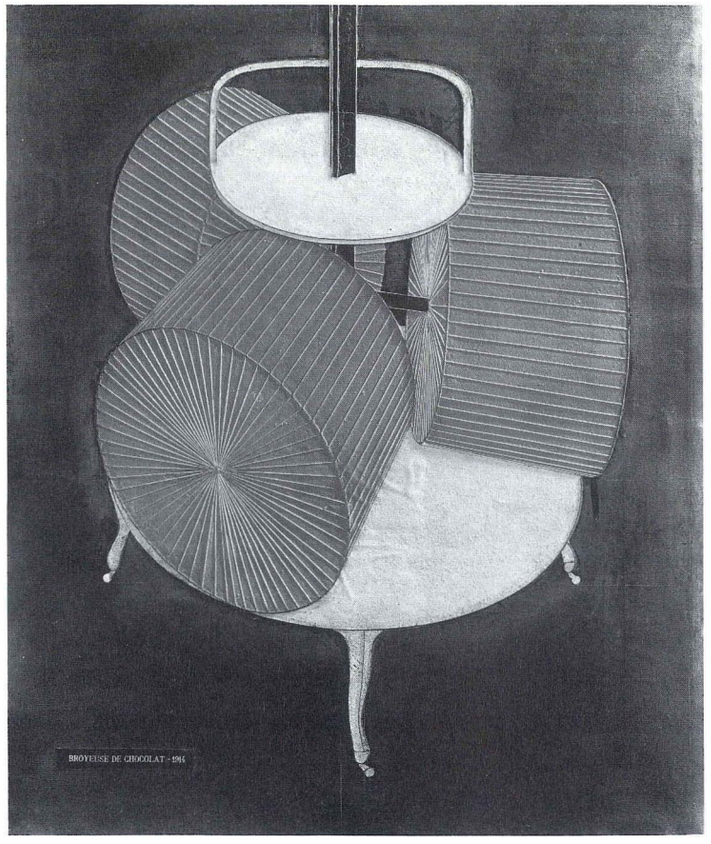
At some point in the 1960s I heard the remark that "All American art can be triangulated between Pollock, Duchamp, and Hopper." I do not know who first said it. At the time it was attributed to Walter Hopps. Apocryphal or not, it seems almost as prophetic now as it did then. Beyond obvious stylistic differences, there are distinct attitudes, ambitions, and implied definitions for art that cohere around the work of these three artists. Yet I think that this triangular plot of the art landscape needs a fourth corner. When the polygon grows to a square, we see Joseph Cornell standing in the fourth quadrant.

The themes and sensibilities underlying the four distinct positions were neither initiated nor summed up by these artists, for each himself stands within a long tradition. But the work of each profoundly focused these traditions, which continue to reverberate in art today. Each of these constellations of ambitions, themes, sensibilities, traditions, and forms constitutes what can be termed an art paradigm. Such fundamental predispositions for certain kinds of art making arise from impulses and perceptions that respond to deep strains and tensions within the culture.

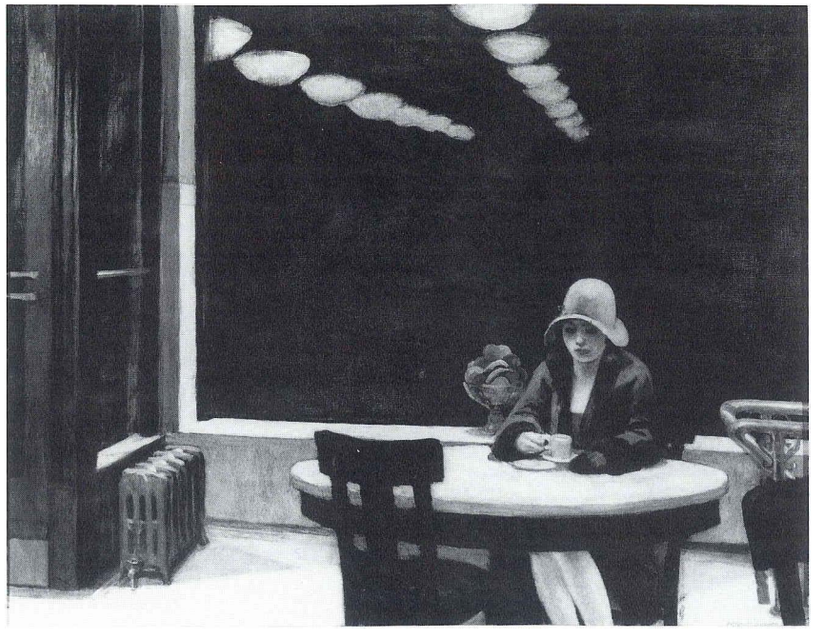
If the work of Pollock, Duchamp, Hopper, and Cornell denote the major art paradigms of the last half century, they can also be seen to stand at the corners of a historical space or grid within which all significant American art of the last few decades can be mapped. Innumerable artists



12.1 Marcel Duchamp, *The Large Glass,* 1915–23. (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier.)

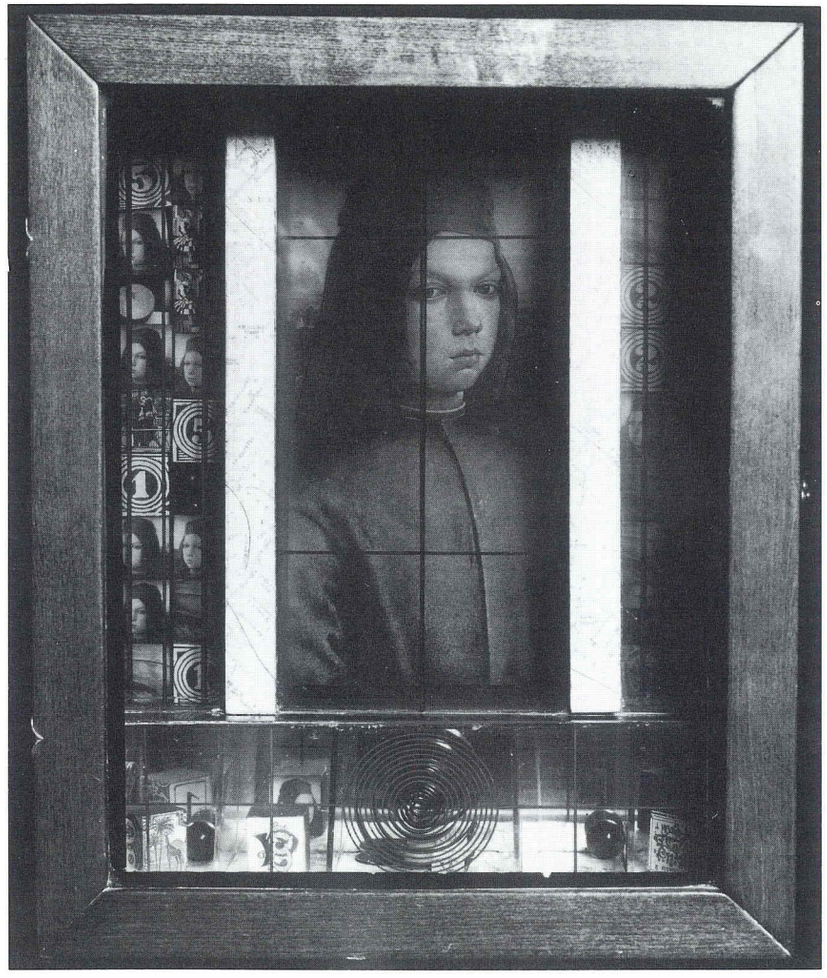


12.2 Marcel Duchamp, *The Chocolate Grinder, No. 2,* 1914. (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.)

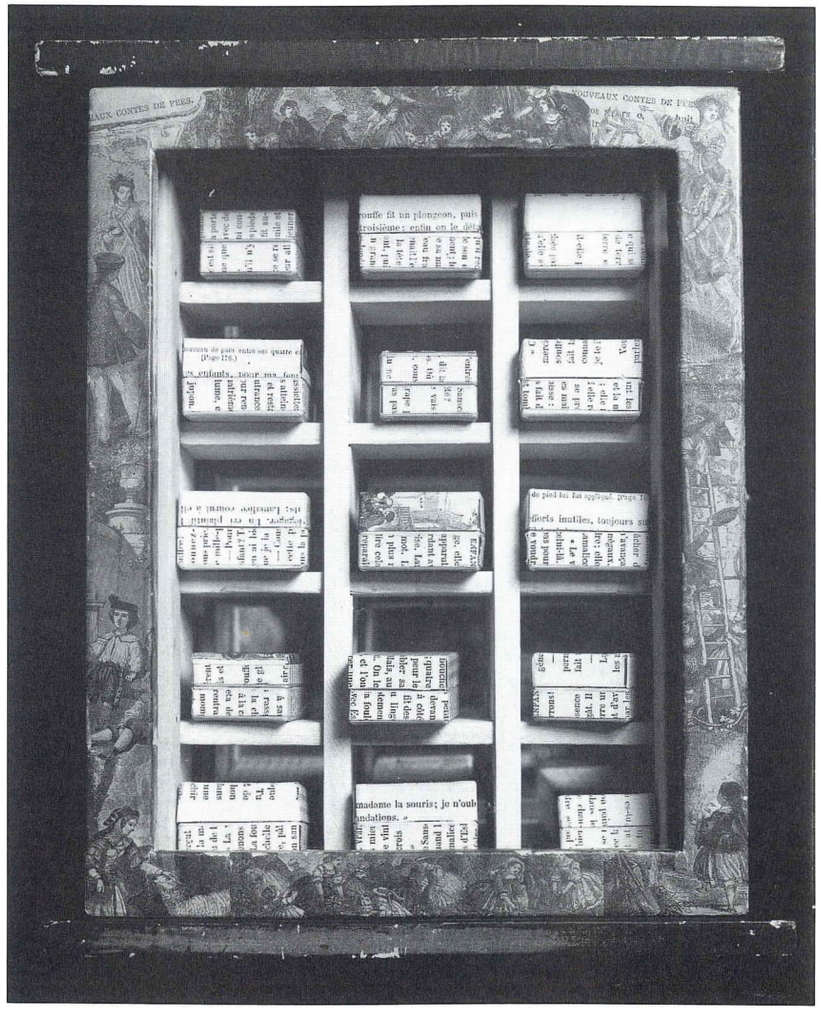


12.3 Edward Hopper, *Automat,* 1927. (Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa, James D. Edmundson Fund.)

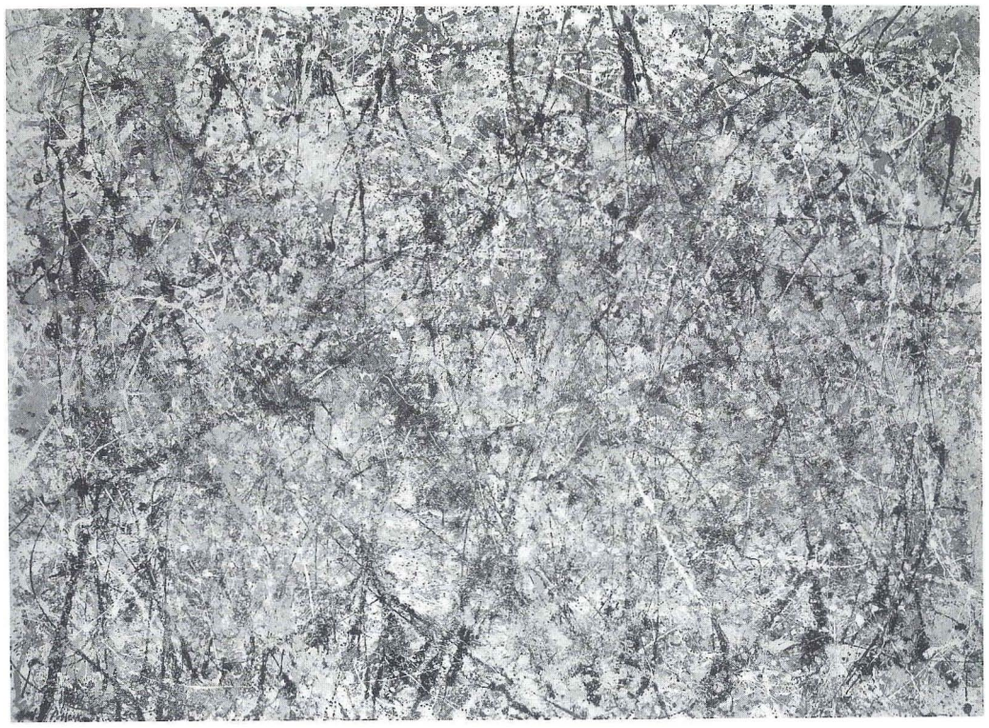
can be plotted among these four positions. Influence is implicit but less important than the fact that the four key points represent both limits and enduring core traditions. Like lodestones or energizers, they have charged the field of art. Art has been made more in answer to one or more of these ambitions and the themes locked within these traditions than to any of the four artists as such. These key positions also provide the model developed here with a third dimension of temporal depth, for the root concerns and obsessions that form the armature of these positions can be traced to the remote past. Considered as a totality, the model suggested here has three distinct levels: the upper grid, like a tabletop, which locates



12.4 Joseph Cornell, *Medici Slot Machine,* 1943. (© The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation.)



12.5 Joseph Cornell, *Nouveaux Contes de Fées (Poison Box)*, 1948. (© The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation; collection of E. Bergman; photo: Jonas Dovydenas.)



12.6 Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950. (© 1992 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.)

positions and orientations; the four key paradigmatic lines (or legs), which form foci and boundaries as well as indicate a vertical dimension of enduring traditions; and at the roots of these sensibilities and traditions we pass into a theoretical realm. For at this level a speculative exegesis of the motivating impulses behind the sensibilities is suggested.

Pollock is no doubt the high point of American abstract art, a pinnacle of formalist modernism. Both critical and expansive, his work broke the grip of European influence. In the classic works of the late 1940s, both the structure of Cubist space and the iconography of Surrealism were left behind for a new and independent art. Of course others were there as well—Still, Newman, Rothko—pushing art toward the big and open look that characterized the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s. Adamantly abstract, this was an art of immediacy and sometimes overwhelming presence. This wave of energy for, and confidence in, abstract work flowed into the 1960s with most of the basic premises intact. Objects, less illusionistic and more obdurately present, dominated the decade. More analytic and less expansive than the earlier efforts, 1960s work was informed by what some would call increased structural rigor; others might term it puritanical. But the unremitting abstraction and aggressive presence were a continued legacy from the 1950s. The Minimalist proposal of the constructed object as redefinition for sculpture was as radical, as American, and as modernist as were the efforts that earlier transformed and redefined painting.

Duchamp and everything he represents would seem to be the antithesis of these attitudes. Full of reference, indirect, even obscure, his work carried overtones of the cynical and ironic and seemed to locate itself almost as much in language as in its physical manifestations. Duchamp seemed to stand in direct opposition to the macho confidence of the "big" art practiced by American abstract artists. But from the early 1960s on, his presence was making itself felt more and more in certain quarters of American art. The distanced intelligence, the refusal to structure art according to the esthetics of presence and immediacy, informed

in certain direct ways the early 1960s work of Cage, Johns, myself, and others. In more diffuse ways Duchamp's stance provided an attitude that made Pop art possible.

In many ways Hopper is just another painter in the realist tradition. He painted trains, rooms, lighthouses, streets, figures, etc. But there is one direction in his work that seems uniquely powerful. This is the theme of the figure, usually but not always in an urban setting. In night cafes and eerie offices, hotel lobbies and train compartments, theaters and rooms at all times of the day and night, his figures endure their profound aloneness. He was obviously not the first American painter to take up this theme. But as I have mentioned, each of the artists chosen here to occupy one of the four key positions does so within a tradition that stretches behind him. I believe Hopper, better than any artist before him, focuses this relation of the figure to its industrialized, urban setting as that sealed space of alienation. That dual relation has not always taken the form of those silent spaces depicted by Hopper. It took a more raucous form in 1960s Pop imagery and Photo-Realism, and has been an obsessive theme in photography from the 1930s until today.

Cornell established a sensibility for a certain kind of decorative object that draws heavily on Surrealist methods and sensibilities. Generally small in scale, his boxes were assemblages composed of disparate bits and pieces and usually carried references to past times and exotic places. This decorative tradition was, if not dormant, hardly hyperactive in the 1960s, but it is there in the early work of Samaras and can be seen in early Rauschenberg combines that accumulated the detritus of the family attic trunk—the old photograph, the child's drawing, the bit of lace, etc. It is there in a more oblique way in Johns's early work in the antique and precious quality that emanates from the surfaces of the encaustic and newspaper collage, and in the mixed objects above the *Target* paintings. Especially in early Rauschenberg, it is not so much the form that came from Cornell as the shared methodology of facture and the density of inclusion. Today, of course, one does not need to look far to find the

sensibility and preciousness that Cornell represents. The Holly Solomon Gallery often seems like one large Cornell box that changes every three weeks. But I would like to extend Cornell's sensibility and precedent beyond a certain formal parameter of the decorative images composed of collaged fragments, for it can represent as well that general sensibility of the *horror vacui* that more often than not is achieved not by the collage of disparate bits, but by the repetition of the homogeneous bit. The result of the application of this methodology characterizes a certain strain of making that runs the gamut from weaving to Johns's paint application. And in much of Cornell (*An Image for 2 Emilies,* for example), small acts of repetition are the rule for generating the object. This is especially true of the grid-based works. Cornell then represents not only a tradition of the decorative object but a definite sensibility for, and methodology of, making procedures that are enlisted to produce certain types of objects.

Three of these four key positions were occupied roughly fifty years ago. The fourth, the purely abstract one represented by Pollock, was established over thirty years ago. But some of the implications involved in each of these sensibilities reach much further back into time. Each represents a way of addressing a particular set of concerns that are neither fully contained nor exhausted by the forms, images, and methods characteristic of that position. As much obsessive response as prescriptive definition for art, the paradigmatic positions are culturally sanctioned channels for action. We can begin to characterize some of the underlying impulses and concerns that drive and shape these art paradigms. One—that represented by Pollock—aims at the production of purely abstract icons that carry certain ambitions for the transcendent. Another—the Duchampian—concerns itself with the construction of various meta-systems in either a strategic mode (the mythical) or a tactical mode (generating art from non-art methods). A third is based on the production of mimetic images of the human figure and the objects of its manufactured environment and revolves around the alienation engendered by this relation. The last, that impulse for the decorative, based on accumulative

or repetitive making procedures, is historically the oldest of the four types. But I would suggest that insofar as it can be at all recovered from the forgotten past, the impulse to the decorative is that of escape. If the impulse for the energetically abstract could be identified with Eros, the decorative would fall on the side of Thanatos.

Given the four points of departure, the general historical lines that radiate out from them as indicated by the few examples cited from the 1950s and 1960s, and the blocking in of certain deeper concerns, it is possible to look a little more closely and critically at the development of this quartet of legacies as they approach and become manifest in work closer to today.

A certain amount of energetic abstract work continued throughout the 1970s. The Earthworks of the early part of the decade were essentially a continuation of Abstract Expressionism's impulse for grandeur fused to Minimalism's emblematic forms. Smithson's invocation of the "void" is but the obverse of Newman's "sublime" carried back to nature, where it originated in nineteenth-century American landscape painting. The impulse for the transcendent in art that is adamantly abstract has been continuous from the 1950s to the 1980s (e.g., Rothko, Reinhardt, Flavin, Turrell). As the dialectical edge of Minimalism grew dull, as it had to in time, and as the radicality of its imagery, contexts, or processes became routine, its options dwindled to a formula: use more space. Size or weight or more phenomenal-immaterial sensation were concomitantly escalated to sustain the grandeur of transcendent, looming presence. Consequently, Turrell goes the way of the angels with colored light as mysterious atmosphere, whereas Serra adds tonnage in attempts to pump up a slumping icon. Such artists as Irwin, Ireland, Grosvenor, Nonas, and Highstein, among others, have worked permutations by dividing large spaces with either dense or immaterial markers; or they have added weight or size in attempts to give presence to long-familiar Minimalist configurations. The need beneath this thirty-year continuity of big, simple, purely abstract forms in American art verges on the religious, but a religiosity

tempered with American puritanism for exclusion of the unnecessary, the sensual, the casual, or the decorative. The prohibition against imagery in what survives of Minimalism is not unrelated to ancient Near Eastern religious strictures against representation.

I have invoked the work of Pollock as representative of an orientation for that continuity of work that has tended toward the large scale, the open look with reduced or all-over imagery, severe purity, and emblematic presence. It seems upon examination that the abstract work that chose to move away from this sensibility had no choice but to fall into that pit of the decorative that was anathema to it (e.g., Stella, Held, Conlon). It is true that there has been a certain parallel tradition or sensibility of abstract decorative art that locates itself between the ambitions of Pollock and Cornell. Early on there were American abstract artists who were committed to the decorative. And from Tomlin to Kelly, a certain amount of this work continues. Even Minimalism had its decorative side in much of Judd's work. The point I wish to emphasize here is that for nearly three decades a kind of high ambition in American art was identified with an almost religious purity of imagery and a desire for a transcendent presence that saw the decorative as an inferior and nonambitious mode.

If there is still this tradition of an abstract art of high seriousness, the escalation of expense and technology that seems needed to keep it afloat brings with it that smell of Counter-Reformation doubt. But whatever the recent moves of abstract art, its credibility has been sinking fast over the last few years. There may be reasons for this other than the stylistic exhaustion of the abstract mode that so personifies the broad sensibility and strategy of modernism. The real heyday of American abstract art occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, which were decades of unquestioned United States imperial authority. Contrary to T. E. Hulme's speculation that art tends toward the abstract in an era of national threat, equal evidence can be found in the art of the ancient Near East and Egypt

(as well as our own more recent history) for the maintenance of hieratic and abstract tendencies in times of imperial stability and power.

One of the central aspects of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism is the projection of an aura of power and domination over the viewer. The production of icons with an intense presence that projected authority has been one of the ambitions of these types of work. Higher authority or force is, of course, the basis of the transcendent. I would suggest that what has been most characteristic of American abstraction—its scale, its presence, its undifferentiated "all over" or holistic, nondecorative, "tough" aspects—reflects either a confidence in or a desire for authoritarian presence. American abstract art began to fall apart in the late 1960s, a time of political unrest and disbelief in U.S. political actions. It is not surprising that in the present atmosphere of insecure political posturing, economic instability, and returning nightmares of nuclear war, the impulses that drove a confident abstraction to macho dimension have shrunk considerably.

Duchamp influenced many, but perhaps the earliest direct American heir of the tradition was John Cage, who exploited some of those key tactical weapons in the arsenal against the esthetic: the uses of chance, language, and the self as subject/object. Jasper Johns drew powerfully on other elements in his use of found images of numbers, flags, and targets. Then, moving in the direction of Cornell, he embalmed them with exquisite, decorative surfaces. Most of Johns's work can be located on that axis between Duchamp and Cornell, between the found object, or later the metasystem, and the decorative. In the early 1960s others employed language, irrational measurement, the self, and contradictory systems as thematic material, which flew directly in the face of a then confident and self-contained abstract art.

Much in Pop art must also be linked to Duchamp, especially its stance of indifferent acceptance of the banal style of media reproduction in advertising for the consumer society. Less well known were such early efforts as those of Henry Flynt who, preceding Conceptual art, early in

the 1960s developed a strategy of "Language Games" to replace the art object. Certainly the notion of a conscious strategy and tactics in art making derives from Duchamp and was perhaps more important in the long run than any particular move made by any one artist for changing the parameters of art making in the 1960s. Throughout the 1970s, Acconci, Oppenheim, Haacke, Baldessari, Aycock, myself, and others developed works, especially installations, which drew on transformations, skewed systems, metaphysics, language, machinery, and metaphor of all sorts. None of this could have existed without Duchamp's detonation of the static, self-sufficient esthetic object as the limit for art making. One of the most powerful aspects of Duchamp's work has been hardly touched by American artists: his revival of the seminarrative mythic theme, which allows his work to address concerns far beyond the formal, the imagistic, or the immediately symbolic. The *Large Glass* weaves together the very movement of art with sexual drama and the machine, all of which hovers in a realm that is as much composed of language as of images. The *Large Glass* lays out a space that is partially mental, partially physical. What is absent from the *Glass* is as important as what is present.

There is a deep chasm between where this work stands and the position of Duchamp's great older contemporary, Picasso. If both artists travel some of the same thematic ground (meditations on the artist and his act of creativity and the force of sexuality, for example), Picasso leaves an endless series of self-contained exclamation marks in his wake, while Duchamp's few brittle, sometimes purposefully unfinished artifacts drag half of Western civilization along behind them. Two broadly divergent views of what art should be emanate from these two artists. On the one hand is an art that resonates in the mind, calling the mind's very processes and judgments into question, invoking laughter and even indifference to escape the habits or to question its values and meanings. Essentially this is a critical art probing into the myths of the culture. It is highly elitist, disguised, indirect, not packaged for the consumption/entertainment role that is the final reassurance that art is harmless.

On the other hand there is Picasso. Here is an art of exuberance and direct feeling. Startlingly immediate, formally amazing and powerfully present, the work runs the gamut of human feeling. If the ambition here is for heightened emotional response and visual fullness that at times is overwhelming, that sort of work is, finally, nothing to worry about. Catharsis, not doubt, feeling, not speculation, the full moment and the obdurate object, not the processes of time and change, inform the powerful works of Picasso. Complete and self-sufficient, his greatest works have a memory only for stylistic art-historical references. These energetic presences may cancel out history and lay down a formal future, celebrate sensuality or bemoan old age, but they give us no distance from our constraining impulses, coercive social prescriptions, and deluding and controlling beliefs. Their power is contained within the possibility of the fully present object. In this sense they represent the cultural artifact as ultimate package and as such constitute some of the greatest gifts to the materialist society of this late industrial age. The ultimate consumer item, Picasso's is an art that fits the norms of a society in which luxury, comfort, high productivity, immediate gratification, and constant variety are so valued.

The Jesuitical sensibility of Duchamp is met with more impatience. Certainly restraint and mental refusal were never popular American virtues. If there is humor in Picasso, there is no cancelling laughter. Perhaps it is that laughter which comes from an almost nonhuman distance in Duchamp that makes him so powerful and, for most people, so unacceptable. Nothing demolishes meaning like laughter. Laughter at our norms and values, our categories, our feelings, our convictions, our human patterns, does not reinforce our good opinions of ourselves. Duchamp has been useful and influential for American art, but not because of the questioning depth, content, or mythical dimension of his art; rather, what has been taken from him is his expansion of the art work away from the object, and an inclusion of system or metaphor. The fact that so much in Duchamp remains unused by recent artists is testimony to

how basically alien to the values of the culture his work really is. Undoubtedly the general sensibility for art as an immediate experience coexistent with the presence of the object falls on the side of Picasso. But as this is both so endemic to the last thirty years of American art and goes so much further back, I do not feel that Picasso so much as Duchamp (in spite of the small amount taken from him) represents the incisive position for American art.

Much Impressionist and later Expressionist work dealt with the figure in an urban setting. The Ash Can School saw Sloan and Bellows paint grimy city life in America. Miles of now forgotten WPA canvases depict workers at every conceivable task. Regionalists from Marsh to Burchfield gave us hefty women on breezy avenues and tired proletarians trudging dusky streets. But Hopper summed up this particular sensibility, which today can be seen in the work of Robert Longo and any number of new wave painters and photographers. Hopper is not only prototypical because of his subject matter, but because he represents the best in the realist tradition. It is the mimetic in relation to the particular concerns of isolation and alienation of urban life that are the dual terms of this mode of art. Photography and sculpture have been as much the carriers of the tradition here as painting. Of the modes discussed, this one is perhaps the least complicated; it is also the least specifically American, the most accessible, and has the longest tradition in Western art.

The separation between the low decorative and the high fine arts has historically been rather arbitrary. Ming vases are high, suits of armor and weaponry low; tapestries and Persian rugs high, most furniture low. Yet Alois Riegl saw in decorative motifs a kind of genetic code for the evolution of transpersonal stylistic change. Some early Constructivists and Bauhaus idealists held crafts and applied arts in high regard. William Morris saw them as a means of countering social alienation, which he considered a result of industrially mechanized modes of production. But in the high official circles of American art over the last fifty years, the decorative arts and crafts have not ranked high. Pottery, weaving, furniture, fabric design, decorative painting, etc., could be seen as therapeutic at best, evidence of a mindless visual fidget at worst.

While the issue of utility has continued to separate the decorative arts and crafts from high art, certain elements from craft traditions—the uses of fabrics, felt, weaving techniques, certain ceramics, etc.—have been filtering, over the last few decades, into the fine arts. If Duchamp's Readymade assumes the categorical distinction between utility and art, the second move in this game has been played by artists in the 1970s and 1980s who present furniture or clothing as art. Refusing to leave its functionalism at the door of the gallery, such work occupied two places at once, and the distinction between fine and applied arts gets further breached. The last few years have also seen a great deal of work that does not raise issues of category so much as it draws on the decorative as thematic material for painting, sculpture, and installation work. Upbeat with a vengeance and seriously mindless, such work is now pervasive enough to threaten us with what might be termed a new "boutique" style.

Cornell, the cornerstone of this fourth position, is prototypical of the paradigm underlying all this recent work. Behind this universe of forms is a sensibility of the enchanted, the exquisite, the toylike—an unthreatening reverie on the exotic. Here is an ideal consumable decor that sentimentalizes any question it might raise. One can probably link Cornell to work that ranges from the pastry-sweet eclecticism of Jennifer Bartlett to the Victorian orientalizing of Brad Davis to the gynecological doilies of Judy Chicago. This may give Cornell more (or less) than his due. But to link him with that coyness and self-congratulatory obsession with style that leaks out of such work strains only the myth of innocence associated with him.

Why a sudden surge of comfortable (decorative) art, and perhaps uncomfortable chairs in which to sit and view it? The demand certainly has to be linked with a shift in art's audience. The fact that there is a wide audience that regards art as an extension of the entertainment industry, perhaps a cultural step up from television, is partly a consequence of the

policies of museums. The recent Whitney Biennial is but the last of a decade-long practice by these institutions to show art that is by turns impressively expensive (trash with flash like the third-rate King Tut Gold exhibition), or so familiar and unthreatening it now has the status of calendar images (the Picasso exhibition), or to integrate art into a kind of penny arcade/cultural smorgasbord (the policies of Beauborg). There has been a general turning away from showing unfamiliar, new, or "difficult" art on the part of all museums. Such a shift may be considered an external force in the increased production and consumption of the decorative object. (On the other hand, some would argue that we are witnessing an internal collapse of an elistist and dour modernism.)

There is no given method for making art. It can be bought readymade, it can be fabricated from plans, produced by machines or hired assistant, or by a solitary individual with the most meager of means. But many objects of a highly decorative nature focus on a particular kind of making. Often associated with the therapeutic, there is an "automatic" aspect to the production of such objects: that repetitive, rhythmic, physical activity in which the anxiety of decision-making is absent, or has occurred initially and prior to the action. Although this type of making is primarily a preindustrial methodology that stretches from the beginnings of culture (flint points require the technique) to present-day art not considered decorative, it is decorative work that epitomizes this activity. I would even include in this category such artists as LeWitt, Darboven, Opalka, Agnes Martin, et al.

Of course, it must be borne in mind that the decorative is also defined on another level irrespective of its mode of fabrication. It is always largely a matter of selection as to which objects (of whatever nature) are considered decorative or high art. Over the last thirty years those works or forms that did not participate in a modernist dialectic were not considered "high" art. Another way of stating it would be to say that work that is perceived as having no problematics is always a candidate for the decorative category.

The history of the modernist dialectic is the history of certain kinds of problematics—the redefinition and breakdown of forms, the reflexive stance, the role of the self, etc. As recent art recedes somewhat in time, it is possible to say that the problematic masks a deeper area in some of the art of the last thirty years. I would designate this deeper area as one of "absence" to distinguish it from the merely problematic. For the references of absence are different from and beyond strategic modernist moves. Absence resides in those unresolved and seemingly contradictory aspects of work that keep art in motion, as it were, with respect to the culture's interest and response. Thus it is a second order of reference—one not constituted by mere presence or immediate signs or metaphors but by deeper and more elusive meanings, which sometimes emerge with a certain slowness from behind the mask of problematics.

In decorative work, which has no problematic mask, the referential aspect is consumed immediately and little or no absence remains. For example, in Cornell there is plenty of reference—to Surrealism, Duchamp, the exotic, etc.—but little absence. In contrast to this, the early work of Johns might be cited. Here the decorative elements are used to promote the problematic as the exquisite, repetitive brushwork contradicts the flat image of flag or target. As the decorative is defeated by the contradictions and dialectics of this work, so finally are the modernist dialectics and problematics defeated by absence that reverberates in the work.

The decorative legacy of the Cornellian mode is now in full flower. It is a legacy composed partly of a certain kind of making, a certain contextual placement, and a certain kind of refusal—the refusal of problematics. Meshing with an audience appetite for the accessible and the entertaining, it represents perhaps a new art of forgetting. It brings to the fore an impulse that is ancient and pervasive: that repetitive physiological twitch of eye and hand that is both productive and lulling. It has always been there in every handmade artifact from the knitted sweater to a Stella striped painting, but its pervasiveness at the present time has

to be recognized as more than a kind of coup de grace administered to modernism with a pop gun: its exoticisms and its basic prettiness provide reassurance in a way art has not for a very long time.

Art's deepest impulses are rooted in some of the same uncertainties that give rise to myths. But the manifestation of art itself involves the production of images by means of physical manipulation of materials and processes of the world. Closer to toolmaking than language, it involves action in real time to produce static images. This is the obverse of myths that take the form of linguistic symbols in the temporal dimension. Even Duchamp's *Large Glass,* a work that partially enters the domain of mythical form, is still a work made manifest by unique processes and physical materials. Its linguistic dimension proceeds by ellipses and obscure notation rather than by literary textuality.

It should be mentioned in passing that the notion of paradigm used relates to Thomas S. Kuhn's earlier articulation of the term in relation to science. He invoked the term to deal with those very wide but constraining horizons of belief that allow science to be both conservative and consistent. But he also was concerned to show how new definitions of reality germinated from perceptions of gaps and anomalies within a prevailing system of assumptions. In the course of the breakdown of one system and the redefinitions for a new one, a new paradigm emerged.

While change and stability are also concerns here, the term engages them in different ways in this discussion. First, the notion of a paradigm is less global. As employed here, the paradigms are in their largest sense four separate codes of meaning that guide the art enterprise in different directions. Four occur here that define separate orders of deep stability and continuity bound within traditions that allow formal surface changes. What is suggested is that there has been far less real change and "revolution" in art over the last thirty years than has seemed apparent. But more fundamentally, what is suggested by the four paradigms is that they constitute a set of limits of response for a cultural time.

We have assumed that the way of accounting for long-standing continuities conforming to a variation/repetition pattern of response is by positing an area of nonresolution that the repetitive action continues to address. It is to these fundamental levels of nonresolution that we must now turn, for they underlie the entire superstructure of each of the paradigms. The abstraction represented by Pollock, the metasystems of Duchamp, the mimesis of Hopper, and the decorative activities that Cornell represents all spring from anxieties whose origins probably coincide with the beginnings of art itself.

I have suggested that at its root levels, abstraction represents an address to transcendent authority. The production of abstract icons constitutes a form of worship of transcendent power. Such an address can face in a number of directions—from the mystical to the political—and involves such divergent urges as the desire for domination or protection, or a gesture of acknowledgment made in the face of the ineffable. A number of things can and have been set up within the human mind as transcendent powers—from deity to ideology to entropy. The little that remains of an intransigent abstraction is mostly tired Minimalism. At this particular moment, it seems irrelevant whether such work carries the torch for an unrequited religious yearning or for a macho authoritarianism.

The tradition represented by Duchamp revolves around epistemology and metaphysics whose manifestation is the articulation of sets of loaded objects that imply extended systems. Questions of causality and knowledge informs this delirious realm so fraught with doubt. One of its key concerns is to suggest how we might be connected to the universe. In this it parallels other concerns outside art—such as the cosmology myths of science. One foot in images, the other in language, this is the least immediate and most discursive form of art making.

The realist tradition is grounded in distant past practices of magic in which mimetic images were produced for the sake of control. Perhaps the threat of physical annihilation is at the bottom of this art, which

constantly mirrors the alienation of the self within its own environment. Such concerns draw near the deepest fears of death.

In contrast to the fears and doubts at the roots of these three types of art, he who practices the decorative would appear to be a happy Zen master whittling on a stick. The decorative refuses questions in its dedication to the repetitive and automatic. (Much present-day abstract art veers toward an alliance with the decorative, too.) Perhaps Yogi Berra's dictum that it is not possible to bat and think at the same time applies here. Whether mindless or enlightened, this work constitutes the great refusal. Its rhythms are linked to those bodily sequences of the repetitive required for the first tools ever made. Its very endlessness, its automatic procedures, and its avoidance of decision promote it as the ultimate activity of escape. The problem is to explain its relatively recent acceleration as a pervasive mode of art making. If in some ways the decorative informs all of the other modes in peripheral ways—and it is often called upon for aspects of production or is involved in the imagery itself, when it becomes dominant, when it asserts itself as the focus of forming, it signals that those modernist anxieties so emblematic of the tortured self that inform the other three modes have been left behind as an orienting concern.

Have we become less concerned with absolutes, with our place in the universe, and with our own individual morality? In some sense I believe we have. It has not just been a matter of exhaustion of modernist forms. An emotional weariness with what underlies them has occurred. I would suggest that the shift has occurred with the growing awareness of the more global threats to the existence of life itself. Whether this takes the form of instant nuclear detonation or a more leisurely extinction from a combination of exhaustion of resources and the pervasive, industrially based trashing of the planet, that sense of doom has gathered on the horizon of our perceptions and grows larger every day. Concomitantly, credible political ideologies for the ideal future no longer exist, and the general values underlying rationalist doctrines for an improved future

through science and technology are crumbling fast. Perhaps only that devout dedication to individual economic aggrandizement, the most fundamental of American beliefs, continues undoubted if joyless. In any case, the future no longer exists and a numbness in the face of a gigantic failure of imagination has set in. The decorative is the apt mode for such a sensibility, being a response on the edge of numbness. The decorative can be seen as the ultimate response to a pervasive death anxiety. Perhaps we can all become Zen masters. After all, Zen originated as a martial discipline that enabled the samurai to become indifferent to his own demise.

Commentary[1]

We always enjoy reading Morris's articles. But it must be said that, like his art, they have tended to wander around a great deal. We cannot let this one pass without noting certain gaps, stretches of muddy prose, some extremely questionable assumptions, constructs which perhaps exist mostly in Morris's mind, etc. First of all his notion of the decorative seems on the one hand historically skewed and extraordinarily selective, while on the other hand he has extended a peculiar notion of "making," which he associates with the decorative, into every area in sight. And what about Matisse? Does he have a category of some sort of lyrical-decorative style which he finds beneath consideration? (We know for a fact that painters are forever invoking Matisse.) The very fact that Morris writes such slanted articles brings up a host of political questions which we will not bother to lay out here. One point, however, cannot be allowed to pass in silence. Not once does he mention his part in the origins of Minimalism. Every chance he gets he associates himself in the most self-serving way with Duchamp. Nothing more need be said about this. The generally gloomy, word-chewing style of the prose needs no comment either. The reader will have by now grown bone-weary.

However, we will pass over these and other shortcomings. We wish to use this commentary primarily to examine one of the more interesting notions he brings up but does not bother to articulate. This is the notion of "absence." Morris seems to oppose this to a notion of "presence" that served as a centerpiece for his

last flashy but wrong-headed article titled "The Present Tense of Space" [A.i.A., *Jan.-Feb. '78.*] *It is of little interest that Morris may now have repudiated the former stance and is opposing it with "absence." But he certainly has not made clear what constitutes the distance between "presence" and "absence." If it amounts, for example, to the employment of a more recondite iconography, then the concept is simply trivial. But he claims that "absence" is constituted by some secondary order of reference beyond mere sign or metaphor. Perhaps what he has in mind are significantly dropped or added terms of form or content—or perhaps he is not admitting it but is after all hanging the concept on dialectical stance, radical sensibility, etc. If so, it is difficult to see how he can save the notion from modernism's old sing-song of interruptive strategies which mend the art code as they violate it.*

Of somewhat more interest is the fact that both the notions of "absence" and "presence" frame an identical focus involving both the work and the viewer. In both cases what he is pointing to is the situation of art functioning as a "site" of interaction. Of course this raises more questions than it answers. If one is concerned not with what art is but with what it does, then one should have more to say about the nature of response, of viewer expectation and behavior. Morris says little on this score. If both "presence" and "absence" are sites of interaction, is Morris saying that the former occurs copresent with the object, and that the latter does not—that it is a site, rather, of reflective, critical and associative engagement a posteriori *to the encounter with the object? How peculiar. More reasonable would be the assumption that there are two tendencies or opposing thrusts which are bound up with different types of referential engagements of sign responses.*

But Morris has not really gone into any semiological analysis. Certainly such an analysis would have begun from the assumption that no autonomous object can exist with which one might have an exclusively real-time experience of "presence," for only systems of relationships of signs are possible. If man is a sign, as Foucault tell us, surely his objects are signs also. And perception itself is the engagement of a code of such selective relationships. Some of these relationships involve memory associations and cultural clues which may not all arrive at the

site of interaction within the normally short span of the viewer's copresence with the object. And if they do, so much the worse for his notion of an experienced "presence." No doubt Morris would say that he had already separated reflection and memory in the art experience from "presence" by the "I-Me" division [see, "The Present Tense of Space"].

Fat chance. If he is saying that work with "absence" is work which moves the site of interaction toward the reflective response, then any critical act operating on the most "present" type of work would automatically move it into the domain of "absence." If his criteria are less crude than this—e.g., some types of critical responses qualify for "absence" and some not—he has not said anything about it. This line of questioning arises because, as we have pointed out, he has said nothing about the nature of response itself. Morris does seem to be indicating that it is something in the nature of commentary (of what sort he does not say) which promotes work to "absence," or might even constitute the site of "absence." We can only say that for our part we do not find this a very pretty sight. For it suggests the image of works we deem significant, those which elicit extensive critical interpretation and even incite perpetual reinterpretation, as some sort of cultural carcasses swarming and half-buried with seething words which, like the movement of a mass of maggots, impart both a certain disgusting motion and transformation to dead things. Indeed, to suggest that the site of "absence" borders the space of commentary is to open the door to a kind of cultural charnel house. The ghoulish image of critics mumbling and chewing their dead artifacts on the table of commentary is something we would prefer to forego.

Note

The author did not acknowledge having written this commentary in the original publication.

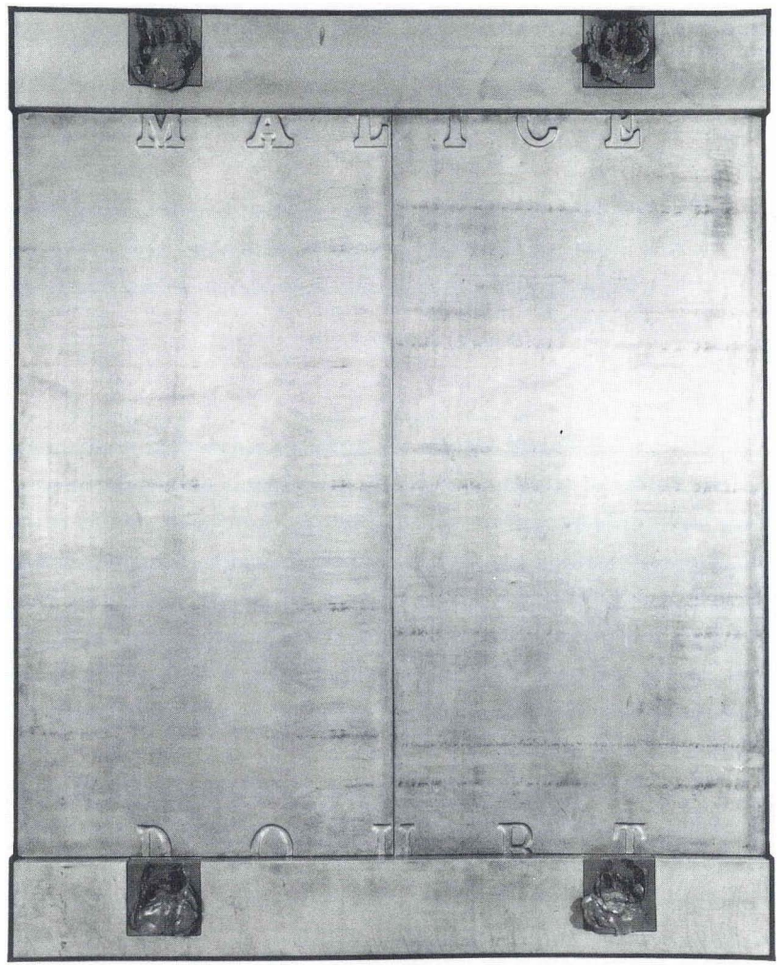
13 — Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides as Allegories (or Interruptions)

> The only kind of curiosity in any case that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.
>
> —*Michel Foucault*

The truism that art should survive the commercialism that it surrounds seems ever harder to maintain. Currently the crassest commercial interests pervade and dominate the art world. Perhaps the truism should be inverted. Does art achieve that aura about which Walter Benjamin was so ambivalent merely from the crown of lucre that adorns it today? Cynics would seem to think so. But today, just as in the past, there are factors besides commercial ones that legitimize art works. A time of heightened avariciousness may, however, be a time when other supporting narratives of art need to be examined.

This need not be a rescue operation undertaken to defend art on some higher, "cultural" plane. In fact, the intense commercialization of art at the present moment allows for a certain distance, a certain perspective previously not available, for viewing the production of art objects in this century. This commercialization testifies to the triumph of certain forces that were always present but often suppressed in the overall consideration of the nature of art in a late-capitalist society. And with things more out in the open now, a different economics—that of desire—has become more available to analysis. For questions now need to be asked about what various competing art stories mean, and where they lead.

No art comes without its stories. An art story is at once a prescriptive text that imposes rules by which its participants learn to play a



13.1 **Robert Morris, *Malice Doubt*, 1989. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)**

certain kind of game; a genealogy of certain events and of certain sets of enduring, often conflicting desires; and a concatenation of traits, tropes, obsessions, and historicized accounts by apologists who would seek to legitimize an ideological position. In short, the art story is a discourse particular to an enterprise that pretends to revolve around the production of a certain unstable class of more or less individually produced, handmade artifacts.

Art objects are totally mediated by the networks of sign systems within which they are suspended. And in broader terms, the visual itself is always a dependent category that has never had a claim to unmediated autonomy. Obviously, art objects are not the same things as what is written or said about them. But in terms of cultural significance, this is a distinction without a difference. There can be no separation between objects and language in terms of meaning. Whether we see only what we can say, or whether we always see more than can be said, amounts to a kind of scholastic dispute. Both may be true. Of more relevance is the acknowledgment that at a certain level language and images, texts and objects, words and icons are locked in an irreconcilable conflict. But things have no significance outside what can be said about them.

When we speak here of the art text, narrative, or discourse, what is being assumed is an amalgamated art enterprise. I believe it was the physicist Richard Feynman who once said of the electron that what was not explicitly forbidden was compulsory. Some similar claim must be made for art; it is an extended cultural activity formed by many more factors than the artist. The art discourse is no more confined to its physical objects and specific critiques than the electron is defined by a single measurement of its position.

What are some of the forces that impinge on the formation of discourses for twentieth-century art? What constitutes these narrative networks of sign systems? They are comprised of specific sets of evolving material practices, material objects generated by these practices, and all that is said about and done with and to them. But such narratives are

shaped as well by more subtle and pervasive networks of power relations. Here it is also necessary to trace the various validating and repressive institutional shifts along the history of an art narrative. One has to account for such things as the extended curatorial practices of art selection and presentation, as well as those contextual pressures of museums' and galleries' architectural styles, where "empty" space itself exerts a hand. More obvious is the impact of the media—from critiques and theory, manifestos and educational canons to the endless gyrations of the popular press. And one should also not forget those "silent" discourses of power brokerage that rustle between collectors, dealers, and art gadflies.

The visual object itself is but one factor in the will toward an art identity that the culture demands for itself. It is the cumulative reassessments, realignments, reinterpretations, and reinscriptions of many combined forces that issue in an art story. By definition these forces are always in flux. The only way to actually understand the fractiousness of competing internal forces and the emergence of the unifying obsessions behind particular discourses is to examine particular instances. But this is a task beyond the scope of this inquiry, which can only be a suggestive overview of such a project.

As discourses expand over time, testing their own limits by absorbing certain differences, repressing others, and exploring new strategies, eventually an extensive, if never internally consistent narrative is accreted. It serves to both prescribe and legitimize, as well as to proscribe by legislating against the threateningly heterodox.

School Days

Many museums in the Midwest, like the Nelson-Atkins Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri, the first I ever knew, occupy sites of former baronial estates. A noble in the Middle Ages might have endowed a monastery in perpetuity for the recitation of prayers on behalf of his soul. But William Rockhill Nelson had an art museum built. I have no idea what sort of collector Nelson was in his day.

When it comes to collectors, nothing is surprising. I visited one once, off Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, who pointed to a closed door and said, "Go in there and see my Cezanne. It's too beautiful for me and I can't stand to look at it."

But on certain long-ago Saturday mornings, fortified with a mother's encouragement, I made my way from the eastern part of Kansas City on the Swope Park trolley toward the Nelson Gallery. I had my crayons and two nickels, one for each way. I got the drawing paper at the museum. I was eight years old and would spend the morning drawing in the galleries. Maybe Nelson had set it all up in his will—kids improving themselves with art on Saturdays. But only half the day, not cutting into baseball time. I remember most drawing from the Egyptian objects. Reliefs. Disembodied eyes, hands, and snakes floating in the hieroglyphic dream space, unburdened by the horizon that designated that weary, dualistic real world of the West where there always had to be a choice between earth and sky, heaven and hell, mind and body. In 1961 I made my first works that would later come to be called Minimal sculpture. Those gray columns and slabs I copied directly from the photographs of the ruins of the King Zoser complex at Saqqâra, Egypt.

I first met the elderly Barnett Newman at a party at Frank Stella's on 73rd Street in 1965, if memory serves. When I introduced myself, he looked at me through his monocle and said, "Yes, I know your work." I was very surprised, but learned later that he was intensely interested in the newer work that was just being shown then and made a point to see as much of it as possible. "Yes," he continued in his gravelly voice, "you're that guy who makes those low gray things, all those plinths and boxes and slabs. It's all so low and hugs the ground. But don't you know the difficult thing is to get it up?"

At thirty I had my alienation, my Skilsaw, and my plywood. I was out to rip out the metaphors, especially those that had to do with "up," as well as every other whiff of transcendence. When I sliced into the plywood with my Skilsaw, I could hear, beneath the ear-damaging whine, a stark and refreshing "no" reverberate off the four walls: no to transcendence and spiritual values, heroic

13.2 South facade of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.)

scale, anguished decisions, historicizing narrative, valuable artifact, intelligent structure, interesting visual experience.

Despairing of ever making a living as an artist, I took graduate courses in art history in the early 1960s in New York City. However, I became too involved with art making after the master's degree to attain a doctorate, which would have enabled me to secure a professorship in an art history department. In the course of these studies I took a seminar in Oriental art with Ad Reinhardt. Although the course was listed as Japanese art in the catalogue, Reinhardt nevertheless insisted that because art always comes out of art, a certain prelude to Japanese art was necessary. A certain amount of preliminary or supplementary consideration had to be given to the precedents in other parts of the Orient, some of which eventually found their way as influences into Japanese art. Or as he put it, "I'm going to start with India then move on to China, Southeast Asia, concentrating on Cambodia, then up to Nepal and Mongolia, and then get to Japan." He further stated that he gave everybody a "B" except those people who tried not to get a "B," and that the final would be relatively simple: "Just organize Oriental art." "Meaning what?" someone asked. "Just list the dates and locations of all the major monuments of India, China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Nepal, and Japan."

Reinhardt showed about 500 slides a night, each one of which he had taken himself. He had been to every major site in the Orient. All he ever said was, "That's Classical," or "That's early Classical," or "That's Archaic," or "That's Baroque." The final was what he said it would be. I had gotten to know him a little by then and asked him afterward why he gave such a test. "I always had a terrible memory and wanted to be able to do that," he said. He said he had traveled summers all over the Orient just to get away from the family, and he said art was too serious to be taken seriously. Toward the end of his life he painted his series of black paintings, each subsequent one a bit darker and less distinct in its divisions than the previous one. I would occasionally visit him in the late afternoon at his studio on Broadway and Waverly. We would sit in gathering dusk, each with a shot of Old Crow, looking out of his large windows, watching the girls leaving NYU across Broadway. On such an evening he got a call from

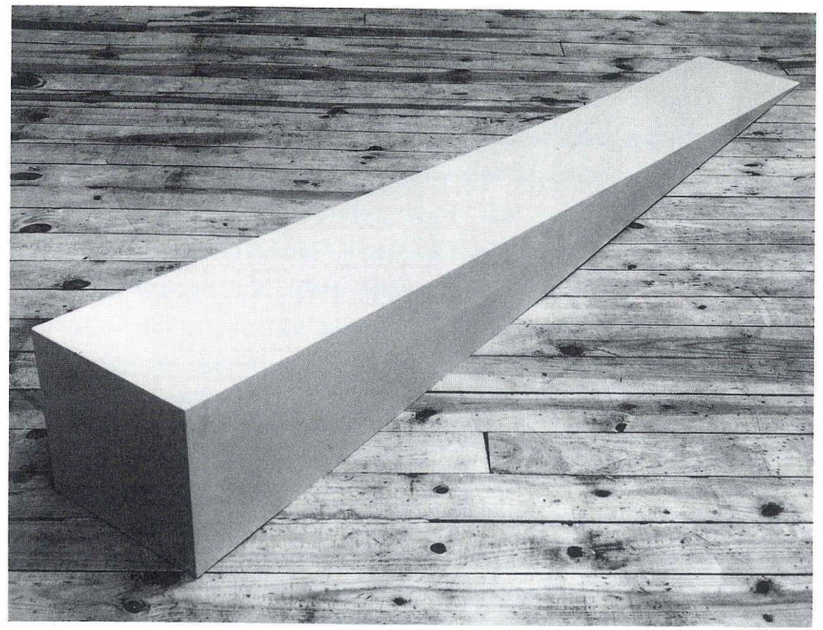
MOMA. They had finally bought one of his black pictures, but someone cleaning the walls had spotted it and they were calling to ask him to come to fix it. I heard him say into the phone, "That won't be necessary. Just send it back. I've got one here that's more like the one you've got than one you've got."

At least three paradigmatic art texts, more or less massive, can be seen at work over the last century. The heaviest of these, of course, is that of modernism. Abstraction was and is its first commandment. Its insistence on progress and the transcendent bringing to light of the new, the "unthought," align abstraction with the broader text of modernity itself. Well deconstructed by now, this text modernism was for much of the century the story of "high" art. The history of the development of abstract art is also one of the repression of words. That is, the demand for an autonomous art was a demand for the excision of contaminating literature within it. However, language thus repressed was merely displaced into the realm of theory. What literature was to representational art, theory became for abstract art. As the modernist text developed, it grew weighty with paradoxes.

By mid-century, Clement Greenberg had become the high priest of modernist orthodoxy, in which the "Eliotic Trotskyism" of an elitist revolution of forms was tied by an "umbilical cord of gold" to the support of the ruling classes. Here, an elevated avant-garde marshaled purity against the ever-threatening kitsch pushing up from popular culture below.

The "purity" of abstract art could be understood simultaneously as a scientific, religious, and ethical-political reformation. The "innocent eye" of the ideal spectator was at once the unbiased eye of science and the spiritually purified eye of the individuals in a new social order, to be produced by religious reformation and/or material revolution. The totems of this new religious/social order were to be the paintings themselves, now finally emergent as the dominant art form of advanced culture.[1]

Even after Minimalism's phenomenological endgames, abstract art still persists. But the legitimizing text of an avant-garde making



13.3 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1965. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

historical moves is no longer avaiable. For Greenberg, progressive movement was a necessity; otherwise, the art enterprise collapses into a static, decadent Alexandrianism. Apologies for abstract-formalist art are now scarce; perhaps a certain fugitive hermeneutics engages it now and then. The obsession with iconoclastic purity has been dropped, only to be replaced with a variety of metaphorical and even allegorical readings. Today, texts generated in apology for abstract art sometimes recall Baudelaire's remark about preferring his own reverie in front of the object to all other considerations.

The genealogy of the abstract-formalist paradigm is long and tortuous. If the notion of progress has been excised from the dogma, that

of unity and transcendence has not. Nor has the idea of a limit to be probed been totally erased from this discourse. This metaphysics always lent a certain romantic, macho riskiness to the enterprise. Frank Stella and Peter Halley, each in different ways, still squeeze some mileage out of this notion, even in the midst of allegorical readings applied to their works.

The second discourse to be traced here revolves around political and social concerns. The art that falls within this narrative has little stylistic coherence. The iconophobic productions of the Constructivists were as much aligned with a political ideology as were examples of the most egregious representationalism. Obviously, the discourse does not lie in the objects produced by the Constructivists, but in the broader, historical wave of Constructivism, the story of how the productions were enmeshed in a particular relationship between art and political ideology. Forms alone do not constitute a discourse. A discourse is constituted, rather, by an evolving set of interrelated concerns: those particular instances, reformulations, and reinscriptions within a set of ongoing obsessions.

Sociopolitical obsessions engaging with art production form one such enduring text of the art of our time. And here one would be concerned not just with ideological engagements of the left, such as Marxist-Leninist alignments of the early 1920s, but also with those of the right—including National Socialism of the 1930s. One also recognizes competing ideologies behind every kind of wartime media manipulation of the 1940s, not to mention the recent manifestations aligned to gender and race. Propaganda and advertising form a subset within this text to be reckoned with, as much as, say, Marcusean notions of art's emancipatory capacities.

This second discourse is animated by a number of strategies that modulate its address to power. These range from the engaged and activist to the ironic. It is amplified by any number of media and invokes a variety of formats. Its manifestations are not always voiced through the traditional art institutions. What this discourse emphatically rejects is the Kantian notion that art is a detached enterprise whose autonomy is guaranteed by an avoidance of cognitive and moral claims.

A structurally distinguishing feature of this second discourse is its implicit claim to truth. It aligns itself in its games of truth not only to critical and philosophical modes, but to that overarching rationality that rules the pervading discourse of the West. Thus it submits to our culture's dominating logos, though its manifestations appear less directly discursive than the conventional criticality of the written text. Foucault has asked, "What caused all Western culture to begin to turn around . . . [the] obligation to truth, which has taken a variety of different forms? Things being what they are, nothing has, up to the present, proved that we could define a strategy exterior to it."[2] Art committed to the sociopolitical mode is bracketed by its "truth-rationality" assumption, which becomes one of the "forms" of this extended discourse.

While the moral stance of recent phases of the sociopolitical art discourse invariably reflects the sentiments of the left, the forms it manifests frequently utilize deconstructions of the advertising and media worlds. Here formats of oppressive control are inverted in the service, ostensibly, of resistance. But at another level the structure shared by both a consumerist discourse and an art discourse, irrespective of the political load, is one of condensation of information in which a whole complex of signification is converted into a "phrase-image" form, an "information byte." And at a certain level a common satisfaction may be served by an oppressive discourse as well as one intended as its opposite: the consumption of reiterated, familiar, condensed information in the face of environments of pervasive overproduction.

A distinction can perhaps be made between work with political implications that might be read in Adornoesque terms or for which various allusive and allegorical truths are claimed, and art more strictly subscribing to the sociopolitical mode. This may not always be a sharp distinction, but I believe there is a difference between works that distance

themselves from the domination of the rational and an ever more clearly defined sociopolitical art discourse in the service of moves that "turn around the obligation to truth." In its games of truth this discourse fulfills that desire which is, if not for a certainty, then for a justified enterprise on the side of the logos; a desire that perhaps was once fulfilled by a historicized modernism.

Every art discourse reveals its subordinate position to the ruling powers, whether these be the state or the various institutions of private money. For without the meshing of production and support, a discourse has no circulatory capacity. There always exists an understood pact between producer and consumer/supporter, however wary, rationalized, or out of sight it may be kept. Warhol's genius was to make this circuitry the centerpiece of his art and make visible his own media manipulations by utilizing the media's own strategies. The relations of power transmitted across this support-producer circuit are always asymmetrical. A power structure must already be in place for the manifestation of an art discourse devoted to showing the contours of that power. Art never bites the hand that feeds without a good-bye kiss.

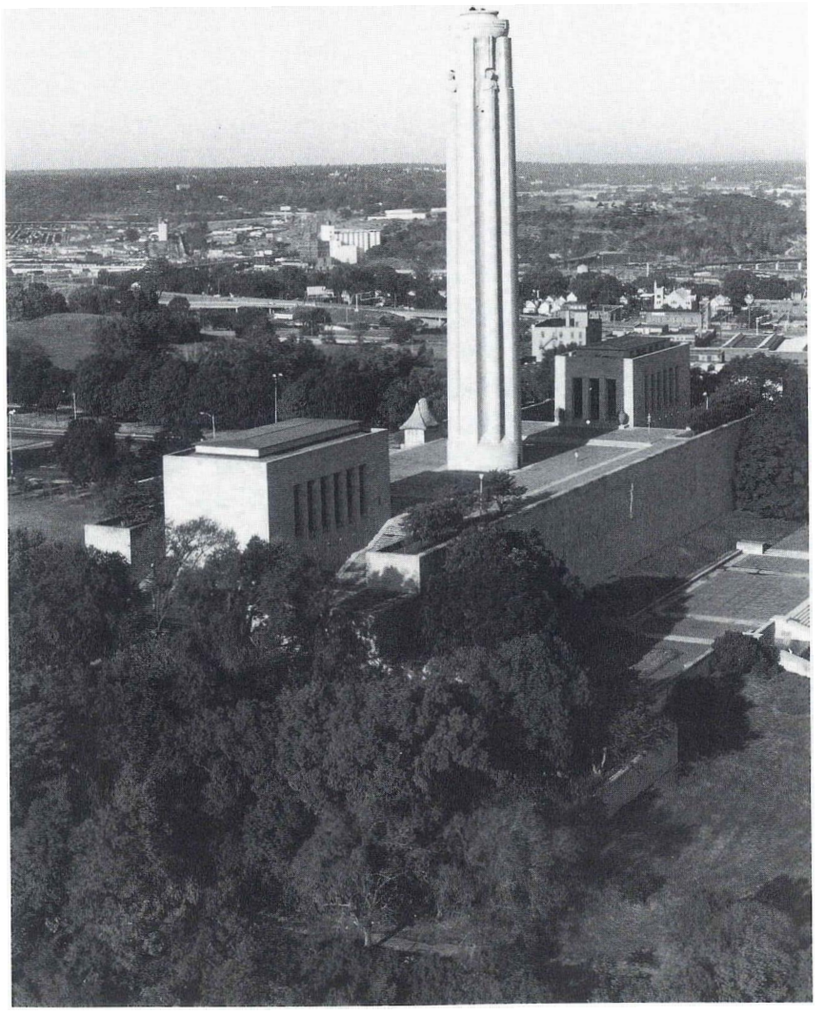
A Kansas City Fragment

As a child, it seemed a long streetcar ride from 52nd Street and Swope Parkway to the gilded Loew's movie palace downtown. And in winter, it was an even longer freezing ride back home. I would sit stiff and sleepy, sometimes lucky enough to be over a rare heater that warmed my bottom through the cane seat, staring out at the lights in the crystalline night air. If that mindless and cynical bloodbath called World War I sparked the Dada movement in Zurich at the Café Voltaire, where the exiled Lenin sat through a few performances, in Kansas City the slaughter was commemorated by the Liberty Memorial. This pale tower I saw on top of the heave in the landscape to my right as the trolley, moving south, made the bridge over the Union Station tracks and approached Pershing Road for the long climb up the Main Street hill. Impressive indeed was that smooth, spotlit

phallic shaft with the illuminated steam at its tip drooling and drifting out into the frozen night sky. When killing becomes patriotic, national, and insane, perhaps only a sexualized memorial to it can keep its reality from full consciousness.

On my left, directly across from the Memorial, crowning that limestone crag known as "Signboard Hill," another illuminated, larger-than-life artifact blazed and blinked in the winter night. High up, formed in blue and white incandescent bulbs, was an enormous sphere—a disc, actually, but meant to read as a globe—a hieroglyph of the earth itself. Suddenly, out of nowhere, at the top of this globe, a small can of paint materialized and tipped forward in a most wonderful syncopation of coordinated lights. Out of this little deus ex machina flowed a quantity of red paint wildly incommensurate with the volume of the can. And the lights began to change from the innocent blue of the natural world to the red of man's engulfing cultural mark, paint, signified by means of electrically stimulated drips and surges, until, within the course of some 45 seconds, the entire globe demonstrated with a thousand red lights the triumphal words that flashed above the whole scene: "Sherwin-Williams paints cover the Earth." This hypnotic spectacle was repeated with only the briefest of pauses throughout the night.

Today, the shoddy architecture of Crown Center has replaced the seedy, blinking Signboard Hill of the 1930s and 1940s. I doubt that anything will be found to replace that militaristic hard-on, the Liberty Memorial. But I hold a certain nostalgia for that blinking sign. Where else could one hope to find a more paradigmatic emblem of proleptic capitalism's optimism for the conquered world marketplace than in that electrified paint, which left no point on the globe uncovered? And of more interest, perhaps—what were the connections to be made between these two public monuments? On the right stood the one dedicated to the sacrificial dead of what history has billed a global conflict, and on the left blinked the merry hopes of global mercantile domination. A certain internal symmetry began to show itself between those geometric emblems of cylinder and sphere. The ideological content began to leak out of these two Minimalistic monuments and run together there on Main Street, waiting for me.



13.4 Liberty Memorial Museum, Kansas City, Missouri. (Liberty Memorial Museum, Kansas City, Missouri.)

13.5 Sherwin-Williams Paints sign, 1940.

But I am just nine on that long climb in the freezing streetcar straining up the hill. The Errol Flynn movie was exhausting. I am dozing off to the muffled knocking of the air compressors, somewhere in the belly of the swaying trolley, thinking only of asking Mother to make me a cape like Zorro's.

A certain despondency underlies much art of the present. So severe is this sense of ending that one could even compare the mood of our moment to the fin de siècle ennui of 100 years ago. Then it was the memory of failed revolutions and of the death of God by the hand of Darwinian science that helped to produce that culture's pervading sense of decadence. Exactly 100 years ago and just before going mad, Nietzsche had spoken of nihilism and coming cataclysm. Much in our own century resonates to his darker speculations. In a century of profound violence and failed political programs, it seems there is a comparable "postideological" despondency. Currently, in the face of an empty present and a cancelled future, a political and intellectual quietism is set at idle beneath the materialistic roar.

In the early part of this century, Expressionism was perhaps partly inspired by Nietzsche's exhortation for a Dionysian self to rise up in a transcendent dance of destruction-creation. Expressionism has endured and made periodic appearances throughout the century at moments of cultural decadence. Yet Expressionism presents too severe a set of limitations to be regarded as a discourse in the sense proposed here. It is more of a style that oscillates in a dualistic tension between despair and hope, death and rebirth, guilt and redemption. The accent is always on the first term. Claustrophobic themes of angst and death obsess the self, while promises of a new dawn hover in the distance. Suffering is a constant theme, punctuated now and then by a ray of hope for the centered, heroic self. Expressionism seeks a unity of resolution within a dualistic field. If the feelings provoked by it are strong, the conflicts dramatic, and the resolutions somewhat unstable, the dimension of the enterprise seems finally univocal. Expressionism never penetrates to that astonishment of the world in which the absurdities of things in collision constantly generate the possibility of new meaning. Its intentions are too heavy, too entrenched, too a priori, to allow for that awe of making that, when interacting with critique and theory, makes the wheel of discourse turn. Yet as a style it may still embody the most appropriate response to this incomprehensibly brutal century, the one Elizabeth Bishop called the worst so far.

The Stockyard Shaman

The Kansas City of my preteen youth was divided into two quite distinct realms, two life spaces. One was more continuous, often grayed-out by stretches of school's tedium and the endless coping, the scheming, and the minidramas of family life. Then there were the stockyards. Father was a livestock man. Mother thought it was a bad influence on me to go down to the stockyards. This provided incentive enough for me to go every chance I got. Father himself was tranformed body and soul upon entering this malodorous and exotic zone. The men who worked in the stockyard arrived in drab and proper attire and ascended the worn stairs to Orin Haggerty's locker room. Here, these ordinary-looking men metamorphosed, donning their various-shaped Stetsons, their lizard boots, their pearl-snapped shirts, chaps, and straps and double belts and Mexican spurs with rowels the size of silver dollars. And all of this amidst the clouds of steam and talcum powder, the yelling, the elaborate obscenities, the bookmaking, the cigar smoke and the rattle and snap of snooker balls. There, witnessing cattle whips and wet towels flicked at unguarded rears, the boasting, the cursing, and the execution of flamboyant, three-cushion side-pocket shots at the green pool tables, I knew I had entered a different—a secret—zone. There Father glowed beneath his Stetson. I could see that he was far more at home there than at home.

The laughing and shouting and the horseplay and the jokes are long since gone from Genessee Street, and the Livestock Exchange building sits tattered and forlorn in the midst of a few token pens. Anyway, it did the last time I saw it a few years ago. But I can remember blazing summers when the acres of gates and chutes and sheds and scale houses stretched to the Kaw River, and the noise

of thousands of animals from the West, the slamming of switching freight cars from the East, and the clanging of metal coming north from the Columbian Tank and Steel Company all combined in an indescribable cacophany that echoed off the bluffs that towered over the West Bottoms. I remember seeing crazed Brahma bulls rip 8-by-8 gateposts out of the bricks as if they were matchsticks, and seeing 200 head of longhorns running wild-eyed across an elevated chute, and learning that, until they were loaded onto a train in West Texas, they had never seen a man.

And within this dense and stressful labyrinth, I saw also an occasional archer with quiver and bow float by as if from some medieval dream. In contrast to everyone else, he crept, sometimes loitered, as he pursued his prey, the giant brown rats that flourished in the abundant grain of the pens. These rats had lost their furtive nature and were fierce and aggressive, perhaps due to their size or the general franticness of the environment. The use of firearms at such close quarters was out of the question. Traps had not effectively controlled these creatures, and cats fled at the sight of prey larger than themselves. Hence the archers. Here, parallel but contrary to the apparent purposes of the stockyards, a species of animal was housed, fattened, and then annihilated, but never, so far as I ever knew, eaten.

Also unforgettable was the medical supply store for stockmen that stood between the locker room and Shipley's Saddlery, with its window display of a stuffed, two-headed calf and a sepia-toned photomural of an enormous sidewinder making a hit on a jack-rabbit in mid-jump. And nothing will ever smell like the place. That verdant, reeking, subhuman, terrifying smell of slaughterhouse and manure, alfalfa and wet sheep's wool, mule piss and men's sweat—all rising up in a sweltering, dusty July cloud that swirled above the rank intermingling of the Kaw and Missouri rivers below. Despite the raucousness, the color, and the high spirits of the men, I knew what the shouts of "Cudahay," "Armour," "Wilson," "Swift and Company" at the scale-house meant. This was one big zone devoted to death. The stockyards were a living funnel into those charnel-house holes. Is that why Father brought me there and, like Virgil, guided me through its noxious

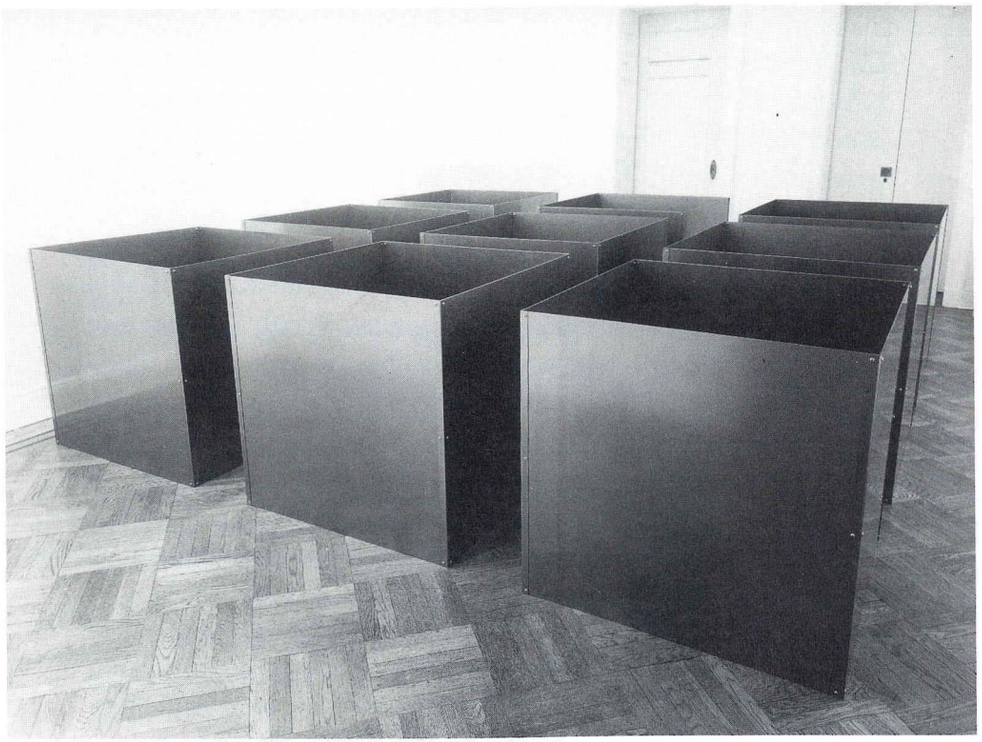
circles—so that I would know earlier than most what was out there? Was that why those men went in costume, maintained nearly self-mocking macho rituals, and clung with loud good humor and even a kind of rough love to one another—since every day they were looking down the tunnel?

The third art discourse is both pervasive and submerged. It's a kind of negative discourse in some ways. Negations are as much a part of it as assertions. It involves encounters and challenges. The third discourse sometimes appears in the midst of the other two as eruptive moments of discontinuity. It is also submerged as a discourse; indeed, it has not been named as such thus far. Its epicenter would have to be located in Surrealism, and would include as its initial tremors those violent deconstructions of Dada. But the first noticeable fault line appears with the introduction of collage in Cubism—bits of the world, bits of text, set into a formalist composition.

On one level, the third discourse can be seen dialectically, in relation to formalistic art. It was nothing if not literary, and would come to be opposed totally to the iconophobia of the abstract endeavor and to its guiding notion of art as an autonomous visual enterprise. At this level, it has at times conversed, but always uneasily, with the sociopolitical text.

Whatever its disjunctive procedures and purposeful dissociations, Surrealism in its heyday was still securely in the grip of the project of modernity. At least under Breton, its aspirations were redemptive and unifying, striving, as did Breton's hero, Freud, to think the unthought in man (woman did not then think, since she was the object of desire). Surrealism's program to liberate man from the bourgeois idea of autonomous art expressed another axiom of modernity, the will to liberate man from his repressions.

If this experiment of the 1920s failed to achieve its stated aims, it was to have a wide impact nevertheless. The attempt to embed art once again in the web of life continued to reverberate throughout the century—it was a notion that, for example, animated the oeuvre of the late Joseph



13.6 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 9 of 16 units, 1967. (Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.)

Beuys. The effort to turn art-making impulses away from the production of estheticized, abstract, and autonomous objects was at the same time a turn toward confrontations with sexuality and death. But unlike Expressionism's pathos in handling these topics, the third discourse more often made the confrontation ironic. Sometimes purposeful indifference becomes the strategy. This is, of course, Duchampian territory. All that proceeds from the readymade—from Pop art to the blitzkreig of postmodernist imagery production—has to be traced back to these early seeds.

Beneath the third discourse lies a rejection of the Western myth of wholeness that continues to be supported by the remains of the enlightenment conception of the world as a reasonable entity. Unbeknownst to the artists in the early decades of this century, in science Max Planck's ideas of discontinuity, which would lead to quantum theory, were beginning to spread. It is in the rejection of a totalizing unity (toward which abstract art always points) that the third discourse must be located as it develops into the second half of the century. A variety of strategies and tactical procedures came to be employed to subvert resolution, wholeness, visual autonomy, and transcendence.

I have characterized the third discourse as submerged and discontinuous. It vanishes when its disruptive maneuvers result in the establishment of a pervasive style. Minimalism is a case in point. Its initial nontranscendent phase related to this discourse. But it immediately stepped backward into autonomous abstraction's desire for the whole, and ended in a bid for the transcendent and the heroic via phenomenological subjectivity.

The third discourse asserts that what is alive in art does not last. It is here today and gone tomorrow. The conditions that give rise to live art are available only now and then, occurring in those charged moments when destruction and creation annihilate each other, as in the collison of matter and antimatter in which a charged energy event is produced. Of course, the history of art does not focus on a genealogy of such fireworks,

but very often proceeds by weary documentation of the gradual rise and fall of styles, the nearsighted tracing of influences, and various interpretive procedures. Careers and markets demand both continuity and copious production. The rationalizations of growth and development are pieties mouthed in the face of individual compulsions and market forces that drive the repetitive production of objects. The third discourse is antithetical to the history of repetitive production, of "the same"; it celebrates the fireworks and the feast days, rather than inventories the warehouse. Such a discourse needs a name. Perhaps it could be named for the skeptical, the ironic, the doubtful. Perhaps it could be called "Philalias," love of otherness.

If some broad notion of style anchors the first of the art narratives, the story of Philalias is more that of an antistyle. Also Dionysian in the Nietzschean sense of being intoxicated with the celebration of difference, this narrative inheres within pivotal objects. One of its identifying characteristics is its capactiy to transform objects into events. Its exemplary objects are often those that in retrospect can be seen to have ushered in changes of direction and reversals of relations. This discourse presides at those sites where power is usurped and new vocabularies are appropriated. The discourse can establish within a single oeuvre an index for movement against the noncritical, the repetitive, the deadening production of a "unified" art identity and its stylistic production. However, in a given oeuvre, such otherness first ruptures and then usually expands production. The expansion of production is of course the establishment once again of style. There, within style, Philalias is absent. Those self-conscious practices of rupture (late 1970s) or disjunctive appropriations (1980s) fall outside the third discourse insofar as they become mere stylistic techniques of production. The third discourse comes into view not as a result of a set of established practices but as a consequence of a collapse of meaning; not as a result of a conscious productive program but as an instance of refusal and negation.

13.7 Edward J. Steichen, *Marcel Duchamp*, 1917. (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.)

The Defrocked Artist

It must have been in 1964 that I went to a panel at the Museum of Modern Art that consisted of Marcel Duchamp, William Rubin, and Alfred Barr. Rubin questioned Duchamp in a scholarly, if overly loud way, while Barr nearly whispered in his misty-eyed reverence. The discussion turned to the Readymades. Duchamp claimed that he never really understood them, only that he was inherently lazy but felt that from time to time he should, nevertheless, make some art. He once referred to himself as a defrocked artist. So he, Duchamp, made appointments with himself: on such and such a day, he would just have to make art. When the time arrived, he would choose something, just to get it over with, and that would be that. A Readymade: not an object he had labored over or crafted, but a mass-produced artifact available to anyone. "But how did you go about this?" queried Rubin. "Well, I would usually find myself in a hardware store on these days. I would look around and choose something. That would be the Readymade," Duchamp replied. Ever the academic, Rubin persisted: "But what criteria were employed in the selection of the object?" "Well, I tried to predict which object there I might always remain indifferent toward, and that would be the one I would select," Duchamp said. At this point, Alfred Barr piped up and said, "But, oh, Marcel, why do they look so beautiful today?" Duchamp turned toward him and said, "Nobody's perfect."

If the initial negativistic rejection that characterized this third discourse resonated with the irrationalities of World War I, it may not be going too far to say that after mid-century its negations reverberated to the still incomprehensible irrationality of the holocaust. It is from this charred source that all post-Enlightenment appeals to Truth and Reason become covered with ashes. All assaults on the unities and hierarchies of Reason are backgrounded by the Holocaust, the most singular event of the twentieth century.

The atmosphere of irony that usually surrounds the appearance of the third discourse (from Duchamp forward) can be read as a defensive

response to losses of meaning—those periodic, recurring glimmers of the illegitimacy of Western hierarchies of thought and society, and of the horrors these hierarchies have precipitated in the twentieth century. Yet one must account for that distancing irony in the third discourse. Why irony, instead of more fervid, agonizing, expressionistic responses? Why so much derisive laughter, rather than drawn-out laments? Does Freud's famous dictum that wit demonstrates a refusal of suffering offer a clue? It may be that this ironic negation is akin to quantum physics' fabled vacuum, out of which such astonishing things as the universe itself roar. For into that "vacuum" of nonmeaning, that hole of absence made by negation, can rush a new freedom and daring, an intoxication with incongruity, hypothesis, permutation, and invention. It is at this tumultuous and unstable site that otherness itself is momentarily seized. As in the quantum world, so perhaps in art, energy can be borrowed momentarily in and from the state of nothingness.

The three discursive paradigms I have outlined are far from homologous. The formalist-abstract has for some time represented a hardened ideological position. Its latest chapter catalogues a shift toward poetic metaphors and allegorical readings. The sociopolitical paradigm presents an intermittent narrative of stops and starts on both the right and the left, employing all mediums and adopting stances that range from propagandistic commitment to detached documentary activities to despondent complaints. This approach may herald utopias or deconstruct media representations. It always addresses power, whatever position it may take in relation to power. Needless to say, stylistic considerations are largely irrelevant to its focus.

Finally, the third discourse can be regarded as something like that other text of the discontinuous that has recently emerged: catastrophe theory. Here, ideas of evolutionary, predictable change are irrelevant. Its dynamic has to do with sudden alterations. The aleatory and the uncontainable, the unpredictable and the fleeting mark the staccato passages of this third discourse. Here is a mode of the anarchic coinciding with the

particularity of individual experience. It may be true that a radical skepticism is a preliminary requirement for the concrete manifestations of this discourse, but the evidence would seem to suggest that its doubts and rejections, which on occasion issue in unforeseen works, are more intuitive than the result of a systematic critique. The possibility of a conscious practice, a strategy devolving from a theoretical analysis of its mode of movement, seems antithetical to what this discourse represents.

How, then, is one to compare these paradigmatic discourses? All are texts of regulation and legitimization. Furthermore, all produce not only artifacts and further texts, but individuals, or art selves. Each marks off, demands, and constructs a certain kind of identity. Undoubtedly, these three discourses speak antagonistically to one another. Taken together, they triangulate their respective lacks, their suppressed desires for what each excludes. For each narrative, the other two represent what is repressed. Obsessive recapitulations of unity or difference, faith or skepticism, action or critique, commitment or doubt, oppose one another between these narratives.

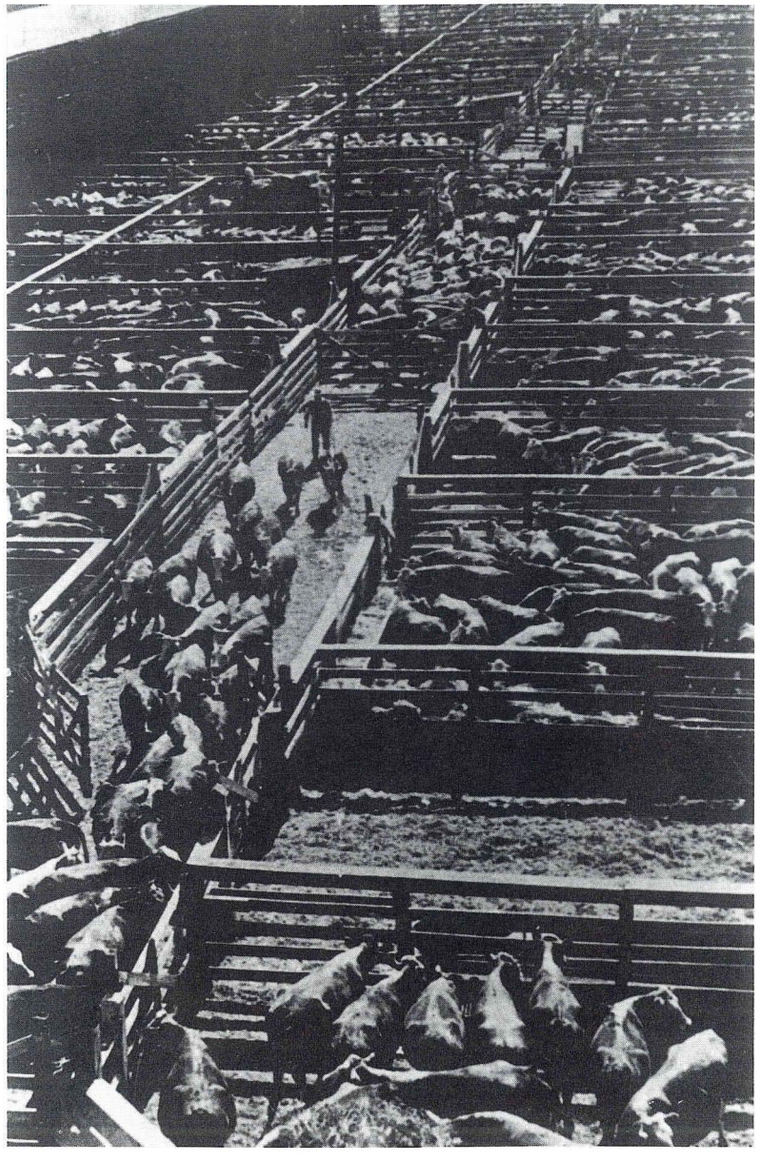
Kant contended in his *Critique of Judgment* that in spite of the isolation of the esthetic, its contemplation leads to thought and to morality. Perhaps it is by virtue of art's very detachment that we are enabled to see that the energies consumed within its labyrinths of desires are less malicious than the will to power that prowls just outside it. Whatever the absurd claims and ideological apologies made on art's behalf, its discourses do not deliver us to those tyrannies perpetrated in the name of Truth. We still suffer from the consequences of that will to truth descending from Plato to Descartes to the present. Perhaps the innocence of detachment cannot be claimed for art in some of its overt political alignments. And none of art's discourses can be dehistoricized away from the politics that bear on each of their formations. But it is only those who have estheticized the political who have formed their creations in human blood.

Art, it has been argued here, arrives in the form of the layered, multidimensional, highly mediated, shifting complexes of its various discourses. In a disastrous and unforgiving century, this art may stand to the side, but nevertheless close to the increasing chill of what spins out of control. In art's irrational games and in its depth of feelings, in its awe and cynicism, its mournings and derisions, its anger and grace, it bears witness to a dark century. Perhaps in the end, the three discourses in their extended sweep only whirl around each other like harmless dust devils, as innocent as they are impotent, hardly touching down into the wreckage that continues to accumulate as we approach the millennium.

Notes

1. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1989), p. 361.

2. Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," an interview conducted by Raul Fornet-Betnanacours, Helmut Becker, and Alfredo Gomez-Muller, in *The Final Foucault,* ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1988), p. 15.



13.8 Stockyards in Kansas City, Missouri, July 1946. (Courtesy of Kansas City Times.)

14 — Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson (Or Is That a Mouse in My *Paragone?*)

The will to a system is a lack of integrity.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*

("What is art?" "What is the origin of the work of art?" "What is the meaning of art or of the history of art?") and the hierarchical classification of the arts. When a philosopher repeats this question without transforming it, without destroying it in its form, its question-form, its onto-interrogative structure, he has already subjected the whole of *space* to the discursive arts, to voice and the *logos*.

—*Jacques Derrida*

We must conclude, perhaps with a shock of surprise, that our primitive actions, the ones we do not do by doing something else, mere movements of the body—these are all the actions there are. We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature.

—*Donald Davidson*

The lights fade up on an asylum-like scene: incomprehensible constructions are under way; all kinds of materials are strewn about—plywood, steel, heaps of earth, and enormous blobs of grease—mirrors lean precariously, and half-visible body parts dangling in the shadows lend a grotesque atmosphere to the chaos. A muffled cacophony of arguing voices, tool noises, and construction sounds pervade the space, which is also occasionally pierced by a shriek or the clatter of a thrown object. Shadowy figures carrying objects or fighting flit now and then into the

14.1 George Herriman, *Ignatz Mouse.* (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

light. Others lurk in the gloom and a pall of dust hangs in the air.

"Hey, Ignatz, drop the brick and get Major Minimax up here. Got a heavy list and he's on it. I know you have been throwing bricks through it all morning. Yeah, It's like the others. But why don't we finally fill one out and send it in, maybe we'll get a brass ring. Can we quiet it down to a roar in here? Hey, Ignatz, that brick went right through number 3. It says 'fill

1. Since your retrospective at the Guggenheim is bound to attract revisionist interpretations and criticism, particularly of the Minimalist and performance work you began twenty-five to thirty years ago, it might be a good idea to trace the development, production, and theory of your work while placing emphasis on any revisions you yourself might want to make—or for that matter, any proclamations concerning the tenacity of its original position. This is made difficult, however, by the sheer diversity and complexity

of your innovations and the discursive nature of your thought. But perhaps by concentrating on the most renowned work of your career, we can begin to see some underlying unity—even if it be a move toward discontinuity. Has it been your intention to remain problematic throughout your career? Or do you see yourself as solving one set of problems only to find another set arising from those solutions?

2. In the 1960s and 1970s when you alternated between dance and sculpture, it became apparent that you were drawing parallels between the relationship of the moving figure in space and the normally static object in space—parallels that ultimately blurred the categories and relationships among theater, dance, and sculpture. How was it that you saw the terminology of sculpture could be grafted onto the spatio-temporal grammar of dance and theater, stating that even when you were performing, you were performing a repertoire belonging to sculpture, and not constructing theater. Meanwhile, people like Yvonne Rainer, who performed similar pedestrian tasks, continued to use the terminology of dance and theater, albeit a reductive terminology.

3. It's been claimed that you also used dance and performance to draw attention to the view that the artist's identity had become that of a heroic

out,' not 'knock out.' So what's wrong with a customs form? It's our chance to 'declare, declare.' A metaphysical manifest like this one with thirteen tickets should not take too long to punch, especially if you can get old Minimax to drag up here. Damn it, Major, fall in, front and center, and sound off in that symmetrical way I know you are capable of. And I want a 'Yes, Sir, No, Sir.' Customs man leaning on us and wants to know what you are carrying and where you got it. Stand at attention and revise yourself or I'll give you a problem or two you won't like solving. What, you don't blame him for not answering, Ignatz? No, doesn't look like he is going to punch the ticket. We could court martial old Major Minimax if he was not already retired. Well, that seems to get the old gent going. O.K., Major, sing your song."

"Let's look at what these tickets repress from the word go. Buried under the old art historical fetish of 'continuity/discontinuity' an entire waxworks of paralytic images unfold which focus alternately (like those winking plastic pictures of Jesus which alternate between a bleeding heart and closed eyes) a 'form,' and that which stands behind it: the artist mouthing statements—or worse, a proclamation—which in its stasis would have nothing to

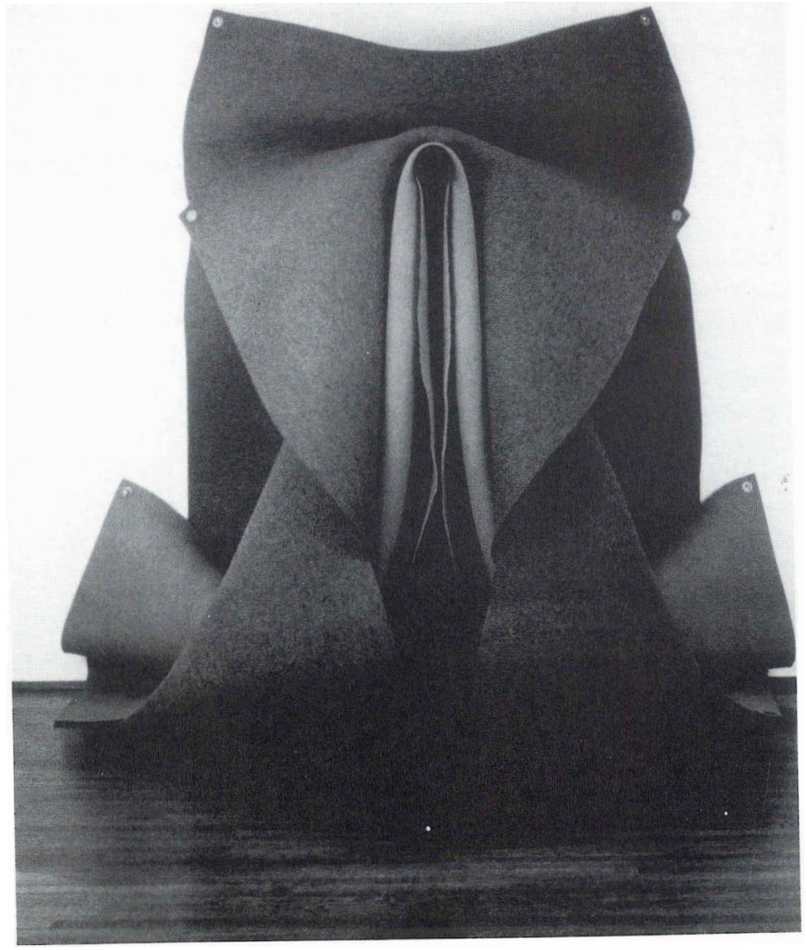
performer within an institution. How would you describe that institution and the artist's relationship to it now that the artist assumes the identity of the antihero? And has your work addressed this progression with its new tone of ironic self-reference? Have you—or the art world as a whole—moved closer toward self-parody or a parody of history?

4. A number of years ago, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe said that you view—or viewed—sculpture as a "received epistemology, a set of terms that amounts to an institutionalized language." But the problem with this epistemological view seems to be that it presumes itself as a foundation to all other knowledge of the world—which would suggest that from your Minimalist sculpture one can infer a criteria or code for discerning an incommensurate reality. Of course, this was the predominant mindset of the early 1960s; since that time, however, many writers and artists have come to think of foundationless models of knowledge as better enabling humanity to cope with its knowledge of the world (I think specifically of Gademer, Rorty, and Derrida). Doesn't this place all of Minimalist sculpture in a predicament requiring major reinterpretation—a reinterpretation that exposes the subjectivity and social agreements that underpin Minimalism's production and the epistemology

do with that unstable, cordite-filled air (if I may be permitted a military metaphor) within which a certain movement of thought confronted its initial contestation with the institution of the 'object' over thirty years ago. But to trace a profile of authenticity across the years which has nothing to do with 'alterations' between 'forms' or 'parallels' or 'epistemological categories' (for which some sort of nameable subject is required but will not be found here amongst this gang—even though many reflective mirrors, also repressed by these tickets, send a certain combative signal across the decades) and . . ."

"Enough, enough! Ignatz, a brick. We let him run on like this and look at his uniform. Where is the spit and polish we used to know from the old Major? Where are those snappy answers we could always count on?

What, Ignatz? He was just speaking up for Mirror Stagette? I know she did not get a ticket, but neither did you. What about the rest of the gang? Well, your favorite, Lil Dahlink Felt, didn't get a ticket to punch. Dirt Macher gets one. Body Bob gets a couple of dances and they are heavy on Undertaker. I, old Vox, get a passing nod, but Blind is not mentioned and neither is Time Keeper, and . . . What, we



14.2 Robert Morris, *House of the Vetti,* 1983. (Fundacion Juan March, Madrid; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

that propelled it? Or do you continue to refute all this?

5. In your famous sculpture *Voice,* which consisted physically of four large speakers configured in a rectangular formation, yet in essence consisted of a recorded narrative played in the gallery space, you maximized the temporal features of sculpture while minimizing sculpture's static materiality and longevity. Was the intention here to envelope the audience (with sound) rather than provide the opportunity for the audience to surround the object, or did it go beyond this, perhaps to the reduction of sculptural objects to the ultimate condition of humanity—that of predication, which is itself an intangible, mental act?

6. Your work *Labyrinth,* a winding, eight-foot high maze, was widely celebrated for all the notions it raised, some of which are contradictory. For example, though the participant initially appeared to be lost in the maze, s/he was never really lost because the gallery parameters remained steadfast; or though the participant was kept in a state of mild suspense (as to his or her destination and location) the participant was in fact following a determined path with minimal spontaneity; or though the sculpture was a static unit, it could only be known through a slow, temporal experience of its features. But didn't this piece also emphasize the author-

retired Minimax too early? Well, we couldn't keep him at the front forever. That battle of the negativity of the unpresentable is hard on the nerves. But maybe you are right, Ignatz, we should have got him back into training. Such a body puncher, and could he work the corners. Just think if we had gone into production, changed the hood ornament every year, how many models we would have on the road today. Just think of the stacks of stuff that would be out there on the market—no, Ignatz, I did not say, 'stacks of stacks.' After all, we must occupy one of the few worlds where numbing repetition is conflated with a moral position. Who cares, if it's like television wrestling. But he didn't want to be a tradesman, Ignatz. Oh no, not Major Minimax. Kept mumbling Sherman's words, 'If nominated I will not run, if elected I will not serve.' He had a problem, Ignatz, which your playmate, Lil Dahlink Felt never had. She knew well enough to stay in the pantry until called and then to rush up batting her lashes and smelling of roses. Oh yes, she knows how to serve and curtsy to you know who coming through the door. 'Oh, Mr. Decision Maker, yes you, darling, you without a chest, yes you, sir, Mr. Last Man, Mr. Economic Man, take me, I'm yours.' I can just hear her saying it, Ignatz. Oh, I don't want to get

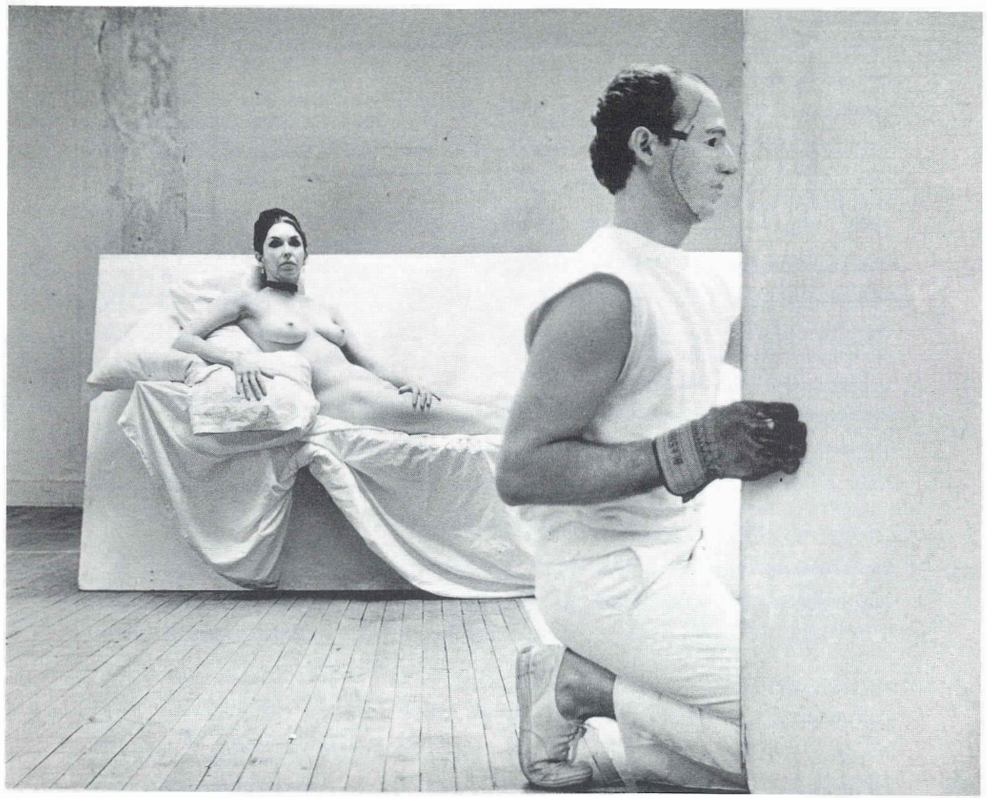
itarian desire artists entertain to control life—even the lives of others? And didn't it also suggest a uniform structure to reality (perhaps like that of the neurological structure of perception)? Weren't you also implying a condition of morality?

7. In the 1970s you conceived and built an outdoor observatory in Oostelijk Flevoland, Holland, which ties astronomy to ritual in drawing sight lines demarcating sunrise at the summer and winter solstices, and sunrise and sunset at the spring and fall equinoxes. How did you see these patterns of solar motion corresponding to human interaction with sculpture? And why was it important to draw this parallel in such a grandiose and cosmological way?

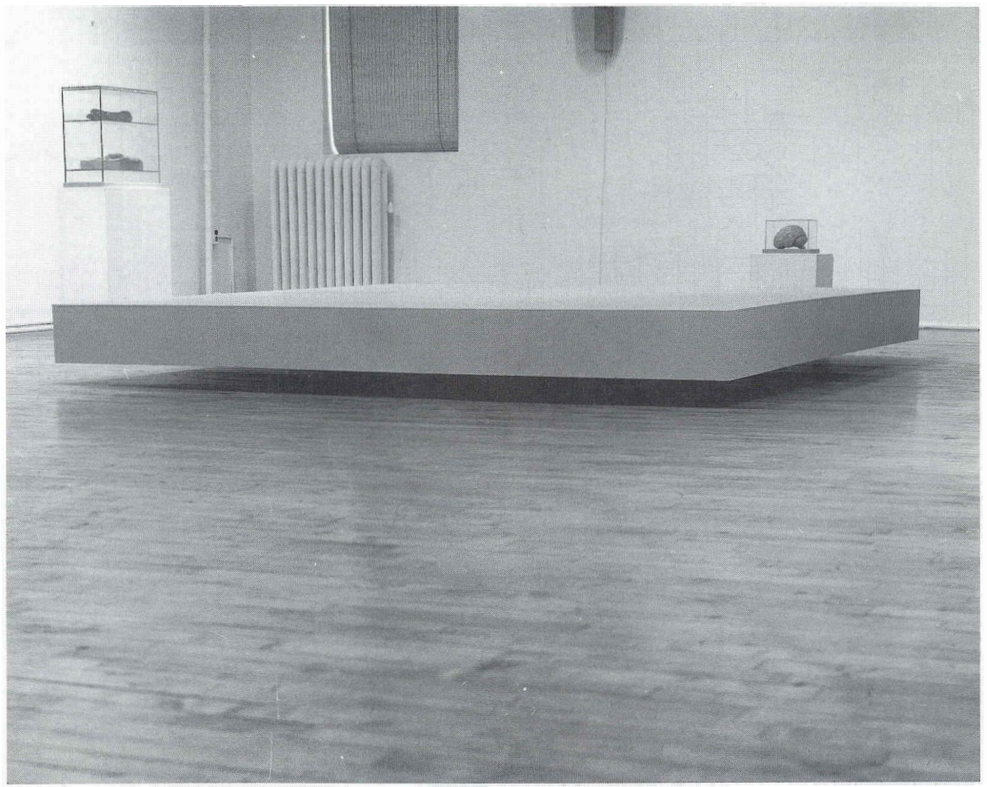
8. In speaking of your work from the mid-1980s—the black, baroque, relief-frames made from Hydrocal and their various central compositions—Carter Ratcliff called you an artist of *Vanitas,* as this body of work is brimming with apocalyptic objects, charnel motifs, and stylistic quotations, and contrasted it with your earlier, Minimalist production—which was widely thought of as proclaiming emptiness as a virtue. But couldn't it as well be interpreted that this quest for "objective" virtue embodied by Minimalism is the far greater vanity, and that your later, far grimmer production negates this quest in confronting one of the most fundamental

into that, Ignatz. Not the dirty stuff. They don't want to hear about our little murderous chaos, about how Lil Dahlink Felt could only have played her games on the broken back of Minimax. Let's not get into our *Pharmakons* of poison as remedy, and who did what to whom. Do you want to show them every brick? Would you want me to tell them about how you tattooed 'Chance' and 'Multiplicity' on Body Bob's derriere so he couldn't sit down? Ignatz, all they want is a simple 'either/or' answer. This 'both/and' is not going to get these tickets punched.

At least I think we should get Body Bob up here. Maybe they have his number: the 'Heroic.' Does that ring a bell, Ignatz? Well it wouldn't be that meat ball from *Waterman Switch,* greased up, bare assed and overweight, inching down the tracks. How about the pseudo-worker in the dirty white suit hoisting the plywood in *Site?* No? Then what about the pedantic professor mouthing Panofsky in *21.3?* That's three. Guess he strikes out. Oh, those were the days though, Ignatz. How we used to dance with our mouths on tippee toes, your bricks sailing by to remind us of what old Neech the Screech used to say about the idiocy of positing a doer for every deed. 'The illusion of Identity.' You scratched that over the pisser, didn't you?



14.3 Robert Morris, *Site*, 1964. Performed with Carolee Schneemann. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; photo: Hans Namuth.)



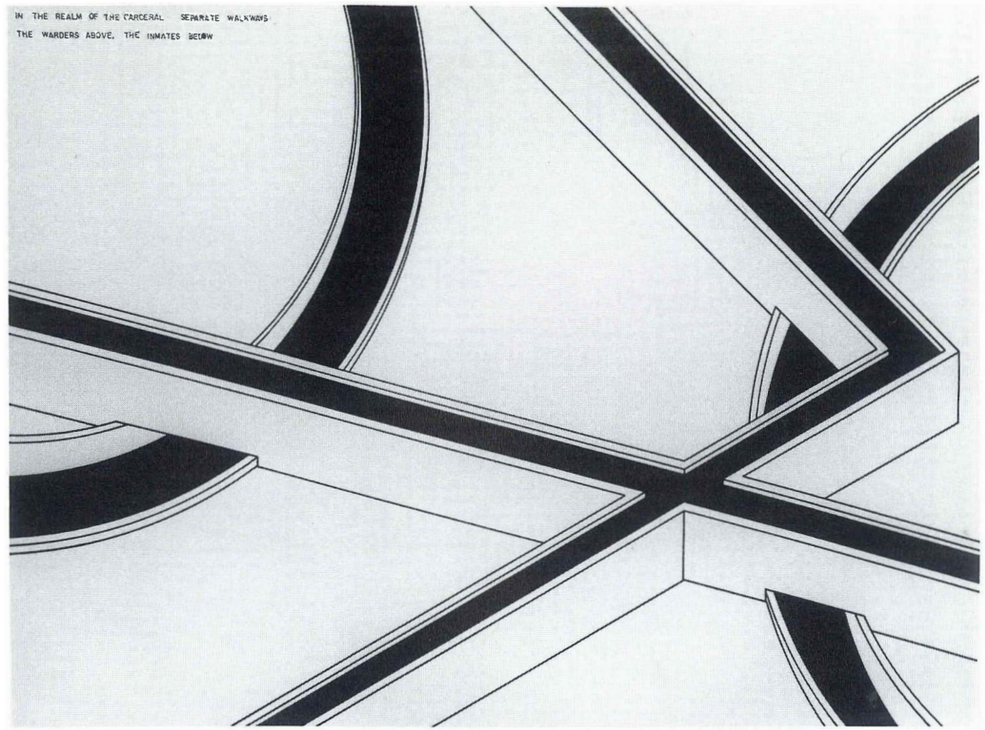
14.4 Robert Morris, *Slab*, 1962. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

and often unconscious premises for art; the staying of death and the perpetuation of humanity and the elevation of production? Didn't this work from the mid-1980s act as a foil for the vanity that underpins all art? And isn't this why you kept moving further and further away from Minimalism? Why did the far more interesting component of the work frame Turneresque sunsets and seascapes? The framing of the photographs of Holocaust victims seemed infinitely more appropriate, but could you elaborate?

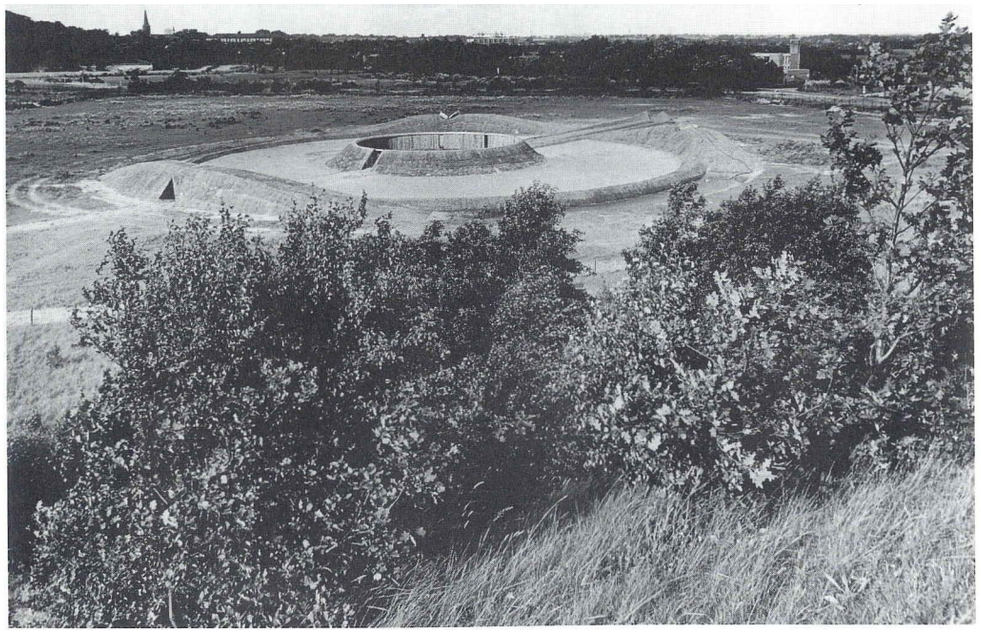
9. In the mid-1980s it was also claimed that your Minimalist production twenty years earlier differed from that of Stella, Andre, Judd, or Smith in that you practiced a geometry that had reference, particularly to prisons where the traffic of inmates is regulated in much the way that viewers are governed by your sculpture and the intervening spatial relations. Such statements imply that you are far more than a Minimalist forbear to Neo-geo theory, but in actuality are the precursor of the ironic formalism of the 1980s, particularly that of Peter Halley, who also talked about his work alluding to prison cells. But it seems that the criticism contemporary to Minimalism as well as your own writings overlooked this aspect and, in fact, opposed it by asserting that your sculpture reduced content to literal object-propositions about appearance, while illusionism

Remember Body Bob and Major Minimax punching it out, round after round, and laughing all the time? Now, really, Ignatz, did we ever see either of them standing knee deep in Merleau-Ponty? Would they have been caught dead Voguing around in the stink of Presence, or tossing anything into that rotting sack of Humanism? It was jab and move, jab and move. Hereclitus may have been old but he was still a good coach. Just the boys in the beginning with their little S & M games, fighting to the death for prestige until Lil Dahlink Felt swished along and softened them up a bit. What, she learned a lot from Time Keeper? Well, he's been x-ed out here. Can't fit *Box with its Sound* into *Slab,* so he had to go, apparently. It's going to have to be by the numbers here if we are going to get a ticket punched and that will leave some of the gang out, I know.

That shopkeeper's mania to sort and file, rank and list, praise and blame—in short, that whole determinate mode, that set which forms a system, a logic, a style, and an encyclopedia of a certain visuality within which we are assumed to march and, while passing in review, unfurl our emblems of a kind of knowledge—will forever motivate the distribution and collection of these tickets, Ignatz. That lust to rule found more often than not in the critic



14.5 Robert Morris, *In the Realm of the Carceral—Separate Walkways: The Warders Above, the Inmates Below,* 1978. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; photo: Bevan Davies.)



14.6 Robert Morris, *Observatory,* Temporarily installed at Ijmuiden, The Netherlands, 1971. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

14.7 Robert Morris, *Untitled* [*Philadelphia Labyrinth*], Installation at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1974. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection.)

was reduced to perception of gestalts. Indeed, Judd wrote in 1964 that your work wasn't valuative, and though Rosalind Krauss amended this limited view of your work—and Minimalism as a whole—it was adopting no more a sociological position than to state that Minimalism was a metaphorical statement attesting to a notion of the self that depends on feelings and intentions experienced by the body in the present—a present self that exists and is acknowledged in experiencing its relations to the "emptied" Minimal sculpture and its immediate space. Where was this ironic position discussed? What works exemplify it? Or was this just another critic's revisionary tactic for promoting your work?

10. Your last show at Castelli seemed to affirm the ironic functions of formalism by its presentation of sculpture that simultaneously functioned as a Minimalist reduction and as an ironic social reference. Unfortunately, the timing of the show made it appear you were responding to the widely touted work of a new generation led by Peter Halley. Or is this view short-sighted?

11. Recently, you wrote about three "paradigmatic texts" that dominate the narrative of twentieth-century art history: abstraction, the address of power, and the negative discourse. Whereas the first two are widely recognized and bear some continuity

(but as opposed to what? A certain violent proclivity for setting in motion the unruly, the startling, the excessive? Where does that line fall between the urge for a conquest without a determinate result and the administration of a unity within a regime of occupation and authority?) All your bricks, Ignatz, will be no match for that leaden list of stylistic categories, formal certainties, systematic influences, historical primes and replicas extracted from the object as a knowledge. But then neither Dionysus nor Heidegger could do anything about that long-standing prejudice of the West to associate staring at an object with knowledge, which is nearly as peculiar as identifying thinking with being: the two rotten epistemological pillars of the house of the dead. Which reminds me, Ignatz, have you seen Dirt Macher? No, I didn't say he was dead, but I was reminded of those conversations he used to have with Reinhardt about those great corporate celebrations of death in the Neolithic. What happened to all those tombs and war memorials he designed? He used to wander around mumbling and drawing vast complexes of exercise courts, bathhouses, prisons, and tombs. 'Dirt or no dirt,' he used to say, 'let's excavate the entombment of recognition.' What's that, Ignatz? You still have your eye patch? Yeah, I remember.

throughout the last century, the third you characterize as submerged and discontinuous; "it vanishes when its disruptive maneuvers result in the establishment of a pervasive style." From the favorable way that you write of it, and from the negating functions of your most recent work, it seems that for the present you're invested most heavily in this "negative" production, especially as you describe Minimalism's course as having proceeded from the nontranscendent and heroic to the bid for transcendence and heroism via phenomenological subjectivity. Is this evolution something which you approve or disapprove? Are you in fact describing the trajectory of your own career or are you critical of the new emphasis on subjectivity (which really seems to be currently supported more by the hermeneutic preference for *reading* several competing texts on reality and the deconstructionist eradication of foundational theories than the phenomenological bias you cite)? Please elaborate.

12. You've also written about art bearing witness to a dark century? What prompted this sullen view and—since you wrote so prosaically about the creative production, theorization, and discourse of the last century in relationship to the catastrophic events surrounding

He wanted everybody to wear one when they went into the *Observatory*. Said it was a monocular work since it acknowledged only one miserable star. And whatever happened to his sidekicks, Marvin Blaine and Jason Taub and . . . who was the other one, I've forgotten? They are all what? At work in Pittsburgh? A secular version of Angkor Wat with steam? They did what? Went off saying they were going to do a public work that danced between the Scylla of the critical and the Charybdis of the utopian? Well, let's not get into that, no ticket here for anything like that. Anyway, Dirt Macher and his buddies would never punch anything but a hole in the ground, much less a ticket about 'grandiosity.' Did they work with the Major on the *Labyrinth?* I don't know. Dirt Macher did what? Left a note before he took off, a little word labyrinth? Well, if you think it will punch a ticket, Ignatz, read it. 'Originless, fetishistic, fascistic, real, imaginary, mnemonic, antiarchitectural, claustrophobic, metaphorical, metonymic, disorienting, Minotaurless, Baroque, spatial, Minimal, linear, neurological, intestinal, threadless, appropriated, timeless, textual, iconophobic, illegal, expensive, temporal, graffiti prone . . .' Enough, Ignatz, it's getting us nowhere.

them, have you any predictions for the art of the coming century and the world it interacts with?

13. Your most recently exhibited work employs a dark, expressionistic style of painting and delivers a despairingly accusational and interrogative tone of language. You've also proceeded from exemplifying sweeping views of death and destruction to narrowing in on sectors of society responsible for the specific conditions of unwarranted poverty, death, and destruction: the sectors of society that, in the language of Nietzsche, blatantly exhibit the herd instinct. In these paintings, private and public sectors, individuals and institutions alike are called on to account for contemporary social ills and hence you depict—indeed indict—the political leadership and the masses, the media and its audience, the critic and the observer. Do you really find contemporary society to be this dark, mad, and morally bankrupt? And if so, do you as an artist feel possessed of a more elevating spirituality—or at least a more pragmatic and compassionate view of civilization, and perhaps hope to revive by postmodern means the romantic view of the artist as cultural seer—say in the tradition of Goya?

What, they should have made more permanent monuments? To what? War, you think, would have been the best subject? But, Ignatz, the most successful war memorial of our time is right down there in Washington, D.C. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Could there ever be a more ingenious act of substituting private grief for public guilt? Has political criminality ever been more effectively repressed than by this weeping wound to the will of the critical? Has there ever been a more svelte Minimal mask placed over governmental culpability? You say you have dreams of what that massacre Desert Storm will one day unleash, Ignatz? In any case the absolution of guilt was as far beyond Dirt Macher's capabilities as was the entertainment of fictions of a unity accessed by the genuflections of a therapy, or a regime of compensating catharsis, or a ministry of healing by amnesia.

On the other hand, Dirt Macher never seemed to belong to the church of the Abstract, did he, Ignatz? Tombs, prisons, observatories, war memorials, labyrinths maybe, but that semireligious enthrallment, that nostalgia for a certain Humanistic thrill—well, we can't accuse him of that. 'The nostalgia for visual presence is true decadence,' he used to say when encountering those late, oversized Minimal objects. I think it was the hype attached to the 'site specific' that annoyed him. He used

to rant and rave about those claims that a nonrepresentational visual sign could hollow out for itself a kind of transcendent space, as if the entire institutional force of a certain history and all the doxy and political investments that arrive with it could be repressed to reveal a mute autonomy that only the visual body had access to, as though this visual sign had been awarded some hypnotic power with which it could obliterate the very story that defined it, as though it could sublate and dominate its own history, as though the 'site' of its specificity was a purged ontology, as if such a site could be delivered without those rationalizations that bind a massive cultural investment to the perpetuation and conservation of a practice of erecting self-congratulatory monuments—monuments, needless to say, that are dedicated to that rationalization that sanctions and underwrites them. Even Body Bob, who always jeered at what he calls 'that jabbering which thinks it sees and that seeing which thinks it compensates' (nobody hated the utopian moment more than he did) said he could never wear those solemn, elevating stilts of the abstract. 'Art has to arrive with kicks and itches,' he used to say. 'Any time they demand silence and the upward gaze, check out the guards. And if you should hear them whispering in the back rows about morality, be sure to run for the hills.'

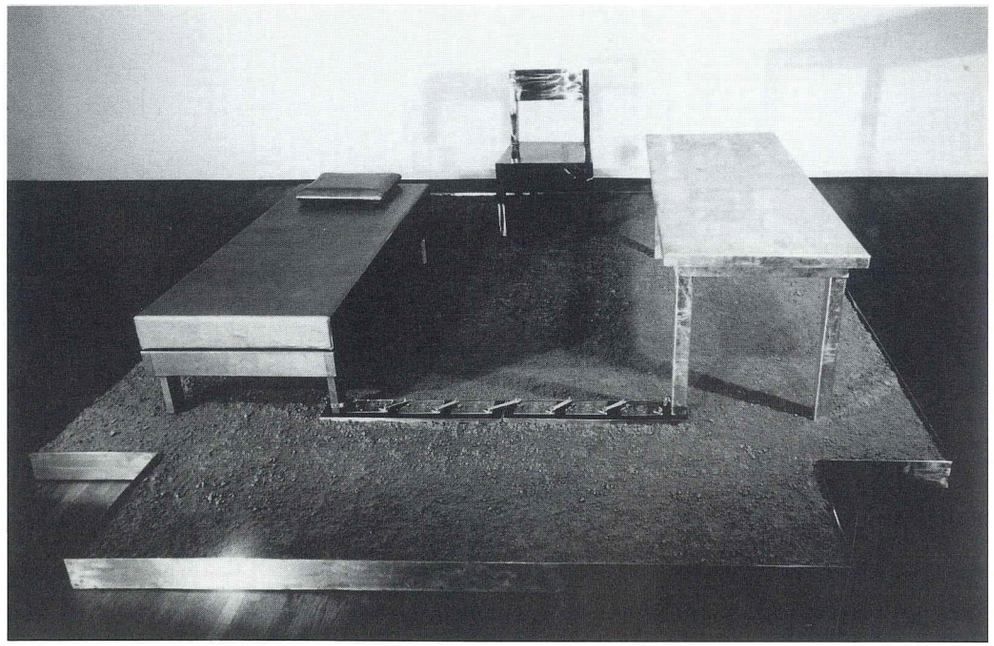
I think that what Time Keeper has known all along, Ignatz, is that only death is identical with itself. What was that he used to tell us about the fate of a single object? He said that irrespective of every intention with which it was produced, it might be launched on an irrecoverable trajectory, its destiny to become a fetish of a cultural moment, for it has the potential, like a magnet, to create a force field around itself by virtue of what is projected onto it. It may set in motion forces of identification that touch nothing of the impulses that gave it birth. Of course it may also drop like a stone into that well of collective forgetfulness, or it may be repressed and hidden for touching too sensitive a nerve. Whatever its destiny, it arrives propelled by forces that operate out of the light and provokes, if it provokes at all, a nexus of identifications and anxieties that

finally are announced to consciousness with all the brittle rationalizations that the brake of theory can apply, and with all that embalming praise, or sometimes vilification, that seize upon a cultural object in order to guarantee a security, a stasis, a rest, a definition, a containment and an identity. And even then the thing threatens to move, in spite of the stranglehold of the critical parergon and the entire weight of the museum sitting on it to hold it still. Eventually death is guaranteed, of course. Wound in a long enough shroud of discourse, wrapped well enough in punched tickets, and placed on a . . . Look out, Ignatz! Time Keeper is wielding some kind of giant punch. Run for it. What? Said he was going to punch my what? That was close, Ignatz. Can't trust any of these guys. Seems that whatever I say sets them off. But then it was always like that. I was only trying to sort things out, tell them what they were up to. Ouch! Hey, Ignatz, lay off with the bricks. I can tell you are really on their side too.

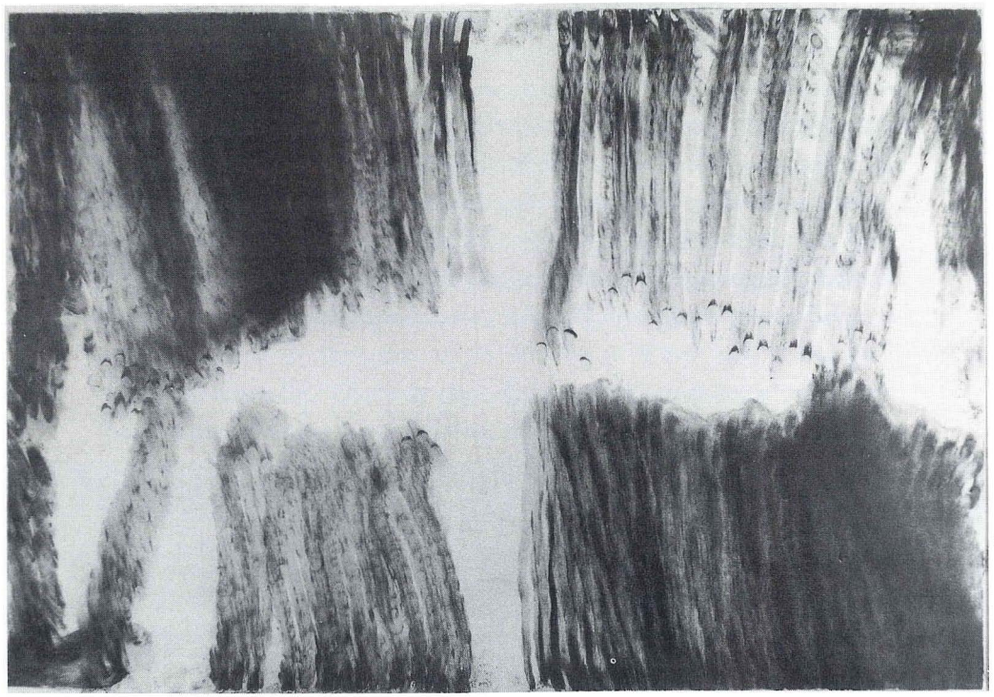
You know, Ignatz, when it finally quiets down here around evening, I see this strewn space as our special encampment, a kind of prison actually, a place where we are, as Time Keeper would put it, 'doing time.' What's that, Ignatz? Do I see this space cut off from the outside, some sort of suburban Kantian Kingdom existing at the edge of a more grown-up world, a zone on the other side of Truth and Morality? Not a chance, Ignatz. Look around, we live in the mean streets too. Folded within our game of the ignition of metaphors is that other game of evaluation and provocation. I admit we are pretty childlike in demanding all that love from the Other. But then the Other seems to demand our images. But not our truths, you say, Ignatz? You should talk. You who quote the old Screech as saying we have art lest we perish of the truth.

I see Time Keeper back there in the gloom, Ignatz. What is he doing pacing back and forth? Sometimes I think there is a kind of musty Edmund Burkean smell around him. He was always wedging his way into things from the very beginning. Always timing something, chipping

away at the ontology of the spatial object, stirring up the old *paragone,* jabbering away at Blind, telling Body Bob when to stop and start. He what, Ignatz? Came up through the ranks with the Major? I didn't know that. I thought he made his debut with that *Box with the Sound.* Anyway he is a real trooper. You would think that anybody who could last with old Vox through *Hearing* and then *Voice* might get a ticket to punch. Well, let me look again . . . hmm. No, he does not get a nod. It's just as well, I suppose. He would just grin that dopey grin, grab Body Bob and the two of them would do that soft-shoe routine.



14.8 Robert Morris, *Hearing,* 1972. (Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; photo: Eric Pollitzer.)

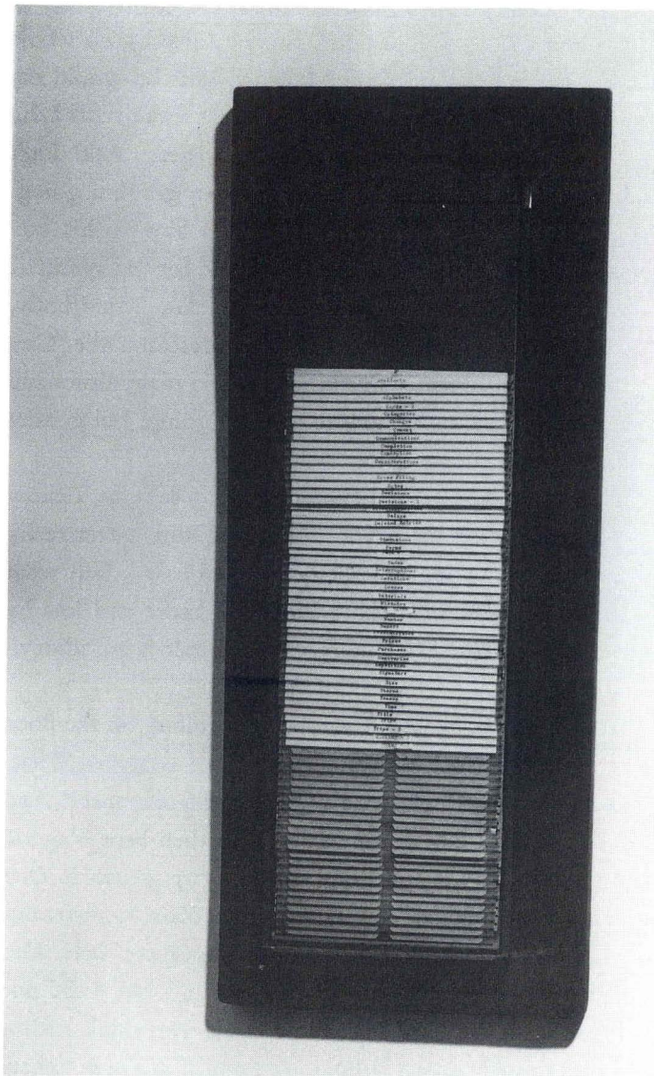


14.9 Robert Morris, *Blind Time XIII*, 1973. (Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

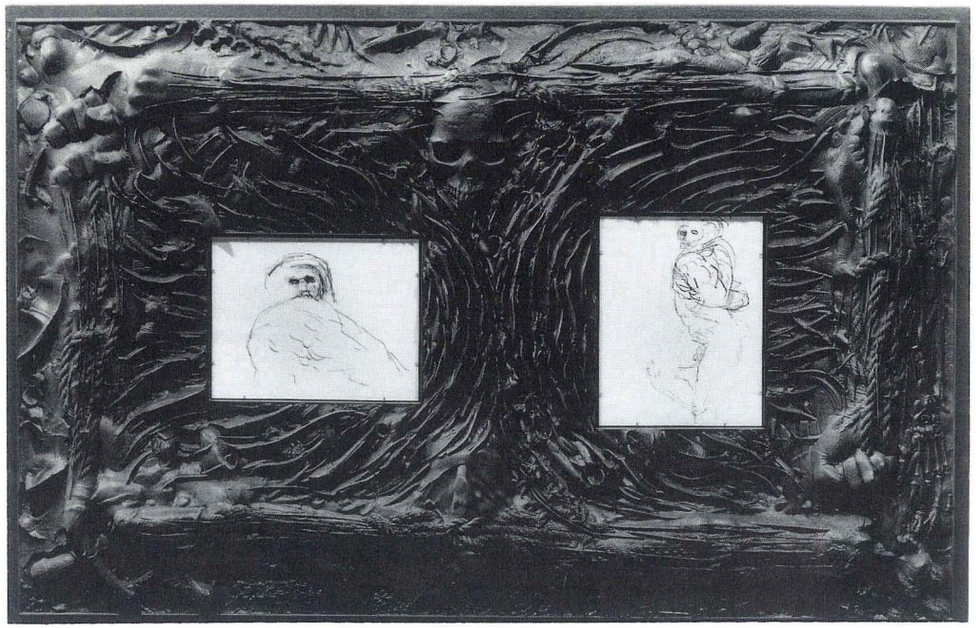
I know we have not got a single ticket punched, Ignatz. But I'm trying, I'm trying. I know Body Bob is pissed that he did not get a whole handful. What about the big one on dance? I know what he would say in that whiny voice of his, 'What about the *I-Box,* what about what I did for the Major and Time Keeper and even that bitch, Stagette? And don't forget Blind and his greasy drawings.' I know how to get him going. Just tell him he is farting phenomenology. That gets him on his box screaming about how Kant nearly made the world safe for the synthetic a priori. Then he would break out in that derisive chant, 'Mind/body, subject/object,' with all those horrible verses about Descartes the 'Cart with two square wheels.' No, Ignatz, I've heard it all so many times and I don't want to hear it again. I know how to get him going, but getting him to punch a ticket is something else.

Maybe we should get Stagette up here? No, You're right, I know how he fights with her. Claims she never understood him, never really knew him, 'in the flesh,' as he put it. I always wanted to ask him what he meant when he accused her of making him both more and less by theorizing him as a mere *imago*. The purely visual gestalt is an 'idiocy,' he used to scream at her.

Hey, what's going on, Ignatz? Everybody is rolling on the floor and laughing. I've never seen such an hysterical gang of assassins. What, you read that ticket about our 'new tone of ironic self-reference?' And what? Body Bob threw the *I-Box* at the Major who then bent Stagette out of shape with the *Corner Piece* and Blind smeared cup grease on Dirt Macher's . . . wait a minute, Ignatz. You started this bedlam by throwing bricks at everyone, I bet. It looks like a 'Night at the Opera' here. Get Body Bob out of that Kraut helmet immediately and . . . No, I did not give it to Lil Dahlink with the *Card File*. How could you think such a thing, Ignatz? You are so surly today. Why don't I punch my own ticket? No, I won't get into this melee by reciting that track of perversions from *Voice* about child abuse.



14.10 Robert Morris, *Card File,* 1963. (Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France.)

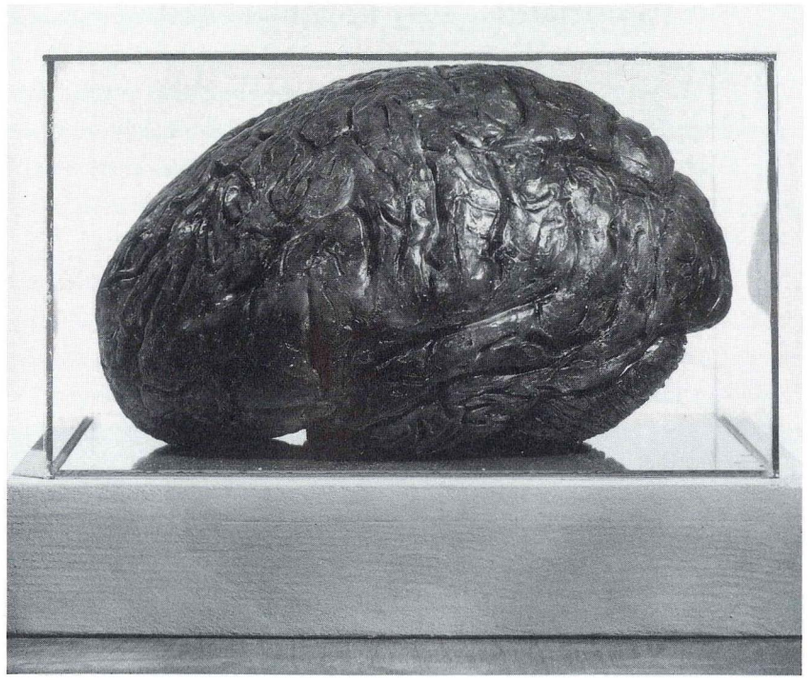


14.11 Robert Morris, *Untitled* [*Fathers and Sons*], 1955–1983. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; photo: Jon Abbot.)

Got a hot ticket here for the ghoul, Ignatz. Have you seen old body parts? Yeah, I mean Undertaker, who else? He doesn't like the name, I know. Wants to be called the archivist of Acheron, or genealogist of the ganglions, or something like that. But Undertaker it is going to be, so get the creep up here. He'll love this ticket. It's as agonized as he pretends to be. Ask him if he ever mistook Minimax for some sort of Zen Master. He's what, laughing but not answering? No cooperation from this gang. Think I'll rest here a little while outside the ghoul's lair. I know the Undertaker has a suspicion that under all the horseplay we were always pessimists. Just 'pissing in the wind,' as Body Bob would

say, while the future as a massive flattening homogenization has been inching toward us. Our shrieks of laughter are just so much noise generated in order not to hear the march of that immense army of last men coming ever closer, bringing a uniformity of the soul, a grayness that would make even the Major run up the white flag. And Ignatz's little bricks reminding us of the necessity of resistance and play, fighting and derision, contradiction and disbelief, would be useless against that sullen contentment and monotonous enterprise of the descending horde whose only itch is for mild distraction. Our time passes, Ignatz. Make way for the heavy-footed tradesmen of style and the glitzy kitsch entertainers . . . Ouch! Thanks for that brick, Ignatz. I think I was having some sort of futuristic nightmare. What a relief to know we are slogging through a fractured present when nearly everybody thinks of themselves as the alienated other and duly claims identity as a victim. So much better to be alive in this culture of boiling resentment, huh, Ignatz?

But what we need to know, Ignatz, is what the meat packer is up to these days. Ticket here wants to know about his virtue and his vanity. What, threw a liver at you, Ignatz? Claims he never touched the Major? I know, I know. He claims he was just looking at the bag of guts from the inside. Says there were plenty of foetuses, cocks, hearts, brains, lungs, tracheas—the whole barn in fact, just unshuffled and laid out. But throw them a single bone and it's a 'National Enquirer' headline. Complaints, complaints. You know, Ignatz, I sometimes think the Undertaker took over for Body Bob after he got too old and fat to dance and prance around in the all together. I realize that we have a very tortured ticket here for the Undertaker, but he ought to like that. However else he might read it, I for one see that it carries a certain tone of urgency, a certain desire to know what stands between Minimax and the Undertaker, a desire to know . . . What, Ignatz, I don't believe it. A text tattooed on that liver he threw at you? Let me have the clammy thing. Umm . . . some of it illegible, can hardly make it out, says, 'isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under



14.12 Robert Morris, *Wax Brain*, 1963. (Saatchi Collection, London; courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; photo: Walter J. Russell.)

everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?' Now that has got to be Neech the Screech raving here on this piece of meat. To tell the truth, Ignatz, I wouldn't be surprised if old body parts cut this out of the Major and it was already inscribed there. No, it couldn't have come from Body Bob. He knows the Undertaker too well to ever get that close to the old porcelain table.

But do we detect a typically Baroque Undertaker-type parable about the inscription of a knowledge on a body? Could he be telling us that a body, every body, is always already inscribed with a text, that however deeply we cut, we will find that a story has already been inscribed and is awaiting us? This text of thirteen tickets also wishes to lay open, like a pass of the scalpel, a certain body of practices inscribed on a subject. Of course we would get an argument from Body Bob here. 'The story can never tell the whole story,' he used to say. No doubt he would argue that if a body is always already a sign, there are ways in which a sign is also embodied, disclosing itself only by a passage through the flesh. You know how he mocks me, Ignatz. Every chance he gets he sings those little doggerel ditties. He'll do that little shuffle and sing . . . No, Ignatz, no imitations. Don't repeat one! Well, there is no stopping him.

Got my itches, got my pictures
Got my time beyond the strictures

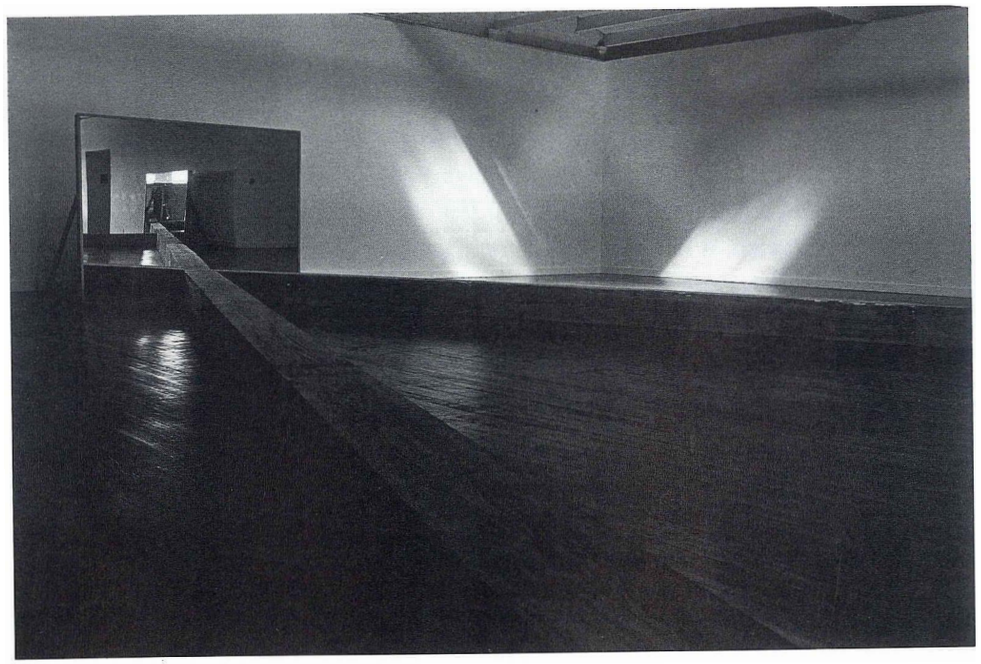
Got the muscle, got the eye
Somewhere else is where I fly

Always elsewhere on the ledge
Always dancing on the edge

Don't confuse me with your story
I'll walk right through you
It could get gory.

Enough! Shut up, Ignatz. You know how old Vox hates that. What we do with the story on these tickets is the question. Here is a text in which every ticket, if it does not quite aspire to slicing open the subject of the subject, nevertheless asks question after question of the subject as the subject of the question. How are we to answer, Ignatz? I believe we can only unravel such a question, as we have been doing, until we come to

that centerless labyrinth of mirrors (perhaps the *Wet Mirror Maze* of 1969) in which that fiction of a subject as having the character of a substance is reflected and refracted into such a multiplicity of relations as to be shattered. Even Body Bob knows that the only authenticity is one which has refused every identity conferred by an institution, a discourse, an image, or a style—as well as every delight and oppression offered by that gulag called the autobiographical. What, Ignatz? How does the subject then represent herself? Do me a favor, go throw a brick at yourself.



14.13 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, Installation at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon, 1977. (Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

I wish the ghoul were in a better mood. This ticket really wants to know what kind of line he's got to the Absolute Master. Whatever he says about being Body Bob's repressed doppelganger we know he's spent a certain amount of time close to Mr. Dust. Ignatz, I can't stand it when he laughs like that. Sounds more like a snake hissing than a human laugh. And that foul breath . . . Ignatz, get him a mouthwash. Of all the gang, he is the worst. Always laughing that hissing laugh at me, mocking me, telling me my theories always arrive last, after the action is over. He accused me, old Vox, of a lack of nerve, of an inability to face my terrors. I hate the bastard. Now you're laughing, Ignatz. I think you're on his side. I think you like those frames of guts and bones he makes. Well, we might get a clue to the old buzzard if we could get a peek into that thick book he keeps under lock and key, that 'Record of Scars.' Looks like some sort of family album. I don't know about you, Ignatz, but I can't hold my breath any longer. Let's get out of his lair, and watch your back leaving. He is too often what you won't see lurking in the shadows over there, and what you don't want that you suspect is there.

Ignatz, it is all very well for you and your friends to have their fun. They play and they learn. But you are all a little smug. You should remember that you inhabit the little world, and the big world does not play your game. You know, Ignatz, you are allowed to play by those men without chests whom you mock so much, just as long as your little games amuse them. And I have to admit, they can be amused by quite a lot—and they always pay for what amuses them. And I also have to admit that your games can, on occasion, soar to a certain fascinating height. And . . . What's that, Ignatz? Does being a servant bother me? Don't remind me. I've heard it before. 'Only the slave achieves true self-consciousness.' You scratched that one up over the pisser didn't you? Why that worried look, Ignatz? What, you think I still don't get it? Me, old Pop Vox, doesn't understand you twerps? Now put down that brick, Ignatz. O.K., O.K. It was worth it, I admit it. Whatever the cost, it was worth it, and I'll check the 'yes' box on the Eternal Return form. Satisfied?

No, that isn't it? Hey, why is it suddenly so quiet? Why is everybody staring at me? Even you, Ignatz. Don't crowd me. Back off. What did I do anyway? Ouch! Ignatz, that brick got me. I didn't what? Hey, Major, watch that slab, it's going to . . . Oh, no. I believe I'm seriously wounded. Ignatz, turn up my volume, I'm beginning to fade. Didn't do what? Didn't mention the gifts? Wait, I'm going down. O.K. O.K. You all left some gifts. Satisfied? Stagette, that glass edge is cutting into me. Ignatz, stop the bricks. Lil Dahlink, gith at fell oua my outh, I can't breathe. Oh, I fall. *Et tu,* Ignatz . . . Help, I fade . . ."

The gang exits left dragging the remains of Vox who, even in his comalike state, has not released what appears to be a long list or roll of tickets (unpunched), which trail behind him in the dust.

CURTAIN

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Continuous Project Altered Daily

The Writings of Robert Morris

Robert Morris

Robert Morris is best known for his significant contributions to minimalist sculpture and antiform art, as well as for a number of widely influential theoretical writings on art. Illustrated throughout, this collection of his seminal essays from the 1960s to the 1980s addresses wide-ranging intellectual and philosophical problems of sculpture, raising issues of materiality, size and shape, anti-illusionism, and perceptual conditions.

Included are the influential "Notes on Sculpture," which in four parts carefully articulates the shifting terrains of sculpture during the 1960s, tracing its movement from the gestalt-driven unitary forms of minimalism, through permutable pieces, to the formally dispersed process-oriented antiform art that appeared later in the decade, and Morris's landmark essay on "Anti Form," which marked a departure from art as object.

In "The Art of Existence," Morris deftly and humorously invents three artists who, in their movement away from object-art and toward the extra-visual, reveal the limits and conditions of modern sculpture. Essays of the 1970s and 1980s reflect Morris's preoccupation with the broad conditions of memory and space, which were explored in his experiments with land reclamation and land art, labyrinthine environments, and carceral imagery. In the later essays, Morris looks at modern art's development in America, based on a framework of strategies produced by Duchamp, Pollock, and other key figures. And in a clever reconfiguration of an interview with Roger Denson, Morris acts out a subtle mockery of himself and his art, collapsing the high seriousness of the intended format into a playful scheme.

An ●*ctober* Book. Copublished with the Guggenheim Museum.