Daniel Buren and Robert Smithson:
A Comparative Study
by
Serge Bérard
B.A., Université de Montréal, 1979
M.A., Université de Montréal, 1990
M.A., University of British Columbia, 1992
A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of Fine Arts
We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
April 1999
©Serge Bérard, 1999
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **FINE ARTS**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date **22-08-1999**
Abstract

This thesis compares the works of French artist Daniel Buren and American artist Robert Smithson during the years 1965-1968. Smithson and Buren have been chosen because their career paths exemplify the fate of the artist in an increasingly administered art world, but also because the subject matter of their respective works is a reflection of the importance of various kinds of infrastructures in shaping everyday life in the modern world. The questions that the thesis tries to answer are principally the following: how has this infrastructural and standardized reality been investigated by artists, and how did it affect their choice of artistic strategy? Furthermore, has their evaluation of this reality found the same formulation whether the artist lived in the United States or in France?

Smithson's work recalls the physical infrastructures characteristic of public works, especially that of the highway system. His choice of infrastructure is significant for an American artist. The extension of the highway system, which will increase dramatically in the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s, is a major event in the history of the United States, and represents the final confirmation of the supremacy of "car culture." As well as evoking the grid of the highway system, Smithson alludes to the corporation and its vast organizational structure that is the source of the need for an enlarged highway infrastructure. Buren's materials and their display in an urban space are intended to compete with the network of urban signs as it is found in the streets of Paris, which becomes in the period around May 1968 the site of a struggle for political affirmation, with wildly inventive slogans scrawled on the walls of the city.

The thesis takes into account the different socio-historical, intellectual and esthetic contexts in which each artist elaborated his strategy, and, as well, relates their work to contemporary concerns over the evolution of the industrial world and its organizations as it develops, with a different national emphasis, in both France and the United States.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Tables iv
List of Figures v
Acknowledgements viii
Introduction: An Industrial Culture 1
Chapter 1: Infrastructures and Managerialism 35
Chapter 2: The Years 1966 and 1967 86
Chapter 3: The Gathering and Distribution of Materials 127
Chapter 4: Conclusion: The Managerialist Regime 210
Bibliography 232
List of Tables

Table 1: Table from Chandler, Alfred Jr, "The Emergence of Managerial Capitalism," in Chandler, Alfred and Richard Tedlow, eds, The Coming of Managerial Capitalism
List of Figures

Fig. 1 Hollis Frampton, Frank Stella, 1959. 22
Fig. 2 Donald Judd, Untitled, 1965. 24
Fig. 3 Andy Warhol, Del Monte Box (Peach Halves), 1964, Campbell’s Box (Tomato Juice), 1964, installation view, 1964. 26
Fig. 4 Monory, Jungle de velours No. 13, 1971. 28
Fig. 5 Erro, Planescape, 1970. 30
Fig. 6 Tom Wesselman, Great American Nude, #48, 1963. 32
Fig. 7 Erro, Intérieur américain, 1968. 34
Fig. 8 Dan Graham, Row Housing Project, 1966. 73
Fig. 9 Robert Smithson, The Monuments of Passaic, 1967. 75
Fig. 10 Robert Smithson, The Monuments of Passaic, 1967. 77
Fig. 11 Robert Smithson, The Monuments of Passaic, 1967. 79
Fig. 12 Robert Smithson, The Monuments of Passaic, 1967. 81
Fig. 13 Robert Smithson, Negative Map Showing Region of the Monuments along the Passaic River, 1967. 83
Fig. 14 Daniel Buren, showing of Interruption, 1969. 85
Fig. 15 Robert Smithson, Pulverizations, 1967. 106
Fig. 16 Robert Smithson, Tar Pool and Gravel Pit, 1966. 108
Fig. 17 Robert Smithson, Aerial Map: Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, 1967. 110
Fig. 18 Robert Smithson, Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, Wandering Earth Mounds and Gravel Paths, 1967. 112
Fig. 19 Robert Smithson, Terminal, 1966. 114
Fig. 20 Robert Smithson, “Assemblages,” 1962. 116
Fig. 21 Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, “Puisque peindre c’est...,” 1967. 118
Fig. 22 Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, Salon de la jeune peinture, 1967. 120
Fig. 23 Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, “Lettre contre les salons,” 1967. 122
Fig. 24 Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, Salon de la jeune peinture, 1967. Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, Musée des Arts décoratifs, 1967. 124
Fig. 25 Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, “Il ne s’agissait évidemment que de regarder des toiles de Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni,” 1967.

Fig. 26 Robert Smithson, Pine Barrens, 1968.

Fig. 27 Robert Smithson, A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, 1968.

Fig. 28 Robert Smithson, A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968.

Fig. 29 Robert Smithson, Nonsite “Line of Wreckage,” Bayonne, New Jersey, 1968.

Fig. 30 Robert Smithson, New Jersey, New York, 1967.

Fig. 31 Robert Smithson, Snap Shot Notes - Pertaining to “Double Nonsite” California & Nevada near Baker Cinder Cones/Rock Collected at Site (Lava)/and “Death Valley Nonsite” Rock Collected at Site (Chalk), 1968.

Fig. 32 Robert Smithson collecting obsidian for Double Nonsite, California and Nevada, 1968.

Fig. 33 Installation view of Robert Smithson exhibition at Dwan Galley, New York, 1969.

Fig. 34 Robert Smithson, Asphalt Pour, Rome, 1969.

Fig. 35 Robert Smithson, Concrete Pour, Chicago, 1969.

Fig. 36 Robert Smithson, The Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970.

Fig. 37 Robert Smithson, Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, Emmen, Holland, 1971.

Fig. 38 Robert Smithson, Amarillo Ramp, Texas, 1973.

Fig. 39 Robert Smithson, 1000 Tons of Asphalt, c. 1969.

Fig. 40 Daniel Buren’s mosaic at Grapetree Bay, Ile Ste-Croix, 1965.

Fig. 41 Common store-front fabric, Paris.

Fig. 42 Daniel Buren, Peinture sur toile, 1968.

Fig. 43 Daniel Buren, Affichage sauvage, 1968.

Fig. 44 Daniel Buren, Affichage sauvage, 1968.

Fig. 45 Atelier populaire des Beaux-Arts, Mai 1968.

Fig. 46 Daniel Buren, Hommes sandwiches, 1968.

Fig. 47 Daniel Buren, Papier rayé de bandes verticales blanches et vertes, 1969, 1989.
Fig. 48 Daniel Buren, Certificate d'acquisition, Description formelle de l'oeuvre acquise, Bordereau de transfert, 1968. 197-201

Fig. 49 Daniel Buren, Two exemplars of Description formelle de l'oeuvre acquise, 1974 and 1980. 203

Fig. 50 Yves Klein, two versions of Maquette de chèque, 1959. 205

Fig. 51 Marcel Duchamp, Monte-Carlo Bond, 1924. 207

Fig. 52 Marcel Duchamp, "Tzanck Check," 1919. 209

Fig. 53 Daniel Buren's office, Paris, 1987. 227

Fig. 54 Robert Smithson, Bingham Copper Mining Pit-Utah Reclamation Project, 1973. 229

Fig. 55 Daniel Buren, "Les couleurs: sculpture," 1977. 231
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Serge Guilbaut for his endless patience and his guidance. Professor John O'Brien made several extremely useful remarks on particular points in my thesis. Professor Maureen Ryan's editorial suggestions and advices were much appreciated. I also would like to thank the director and the personnel of the Nouveau Musée/Institut de Villeurbanne for their generosity in allowing me to do research in their archives midway in my doctoral research. I would especially like to thank Anne Ramsden.
Introduction: An Industrial Culture

It is the practice of historians - including this one - to treat the development of the arts, however obvious and profound their roots in society, as in some way separable from their contemporary context, as a branch or type of human activity subject to its own rules, and capable of being judged accordingly. Yet in the era of the most revolutionary transformations of human life so far recorded, even this ancient and convenient principle of structuring a historical survey becomes increasingly unreal.

- Eric Hobsbawm

It is an interesting and rewarding coincidence that Hobsbawm, beginning his relation of the arts after the Second World War with the words quoted above, follows with an account of the powerful influence of a medium, the radio. This early mode of mass communication, coupled by the double innovation of the transistor and the battery, reached millions of people who did not live in cities, allowing them to join in the concert of modernity. The broadcasting network, an infrastructure, is to the great English historian at least as significant, if not more, than the content it carried on its waves. The notion of infrastructure is a key notion in this comparison between the careers of Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren in the 1960s. What may seem at first to be a sort of double monograph is in fact a much larger and different argument. Smithson and Buren have been chosen because their career paths exemplify the fate of the artist in an increasingly administered art world, but also because the subject matter of their respective works is a reflection of the importance of various kinds of infrastructures in shaping everyday life in the modern world.

The notion of infrastructure is complex. It can refer to a collection of buildings or even of equipments, it can refer to the preliminary, foundational work of a given “structure,” as in the case of the foundation for road surfacing, but more often the notion pinpoints the physical ensembles that are used for transportation, be it the

2For better or sometimes for worse, as can be illustrated by the despair of youth in communities distant from the centers, such as the Inuit, who can listen to the concert without having hope of joining in.
3The importance of the various infrastructures and their development according to the changing needs of industry is a theme that is also especially pertinent to the Canadian experience, indeed it could be said to be fundamental to the Canadian experience. The analysis of infrastructures has produced two important Canadian thinkers: Harold Innis, the theorist on physical infrastructures (Empire and Communications, 1972), and the more popular Marshall McLuhan, the theorist of the new structures of mass communication (Understanding Media, 1964), to whom one should probably add George Grant (Technology and Empire, 1969). This commonality of interests between the United States and Canada points to the two main characteristics that the two countries share: huge geographical distances and a relatively clean slate to start with, physically, demographically and historically, especially since care was taken to deprive the earlier inhabitants of the continent of their right to land.
transportation of merchandises and people, or the transportation of intellectual contents as with the telephone, the radio or television. An infrastructure can also take the form of a spatial distribution of signs over a given space, or that of the network of highways and connectors that one finds in the domain of public works. It can also be the rational organization of people and resources for administrative, economical or political goals. Finally it can be argued that a set of rules or conventions that give meaning and value in a given society is also a form of infrastructure.\(^4\) A second dimension, shared by all infrastructures, is, as the name indicates, its inferior status in relation to what it facilitates: for example, the road supports, or facilitates, automobile circulation. The inferior status of infrastructures should not prevent their recognition as one of the fundamental elements in the constitution of the modern experience. Infrastructures have followed one after the other, and have overlapped, adopting different forms, and taking on different material realities. There is a vast difference, both conceptually and physically, between the development of the highway in the 1960s, a heavy infrastructure built of tar, stones and sand, and the very last born of the infrastructures, the internet, with its quasi-virtual existence, and where the perception of distance has all but disappeared. Today these two infrastructures nevertheless exist simultaneously. A second notion, closely related to that of infrastructure is that of standardization or normalization. Standardization is a conceptual infrastructure which, by imposing minimal norms for the fabrication of objects, regulates (in the same way that the road regulates the flow of circulation) the production and the distribution of manufactured objects, while insuring their interchangeability. This situation is valid as much for the objects that are destined for mass consumption as those that are part of industrial machinery, and thus recoups the overwhelming majority of consumer products. Only objects made by artists or crafts people escape this standardization. Infrastructural reality and standardization shape major segments of our present reality. While physical infrastructures for transportation have been the object of a critical representation by artists, the infrastructures for communication have been the site of appropriation strategies, timidly so in the case of radio or television, more boldly so when it came to video or, more recently, the internet.

How has this infrastructural and standardized reality been investigated by artists, and how did it affect their choice of artistic strategy? Furthermore, has their evaluation of this reality found the same formulation whether the artist lived in the United States or in Europe, for instance?\(^5\) I have chosen two artists, one French and one American - Daniel Buren and Robert Smithson - to try to answer those questions. Given the different conditions - historical, social and cultural - in which Buren and Smithson defined the nature of their work, their strategies for making art, and the forms and materials they utilized, it is plausible to think that they would also address different forms of infrastructures. It will be shown that this is certainly the case for the work of Smithson and Buren. Smithson’s work recalls the physical infrastructures characteristic of public works, especially that of the

\(^4\)The notion of “habitus” developed by Pierre Bourdieu, that is, the anchoring of norms and habits in the individuals of a given society could be such an infrastructure.

\(^5\)One could ask also how this reality would be interpreted by a woman artist, or an artist from an “underdeveloped” country.
highway system. His choice of infrastructure is significant for an American artist. The extension of the highway system, which will increase dramatically in the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s, is a major event in the history of the United States, and represents the final confirmation of the supremacy of “car culture.” This happens at a time of nascent concerns among the general public over the fragility of the environment and the price to be paid for a consumer society. As well as evoking the grid of the highway system, Smithson alludes to the corporation and its vast organizational structure that is the source of the need for an enlarged highway infrastructure. Buren’s materials and their display in an urban space are intended to compete with the network of urban signs as it is found in the streets of Paris, which becomes in the period around May 1968 the site of a struggle for political affirmation, with wildly inventive slogans scrawled on the walls of the city. Additionally, Buren’s use of an institutional framework for his interventions also bears witness to the importance of an institutional and conventional context framing any gesture, giving it its meaning and value.

The existence of huge managerial organizations and the growth of bureaucracies are characteristics found in all industrially advanced countries. From the 1930s on, the analysis of the effects of such large systems upon society will be the object of an ongoing critique in France and the United States. It will also be a major theme during the social upheavals of the youth of both countries in the 1960s. The American view and the French view, however, will emphasize different aspects of the topic. The same order of dissimilarity can also be found in the strategies chosen by Smithson and by Buren, strategies which differ insomuch as the same modernity could be, would be, differently perceived and criticized in France and the United States, in part because modernity itself was instated with a different emphasis in each country. These different contexts must be taken into account because they constitute the “cultural tools” with which Smithson and Buren formulate their strategies.

That those cultural tools are different for an American artist and a French artist is illustrated by the different manner in which Buren and Smithson define the meaning of “public.” While both define it in the sense of constituting an “outside” to the enclosed system of galleries and museums, Buren interprets it as an incursion into public discourse and its institutional arena, while Smithson translates it in terms of public works and wide open spaces. The public nature of the work of Buren and Smithson is all the more surprising after the relatively quiet period of abstract subjective art that characterizes the immediate postwar years in both countries. It recalls the avant-gardist strategies of the 1920s and 1930s, strategies of an art closely associated with the traditional Left, an art of the artist engagé who feels the need to intervene in the “real world.” In the 1960s, however, a term such as “public art” takes on another signification, more muted politically, and carrying a different meaning whether we are speaking of the French context or the American one. One of the reasons for the decline in the radicality of public art lies in the fact that the old Left is practically non-existent in the United States in those years, while in France it remains a sizeable, if considerably weakened, presence. In France, it is still possible for Buren’s strategies of using the public
wall to recall the Communist Party's inspired murals of the 1930s. Smithson, on the other hand, intends no such relation to muralist, engagé art, and takes the idea of "public" to mean an art that is not physically enclosed in an architecturally defined space, that is situated "outside," in "open" space.

Dematerialization and Re-Materialization

It is by now a well worn thesis that during the 1960s up to the first years of the 1970s there was, in several industrially advanced countries, the beginnings of artistic strategies whose goal was the abandonment of the task of object making in favor of other types of activity. This international artistic phenomenon has been seen, especially under the powerful influence of Lucy Lippard's interpretation, as a desire to abandon object making, to "dematerialize" the art object. The dematerialization of art that occurred during those years, and which was from the start, and increasingly, an international phenomenon, elicited a surprising variety of artistic strategies. Amongst the many artists proposing radically new ways of making art throughout the 1960s: in 1960 Stanley Brouwn registered Steps of Pedestrians on Paper, while Lawrence Weiner created a crater through the use of explosives; in 1961 Piero Manzoni produced his own Merda d'Artista in multiple, canned editions; in 1962 Ben produced his own Urine and Robert Morris produced a Card File which referenced all the steps incurred in the production of the said card file; in 1963 Yoko Ono asked to "Listen to the sound of the earth turning" and Hans Haacke fabricated a box to make visible the process of condensation of air; in 1964 Edward Ruscha produced a book of photographs of Various Small Fires; in 1965 Joseph Kosuth propped a Glass Piece against the wall and Joseph Beuys gave a performance to demonstrate How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare; in 1966 On Kawara started to paint the date of the day, every day, Robert Morris produced a Steam Cloud and Daniel Buren had the first public exhibition of his stripes; in 1967 Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin displayed columns of air in the Air Show/Air-Conditioning Show, while the group composed of Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni worked in public for the opening of the Salon de la jeune peinture and withdrew from the exhibition the next day; in 1968 On Kawara produced his 100 Years Calendar and Dennis Oppenheim drew a Boundary Split on the ice covering a river; in 1969 Vito Acconci followed people chosen at random on the street for twenty-three days, all to create a Following Piece and Robert Smithson executed an Asphalt Pour.

Common to all those practices was a desire to retreat from traditional object making, and object showing, as if those activities had ceased to

---


be interesting or, even, as if they had lost their legitimacy. Art making itself never disappeared, but the traditional postulate that to make art was to make art objects was questioned. Smithson and Buren both participated in the refusal to produce traditional art objects, and shared with other artists the desire to escape the confinements of the gallery space, as described in Brian O’Doherty’s Inside the White Cube: “The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art.” The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics.”

However, to present the strategies of those artists, and in particular Buren and Smithson, in exclusively negative terms as a refusal to pursue older forms of art making and exhibiting, and as a “classic” modernist gesture of pushing the limits of what art can be, runs counter to the goal of this thesis. Rather than insist on the dematerialization of their works, an inaccurate proposition when considering either Smithson’s or Buren’s art, it will be, on the contrary, important to focus on the materiality that remains, massively so with Smithson, and discreetly but pervasively so with Buren. Their two very different conceptions of the nature of the materials to be used in order to continue art practice while refusing to make discrete art objects is more telling than are their strategies of reductionism.

A distinction must be made, when examining the way Buren and Smithson organize their work process, between management and corporatism. Corporatism is the dominant structure of the modernist artist. Thus Clement Greenberg’s 1939 article entitled “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” a seminal article for post-Second World War American formalism, linked modernism with a corporatist vision of the artist as tradesman in the most celebrated passage of the article (and perhaps of Greenberg’s entire output):

In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or “abstract,” if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have imitated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature. If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation, then we have here is the imitation of imitating. To quote Yeats:

Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence.

---


By "craft" and "work," Greenberg implied that the artists he admired simply applied their trade, taking stock of what their predecessors had done in a closed circuit, self-regulating practice typical of corporatism. This is not what Buren or Smithson, or many others at the time and many more soon after with the coming of the 1970s, will chose to do when they discard all reference to the traditional practice of making art objects. The various strategies that the artists will come up with during the 1960s will situate them outside of the agreed-upon principles put in place through the evolution of the course of modern art, at least in its modernist, corporatist account. In this sense, Buren, Smithson, and the others, will cease to be traditional trades people.

Such a fundamental re-evaluation of the role of the artist has precedents in the historical avant-gardes. Nikolai Punin, for example, in a series of lectures given in 1919, had insisted on the necessity for the artist to use the new forces of mechanization, and even to adapt himself or herself to its principles of efficiency and regulation:

> Man is a technological animal, i.e., in the new arrangement of European society - which has not yet come about, but which is in evidence - man must as far as possible economize his energy and must in any event coordinate all his forces with the level of modern technology. In this respect the role of the machine, as a factor of progress, is, of course, immense in the modern artist’s development. The effect of the machine shows not only in the change of his psychical complex, in this or that digression of his interests, but also in the artist’s aspiration to regulate his own artistic, creative forces. The machine has revealed to him the possibility of working with precision and maximum energy.\footnote{Punin, Nikolai, “Lecture 6,” in Bowlt, John E., ed. and transl., Russian Art of the Avant-Garde, Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934 (New York: Thames and Hudson, revised and enlarged ed, 1988), 175.}

In order to understand how both Smithson and Buren renew this dialogue with industry and its various forms, it is important to consider their immediate predecessors, the Pop artists and Minimalists for Smithson, the Nouveaux Réalistes and the artists of the Nouvelle Figuration for Buren. After the subjective interlude of the art following World War II, there is again, with those movements, a desire to abandon the traditional approaches to art making in favor of an approach that recalls industrial techniques, similar to that adopted by the artists of the historical avant-gardes, but formulated in different terms mainly because the relation of the artist to technology is no longer accompanied by the belief that, by engaging with technology in the production of his or her art, the artist will transform or revolutionize the world. The self-promotional tactics of Frank Stella, who presented himself as either a worker or as an impeccably suited executive (fig. 1)
for the occasion of the 1959 exhibition “Sixteen Americans” at the Museum of Modern Art, were an early manifestation of the 1960s artist’s desire to adopt an industrial esthetic, and a means to distinguish himself from the typical image of the abstract expressionist artist whose bohemian guises signified a refusal to belong and marked the wearer as an “outsider” of the system. By espousing not only the clothes but the behavior of an anonymous worker, using paint directly out of the can applied with the technique of house painters, or alternatively, that of an executive when he delegated the painting to assistants in the mid-1960s for the production of large series, Stella exemplified the rapidity with which the image of the artist had evolved by the mid-1960s from that of a tradesman, still current in the 1950s, to that of a modern manager. As Caroline Jones has noted, the artists associated with Minimal Art and Pop Art were at the time reacting to a visual culture heavily indebted to an industrial language. The adoption of an industrial esthetic and of industrial techniques was however far from absolute. While Stella emphasized the image of the executive, he still made his paintings in the studio. Andy Warhol promoted himself as the manager of a “factory,” suggesting the anonymity of industrial production even while his production was nevertheless stamped by the proper name “Andy Warhol,” and originated from a private site of production. In 1965 Donald Judd used technologically advanced materials such as plexiglass as in Untitled (fig. 2) for the fabrication of his boxes and later contracted out their fabrication to businesses. Yet he planned the whole look in solitude. Finally, both Pop and Minimalist productions were destined to be exhibited inside “the white cube.” These two styles, it is important to note, focused on the manufacturing sector. Yet there again the imitation was timid. Pop artists employed industrial processes typical of the manufacturing sector, while, as in the case of Andy Warhol, still remaining entirely within the domain of industrial processes of representation, especially in the making of brand names for, and the packaging of, consumer items. One of the rare incursions Warhol made into the field of sculpture, his various boxes (fig. 3), seemed to be “cloning” real industrial products, but they contained nothing and existed as packaging only, remaining “safely” within the realm of representation. Minimalist works more directly implicated the actual manufacturing processes not only because their fabrication included industrially made materials but also because, increasingly, they were produced by contracting their actual fabrication out to a factory. These works often adopted the seriality characteristic of mass produced items. They remained, nevertheless, within the traditional domain of objects intended for contemplation. By the mid-1960s, however, the manufacturing sector was progressively abandoned as a reference by those American artists involved in a strategy of reductionism in regard to the art object. At that point, the then predominant will to dematerialize the object was indicative of the exhaustion of the manufactured object as a theme.

---

11 All the remarks on Stella are found in Jones, Caroline A., Machine in the Studio (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115-117, 120-125, 178-180.
12 Ibid., 162.
13 Ibid., 270.
Rather than commenting on consumer or industrial culture by imitating its products, artists turned to "dematerialized" manifestations. In a move involving nothing less than an entire industrial sector, conceptual artists, having become part of an international movement, ceased to refer to the manufacturing sector, and started instead to investigate the third sector, the service industry, with its emphasis on procedures and the transmission of information. This is exactly what Buren did. Smithson, on the contrary, turned toward the primary sector, that of the extraction and initial transformation of raw matter. It is interesting to note that, in American art practice, this move away from an involvement with the mass production of objects occurs simultaneously with the first downward pressures on the manufacturing sector in the United States, caused in great part by new competition from Europe and especially from Japan in the areas of consumer electronics and production of cars.  

In the United States both Pop artists and Minimalist artists, conscious that Abstract Expressionism had created a triumphant national precedent that had positioned the United States as the world leader in contemporary art, presented their gesture of defiance confident that they had something substantial to oppose, their opposition being thus a form of homage; in France the artists that came of age and to prominence at the beginning of the 1960s presented their works against the background of an esthetic field that was mired in a deep depression. This new generation was uninterested in radicalizing the accomplishments of their predecessors who, basically split between the abstract subjective art of Fautrier or Soulages or the geometrism of Victor Vasarely's Op art or Nicolas Shöffer's Lumino-Dynamisme, represented not a triumphant achievement, but rather the last gasp of a moribund École de Paris. The younger French artists felt on the contrary that they had to make a radical break from the esthetic tenets of the generation that dominated the immediate postwar years and which banked on the myth of a still vital École de Paris. That the myth was no longer working can be illustrated by the fact that the market for abstract painting, after a decade of boom years, was experiencing a marked slowdown in sales at the beginning of the 1960s, and what amounted to a crash around 1964, caused in part by a plethora of new abstract, "informel" artists who aped the style of their predecessors. The glut of abstract artists had been already decried by the leftist critic Charles Estienne:  

Cette commode idée de la non-figuration qui permet de satisfaire, sans se fatiguer, à la bonne conscience esthétique moderne des marchands de cochons de Chicago, des fabricants de voitures italiennes et des architectes-collectionneurs de l'Allemagne de l'Ouest. Or ces clients marchent, mais pas nous... Car tout le monde est abstrait aujourd'hui, même au Salon de la jeune peinture: certes on y est réaliste, car on aime la bonne soupe, mais accomodée à la sauce ou à la demi-sauce abstraite et les

16 In Western Europe, the lack of a triumphant tradition to oppose and its effect on the younger generation of artists is discussed in Rochlitz, Rainer, Subversion et Subvention (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 201ff.  
Galeries de la rue de Seine, qui sentent le goût moderne, veulent ça même si leur poulain est figuratif ou réaliste comme on dit. Alors on fait de la caricature barbouillée, du Siné barbouillé de tachisme. Moi je préfère Siné, et les Fougerons de la Belle Époque. C'était clair, au moins.18

Estienne was criticizing the loss of political content that could be found with Communist-backed artists such as André Fougeron, and the fact that content had become diluted by the endless repetition of an abstract subjective style that amounted to empty mannerism. The abstract subjective style was rejected by the younger generation of artists because it seemed out of touch with a French society that was at the time increasingly centered on consumerism. This was an important factor for the younger artists who formed the group of Nouveaux Réalistes,19 or for those who constituted the Figuration narrative. These groups came on the heels of the Société de consommation in France, a period of rapid growth in the economy and of relative social peace after the difficult period of crisis marked by the dissolution of the French colonial empire.20 In the early 1960s the French artistic scene was thus mutating from a preoccupation with an abstract subjective art which had dominated the postwar years up until the mid-1950s, to the beginning of an art that responded to the new consumer society.21 The Nouveaux Réalistes directly addressed the new emphasis on consumerism at the beginning of the 1960s through, for example, Arman’s Accumulations, collections of similar objects glued onto flat surfaces or agglutinated with polymer resin to form blocks of matter. Similarly, César’s Compressions were made out of cars compressed into... blocks of matter. Spoerri glued the remnants of meals onto a table, and Christo packaged together various objects. The members of the loosely named Figuration narrative22 produced a style of painting devoid of any expressionism or tactile feeling, trademarks of the French abstract subjective style, and instead depicted modern scenes of utter desolation. Monory (fig. 4) painted cold bucolic scenes suggesting that they were in fact electronically controlled environments. Erro (fig. 5) painted obsessive, monothematic accumulations of objects, cars or planes for example, in which there was no air to breathe, no room to move between the stacked objects extending out to the edges of the painting and filling every inch in an allover pattern of material accumulation. Predating Warhol’s spectacularization of his works, Yves Klein turned his exhibition into art world events, for instance in the 1958 exhibition “Le Vide” at the Galerie Iris Clert where he showed... nothing and created a succès de scandale. By emphasizing the ritual of art presentation, Klein insisted on its conventionality. Perhaps the figure who best expressed the passage from an art of interiority to an art of the spectacle is Georges Mathieu, who was not affiliated with either of those two groups and who, by doing

---

19 The group was founded in Nice in 1960 with the help of its main spokesman, the critic Pierre Restany.
22 The term was coined by the critic Gérard Gassiot-Talabot for an exhibition held in 1964.
“live” paintings of simplified, signature style expressionist gestures, created in fact a caricature of abstract subjective art.23

Op Art and Art Cinétique on one side, the Nouveaux Réalistes and the Nouvelle figuration on the other, cut a clear distinction between pro and contra technology positions. The artists associated with Op Art and Art Cinétique would propose an art custom-made for the new “civilisation des loisirs,” in an optimistic view of progress and an uncritical role for the artist.24 In what is perhaps the most significant gesture, socially speaking, for this style, the group GRAV (Groupe de recherche en art visuel) which comprised Garcia Rossi, Le Parc, Morellet, Sobrino, Stein and Yvaral, would organize in 1966 an event called “Une journée dans la rue,” where the group would go toward the public, on the streets of Paris, armed with a collection of bizarre objects with the intention of creating a spontaneous collective celebration of the arts, without any association to the elitism associated with art events, and being thus close in spirit to André Malraux’s wish for a democratization of access to the arts.25 The belief in progress was of course visible in the use of new materials such as Plexiglas and vinyl by the artists of Op Art and Art Cinétique. However, the optimistic view of progress was less visible in the “accumulations” of the refuse of industrial society by members of the Nouveaux Réalistes group like Arman or César with his “compressions” of automobiles, but those same artists used new materials: Arman cast refuse in polyester, César used polyurethane to make his “expansions.”26

The illusionistic and psychedelic aspects of Op art and art cinétique served to create the illusion of a benevolent, fascinating modernity, of an environment completely transformed by the power of the association between industry and science. The collusion of ideologies between the art of that style and the industries of mass produced goods was proven by the formidable popularity of Op Art products on sale during that period. While the artists associated with the Nouveau Réalisme movement could still be seen as having an ambiguous relationship with consumer society, the tone changed radically in the case of the painters associated with the Nouvelle Figuration for whom the function of painting was first and foremost that of contestation.27 Their position remained radical when, under the influence of then fashionable Maoist philosophy, Gilles Aillaud and Eduardo Arroyo, preparing for the exhibition “Salle rouge pour le Vietnam” for the Salon de la peinture in 1969, will consider their paintings uniquely as a vehicle for political messages without any consideration for their formal properties, and advocate making use of a non-sophisticated figurative style easily understandable by an unsophisticated public.28 With the painters of the Nouvelle Figuration, the spectacle of modernity was portrayed with mordant criticism. Consumer society was shown to be the arena where

25 Ibid, 27.
27 Ibid, 77.
28 Ibid, 22.
ideology and politics converged\textsuperscript{29} to produce an alienated environment often permeated with violence.

That such an attitude was barely conceivable on the part of the American Pop artists shows the radical difference in intention in the portrayal of modern life under the regime of consumerism, which was, nevertheless, the subject matter of both schools of painting. The influence that surrealism had on the younger generation of French painters\textsuperscript{30} played an important role in guiding them away from a pure formalist esthetic, and in establishing an atmosphere and an intent quite the opposite of their American counterparts. In fact, Pop art, knowing official recognition and popular appeal, would be seen by their French counterpart as representative of American imperialism.\textsuperscript{31} The fact that American Pop art and French Nouvelle Figuration both used "ready-made" images from the world of publicity and representation, rather than from the "real" world, made for some homogeneity between the visual vocabulary of both schools.\textsuperscript{32} However there was an essential difference in the fact that Pop art images were static while the French ones implied duration.\textsuperscript{33} The introduction of a narrative into the French production of images allowed for the possibility of telling a story,\textsuperscript{34} and thus of enunciating an oppositional stand, while whatever critical charge the American Pop images may have had remained ambiguous at best. This story-telling aspect of Nouvelle Figuration production is what has made it seem less radical than Pop art, even retrograde in comparison. Another essential difference lay in the fact that the American artists produced, with few exceptions, neutral images depicting objects or scenes devoid of any controversial elements, while the French artists depicted shocking juxtapositions of conflicting contents in a dense, theatrical atmosphere. A notable exception to this was of course Andy Warhol's series of canvases depicting disasters and death scenes in 1963, but there again, these atypical works had more success in Europe than they had in the United States.\textsuperscript{35} There was also the exception of the densely charged installations of George Segal, but again, this artist was particularly well received in Paris.\textsuperscript{36} There is no better comparison to illustrate this difference in "temperament" than that of the American interiors of Tom Wesselman (fig. 6) who portrayed women in the intimacy of their middle-class bathrooms, and the series by Erro of Interieurs américains, (fig. 7) where Vietcong soldiers burst upon the serene heart of the American landscape, the suburban interior, to avenge themselves

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid, 66.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid, 71. Millet indicates that Surréalism had an influence on the formation of such important Nouvelle Figuration artists as Recalcati, Télémaque and Monory, 73.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid, 83.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid, 84. Millet is quoting the critic Gérard Gassiot-Talabot in his text for the catalogue of an exhibition that he organized, entitled "Les Mythologies quotidiennes" in 1964.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid, 84.
\textsuperscript{35}Crow, Thomas, The Rise of the Sixties (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 92. Crow is vague on where these paintings were shown outside of Germany, but Warhol had exhibitions at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in Paris in 1964 and 1965.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 95.
symbolically for the real invasion of the Americans upon their landscape. There should be no surprise at the fact that a French artist would focus on an American interior, and the reasons lie not only in the fact that American political imperialism was the theme of that series. A technicized, consumerist society was seen readily by the French as being American, because only here had it received its full realization. This was the conclusion reached by Jean Baudrillard as late as in 1968.  

The muteness of American Pop art compared to the theatrical, narrative atmosphere of the Nouvelle Figuration presented an order of difference that was found again when comparing the American Minimalist and Conceptual movements and the group of Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni. Minimalism had simply no equivalent in the French production of the corresponding period. The atmosphere of provocation that Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni produced in their theatrical interventions (which will be detailed in chapters 2 and 3) contrasted sharply with the muteness of a typical Minimalist exhibition such as the Whitney Annual exhibition of 1966. Commenting on the installation of the numerous works in the exhibition, the critic Michael Benedikt would say: "With all due respect to the frequently high quality of the sculpture shown, it is necessary to start out by remarking that the success of this year's show, to a greater extent than in most shows I can recall, sculptural or not, tends to be a function of the structure in which the work is being shown."  

Comparing that show to the earlier "Primary Structure" held at the Jewish Museum, Benedikt added that "the Jewish Museum show did not, of course, have the advantage of being mounted in a brand new architectural setting designed by Marcel Breuer, which functioned quite well with the work, probably because of Breuer's fine and efficient structure, with its bulky, clunkily brut surfaces... Also, the show's success had to do with certain details of mounting. But whereas the Jewish Museum surroundings tended to be set off from the work shown there at the "Primary Structure" exhibition, the Whitney setting tends to interlock with, continue, and even help justify the work shown."  

Far from being an institution to attack, the museum, in the New York sensibility of the period could, by its structure, justify the works shown. The show was enormous and offered a complete representation of the major figures of Minimalism and other kindred spirits including Tony Smith, John McCracken, Ronald Bladen, Robert Morris, Ellsworth Kelly, Donald Judd and Robert Smithson who presented Alogon which had as a function inside the museum to, according to Benedikt "suggest... one more possible shift in the room's geometry - shelves." The purely formal role ascribed to the works of Minimalism presented was not only the interpretation of one reviewer, it was the role assigned by the

39 Same page.
40 Ibid., 80.
Minimalist artists themselves. Asked by Lawrence Alloway in 1967, the same year Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni would so loudly denounced the institutions they were exhibiting in, if he wanted his work in a museum, and under what conditions, Donald Judd would reply an unproblematic “yes,” describing the conditions the museum would have to fulfill in the following manner: “A large rectangular space with a fairly high ceiling is fine - the Jewish Museum’s upper room, or the fourth floor of the Whitney as they’ve left it for the sculpture annual. A smaller room is all right if the ceiling is high and there isn’t too much work in it. There shouldn’t be any mouldings or grooves. The walls and floors should be smooth and square, not flagstones.”

And Judd, of course, went on and on. The complete refusal to consider the museum as other than a physical entity, shows how unsophisticated, politically, the Minimalists were in thinking about the function of their art inside an institutional framework. The static formalism of the Minimalists was unacceptable to French artists, who were not only more inclined toward a narrative structure than the Americans but also more inclined toward a political reading of the meaning of their work. There was also, as I have already said, behind the Minimalists’ lack of hostility toward institutions, a conception of the history of the arts and of the history of modernity quite at the opposite of that of the French artists. For the American artists, the precedents created by their “fathers,” the Abstract Expressionist painters who established the United States as the new international center for the arts, represented an achievement upon which the younger artists felt they must build according to an evolutionary schema, that is, rejecting their teaching only to be able to produce “better,” “more advanced” art. This attitude was in agreement with a history of industrialization in the United States which represents the uninterrupted building up of its landscape and its progressive recognition of itself as a country. The French artists for their part considered their “fathers” as the last gasp of an exhausted École de Paris, and certainly no yardstick to measure themselves against, and their sense of rupture was made all the more acute by the fact that their recent history, as Europeans, was not that of the slow build up of nationhood through the achievements of industry, but that of two successive catastrophes, the two world wars, which in great part were the results of technological improvements in war machines. Finally, and here appeared again the dichotomy which the work of our two artists symbolizes, modernity in the United States meant the transformation of the national landscape, while modernity in France meant the carving out of a tight, urban space.

42Rochlitz, Subversion, 204.
43I paraphrase here the critic Jean Clair, “Nouvelles Tendances depuis 1963,” 11-12: “La première révolution industrielle a fait de l’Amérique une nation. En 1960, ce sens de la nature moderne rentre dans la logique de l’histoire des idées américaines: il apparaît comme une réflexion de la maturité d’une culture industrielle, comme un folklore national. En Europe ce nouveau paysage urbain s’est imposé en force sous l’effet de deux guerres mondiales successives: la nature moderne apparaît comme une découverte sensible, une rupture philosophique, le réflexe d’une jeunesse retrouvée au prix de durs sacrifices... Chez les Américains de 1960, on note un majeur souci esthétique et le sens de la continuité
The American Conceptual artists pursued a rather quiet interrogation of the “borders” of art, the transgressions of which, through their work, generally meant a formal transgression, politically mute. Thus Joseph Kosuth’s Any Five Foot Sheet of Glass to Lean Against any Wall, 1965, and his dictionary definitions revealed a complete indifference to object making and an attention to verbalized intentions and descriptions that put him in an ambiguous position of still pursuing an analysis of the art object through a radical reduction of its physical components, and at the same time proposing simultaneously an art activity that was almost purely mental. Mel Bochner’s Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art, 1966, consisted of binders filled with materials of negligible importance in our accepted sense of what a work of art is, that is, receipts for art materials, sketches, and various other papers, and interrogated the system of exhibition of works of art, even investigated some of its economic realities, but from inside the interrogation of the nature of the art object. Eleanor Antin’s collection of blood specimens from one hundred poets entitled Blood of a Poet Box, 1965-1968, which consisted of a neatly organized box with on one side the blood samples on glass, and on the other, the list of the names from whom the samples had been collected evoked the same mock scientific activity as Smithson’s own collection of samples in an 1962 exhibition collectively titled “Assemblages” which will be discussed in the first chapter. And, more directly concerned with the economic underpinnings of the art system, Dan Graham, in his subversion of commercial advertisements in 1965 and 1966 where he inserted strips of adding paper representing sums of money spent for an unknown purpose, and especially in his series of Homes for America, 1966-1967, where he investigated suburban housing, represented an exception among the more formally inclined Conceptualists, an attitude which made him closer, in mentality, to Smithson’s approach to art making. However, at the end of the year 1967, no American artist had the insight of Smithson into the importance of infrastructures in carving out and sustaining the “American way of life,” except perhaps for the schematic allusions of the surprising Edward Rusha who, with Every Building on the Sunset Strip, 1966, a wide photomontage depicting the boulevard from one horizon to the other, with Twenty-six Gasoline Stations, 1962, and Thirty-Four Parking Lots in Los Angeles, 1967, both books of photographs, would stress some of the same aspects as Smithson, especially the ubiquity of these “monuments” dedicated to the car culture, but without dealing with the infrastructural nature of those features of modernity. Smithson will, however, just like Buren on the other side of the Atlantic, make radical advances in his art in the year 1968, going far beyond the set of strategies of his contemporaries. In doing so, he will of course, push the boundaries of art making, and interrogate the necessity of making art objects, and he will, like Buren, but still more formally, also criticize the institutions, galleries and museums, that consecrate objects as works of art.
Both Smithson and Buren also used the public space for their interventions, breaking away from one of the fundamental premises of the abstract subjective art of the early postwar period, that is, the solitary expression of anxiety and revolt. Pop art and Minimalism, the Nouveaux Réalistes and the Nouvelle Figuration had done the same before Smithson and Buren, but if the vocabulary of forms and the choice of materials favored by those movements signified a surrender to consumer culture, their practitioners still maintained an essentially solitary approach to art making and required a traditional approach to art viewing. With Buren's and Smithson's production, however, the process of realizing the work, the materials used, and the context of reception of the work took on a radically public nature. Buren distributed his posters throughout the streets of Paris, placing his artistic product on par with all the other signs addressing the passersby; Smithson drove out to the countryside to collect samples which he then brought back to New York to show them in carefully arranged containers, complete with surveyor's documentation to remind the spectator of their distant origins.

In order to understand how remarkably inverse were the strategies of Smithson and Buren at the time, and how they both made a radical departure from the art associated with Pop, Minimalism, Nouveau Réalisme and Nouvelle Figuration, it is helpful to consider the paradigm of industrial sectors. Smithson and Buren, like other artists involved in the "dematerialization of art," both moved away from referencing the manufacturing or secondary sector, but while Smithson went back towards the primary sector of the extraction and initial transformation of raw materials, as well as their transportation, Buren went in the opposite direction, "forward" toward the tertiary sector of services characterized by an emphasis on communication and the circulation of information. In doing so these two artists echoed some of the most profound changes that affected industrially advanced societies after the Second World War. Smithson focused on the physical transformations that were taking place in all the conurbated areas of the United States and throughout the country as a whole, while Buren addressed the changes affecting quality of life as experienced in the urban fabric of a densely populated center. In other words, Smithson presented reflections on the physical landscape of the United States, Buren, reflections concerning the institutional theater of France. The change of scale implied by these two metaphors, landscape and theater, conforms rather well to the respective scopes of modernization in the United States and in France. It also appropriately stresses the difference in nature of the two processes of modernization, how each country put a distinct emphasis on what modernity would signify. This thesis is motivated in great part by the following double question: why does it seem improbable that Buren could have done Smithson's works, why does it seem improbable that Smithson could have done Buren's works? It is improbable that Buren would have had the idea of exploiting the theme of physical infrastructure in the way that, as will be explained in detail later on, Smithson did with the highway infrastructure, not because highways did not exist in France at the time, car culture becoming during the 1960s an encompassing reality throughout Europe, but because it represented, in France, a derisory effort compared to its counterpart in the United States. The difference is fundamentally one of emphasis and

44 This process in marvelously described in Jacques Tati's car-obsessed Traffic, 1971, where the tribulations of Tati's alter ego, Mr. Hulot, involve a car show held in Amsterdam.
scope. This difference in scope is graphically summarized if one compares the respective programs of the construction of the highway system in both countries. In France the total amount of highway kilometrage in 1960 is 174 km, reaching a modest 2,878 km by 1974.\textsuperscript{45} In the United States, the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 starts the greatest public works project in history, with the goal of building 41,000 miles of highways, that is, approximately an infrastructural project twenty times the size of that of France, and to which thousands of supplementary miles of secondary roads will be added in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{46}

In general, the disproportionate industrial power of the United States compared to any single Western European country explains in great part why Smithson focused on the physical aspects of the modernization of the United States, and especially on the enormous scale of change happening in this country; and why Buren focused rather on the institutional theater to which he was confronted inside the art world and which pervaded French society as a whole, with the help of signs scattered over the urban fabric. This is not to say that institutions did not exist in American society, but in France, as will be shown later, they imposed themselves with an ineluctability that did not have an equivalent in the United States.

Buren and Smithson were not simply “conditioned” by their surroundings. Such a schema is too simple and leaves too little space for the individuality of the artists. It is rather that each artist was nudged, rather insistently, in one direction rather than in another. Thus, in his bid to escape the traditional confinement of the gallery space, Smithson borrowed from an overwhelmingly present industrial environment which provided him not only with materials, but also with the theme, infrastructures, to emulate; Buren, for his part, put the emphasis on the behavior, rules and rituals affecting the art world, and in extenso, French society in general. To simplify: in their own respective practices, Buren carried information about, Smithson carried matter about, yet both come to be involved with similar notions of infrastructure. This parallel, and paradox, requires, to be elucidated, a definition of Smithson’s involvement with the notion of physical infrastructures, and, in the case of Buren, his involvement with sign infrastructures. The relation to infrastructures both artist will develop is discussed in the second chapter for the work done in the years 1966-1967, and in the third chapter for the work done in 1968.

An Industrial Language

The impact of industry and technology on art practice is an ongoing theme throughout this thesis, and some remarks on the nature of that impact are in order. A study by Molly Nesbit entitled “La Langue de l’industrie,” which is an interpretation of Marcel Duchamp’s work, showed that his peculiar repertoire of forms, style of execution and choice of depicted objects had its source in technical drawing as it was


\textsuperscript{46}Kay, Jane Holtz, Asphalt Nation, How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1997), 231.
taught at the time of Duchamp's schooling. The teaching of technical drawing was an expression of the arrival in France of a "technical culture" of mass production and of its imposition as an "industrial language." Nesbit's account is ultimately critical of the artist's fate: in an earlier formulation of her problematic which centered on Duchamp's ready-mades, she showed that Duchamp's attempts at controlling the visual discourse of the technical culture - the ready-mades - were derisory because industry always maintains control of the models of repetition, as well as the production of symbols. She concluded with the following: "The idea that he could seize control of the visual means of industrial culture was, of course, misguided, pure fantasy on Duchamp's part. Nobody except industry gets control over its symbolic means, let alone its models of repetition, not even artists."

Not only was the artist unable to gain control over industrial language, but industry, with its vast vocabulary of forms had an increasing influence on the setting of individual values, priorities and suggested modes of behavior. Taking refuge in a traditional practice, outside of the realm of industry was not an option since, as De Duve has shown, the example of Duchamp also demonstrates that, because of industrial innovation, the artist had lost control over traditional artistic means, dispossessed of the knowledge of his trade by the science of the chemist and the engineer. Borrowing from Duchamp's imagery and personal symbolism, de Duve stated: "Avec l'industrialisation le célibataire ne broie plus son chocolat lui-même, les pigments ne sont plus confectionnés à l'atelier, mais au laboratoire et à l'usine, l'artiste est dépossédé par le chimiste et l'ingénieur." Like Nesbit, de Duve insisted on the powerful impact of industrialization which renders traditional art practice impossible. The Duchampian strategy of nominalism, that is, the fact of declaring an industrial object an objet d'art as when Duchamp declared that a urinal was in fact the artist's rendition of a fountain, far from demonstrating the triumphant lucidity of the artist, appeared in fact like a desperate gesture of escapism. By displacing the readymade from the realm of usual objects to the realm of symbolic objects, Duchamp, it is true, insured the continuity of art despite the impact of industrial culture, but that displacement-salvation was accomplished by an act of conjuring that seemed more like a trick than the "real thing," turning urinal into fountain, lead into gold, with a few simple words. Duchamp was simply postponing the inevitable: "Aucun artiste individuel, pas plus Duchamp qu'un autre, ne peut être tenu pour responsable des conditions historiques dans lesquelles il naît. C'est, au sens le plus large, l'industrialisation, et en un sens étroit, l'incidence spécifique de

---

48Nesbit, Molly, "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," October no. 37 (Summer 1986), 53-64.
49Ibid., 64.
50De Duve, Thierry, Nominalisme Pictural, Marcel Duchamp, La Peinture et la Modernité (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984), 263. Even though De Duve, in his book, pursues an essentially formalist reading of the work of Duchamp buttressed by the double metaphysical tools of psychoanalysis and philosophical nominalism, the brute fact of industry dominates his interpretation.
51Ibid., 263.
This comparison of the work of Smithson and Buren shares the same objective as Nesbit and de Duve: to reexamine the work of an artist—in this case, two artists—in the light of the influence of an "industrial culture." Contrary to Duchamp's strategy, the "virtue" of both Smithson's and Buren's strategies in dealing with industrial culture is that they will not have recourse to a trick, as Duchamp did, in order to keep on producing art. There is some irony in the fact that, in so doing, they will both cease to make art objects in the proper sense of the term. This thesis will offer a similar conclusion to that reached by Nesbit and de Duve: far from succeeding in subsuming it into his or her own artistic formulation, the artist is, crudely speaking, swallowed up by industrial culture.

What "industrial language" were Robert Smithson and Daniel Buren wrestling with? As with Nesbit's Duchamp, they were both reacting to an industrial culture through modifying their artistic vocabularies. The extent to which both Smithson and Buren reexamined what constituted for them an adequate vocabulary, in terms of forms but more crucially in terms of materials, led them both to abandon the production of art objects as such. The object of this thesis is to define the new fields of interventions investigated by these two artists. The definition of these fields will require a close examination of key works by the two artists produced during the years 1965 and 1968. Those years have been determined partly because they are the years in which Smithson and Buren each arrived at a new formulation of their art practice, and also because they arrived at this formulation autonomously from one another, prior to participating in an international contemporary art scene that takes shape at the tail end of the 1960s. This relative isolation is important because an aspect of the argument of this thesis is that the choice of artistic strategy by each artist is determined partly by their national context, both in physical terms and in cultural terms, and partly by the evolution of modernity itself, or its industrial culture, which knows no such boundaries.

In chapter one, the cultural and physical specificities of the respective contexts of each artist will be summarized. This entails an analysis of the difference in how modernity takes hold in each country. It will stress the building of the infrastructure reserved for the automobile in the United States and its impact on the suburban landscape, while in the case of France it will stress the increased semiotization of the urban environment of Paris. The account of these physical transformations is accompanied by a summary of the development of the managerial organization of large corporations in the United States, and the development of bureaucracy in France. There will also be a summary of the two national traditions of critical writing about the impact of the development of such managerial or bureaucratic strata on modern society. Two major descriptive essays by Buren and Smithson, a series of cinematic vignettes on Parisian cultural life in the case of Buren, a description of the desolate suburban landscape of Passaic, New Jersey in the case of Smithson will be juxtaposed to a description of

52Ibid., 274.
the cultural and physical contexts of the two countries in order to show how these artists have internalized those contexts in their practice.

In chapter two, the parallel between Buren and Smithson will be pursued, focusing on the Proposals for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport (Tippetts, Abbett, McCarthy & Stratton, Architects and Engineers), 1966-67 by Smithson and on the interventions by Buren - along with Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni - in 1967 at various institutional events or sites constitutive of the Parisian art world. The interpretation of those works will bring further evidence of the fact that the two artists are pursuing almost inverted directions: Smithson is interested in physical infrastructures, and Buren, in the system of rules and conventions that dominates the art world.

In chapter three, a comparison of the Affichage sauvage and other related works by Buren and the series of Nonsites by Smithson will show how, in 1968, these two artists break out of the space of the art gallery to intervene outside of the sites previously reserved for art exhibiting, in open, public space, and do this while still remaining faithful to their respective interests.

In conclusion, it will be shown that Smithson and Buren were tempted to join the managerial ranks, Smithson as an expert consultant, Buren as an artist of the institution, even if it was with the intention to criticize it. The growth of a managerial or bureaucratic stratum parasitizing the practice of art is a phenomenon that starts in the 1960s and increases rapidly in importance during the following decades. Since, for both Buren and Smithson, this question has a crucial significance, this thesis will end with some comments on the gradual take over of the art scene by a new class of artworld managers, and on how both artists already anticipate in their practice the impact of such a phenomenon on contemporary art in their practice. This thesis will mostly make use of authors who published immediately before, during, or immediately after the years around which the artists produced the works under discussion. It is hoped that, by using authors that were in currency around those years, a picture of the period will emerge, thus demonstrating how topics of discussion, sources of concern, and proposals for solutions are all a highly historicised phenomenon. Tempora mutantur et nos in illis: times change, and we change with the times.

Not only a sense of time, but also a sense of place will be felt through the comparative approach that this thesis takes. It will allow the strategies of Buren and Smithson to be understood not only in terms of their novel character when compared to previous or contemporary art movements, but also in terms of how they were articulated answers to specific, national contexts. The comparative approach will also make visible the fact that industrial culture is essentially the same in both national contexts, but that these national contexts emphasize different aspects of that culture. It is evident that such a comparative effort must avoid anything resembling a Völker Psychologie, where an essentialism is postulated, or looked for, in a group, whose psychological profile would be predetermined, and, in one way or another, immutable. Michel Crozier 53 addressed the problem in 1963 and

concluded that, if the comparison between two countries takes as a starting point the comparative study of their respective institutions and the effects of these institutions on individuals, the danger of essentialism is avoided:

C'est en effet seulement à travers le fonctionnement d'organisations complexes que l'action de l'homme moderne peut s'exprimer. Et c'est par conséquent, seulement grâce à la médiation des systèmes de décision que constituent ces organisations, qu'une société peut apprendre, c'est-à-dire élaborer de nouveaux modèles de rapports humains, ou du moins transformer ceux dont elle s'était jusqu'alors servi. L'étude de tels apprentissages, impossible au plan des valeurs, renouvelle complètement, croyons-nous, le sens et la portée de la réflexion comparative qui peut échapper ainsi complètement à la tradition fixiste et conservatrice laissée par la psychologie de peuples.54

---

54Ibid., 257ff.
Fig. 1 Hollis Frampton, *Frank Stella*, 1959.
Fig. 2 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1965, steel and plexiglass, 50.8 x 121.9 x 86.3 cm.
Fig. 3 Andy Warhol among exemplars of Del Monte Box (Peach Halves), 1964, each 24.1 x 38.1 x 30.5cm, and on the floor Campbell’s Box (Tomato Juice), 1964, each 25.4 x 48.3 x 24.1cm, installation view, Stable Gallery, New York, 1964.
Fig. 4 Monory, *Jungle de velours No. 13*, 1971, oil on canvas, 260 x 300cm.
Fig. 5 Erro, *Planescape*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300cm.
Fig. 6 Tom Wesselman, *Great American Nude, No. 48*, 1963.
Fig. 7 Erro, Intérieur américain, 1968.
Chapter 1 Infrastructures and Managerialism

The difference in the social, political, and esthetic contexts in which both Buren and Smithson elaborated their respective strategies is illustrated by two "portraits" of their environment that those artists produced in the late 1960s. In the case of Smithson, it was the publication of a text entitled "The Monuments of Passaic" in Artforum in December 1967, which consisted of a commentary of a visit of a series of sites in the suburban town of Passaic, New Jersey; with Buren, it was a film, or rather a series of shorts, entitled Interruption presented on Scopitone at the galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris in 1969 and which was an acerbic representation of the Parisian art milieu.

Interruption was a series of reflections, or vignettes, on the rules, venues, modes of behaviors that form the "social infrastructure" of the art phenomenon in late 1960s Paris and the institutional context that conferred meaning and value on any artistic intervention, and, in extenso, on the larger social environment of French society in general. Buren focused on Paris, the center of France, at one time the artistic center of the world. Smithson reflected on the roads, the suburbs, the quarries, the physical environment of the American experience as viewed from the periphery, more precisely from the slightly off vanguard point of Passaic, an anonymous suburb near what was the new political, economic and cultural center of the world, New York. Suburbia was for Smithson incarnated in New Jersey where he spent his youth, and where he probably experienced indirectly the dramatic changes that the building of the highway infrastructure imposed on New York since, for ten years, trucks carrying debris from the carving up of the Bronx to make room for a throughway will go through the suburbs of New Jersey. A discussion of "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" will be followed by a summary explanation of the social and economic conditions that created the landscape Smithson is portraying, and a survey of the American critical literature on the topic. A summary of the French conditions that produced the environment Buren is describing, as well as a survey of its own history of publication on the topic will be followed by an analysis of Buren's cinematic portrait.

A Visit to Passaic

Two major themes in Smithson's works and his writings, the quarries, especially those found in New Jersey, and the infrastructure of the highway system, appeared in "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey". "The Monuments of Passaic," even though it was preceded by other significant publications, had the flavor of a seminal essay. This

---

2Interruption, April 1969, film for Scopitone transferred onto video, length 18 minutes.
4Between the years 1965 and 1969, Smithson will publish more than twenty articles or other publications in various magazines like Artforum, Arts Magazine, Harper's Bazaar, Art International, or for catalogues.
impression was partly the result of a rhetorical device as Smithson adopted the style of travel writing which he dramatized to transform it into a veritable Bildungsroman. At the end of the tour of the monuments of that suburban town, a visit which also represented a form of pilgrimage for Smithson, since he was born in Passaic where he spent his youth, while his adolescence was spent in Rutherford, both towns situated in New Jersey, the reader felt that Smithson had acquired a different outlook on the world around him. Moreover, imitating the style of the Beat writer William Burroughs, Smithson transformed the account of his trip into an hallucinatory account that reinforced the impression of an extraordinary experience. Written in a subjective, impressionistic style, reminiscent also of a Joycean stream of consciousness, his account of the multiple impressions and thoughts that the sight-seeing provokes in him, constructed an allegorical vision of an ecological, technological and human disaster in a style that ran counter to the usual deadpan, purely descriptive style of the writings of his colleague artists, Minimalists such as Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt, Frank Stella or Carl Andre.

In his text, Smithson circled around a closely related set of physical realities all touching on the theme of the infrastructure of transportation: public works, the machinery that built it, public transportation, private transportation companies, buildings, parking lots, highways, accommodation for travellers, etc., everything alluded, directly or indirectly, to transportation. From the start Smithson mentioned the Port Authority Building where he went to buy tickets for his destination, told the reader that the bus he took belonged to the Inter-City Transportation CO, remarked on the sign of a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge. His bus route was dutifully detailed: "The bus turned off Highway 2, down Orient Way in Rutherford," where he got off "at the corner of Union Avenue and River Drive." The reader, through this information, had already entered the landscape that Smithson was intending to depict, a landscape that was to be the opposite of an idealized landscape. Leafing through the edition of September 30, 1967 of the New York Times, Smithson noticed John Canaday's art column commenting, among other things, on a landscape by F.B. Morse depicting a gothic castle perched on top of an idealized garden. This allegorical landscape representing harmony between industry, science and the arts will be contrasted to the landscape Smithson was to describe, where the effects of industry on the landscape were to be presented in the form of a series of desolate, artless vignettes. A monument is an architectural or sculptural work commemorating an exceptional person or event. The monuments Smithson was presenting, however, had nothing exceptional as they were by then ubiquitous in the American landscape. As Robert Sobieszek noted, the landscape of Passaic is similar, geographically, to the urban housing tracts (fig. 8) that were photographed by Dan Graham in the same period. What these mundane monuments that included a preponderance of industry and infrastructures such as roads, bridges and so forth, commemorated were decades of deterioration of the landscape by

---

5"Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institute," in The Writings of Robert Smithson, 137.
industry. Smithson visited Passaic on foot, which was already a transgression of the manner in which the town was usually perceived, that is, from a passing car. As Hobbs says, Passaic is "A Town turned into a long strip, resembling a shopping center with a highway running through it, Passaic is an area meant to be seen cursorily as one drives to specific spots - Smithson examined it carefully by walking through it, and thus slowed down perception."^

The first monument (figs. 9 a, 9 b, 9 f), "The Bridge Monument Showing Wooden Sidewalks," 53, was commented upon by Smithson in tandem with a commentary on the photographic act, 53. Smithson took photo after photo while the bridge was pivoting, with "the limited movements of an outmoded world," 53. Reinforcing the impression of an outmoded world, a company sign, that of Dean & WestBrook Contractors, N.Y., announced the date the bridge was built, 1899 or 1896, 53. This bridge, an old relic made of iron with a wooden sidewalk, constituted a meeting of two infrastructures of transportation: below the bridge, the old fluvial infrastructure, 10 on the bridge itself, one of its successors, the early road infrastructure, with a recall of an even earlier one, the footpath, symbolically represented by the wooden sidewalk. The bridge as well as the sidewalk that ran alongside it are also elements of infrastructures, as is also the fluvial infrastructure, which once was very important and to which the bridge still periodically gives way by rotating. The pivoting of the bridge suggested to Smithson that he should call it the "Monument of Dislocated Directions." The monuments he described during his visit belonged to a dislocated world, a world "dismembered," and one which had lost contact with its origins. Smithson's view of Passaic was meant in part to evoke the heroic first phase of industrialism of the late nineteenth century and the early forms of infrastructure that accompanied it. That world was partly demolished: "River Drive was in part bulldozed and in part intact," (fig. 9 c) machines lay about like prehistoric creatures, representing a "prehistoric machine age," 53. Smithson noted some minor monuments, concrete abutments for a new highway (figs. 9 d, 9 e), and that the new highway seemed to blend in with the old infrastructure in a "unitary chaos," which, in Smithson's inflated style, meant a uniform appearance of desolation. The impact of these infrastructures on the social and physical environment was also noted. Passaic was representative of the suburbs such as they were constituted before and after the Second World War: "On the edge of this prehistoric Machine Age were pre- and post-World War II suburban houses," 53. In Passaic, the houses "mirrored themselves into

8The effect of industrial activity on the suburbs, or the edges of the city is a theme that was exploited by artists already at the beginning of the modern period in the mid-nineteenth century. See T. J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).


10"Monuments of Passaic," 53. As a reminder of that traffic, Smithson tells us of a barge which is about to pass under the bridge and is the cause for the pivoting.
colorlessness," making it difficult for him to distinguish "the new highway from the old road". 11

The second monument, "Monument with Pontoons: The Pumping Derrick" (fig. 10 b) was a pumping tower situated in the middle of the river, and connected to the bank through a long pipe supported by pontoons, continuing for "about three blocks along the river bank till it disappeared into the earth," 54, to which he gave the title "The Great Pipe Monument," (fig. 10 f), but without counting it as a monument. Of the pipe he said: "one could hear debris rattling in the water that passed through." The third monument, "The Fountain Monument: Bird's Eye View," (figs. 10 c and 10 e) was composed of six pipes emptying their content into the river, which Smithson compared to a huge fountain, 54. The whole system appeared to Smithson as if a sexual encounter was being played out, 54: "The great pipe was in some enigmatic way connected with the infernal fountain. It was as though the pipe was secretly sodomizing some hidden technological orifice, and causing a monstrous sexual organ (the fountain) to have an orgasm." It is tempting to see in this mechanical expense of sexual energy a Duchampian machine célibataire, but it is also interesting to recall what those pipes meant for New Jersey. In 1927, the Passaic Valley Sewerage and Drainage Commission brought together seventeen municipalities in an early form of centralization which signified the loss of autonomy for the municipalities involved because the setting up of an infrastructure for the collection of sewer required a centralized administration and an important capital investment. 12 The pipes Smithson was contemplating represented the loss of autonomy of New Jersey, and henceforth its lost of identity. The sewerage infrastructure was an early sign of the power an infrastructure possessed to effect the erasure of differences. This effect of erasure was to be brought to its full potential through the work of a more powerful infrastructure, the highway system.

As if attuned to spotting all forms of infrastructures, Smithson remarked that he could hear the sound of an infrastructure of communication in the form of a public address system at a distant football game, and that, just before he saw a sign that, to him, "explained everything," 54. The sign read (same page): "Your highway taxes 21 at work," followed by a listing, on the left column: "Federal Highway Trust Funds, 2, 867,000"; on the right side: "U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Public Roads, State Highway Funds, 2,867,000," and underneath, the signatory, "New Jersey State Highway Dept. Until this point, Smithson had for the most part mentioned private transportation companies, that is, organizations peripheral to the existence of the highway infrastructure. He now saw, through the information listed in the sign, the essential condition for the existence of the highway infrastructure, that is, the partnership between corporations and government, the philosophy of government involvement that underlined it under the form of both national and state funding. This information indicated a crucial component in the development of infrastructure, and,

---

11In Smithson's writings, the theme of the mirror and of its reflections, closely related to the theme of the crystalline, is invariably associated with the phenomenon of urbanisation.
in fact, could be seen to "explain everything" about the prodigious expansion of the highway system. Such a company profiting from these particular political and economical conditions, the Passaic Concrete Plant, was present on the site, and Smithson noted it did good business in (and each of those materials appeared in the text in capital letters) stone, bituminous, sand and cement, 55. The composition of the pavement of the highway infrastructure requires all these elements. Another private business related to the highway, a car lot with the telling name of City Motors, 55, had a sign which again attracted Smithson's attention. The sign, said Smithson, proclaimed "Utopia" by listing the new 1968 Pontiacs "wide track" series through an "incantation" of names: the Executive, the Bonneville, the Tempest, the Grand Prix, the Firebirds, the GTO, the Catalina and the LeMans. As if indicating a future not yet realized, the sign was positioned at the end of the highway construction, 55.

Smithson then walked across a parking lot covering over a disused rail track (see fig. 12 e) one newer infrastructure covering another, a metaphor for the triumph of the car culture over the train culture. This was in fact what was happening during the 1960s in the United States. Unlike rail transportation in the European countries where it was thriving, in the United States it was in decline and most American regional train lines were going bankrupt. This was the reason behind an act of congress that established in 1970 the National Railroad Passenger Corporation to maintain dwindling inter-city traffic, leading to the creation of Amtrak.\(^{14}\) That parking lot had, said Smithson, "monumental" dimensions and constituted in itself a "flat monument," 56, which "divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection" (56). The parking lot, with its cars and the sun shining on the pavement offered to Smithson a fantastical vision, 56:

Everything about the site remained wrapped in blandness and littered with shiny cars - one after the other they extended into a sunny nebulousity. The indifferent backs of the cars flashed and reflected the stale afternoon sun. I took a few listless, entropic snapshots of that lustrous monument. If the future is "out of date" and "old fashioned," then I had been in the future. I had been on a planet that had a map of Passaic drawn over it, and a rather imperfect map at that. A sidereal map marked up with "lines" the size of streets, and "squares" and "blocks" the size of buildings. At any moment my feet were apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical (sic) past; it is in

\(^{13}\)Before that, Smithson has quoted at length the notice he finds on the back of a Kodak film box. It could be inferred from that that Smithson is here mentioning yet another "infrastructure," that is, the film itself, as an infrastructure for images. The fact that he mentions earlier on that walking on the bridge was like "walking on an enormous photograph," 53, would confirm such an explanation. However, this interpretation of Smithson's text focusses primarily on real, traditional infrastructures, and not a metaphorical one.

\(^{14}\)Hamilton, Davis, Pictorial History of Trains (London: Octopus Books, 1977), 186. The decline of the railway is one facet of the general decline of public transportation in the United States. On this see also Kay, Asphalt Nation, 247ff.
yesterday’s newspapers, in the jejune advertisements of science fiction movies, in the false mirror of our rejected dreams.

The parking lot as a map of the stars is a startling image, (see figs. 12 c and 12 f) and it is meant to convey scenes belonging to the futuristic scenarios found in American science fiction literature of the 1950s and 1960s of which Smithson was an avid consumer. Those images, plus the myth of technological and consumer happiness are what Smithson is alluding to when he is talking about a future being “out of date”: the “future” as Smithson could see it had indeed created a landscape of shining metal as it was portrayed on countless science fiction paperback covers, but it gave an overwhelming impression of degradation and desolation, of a future littered with cars. The starry quality of the parking lot could not prevent it from being a metaphor for the failure of the American dream of consumer happiness.

The last monument Smithson encountered was “The Sand-Box Monument” or “The Desert,” (fig. 12 d) a sand box which made him think of a “model desert” and also of a “map of infinite disintegration and forgetfulness” 56. This sand box provoked in Smithson two reflections that marked a departure from his previous comments. The first one was yet another metaphor suggested by the sand box, 56: “This monument... suggested the sullen dissolution of entire continents, the drying up of oceans - no longer were there green forests and high mountains - all that existed were millions of grains of sand, a vast deposit of bones and stones pulverized into dust. Every grain of sand was a dead metaphor that equaled timelessness, and to decipher such metaphors would take one through the false mirror of eternity.” Then, in a mock scientific tone, Smithson proposed the following experiment, 56-57: “I should now like to prove the irreversibility of eternity by using a jejune experiment for proving entropy. Picture in your mind’s eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of time clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn gray; after that we have him run anticlockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of grayness and an increase of entropy.”

The image of horror that the sandbox evoked added a different dimension to Smithson’s text. It too recalled the genre of science fiction, a literary genre that, in fact, had been alluded to from the start of the visit to Passaic when Smithson had mentioned that he had brought with him for the trip a copy of Brian W. Aldiss’ Earthworks. 15 The future of sand that Smithson saw prefigured in the sandbox, with the metaphor of the continents drying out and the forests disappearing, is precisely the plot of this remarkable little novel written in the first half of the 1960s.16 Earthworks is a science fiction novel about the consequences of overpopulation on the planet, subjected to the cruel law of diminishing returns, a primitive formulation, as it were, of entropy. The soil that is cultivated in Earthworks is made of sand transported from Africa,

15Smithson mentions the book in the second sentence of his text, 52: “On Saturday, September 30, 1967, I went to the Port Authority Building on 41st Street and 8th Avenue. I bought a copy of the New York Times and a Signet paperback called Earthworks by Brian Aldiss.”

injected with chemical products to produce an artificial growing medium, highly toxic, thus turning the land that grows the food into an uninhabitable place. This ecological catastrophe would be echoed by Paul Erlich in his 1968 *The Population Bomb*, with the following scenario: "It seems from books that the population rose steeply in the twentieth century. That brought acute crises in famine-struck areas like the East and the Middle East... They needed a fourfold increase in food production to cope with the extra mouths, and of course it couldn't be done... Once land gets in a state, once it begins to deteriorate, it is hard to reverse the process. Land falls sick just like people - that's the whole tragedy of our time."  

Erlich's thesis would receive somewhat of an official confirmation in the first report of the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*, in 1972, published right before the petroleum crisis. While the connection between Smithson's work and science fiction is perhaps more fruitful if one considers the fascination J.G. Ballard's novels exercised on him, Earthworks has nevertheless a special significance. In the tradition of Orwell (Aldiss mentions 1984 in his novel) with the derisive gaze of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, Earthworks offered nevertheless something different than the anti-totalitarian message of Orwell, or than the mocking comments on the moral degradation of American society of Bradbury's collection of short stories. Aldiss turns his imagination toward the threat of an ecological catastrophe. Smithson's choice of novel to read on the bus was thus not innocent. He had chosen a dystopia to bring along on a visit of anti- or dys- monuments. He had mentioned the novel Earthworks at the beginning of his account of his trip to Passaic, and ended the account by evoking a fate similar to that described in the novel: a future of inert sand. Smithson was looking at the ruins of the modern landscape as a convincing set for scenarios of future catastrophes. The feeling of despondency expressed by Smithson throughout the commentary on his visit to Passaic, in 1966, showed an awareness of the devastating impact that consumer culture, especially car culture, had had on the urban and suburban environment. The suburbs had meant the rapid degradation of the quality of life in the city core to the profit of what he considered to be a disembodied, exurban life. The highway system had played a crucial role in the degradation of the city core by necessitating the construction of expressways that passed right through densely populated urban areas. Exacting a heavy toll on...
the environment because of the pollution it generates, the car culture had also desecrated its surroundings.

For Smithson, the suburbs were a place to go and visit like one would visit the site of a past catastrophe, not a place to live: "I like to think and look at those suburbs and those fringes, but at the same time, I'm not interested in living there. It's more of an aspect of time. It is the future - the Martian landscape."\(^{19}\) The Martian landscape, as anybody who has watched enough 1950s "B" movies knows, is a forlorn, hostile place, inhabited by diabolical creatures whose purpose and intent remain foreign except for the fact that they obviously want to pilfer the Earth and enslave its inhabitants. Smithson's Passaic was an example of the damages inflicted by the alien forces (fig. 13). There was however, no invasion, as his description was in fact an attempt to "critically assess the new order created by modern industry and mass transportation."\(^{20}\)

**American Modernity and Its Critics**

To understand how, and why Smithson viewed his environment with such disillusionment, it is necessary to look at how the landscape of the United States could present such a picture of desolation, and how that desolation had been brought to the attention of the general public through several important critics of modern life. The 1960s are nestled inside a larger period which extends from the early postwar years to the petroleum crisis of 1973, a golden age that will remain in all probability an historical anomaly due to the rapid growth of the economy, the important technological developments, and the extraordinary increase in wealth of the middle class.\(^{21}\) This golden age eventually became pervasive in Western Europe and other industrialized countries and some repercussions of it were felt in the third world, but it was especially in the United States that it found its fullest expression. The economic boom that more or less lasted from 1945 until 1973 was the longest in American history,\(^{22}\) and singles that period out, at least in economic terms, as one of exceptional optimism, an optimism which relied in great part on the promises of technology.

In all the industrially advanced countries, the advent of consumer society meant the enjoyment of the benefits of the collaboration between science, technology and industry. The prodigious advances in consumer electronics in the late 1960s and the 1970s, for example, had an impact on society and on industrial development equal to that of the advent of electricity at the turn of the century.\(^{23}\) A consumer society also meant a change in the character of daily life, now hijacked by business interests and their publicity machine, and reduced to a spectacle of

---

19 In an interview with Alan Kaprow titled "What is a Museum?," The Writings of Robert Smithson, 59.

20 Kay, Asphalt Nation, 188. Such was the goal formulated by the Regional Planning Association of America in 1923.

21 For instance see Bobbsawm, Age of Extremes, 8.


consumerism. A Situationist theme which forms the backdrop upon which the work of Buren takes its signification. The spectacle of consumerism is not, by any means, an exclusively French phenomenon. Smithson saw the spectacle of consumerism in terms of the scarification that its main infrastructure, the highway system, imposed on the suburban landscape, the ugly by-product of the American dream.

The modern, consumerist landscape also necessitated the active involvement of public funding for the large-scale, long-term projects that required more capital than could be raised by one private company alone. Projects such as these were often infrastructural in nature, whether they were geared toward the production and distribution of energy, or the transportation of goods and people. In the United States of the 1960s, one of the most visible signs of the collaboration between government and private industry was the rapid expansion of the highway infrastructure. The process of laying out the highway infrastructure reached its apogee in that decade, at the same time as the confidence of the American people in the modern, technological environment they were building also reached an all-time high. This confidence was expressed in political terms by the Kennedy administration when it described the United States as the New Frontier, and later, by the Johnson administration when it declared war on poverty, proposing to build the “Great Society”. The expansion of the highway system did not happen suddenly in the 1960s, but that decade certainly marked the high point of its splendour. The highway system was expanded not only to satisfy the individual consumer as he or she buys into the car culture, but also as a response to the new requirements of the rapidly expanding industrial complex devoted to the mass production and mass consumption of goods.

If the building of the highway infrastructure is without a doubt the defining characteristic of the 1960s, it was a long term phenomenon which first gathered momentum in the 1930s, when the building of infrastructures became, under the progressive package of measures of the New Deal, a Government funded affair, and a gesture meant to alleviate mass unemployment and the collapsed economy that came in the wake of the Great Depression. The New Deal philosophy represents, in the history of the United States, government intervention at its most progressive and powerful but it also meant, at least to some critics, the exercise of an oligarchic, bureaucratic form of control over significant portions of social activities. The emphasis on government intervention continued well into the 1960s in the form of policies that had already been put forward by the New Deal doctrine and given economic validity.

---

24 The Situationist International is discussed later in this chapter.
25 Berman, All That Is Solid, 72, 74: “It is only in the twentieth century that Faustian development has come into its own. In the capitalist world it has emerged most vividly in the proliferation of “public authorities” and superagencies designed to organize immense construction projects, especially in transportation and energy: canals and railroads, bridges and highways, dams and irrigation systems, hydroelectric power plants, nuclear reactors, new towns and cities, the exploration of outer space.”
26 Ibid., 299-300.
through the doctrine of Keynesianism, which meant that the construction of infrastructures was still viewed as public business. The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 was the expression of a political will to vastly increase funding devoted to the highway infrastructure and was, as has already been said, the largest public works project in history. The development of the highway system continued well into the 1970s, the oil crash having little effect on the process of its development which then extended, less spectacularly because less noticeable, to the outer, peripheral regions.

Government involvement in the building of infrastructures should not obscure, however, the link between the expansion of the infrastructural network of transportation and the needs generated by the new systems of mass production of commodities. The 1939 World’s Fair General Motors’ pavilion, boldly entitled Futurama, and which was a representation of the city as it would be in 1960, is perhaps the clearest illustration of the relationship between the building of the transportation infrastructures and the corporate push to consumerism. Installed as a public relations strategy to celebrate the potential of the American way of life, the display also tried to convince the general public of General Motors’ visionary power and of its wisdom in suggesting the need to spend heavily on infrastructure. In the display, the road infrastructure nearly dwarfed a nevertheless imposing scattering of huge skyscrapers linking in an economical metaphor corporate power and road infrastructure. This painting of modern life suggested that the city would have a center devoted to business, emptied out of communal life, and that communal life would be replaced by a “commuting life” to a distant suburb not even represented in the “tableau,” so as to clearly emphasize the road network facilitating the connection between center and suburb. The automobile did not merely allow suburban life to thrive, it also became one of the main consumer items in a society devoted to consumerism, constituting, by itself, one half of the mass of consumer objects, the first half being the set of consumer items devoted to domestic living.

The highway system was the infrastructure of the new American consumer society, itself the product of an increasingly complex industrial base governed by a managerial class in full expansion, whose members were judged by their technical expertise, and who worked both to develop strong national management and international economic integration. While the United States of the 1960s were also full of turmoil, with numerous social and political crises, they were also very much the continuation of the previous decades, the conditions of State capitalism appearing with the New Deal policies during the Great Depression, and were merely amplified after the Second World War.

28 Berman, All That Is Solid, 299.
29 Kay, Asphalt Nation, 231.
30 Berman, All That Is Solid, 78.
32 Baudrillard, Système de l’objet, 92-93.
33 Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 4.
34 Ibid., 4.
represented the culmination of the steady expansion of State capitalism and consumer society, a characteristic which the United States shared with the countries of Western Europe.

The negative consequences of the implementation of the highway system on the environment of the American countryside would receive confirmation only several decades after the 1960s, in the dwindling of wild life, and the warming of the atmosphere by carbon monoxide emissions from the cars and trucks travelling on the highways. The consequences on the urban space of major centers such as New York and its immediate suburbs were, however, felt much earlier on. In New York, the suburban sprawl had begun as early as the end of the nineteenth century, and as early as 1921 plans were underway (finalized in 1929) to encourage the spreading of both businesses and populations into the suburbs of New York. From that year, 1929, the construction of highways crisscrossing New York, under the control of Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, was a public works project on a scale never seen before in a modern city. After the Second World War, Moses executed a second series of public works which increased the sprawl, as well as the destruction of city neighborhoods, since the highway system was not confined to the vast spaces between cities, but also invaded their inner center. The throughway which crossed the Bronx, for example, necessitated the destruction of a dozen city blocks causing the displacement of sixty thousand inhabitants. The destruction of the Bronx, which went on from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, showed how the processes at work in transforming the modern landscape were long term and immutable.

The destruction of the living urban environment meant not only the destruction of already existing neighborhoods but also the construction of new ones which erased previous forms of urban social living to replace them by a radically new social environment. The deleterious effects of the car culture were thus reflected in the new face of urbanism, where the infrastructures permitting conurbation erased the distinction between city and country by building the roads necessary for the population which had fled from the urban center and its deteriorating conditions, to find peace and quiet in the suburbs, and to allow them to be able to go back and forth from the home to the work place... and to the malls. The explosion of the suburbs seemed to create a monotonous and gigantic integration of highways and buildings where the repetition of the same was the rule, whether it be the succession of bungalows or the repetition of shopping centers. Wealth was to become especially concentrated in suburbia, which, like the infrastructural projects, was another product of the collaboration between Government and the private sector. The involvement of the Government in financing the construction of housing and in facilitating the acquisition of houses by the public played an important role in the rapid development of suburbs after the Second World War. By 1947 over one million veterans

35 Berman, All That Is Solid, 24.
36 Ibid., 26.
37 Ibid., 29.
38 Ibid., 38.
39 Ibid., 290-312.
40 Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 9.
had received grants enabling them to buy a home under the GI Bill,\(^{41}\) and long-term mortgages at very low interest were made available through the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration guarantees.\(^{42}\) Even the design of the houses themselves were regulated by the Government through the setting of standards for everything including the style of the house, the size of rooms, the height of counters and the size of domestic appliances and sinks.\(^{43}\) The 1950s, especially, marked the acceleration of the sway of corporate culture over the fundamental facts of modern life by increasing and sometimes creating anew the infrastructures for the mass production and the mass consumption of commodities, in the process literally sculpting away at the American landscape in large chunks. The domination of the car culture with its Interstate highway system, suburban expansion, the spread of shopping centers, the huge chains of department stores and fast food franchises, all were, if not "invented," at least undergoing a vast and rapid expansion during that decade.\(^{44}\)

The building of the highway infrastructure, the development of a suburban landscape of desolation, the dire consequences of both these phenomena on the American landscape are essential themes in Smithson's works. There is no portrayal of the wealth displayed in the interiors of the houses that formed the new suburbs, nor of the manifestations of consumer culture displayed therein, the latter being one of the main subject matters of Pop Art. The emphasis is rather on the misery and the desolation found outside the home, in the system that supports its comfort and allows the distribution of its wealth. The desolation of the highway did not mean emptiness, it was a very intricate, lacelike structure made up of ramps and various other infrastructural elements, and of parking lots. There was also a whole network of travel accommodations and food outlets which decorated the edges with the offerings the middle class had come to expect out of life: hot water, hot standardized food, fast and courteous service. The theme of middle-class comfort was however a theme already investigated by Pop art. Smithson, consequently, preferred by 1968 to investigate sites that were used for the extraction of primary matter, the ubiquitous quarry, found all over New Jersey, often exploited in order to extract material to be included in the mixture composing the endless ribbon of the highway system.

The construction of the highway infrastructure was only one of several facets of life, such as the expansion of the suburbs, the creation of vast industrial complexes devoted to the mass production and mass distribution of goods, and the media industry, that were radically changing after the Second World War, due in part to the fact that they had been taken over by a rapidly developing modern managerial system. In its newest incarnation, the managerial type of enterprise comes to be known as a "large corporation," and then as a "multinational


\(^{42}\)Ibid., 17.

\(^{43}\)Kelly, Barbara M., Expanding the American Dream, Building and Rebuilding Levittown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 47.

\(^{44}\)David Halberstam summerizes all these developments in the entertaining The Fifties (New York: Villard Books, 1993).
The development of the transportation infrastructure was dictated by the large scale requirements of the managerial enterprise as it developed into immense corporate entities with complex organizational charts. Like the building of the highway infrastructure and the development of suburbia, the evolution of the corporation was not exclusively a 1960s phenomenon, and evolved steadily throughout the first half of the century. The advent of managerialism as the main form of organization of the work environment seems to have taken place during the 1920s and 1930s, helped in this by the legal tool of incorporation which ensured the life of the company beyond the present, living management.  

However, it is in the 1950s and the 1960s that the position large corporations occupied in the economy reached gigantic proportions. The concentration of the means of production in a few big corporations was such that, already by 1950, one hundred and thirty-five corporations represented 45% of the industrial output of the United States. The fact that such an increase in the size of the managerial enterprise happened only after World War II was mainly due to the slow down in development caused by the string of catastrophes that were the First World War, the Great Depression and World War II. Such huge entities with new, complex structures of management required new managerial skills and structures and a mobilization of all available resources in terms of manpower and raw matter. Thus, at the source of the postwar technological revolution in the way goods were consumed, people and goods transported, and the working environment structured were two interlocking phenomena: the rapid expansion of public works, and the equally rapid expansion of the corporation and its organizational demands. The apparition of the new, postwar landscape of mass living had as a consequence the disappearance of the family business with its simple organization, and its replacement by a huge horizontal structure, with complex levels of decision making characteristic of the large corporation. The development of managerial expertise was intimately linked to the development of the large corporation. In order to be profitable, large manufacturing plants needed to be utilized to their full potential to achieve economies of scale. Without economies of scale, there would have been no justification for the large sums of money needed for the construction of huge manufacturing plants because those sums could not have been recuperated. In order to insure that the large plants with their advanced production technology were used to full capacity, the large corporations had to pay special attention to throughput, that is, the maintenance of a constant flow from the

45Enteman, Willard, Managerialism, The Emergence of a New Ideology (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 168. Enteman later remarks, 245, note 17, that the dating of the emergence of the corporation, the 1930s, is advanced as an hypothesis by the management theorist Peter Drucker in The Concept of the Corporation (New York: John Day Co., 1946).
47Chandler, Scale and Scope, 606.
48Chandler, Alfred Jr, "The Emergence of Managerial Capitalism," in Chandler, Alfred and Richard Tedlow, eds, The Coming of Managerial Capitalism (Homewood, Ill.: R.D. Irwin, 1985), 405: "What is of basic importance for an understanding of the coming of the modern managerial
supply of raw matter to its transformation into the finished product, and then to their staged distribution to consumers. The coordination of such a flow, which, in the case of the petroleum industry or the car industry, would take on enormous proportions, necessitated both an extreme refinement in managerial techniques, and the creation of a huge managerial "class" whose organizational structure differed radically from that of the family owned business. It differed essentially in that two supplementary levels of management were created, middle management and top management, whereas the family owned business required only the owners and the lower management (or foreman) to organize the enterprise. The managerial structure that allowed a corporation to supervise all the steps from the extraction of raw materials to the distribution of the finished products was not a secondary characteristic, it was the constituting principle that led to the advent of the giant corporation and the multinational. The evolution in both scale and refinement of the organizational capabilities of the managerial class had, by the 1960s, become "the central dynamic of modern industrial capitalism." 49

No more extraordinary example of the ideological power that the new managerial "class" exercised in the United States can be found than in the role that managerial expertise played during the course of the Vietnam War. The techniques of decision making that were elaborated for the private enterprise were used to direct American strategy in the conflict. It rapidly became a war of number crunchers where expertise, and interests, from the private sector and from the military and government offices were intertwined bringing together: "Intelligence agency analysts, Pentagon strategists, military contractors, State department area specialists, university-linked contract experts, and White House staffers." 50 The career path of Robert McNamara, the "architect" of the Vietnam War, represents well this mingling of expertise. Hired by the Ford corporation in 1946 as part of a group of young people (soon called the "Whiz Kids") who, while serving in the Army at the Office of Statistical Control during the Second World War, had refined their technological knowledge of management, especially in that relatively new accounting technique, cost analysis, 51 and were proposing themselves for hire as an already formed management organization, 52 McNamara played a key role in the Ford Motor Company's

enterprise is that the cost advantage of the larger plants cannot be fully realized unless a constant flow of materials through the plant or factory is maintained to assure effective capacity utilization. The decisive figure in determining costs and profits is, then, not rated capacity for a specified time period but rather throughput -that is the amount actually processed in that time period. Throughput is thus the proper economic measure of capacity utilization. In the capital-intensive industries, the throughput needed to maintain minimum efficient scale requires not only careful coordination of flow through the processes of production but also the flows of inputs from the suppliers and the flow of outputs to the retailers and final consumers. Such coordination cannot happen automatically. It demands the constant attention of a managerial team, or hierarchy."

49 Chandler, Scale and Scope, 596.
50 Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 118.
51 Ibid., 421-423.
52 Lacey, Robert, Ford (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 421-422.
financial recovery between 1946 and 1956. His career took a full 360
degrees turn when he was asked to become Defense Secretary as part of
Kennedy’s 1961 administration. The technique he developed specifically
for the war was called “Program Planning and Budget System” and meant a
translation of the operations of the conduct of war in terms of outputs,
that is, desired goals, and inputs, that is, the means to achieve
them. This new management technique was aided by early experiments in
computer modeling. His fascination with mathematical precision would
earn McNamara the nickname “human Univac.”

The technique he developed specifically for the war was called “Program Planning and Budget System” and meant a translation of the operations of the conduct of war in terms of outputs, that is, desired goals, and inputs, that is, the means to achieve them. This new management technique was aided by early experiments in computer modeling. His fascination with mathematical precision would earn McNamara the nickname “human Univac.”

The belief in the virtues of the managerial system with its new, exotic, techniques to facilitate decision making processes was at the heart of the Kennedy administration and, later, the Johnson administration. Political decisions on both international and domestic affairs were made under the regime of “managerial liberalism,” and the arcane character of the techniques of decision making played a significant role in raising discontent among American youth. When, on both sides of the Atlantic, the students disrupted the order of things, they also expressed their rejection of the bureaucratic or managerialist regime and its institutions. The ideology of managerial liberalism bloomed with the Johnson administration’s “Great Society” project and its emphasis on domestic issues. This was a further expression of optimism in technological progress and in “Growth Liberalism.” Growth Liberalism, a continuation of the New Deal’s philosophy of Government involvement in social matters, meant the belief that Government encouragement of business, through tax cuts, among other measures, would produce enough wealth to allow a trickling down of money into the poorer segments of society by means of various government programs, leading ultimately to the eradication of poverty.

This version of modernity, proposed by the State in conjunction with the corporations, and almost exclusively based on the potential of industry, science and technology to manufacture well-being and happiness, was not subscribed by everyone. On both sides of the Atlantic, the collusion between the State and business was received by oppositional voices as a threat to individual freedom and quality of life, as an imposition from above. After Max Weber’s early insight into the role played by institutions in shaping society (Weber saw bureaucracies as the fundamental condition for the advent of a rational society), a critique of the modern, administered life, where a stratum of society composed of

---

53 Ibid., 490-491.
55 Ibid., 25.
57 Gitlin, Years of Hope, 133. I take the expression “managerial liberalism” from Gitlin.
58 Ibid., 135: “The New Left’s disruption of established procedure was a counterpolitics to the managed world of institutions—a system which professes the glory of democracy while its bureaucratic rules mask the ways in which correct procedure has taken a weight of its own.”
59 Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 104-105. Farber indicates that “Growth liberalism” is the expression of historian Robert Collins.
managers or bureaucrats comes to monopolize the decision making processes affecting daily life had its first formulation in the critique of the role of the bureaucrat in Leon Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, of 1937. Trotsky's analysis of the role and rapid development of the Russian bureaucracy, which paralleled the development of industries geared toward the mass production of consumer goods and their distribution, concluded that such a bureaucracy inevitably developed both in numbers and in influence on society, and that its growth was detrimental to individual freedom. His influence over the generation of American intellectuals active both before and after World War II was enormous.60

From the 1930s on, the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School theoreticians pursued the critique of the effects of an "administered" life under the concept of "instrumental reason," which meant the search for an ever more rational use of people, resources, and technology exclusively geared toward economic interests and dominated by the desire for efficiency. The "administered" life endangered other dimensions of life, individual freedom, even its human quality. For example Max Horkheimer would write in 1967:

> If social progress is really to live up to its name, it must preserve what was good in the past. To suppress the thought of the cost a culture pays for its new miracles and to adopt an official optimism is to be enslaved to an evil status quo... The demand that we construct a better social totality and develop in a positive way the new possibilities opened up by technology can be met only when our conscience refuses to rest easy with the disappearing freedom of the individual; the fact that such freedom was earlier limited to the bourgeoisie can make no difference here.61

To Horkheimer, the individual was losing the humanist, bourgeois, nineteenth-century set of values and adopting a behavior conditioned by new technical demands.62 Older forms of sociability had disappeared to be replaced by behaviors resembling work. Such views were heard in the United States since most of the prominent thinkers of the Frankfurt School had immigrated to America to escape the persecution of the Nazi regime, where they had subsequently developed their ideas. Echoes of Horkheimer's thoughts could be heard, for instance, in the views of Daniel Bell, whose conservatism did not prevent him from sharing the same concerns vis-à-vis the rapid developments of technology:

> When capitalism arose as a socio-economic system, it had a tenuous unity: an ethos (individualism), a political philosophy (liberalism), a culture (a bourgeois conception of utility and realism), and a character structure (respectability, delayed

---

62Ibid., 13. Further on, he adds, 22: "Machinery requires, for its operation no less than its invention, the kind of mentality that concentrates on the present and can dispense with memory and straying imagination."
gratification, and the like)... What is left is a technological engine, geared to the idea of functional rationality and efficiency, which promises a rising standard of living and promotes a hedonistic way of life. A post-industrial change begins to rework the stratification system of the society, to provide a more sophisticated technology, and to harness science more directly to instrumental purposes.63

From the 1930s on, in a series of popular books and in magazines with a small but faithful readership like Partisan Review and Dissent, the public would be told that they had left the reassuring world of small town life and family businesses to join the hordes of men in gray flannel suits manipulated by hidden persuaders. The theme of the alienation of the individual lost inside the huge corporate structure was voiced by many writers. While James Burnham proclaimed triumphantly the advent of the rule of managers in The Managerial Revolution,1941, many other writers expressed anxiety over the phenomenon. The immensely popular book by Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, published in 1941, but which had an ongoing readership throughout the 1950s having been, by 1959, reprinted 19 times, presented the picture of a profoundly isolated individual caught inside structures of economic production and social organization that made it impossible to give meaning to one's own existence. The individual was described by Erich Fromm as an automaton incapable of doubt over the role assigned to him by society.64 David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd, 1954, described the newfound isolation of the individual while Sloan Wilson's The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, of 1955, described the forced conformity of the corporate world. The critics of the effects of corporate life were coming from the Left and from the Right, the concern was unanimous. For example on the Left, C. Wright Mills, in White Collar, 1951, and in The Power Elite, 1956, showed that power had become centralized into the hands of a group of experts, while on the Right William H. Whyte Jr., in The Organization Man, 1956, showed how the individualism of the businessman was crushed and replaced by a corporatist atmosphere of team spirit and conformity which promoted anonymity. Among those of a younger generation, Paul Goodman's Growing Up Absurd, 1956, wanted, in his own words, to diagnose: "The disgrace of the Organized System of semimonopolies, government, advertisers, etc., and the disaffection of the growing generation."65

John Keats published in 1957 The Crack in the Picture Window, an indictment of the refuge of the corporate man, the suburban house, and the isolation it produced for the stay-at-home wife. Lewis Mumford in The City in History: its Origins, its Transformation, and its Prospects, 1961, criticized the uniformity of the suburban setting. Jane Jacobs's The Death and Life of Great American Cities, published in 1961, described urban life, especially the city core, as in danger of serious degradation, in particular because of the efforts of urban planners like Robert Moses. Even the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, expressing the views of the Liberal moneyed class with The Affluent Society, 1958, made

64Wish, Harvey, Society and Thought, 601-2.
an early call for some moral balance amidst the triumphalism of the time. Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, 1962, was for a large public the way it discovered that there was still actual poverty in the United States during the Golden Years. If poverty was for the middle class an experience that belonged to the past, their ignorance of the poverty of about 20% of the American population, a huge mass of people in absolute numbers, was also characteristic of the blind optimism of the early 1960s. Finally, such questions were echoed in the aesthetic realm with Clement Greenberg’s most important article, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” published in 1939, which was an attempt to deal with the question of the impact of mass culture in aesthetic terms by asking the question: what kind of art should be produced by artists in a period of mass production and mass consumption of goods? This question remains a dominant theme in contemporary art production to this day.

The cumulative effect of those various critiques of industrial, mass culture amounted to a powerful description of life in the modern world. However, the critique of mass culture, whose rise coincided with the gradual decline of the influence of Marxism on American intellectuals, had begun to lose its critical edge and its grip on the reading public by the mid-1950s, not because it had failed to prove the stupefactive effects of mass culture, but rather because it fell prey to its own publishing success, the topic having become boring due to overkill, and its authors finding jobs inside the equally large and impersonal ensembles that universities and colleges had become.

Students for their part were finding the institutions, especially the universities since this is all they knew, increasingly unbearable. The two generations took literally opposite roads in the 1960s. Intellectually, the youth in the United States received legitimacy through the writings of a thinker closely related to the Frankfurt School and who would become, in the 1960s, an author at least as popular as Fromm had been in his day: Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, published in 1964, offered in a more digestible prose for an American stomach, the same critique of a rationality geared exclusively toward imperatives of efficiency, fueled by techno-scientific innovations, reducing the multiple dimensions of human nature to fit the needs of an ever narrowing process of specialization. The rejection, by its critics, of a standardized form of happiness with its belief in technological progress as a beneficial force, and in continuous economical growth was compounded, in the early 1960s, by the questioning of the dogma of

---

66 Harrington, Michael, *The Other America* (New York: Penguin Books Inc, 1963), 194: “In short, somewhere between 20 and 25 per cent of the American people are poor. They have inadequate housing, medicine, food, and opportunity. From my point of view, they number between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 human beings.”


68 Isserman, Maurice, *If I Had a Hammer* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 91: “One can chart the level of disillusionment with Marxism among American intellectuals from the 1930s through the 1950s with reasonable accuracy by keeping track of the number of times that the phrases ‘mass society’ and ‘mass culture’ appeared in articles in little magazines during those years.”

69 Ibid., 98ff, 116.
scientific objectivity. Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science, proposed in another popular book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, to replace the picture of an objective science by one where the scientific institution oriented research according to systems of beliefs that only a scientific revolution could turn upside down, showing the way for a radical questioning by ecologists of the scientific and economic creed of the 1960s. Ecological thesis started to appear, outside of the closed scientific circles where ecology had been a scientific topic for more than a hundred years. It was with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 that it became clear to a large public, thanks to a powerful description of the dangers of the use of chemicals in the environment, that to the nuclear menace that had been the doomsday scenario since the beginning of the Cold War was to be added the ecological threat, a danger more insidious, with the enemy less easily discernible as the “other,” since the threat came from the “inside.”

In the countercultural field, Allen Ginsberg, with *Howl and Others Poems* of 1956, decried the ugliness of modern America, and Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, 1957, showed the highway to be not the comforting means to commute between job and home, but rather the way to escape the confinements of such a life, if only to find desolation at the end. William Burroughs chose knowingly the life of a heroin addict in order to avoid the imperatives of work, and subverted the technological ideal with homosexual science fictional plots in *The Ticket that Exploded*, 1967 and *The Soft Machine*, 1966.

These theorists and writers, through their magazines and their books, provided the rebellious youth with its main theme: the elimination of bureaucratic domination with its elitist authoritarian hierarchy, in favor of an egalitarian society. The ideas of these American intellectuals were echoed in the most famous manifesto of the “new left,” *The Port Huron Statement* of 1962, which stated in rather romantic terms that “the bonds of function” alone were not enough to form a basis for society, leading to estrangement and loneliness: “Personal links between man and man... are needed, especially to go beyond the partial and fragmentary bonds of function that bind men only as worker to worker, employer to employee, teacher to student... Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man.”

The members of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley would explain that their movement was against a “liberal bureaucracy” of which the campus of Berkeley was a perfect example. The campus of Berkeley was perceived

---

74Quoted in Gitlin, *Years of Hope*, 106.
by the students as an impersonal structure more interested in producing engineers or social scientists and in collaborating with the large corporations, than with education as an end in itself.\textsuperscript{75} The institution of the university in general, its bureaucratic bent, was compared to a machine that had to be stopped. One of the main spokespersons of the movement, Mario Savio would make such a comparison in 1964 in a speech full of Luddite accents: "There is a time when the operations of the machine become so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people that own it, that unless you’re free, the machines will be prevented from working at all."\textsuperscript{76} But it is perhaps the counterculture that offered, with the fantastical theater that was the music festival held at Woodstock in 1968, the most telling image of the refusal, on the part of youth, of the forms of modernity proposed by the collusion between the big corporations and the State. At Woodstock it was not only the music, the drugs and the free love that were celebrated, but also the rapid and total collapse of the infrastructures put in place to accommodate the concert goers, which, in folklore, have become as legendary as the concert itself.

This survey of the American way of life as it had come to be in the 1960s, the explanation of the crucial role played by the evolution of the corporation and the constitution of the managerial stratum, and finally the very incomplete summary of the critics of the American way of life constitute the horizon in front of which Smithson contemplated his position vis-à-vis the world in which he lived. His pilgrimage to the suburban town of Passaic was informed by all the discomfort with modern life that its critics and the rebellious youth would voice. The influence was perhaps not direct,\textsuperscript{77} but Smithson could not but think within the parameters of the physical landscape that he saw, and through the ideas that he heard. These ideas conditioned the way he saw Passaic. If Smithson conceived of his environment in terms of infrastructures, of cars, of the plight of suburban life, it is because such were the particular forms modernity took in America in that period.

French Modernity and Its Critics

Buren focused on other dimensions of modernity, less physical and more institutional, emphasizing rules of behaviors, codes regulating conducts, the theater of events, and he did so because, like Smithson, he was influenced by his particular surroundings and by a particular


\textsuperscript{76} Quoted in Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 196.

\textsuperscript{77} It is not sure whether Smithson himself was influenced by such thinkers, however, amongst the books in his possession are found several of the authors mentioned: Lewis Mumford, Paul Ehrlich, Michael Harrington, Herbert Marcuse, Marshall McLuhan, as well as the French theorist of the machine age Jacques Ellul, and Henri Lefebvre, and almost all the novels of William Burroughs. The list of the books and other items found in his library is reproduced in Robert Smithson, Une Rétrospective, Le Paysage entropique 1960-1973 (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), 222.
critical tradition. The difference between the two modernities, one American and the other French, is in inflection only, for, in the 1960s, the same fundamental dimensions are present in both France and the United States. However, the particularities of both versions of modernity are important to note since they condition each artist’s critical gaze and choice of artistic strategy. Even the definition itself of what constitutes an environment will differ radically depending on whether one is looking at Smithson’s physical descriptions, or at the set of rules and conventions challenged by Buren.

The critique of modernity in France and in the United States has close parallels in both its origins and in the terms in which it is phrased. The best example of this close parallel is found in the respective ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Dwight MacDonald. The similarity between Dwight MacDonald’s famous article “The Root is Man,” published in Politics in 1946, and Jean-Paul Sartre’s denunciation of dialectical materialism in 1945 (“Existentialism is a Humanism”) and 1946 (“Materialism and Revolution”) is clearly discernible. Both rejected Marxism, but also scientific progress, both showed an awareness of the dangers of bureaucracy, a belief in a crisis of values, and both insisted upon the importance of single, individual acts. Apart from the two men’s different intellectual horizons, the main difference between these two thinkers was the extreme popularity of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially among the youth. Sartre’s “Existentialism is a Humanism” (probably his most famous line), and his 1946 article in Les Temps Modernes (founded by him), “Materialism and Revolution,” promoted, like McDonald, the return of a humanist discourse replacing Marxism and its “monster,” materialism, and insisting on independence of thought and the importance of the individual. Materialism, it is interesting to note, was compared by Sartre to “American Taylorism and behaviorism” in its function as legitimating the given social order.  

French youth received the same lessons and warnings as American youth, though transmitted through different voices. Bureaucracy, a subject of study in academic circles, became a focus of the hostility of the youth by the end of the 1960s. In the French translation of the debate on the “administered life,” the manager or corporate man became the bureaucrate, and this change indicates more than the passage from one language to another. The bureaucratic system in France has a rigidity that one does not find in its American counterpart. Doubled with what amounts to a caste system extremely influential in deciding the fate of one’s career, the French bureaucratic system was pinpointed as a target of criticism with a singularity of purpose that remains striking, and is continued to this day. The critique of mass culture was also present, but its formulation missed the import of the Frankfurt School theory since the group of German theorists had, during the lifetime of its exponents, no influence on French thought. The ideas developed by the French theorists still echoed more or less the ideas of their cross-

---

79 Crozier, Phénomène bureaucratique, 5. The introduction, from which this remark is taken, was written in 1970.  
Atlantic colleagues, but their analysis insisted perhaps more on the bureaucratic universe than on the false societal consensus the analysis of which, following the inspiration of the exiled German thinkers, was a fundamental theme in the American critical literature of the time.

Henri Lefebvre, especially through the magazine *Arguments*, Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort with the magazine *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, were, in that period, the main thinkers of the phenomenon of bureaucracy and the deterioration of urban life. Close to Trotsky’s analysis, Castoriadis,°1 insisted that it was the nature of bureaucracy itself that presented the biggest obstacle to the advent of socialism. The bureaucracy in the Soviet Union expressed itself through nationalization and government planning, authoritarian acts close in spirit to capitalism, which brought Castoriadis to state that communism was a variant of capitalism, with the Russian bureaucracy as the exploitative class. This system Castoriadis called “bureaucratic capitalism,” and he saw in the industrially advanced nations of the West the same signs of the replacement of the classic bourgeoisie by a bureaucratic class. Castoriadis reasoned as following: in the 1930s, in an attempt to solve the problems created by the failure of capitalism, the State had intervened more directly in the economy. This apparent benevolent gesture on the part of the State only displaced the exploitative relationship away from the classic opposition of the owners of private property and the propertyless laborers toward a bureaucratic (or managerial) opposition between order givers and order takers. Socialism and capitalism were to Castoriadis but variations on the bureaucratic theme, and the only solution was to give control to the masses through self-managed worker’s councils (autogestion).°2 Claude Lefort corrected Castoriadis’ analysis by stating that bureaucracy was not a class, but a formation that existed through the principle of class division in order to promote a common order. What made bureaucracy so efficient was that it presented itself simply as a universal principle of efficiency, while it was in fact imposed by force.°3

Michel Crozier studied the effects such a bureaucratic system had on the social and cultural life in France. In the last part of his book, Crozier attempted to analyze the particular forms bureaucracy took in France as the outcome of the specific historical and social conditions of French society. He noted that the fact of personal isolation and the predominance of formal relations over informal ones in the typical French organization contrasted with the relative suppleness of its American counterpart.”°4 As it has been shown, this was certainly not the opinion of the American critics of corporate life. Perhaps more interesting was Crozier’s subtle insight that all strata inside French organizations had it in their interest to maintain formal rules of subordination and avoid informal groupings or relations so as to protect themselves from the vagaries of discrimination and favoritism.°5 Crozier speculated that this formalization of the rules of subordination lead to

---

°2Ibid., 112.
°4Crozier, Michel, *Phénomène bureaucratique*, 262-263.
°5Ibid., 263.
long periods of routine and acceptance broken by short periods of intense crisis, a characteristic also valid, he insisted, for French society in general, and which Mai 1968 would confirm. Before Crozier, Jacques Ellul had analyzed the effects of the imperatives of technology on human conduct. For Ellul, technology was to be distinguished from the machine which was but one of the many forms technology took. The machine age transformed nineteenth-century society, and - here Ellul mentioned Mumford - took over, creating inhuman conditions for the vast majority of people. Nineteenth-century society was not adapted, politically and institutionally speaking, to the requirements of the machine age. Technology was comprised of various techniques to adapt society to the requirements of the machine age. Technology took many forms, many of them abstract, but its main function was to clarify, to order into categories, to rationalize. It smoothed out the edges of the machine age in order to make it more acceptable to the individual, and in so doing created a screen (écran) between the individual and the machine.

The screen mentioned by Ellul was another way of expressing the Marxist concept of "alienation," that is, the way the forms of mass production and mass consumption hid from the individual the true nature of his/her relation to society as a whole. Henri Lefebvre's critique of everyday life sought to describe a crucial development in capitalist society: the way the "screen" had created a fragmented society, and the fundamental role consumerism played in that process. In Lefebvre's La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne, daily life was shown to have become in the modern era a product or rather the backdrop on which mass produced goods were laid out to be mass consumed: "À ce titre, la quotidienneté serait le principal produit de la société dite organisée, ou de consommation dirigée, ainsi que son décor: la Modernité." Lefebvre, however, also indicated that daily life was the most propitious site for attempting to change the order of things: "En même temps qu'une déchéance, poussée jusqu'aux plus extrêmes conséquences, apparaissent plus sensiblement et immédiatement dans la vie quotidienne qu'ailleurs les possibilités." Those possibilities for understanding the new conditions of living and acting changes were analyzed, and used in real life situations by the Situationist International, a small group of provocateurs, theorists, artists or terrorists, depending on how one views them, led by Guy Debord. The group pursued Lefebvre's intuitions and analyzed the territory of modern life which they labeled the société spectaculaire-marchande, or, more simply, la société du spectacle. The tactics of the group, such as the construction of

---

86Ibid., 273-275.
87Ellul, Jacques, La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle (Paris: Economica, 1990), 2-3. "Technique" in French is translated by "technology" in English. The French habit of using the term "technologie" to designate a set of techniques, and not "the study of technique" is a recent, and incorrect, fashion.
89Lefebvre, Critique de la vie, vol. 1, 243.
"situations" where the social and institutional characteristics of a site were subverted in order to reveal the true nature of urban life; the détournement which meant the subversion of already existing images, signs and other manifestations in order to make them say something entirely different than what they had been created for; and the notions of psychogeography and dérive which described the practice of roaming through parcels of urban life in order to experience them and learn from them, were meant to be tools with which to analyze and critique modern living conditions and how they affected urban space.

Other theorists such as Gilbert Simondon with his Du mode d’existence des objets techniques, 1958, a study of the nature of the technical object, and Jean Baudrillard with Le Système des objets, 1968, a study of the values attached to objects and of how they function as signs, completed the picture of a French society totally immersed in the myth of happiness through technological innovation and consumerism. The consequences of such an immersion on the psyche of the individual was portrayed by several French novelists of the period. Michel Butor’s La Modification, 1957, one of the great works of fiction of the period, revealed, beneath the narrative, the materiality of the text while at the same time reducing the text’s capacity to function as a window onto reality to the point where the narrative became more real than the story it told. The loss of referentiality was meant to bring attention to the act of reading as a production, but the actual experience of reading created the strange impression of being able to see only a muted world leaving in the mind of the reader an impression of alienation vis-à-vis their familiar surroundings. More directly to the point, Georges Pérec’s Les Choses, 1965, implied an almost schizophrenic relation to consumer goods which invaded the consciousness of the protagonists, while Nathalie Sarraute’s Martereau, 1953, showed an individuality reduced to despair over decorating choices and what they “said” about her.

The influence of the French “structuralist” thinkers on the events of May 68 must be evaluated with prudence. It seems probable that the interpretation directly linking the events of May 1968 in France to the writings of the philosophers and theoreticians of the 1950s and 1960s associated with structuralism is exaggerated. Louis Althusser, for example, far from being sympathetic to the students during the years preceding 1968, attacked, in 1964, the right of students to criticize the programs and the structures of his teaching, since what was transmitted through him was objective and scientific knowledge. Structuralism does not seem to have been present in the events of May 1968. It does not appear in the numerous accounts of the leaders of the


92 Castoriadis, “Le Mouvement des années soixante,” 188.
movement, it does not appear as a slogan on the walls of Paris at the
time. If it appears at all, it is to be ridiculed, as in the well-
known inscription posted at the Sorbonne, which said that "Althusser à
rien". Ideas, however, have a way of mysteriously trickling down from
the closed circles in which they are first voiced, and of "hanging in
the air," and in this manner the insights of structuralist linguistics
as they were adapted by the semiotician Roland Barthes, the
psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the
philosopher Louis Althusser might have played a role in the turbulent
years of mid-1960s France. Buren seems to have been aware of several
French theorists in the years 1966 and 1967, but his list is of a
generation older than the theorists named above, with the exception of
Claude Lévi-Strauss. For the generation that erupts in 1968, ideas
about the death of the subject, about a semiotic universe with its own
independent laws that structures the systems of values that pervade
society, that conditions individual desire in invisible ways, about the
influence of ideology in promoting the interest of the dominant class,
might have found their way into the mentality of the student population
under the form of a growing discontent with the arbitrariness of the
conventions that ruled French society.

The particular forms modernity had taken were thus criticized in not
identical but closely parallel terms by theorists in France and in the
United States. However, an asymmetry is at work that is an important
factor in looking at this question. Modernity was not only a phenomenon
imposed from above in each country, the expression of the will of the
elite in government and in business, it was also the terrain on which an
international battle for markets and influence was raging. Modernity, in
France and in many other Western European countries, meant also the
imposition, perceived and real, of the American way of life onto other
national realities. This was at least the perception of the
intellectuals in France, and the phenomenon merits close attention
because it also throws some light on the split of opinions between the
general public and its intellectual class as to how to evaluate American
influence. Anti-Americanism in France was the creation of the
intellectuals, and their opinion clashed with those of the general

---

93 Castoriadis enumerates: Cohn-Bendit, Daniel et Gabriel, Le Gauchisme
de la Commune étudiante (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969). The numerous inscrip-
tions posted or painted on the walls in Paris, and where no struc-
turalist is quoted, can be surveyed in Besançon, Julien, Les Murs ont la
94 The saying can be roughly translated as "Althus-serves no purpose."
95 Baldassari, Anne, Daniel Buren, Entrevue: Conversations avec Anne
Buren names the following: Michel Leiris, Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul
Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Friedrich Nietzsche, Samuel Beckett, the
Situationists, the French cinematographic Nouvelle Vague and, above all,
Jean-Luc Godard. The least one can say about such a list is that it is
eclectic, and that it does not include the more popular structuralists
such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, or the so-called post-
structuralists such as Jacques Derrida or Gilles Deleuze, who come much
later into a certain degree of notoriety.
96 Suleiman, Ezra N., "Anti-Americanism and the Elite," in The Rise and
Fall of Anti-Americanism, Lacorne, Denis, Jacques Rupnik and Marie-
During the 1950s and up until the beginning of the 1960s, the French public had a positive view of the United States especially in the fields of management, production and quality of life, but not in cultural matters or in character. The anti-Americanism of the elite was principally a cultural anti-Americanism, where mass culture, equated with the American way of life, was put in opposition to "high," French culture, or, alternatively, with the old, peasant ways of the "France profonde." The Gaullist regime reinforced the feeling of hostility toward the United States by insisting on a neutralist policy in the disputes between the United States and the Soviet Union. De Gaulle appeared to be defiant toward the United States economically and politically, but in fact he promoted for France a similar program of modernization that had as its goal to bring France onto a more competitive level with the United States.

---


97 Rupnik, Jacques and Muriel Humbertjean, "Images of the United States in Public Opinion" in The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism, 93: "What is really interesting about these trends in French opinion is that they were always totally out of step with the cultural anti-Americanism of a majority of the French intellectual élite."

98 Ibid., 94: "In 1962 an IFOP poll asked French people to express their opinions on the USA's strengths and weaknesses. According to the replies, the former lay not in American military might (which was ranked fifth place) but above all in the country's economic wealth, as well as in the youthfulness and dynamism of the American population. Conversely, America's weaknesses were attributed to that society's vulnerability to crises, as well as to the 'puerile and arrogant character' of the American people." In the 1953 poll one question and its answers made clear that the American way of life was generally admired by the French public, same page: "However many faults were attributed to the American economic system (capitalism, commercialism, the All-mighty Dollar, and so on), it was nonetheless a system that knew how to apply scientific progress not only to industrial efficiency but also to lifestyle."

99 Rupnik, Jacques and Muriel Humbertjean, "Images of the United States in Public Opinion," 81: "This bipolarity in French perceptions of the international situation can be traced back to an endeavour to maintain balance and equidistance in France's relations with the superpowers, in order to guarantee national independence. In this specific case, French public opinion would seem to have been at one with that of the country's intellectual and political élite (and not only with the Gaullists and Communists)."

100 Harrison, Michael, "French Anti-Americanism under the Fourth Republic and the Gaullist Solution" in The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism, 170.

101 Ibid., 175: "De Gaulle also asserted and fostered the development of an independent French and European economic and technological capability as an instrument to defend against American power in this domain. But it is important to note that, unlike many on the right and left who resisted Americanisation because they feared modernisation, de Gaulle was a ruthless moderniser who wanted to confront American economic power on its own terms by fostering the independent development of the French and European industrial economy."
In France the necessity of rebuilding the infrastructure and the economy provided ample room for reorganization. The new emphasis on consumer culture, the mix of State and corporate involvement offered conditions similar to that of the United States. The two major economic models that presided over the choices made in the United States, a mixture of Fordism and of Keynesianism, were present in differing proportions in most industrially advanced countries of Europe: "But what is remarkable is the way in which national governments of quite different ideological complexions - Gaullist in France, the Labour Party in Britain, Christian Democrats in West Germany, etc. - engineered both stable economic growth and rising material living standards through a mix of welfare statism, Keynesian economic management, and control over wage relations. Fordism depended, evidently, upon the nation state taking... a very special role within the overall system of social regulation."  

A crucial difference between the two countries was the relative absence of large corporations in France. The United States, which already by the First World War had major parts of its economy placed under the system of managerial capitalism remained in fact quite unique among the industrially advanced countries in that aspect. The United Kingdom, for example, had few such large enterprises even by the Second World War, the businesses remaining family based. France offered a similar situation for the greater part of the 1960s, with an abundance of small firms, very few large ones, in part due to protectionist policies. The way France carried out the modernization of its infrastructure reveals the authoritarian bent that characterizes managerial life there, which in turn affects the setting of priorities and favors prestigious projects rather than more mundane ones. Thus priority was given, during the de Gaulle years, to building the ocean liner France, the supersonic jet Concorde, the Mont Blanc tunnel, to the detriment of less glamorous projects such as the highway infrastructure, the electrical grid or the telephone system. If the modernization of the various infrastructures in the United States almost always implied a form of centralization, in France centralization was part of the cultural mindset with an intensity that had no equivalent in the United States.

In France, modernization involved also the domination of the class of managers, here called "technocrats," over every major decision making processes, a fact that was the object of numerous commentaries at the time. More than in the United States, the agenda for the modernization of France was imposed from above. France's modernization after the Second World War followed a vast blueprint for the rebuilding of the country, which, in Soviet fashion, was called "Le Plan," under

---

102 Wish, Harvey, *Society and Thought*, 135.

103 Chandler, "Emergence of Managerial Capitalism," 416.


105 Ibid., 24.

106 Ibid., 89.

107 For instance in addition to Crozier's *Le Phénomène bureaucratique*, one can cite J.A. Kosciuko-Morizet's *La Mafia polytechnicienne* and J.C. Thoenig's *L'Ère des technocrates*, both of 1973.
the supervision of Jean Monnet. As with the United States, one found the same emphasis on government intervention, but through important nationalizations such as the railways and the two main sources of domestic energy, coal and electricity. The technocrats, named by the State to head State corporations, formed (and still form) a close-knit elite almost all coming from either the Grandes Écoles (especially the École Nationale d'Administration and the École Polytechnique) or the Grands Corps (such as the Inspection des Finances). The power of those elites, inhabited by strong “esprit de corps” loyalties, was greatly increased during the de Gaulle years. Their propensity to occupy subsequently or even alternatively, high managerial positions in industries and then, seemingly interchangeably, positions in government only increased the power of the technocrats. In the 1960s at least, there was not in France the corporate spirit of group osmosis that could be found in the United States. French corporate life remained highly hierarchic with little meddling between levels of management outside of highly formalized interactions, where everyone knew his or her place and furthermore knew that that place had a good chance of remaining his or hers forever. This meant a reluctance to engage in spontaneous teamwork, and a preference for a highly formal atmosphere in the contacts between different levels of management. From this situation resulted some determining differences between the “typical” French and American manager at the level of their value systems. Management in France tended to place more importance on the moral and cultural aspect of their personality over their socioeconomic status, while American management put their socioeconomic status first, moral second. American managers valued both of those traits more than cultural capital. The French premium on symbolic values to the detriment of material ones was an echo


109 Ardagh, New France, 54: “...many firms welcome them [graduates from the École Polytechnique] with open arms - less, very often, for their actual abilities than for their precious contacts. If you have an ‘X’ [that is a graduate from the École Polytechnique] on your staff, he will be able to ring up just the right pal in the ministry that is blocking the crucial permit you need.”

110 Ibid., 39, 47. Especially l’École Polytechnique and l’École Nationale d’Administration, as well as the Inspection des Finances.

111 Ibid., 47.

112 Same page.

113 Ibid., 55: “Promotion on merit from the middle ranks is almost impossible: if by ill chance you failed to acquire the right diplomas from some Grande École in your youth, you have little means of moving far up the hierarchy, however able and intelligent you may prove yourself. The closed-shops prevent it.”

114 Ibid., 45, 48-49.

115 Lamont, Michèle, Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5. On page 4, Lamont defines the moral boundaries as comprising honesty, work ethic and integrity; the socioeconomic boundaries as being wealth, power and professional success; and cultural boundaries as intelligence, education, manners, tastes and high culture. Lamont adds that these differences tend more and more to disappear to the profit of an emphasis on the socioeconomic on both sides of the Atlantic.
of the particular requirements French enterprises imposed on their staff, especially the fact that technical expertise was not valued as much as general cultural knowledge and a humanist veneer. The lack of emphasis on competency and professional competition was also due to the lack of job mobility, a condition which had its attractive counterpart, maximized job security. Unable to move up through the ranks through technical competency alone, owing their position to their social background, French managers tended to look for personal validation elsewhere than in technical and professional competency. Corporate mobility was acquired at great effort by managers and only through ingratiating themselves to higher echelons in a tight bureaucratic structure, where "de toute façon" one's class origins determined in great part one's destiny. These characteristics of French corporate life meant that the French were more attached to power for its own sake, they more readily accepted a highly structured and centralized authority with sharp divisions between organizational levels. Their American counterpart favored cooperation and teamwork and de-emphasized authority structures, in great part because they were encouraged by the strong possibility of upward mobility. One should notice that this emphasis on formalities, conventions and rigidity was a target of the interventions of Daniel Buren at the time.

In France, the student movement rebelled, like their counterpart in the United States, against what they saw as a techno-bureaucratic society, whose goals and institutions they felt alienated from. Unlike the American youth who was confronted with the Civil Rights crisis and then the war in Vietnam, the uprising of the French youth happened in a country devoid of real economic or political crisis, and nevertheless developed rapidly into a generalized conflict. As with Woodstock, the carnivalesque and festive aspects of the events of May 1968 seemed to take nourishment in the chaos created, as if chaos represented a counterproposal to the efficient, orderly, technocratic society which the students felt was imposed onto them from above. This disinterest in the normal outlets as they were offered by society can be explained by the fact that the higher educational requirements meant a long protracted student life of frustrations, and that the careers that were

---

116 Ibid., 47.
117 Ibid., 71-74.
118 Morin, Edgar, "Mais" in Vingt Ans Après, 148.
119 Ibid., 149: "le premier élément détonateur [est] issu de la conjonction de deux facteurs contradictoires: trop grande inadaptation entre la production croissante de diplômes et la rareté des débouchés, mais aussi trop grande adaptation des sciences humaines - et particulièrement la sociologie - à une société où elles deviennent les auxiliaires du pouvoir... Une autre interprétation, au contraire, insiste non sur la volonté des étudiants d'adapter l'Université à la vie moderne, mais sur leur refus de la vie bourgeoise considérée comme mesquine, médiocre, réprimée, oppressive; non pas sur la recherche des carrières, mais sur le mépris des carrières de cadres-techniciens qui les attendent; non pas sur leur volonté de s'intégrer le plus rapidement possible dans la société adulte, mais sur une contestation globale d'une société adultérée. Cette interprétation fait valoir que de grandes universités très "fonctionnelles" et adaptées à la modernité, comme Berkeley et Columbia, ont été le siège de révoltes virulentes."
offered seemed only to imply a surrender to the imperatives of a society whose system of values the students violently opposed.

The unfulfilled promise of the events of May 1968, more than any other facts associated with these events, is the idea of worker’s self-management. As soon as the movement ceased to be only a student affair and spread to the workers, the demands for self-management appeared, going far beyond the demands for better pay, or for the nationalization of industries, and represented the most direct expression of discontent with the managerial or bureaucratic society as a whole.\textsuperscript{120}  
L’autogestion, as it was called in French, is perhaps the only answer to managerial society, but its possibility, except for a few scattered experiences, has remained unexploited.\textsuperscript{121}

This double survey of modernity in France and in the United States and of their respective critics provides a useful background to evaluate how the works of Smithson and of Buren differ in subject matter and in strategy. The manifestations of modernity that Smithson reflects upon are highly physical in nature while those on which Buren reflects are more conventional and organizational in nature.

A Visit to Paris

The difference between Buren’s environment and that of Smithson can be gauged by the following analysis of a work by Buren done in 1969, which can be compared to Smithson’s visit of the monuments of Passaic. The latter should be kept in mind while reading about this very atypical work of Buren (a work that has received almost no critical attention) because it shows how Buren’s view of his surroundings is literally and conceptually miles away from that of Smithson. In July 1969, an event organized by Buren was reviewed briefly in \textit{Art Vivant}: “Depuis environ 3 ans, Buren qui a 30 ans avec ou sans Mosset, Parmentier et Toroni, répand un peu partout des bandes, imprimées ou peintes, sur le papier ou sur toile, également espacées, généralement vertes (ou roses) et blanches. Il présentait en Mai dernier, à la galerie Yvon Lambert, un ensemble de films, mettant en cause le milieu de l’art introduits par un texte.”\textsuperscript{122}

The series of eight short films collectively entitled \textit{Interrupt} (fig. 14) was presented on Scopitone at the galerie Yvon Lambert.

\textsuperscript{120}Morin, “Mai 68: complexité et ambiguïté,” in \textit{Vingt Ans après}, 154.  
\textsuperscript{121}It’s only generalized application, during the 1930s in Republican Spain, led to disappointing results since workers more apt at managing eventually distanced themselves from the others and formed another managerial class. See Guérin, Daniel, \textit{Anarchism} (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1970) 130ff. Published originally in French in 1965.  
\textsuperscript{122}Anonymous, “Buren : pourquoi?,” \textit{Art Vivant} no. 3 (July, 1969), S.P.  
\textsuperscript{123}\textit{Interrupt}, April 1969, film for Scopitone transferred onto video, length 18 minutes, archives of the Musée de Villeurbanne. I rely on notes taken while viewing, repeatedly, the film at the Musée, and the reader should be indulgent toward the faithfulness of the transcription. In his collection of writings, \textit{Les Écrits} (Bordeaux: capc Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1991), Buren has reproduced only one of the eight texts used in the film, with a note explaining that two of those
Godardian in style, this work was for Buren what the account of the trip to Passaic was for Smithson. In fact *Interruption* could be said to be Buren’s “visit to Paris.” Unlike Smithson’s text on Passaic, however, *Interruption* did not describe the physical landscape of a given site, but rather the artificiality of the conventions regulating the art milieu in Paris. Rather than a complete account of the work, the text will be described from a bird’s eye view, retaining only the most relevant passages (see preceding footnote). About the reasons behind the showing of the film, Buren said: “Je savais que les gens étaient intrigués par l’exposition, qu’ils voulaient voir qui était ce “phénomène” dont on commençait à parler. Ils venaient donc, pour la première fois voir des bandes. Alors ils n’en ont pas vu.” The films were presented in the gallery with the works from the preceding show still hung on the walls. The beginning consisted in a long monologue, presented in voice-over, with the text shown simultaneously on the screen. The written text unfolded continuously like a ribbon, and began thus: “Qu’est-ce qui essentiellement est à dire? Ce qui avant toute chose est digne d’être dit et rien d’autre. La nécessité. Le logos est rassemblement dans l’unité de dire.... La langue est l’ouverture de l’étant. C’est pourquoi nous demandons: Qu’est-ce que dire?” This Heideggerian beginning was, thankfully, soon over, and in the second segment the biography of the artist was the object of a harsh judgment. Somebody entered a photo booth placed outside on the street, a hand picked up a few photographs and the following lapidary statement was heard: “La biographie de l’artiste c’est le pedigree des chiens.”

The melodramatic tone of the interjection was perhaps a bit forced, but the notion of the artist as submitted to a classification system as rigorous as that for dogs, despite its self-pitying accent, pointed to a “bureaucratization” of ascendency, and to the authority of tradition. The life of the dog or the artist, their historical reality, was less important than their filiation to previous prominent members of their respective group. What counted was the transmission of heritage, either genetically or culturally. Works of art from the Universal History of

texts were written by Michel Claura and René Denizot, and that the realization of the film was by Jacques Caumont. Buren does not explain who has written the other five parts. There thus remains five texts that Buren (or somebody) has written, and that are not included in his collection of writings. The showing of those segments was presented by the press as a work by Buren, and the omission of the complete set of the texts in *Les Écrits* is puzzling. Is Buren here attempting to protect himself? If he were, one might suspect it is from the heavy Heideggerian overtones of the first segment, but it does not explain the reason for the other omissions. Except for the first part, my impression is that the style is consistent, and seems to have been written by one and the same person. Buren himself, in conversation, has explained the presentation of those films as being his first solo exhibition: “ma première exposition personnelle à Paris où j’ai présenté des films sur un scopitone” (Buren, Daniel, Parmentier, Michel, *Propos délibérés*, Baldassari, Anne, ed. (Lyon: Art Édition, 1991), 96). Most of the quotes will thus not be footnoted, except for the part reproduced in *Les Écrits.*

Art started to unfold on the screen, going from Medieval art, to Goya, Johns, then Poliakoff and Rosenquist. This enumeration of the great pedigree of the artist was accompanied by a series of lapidary comments on art criticism such as: “La critique est stérile; la critique n’a que complaisance pour la complaisance de l’art; l’art non pas comme phénomène mais en tant qu’art: la critique doit enregistrer l’histoire mais pour en sortir, double jeu de la nouveauté et de l’histoire.”

That a young artist felt hostility for the critics should not strike one as surprising, but the third statement, cryptic, pointed to the paradox of the consecration of the artist by the critics, which has to be innovative but also linked to the great masters of the past, be one of them. The role of the critic was thus shown to be merely to put the artist in filiation, show that he, or she, has the right pedigree. The fourth segment, “Topographie,” was perhaps the closest in spirit to Buren’s more or less contemporaneous work with stripes. The front of a gallery in Paris, probably the gallery Yvon Lambert, was visible, while a voice announced: “Vous êtes dans un lieu culturel artistique parisien.” Then somebody was shown reading the classifieds in a bus, and in the inimitable deadpan tone of voice of commentators in movies of the Nouvelle Vague, a listing, imaginary both in the sheer profusion of jobs offered to artists and by the highly fantastical and cynical job descriptions, was recited: “Galerie d’avant-garde recherche artiste, si possible de talent, pour exposer dans la rue... Société recherche artiste pour écouter déchets en tout genre... Exécutant tout travaux en vue d’embellir la décrépitude, s’adresser aux artistes... On demande témoin de préférence prophète – signé: la critique... Artiste individualiste faisant n’importe quoi, troublé cause crise de conscience, cherche à faire n’importe quoi, mais en équipe.”

To the young artist, quite obviously out of work, were offered fantastical jobs, all useless, all ultimately degrading. The last remark, that the artist had to be ready to do anything, as long as it was inside a team, seemed an obvious comment on the mania for group exhibition to which Buren himself had contributed in the last few years forming the group known as B.M.P.T. with Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni. This mania for groups will be discussed in the next chapter. In the description of the requirements for the various jobs were listed exhausted stylistic options of the recent past. The artist was asked to show “in the streets,” to find a way to “sell off garbage of all kinds,” “to embellish decrepitude,” to play the role of “witness and prophet,” he was shown to be in a deep “existential crisis,” pleading for the opportunity to “do anything.” All these choices referred to actual stylistic options whose currency at the time was obviously derided in Interruption. In the fifth segment, “Mise au Point,” a young man approached a farmer asking first to buy some eggs, and then, seeing a bottle rack exactly like that of Duchamp, wanted to buy that as well: “Pardon monsieur est-ce que vous pouvez me vendre des œufs, s’il-vous-plait? Oui, bien sûr. Oh! [says the young man picking up a Duchampian bottle rack] quel magnifique Marcel Duchamp que vous avez là!” This scene was an obvious jab at the most prominent figure of the French art world at the time, Marcel Duchamp, but also, by setting the action in a context that was that of the refined, urban environment of a

126 Moulin, Raymonde, Le Marché de la peinture en France (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 175. Moulin is talking about the more traditional figurative artist, but that conclusion is also valid for the abstract artist.
Parisian gallery, it pointed to the artificiality of the rules that allowed, say, one bottle rack to gain such preeminence, and another, to remain, "undiscovered."

The sixth segment, "Températures relevées sous abri et évolution probable du temps," consisted in a series of conversations between different groups of people, meant to represent different segments of French society. In voice-over the following words were heard: "Depuis quelque temps, il se passe quelque chose dans le milieu de l'art. Les rapports de l'art avec le public, les rapports de l'art avec la société, le système, le circuit de l'art sont en voie de révision. Il se peut que nous soyons à la veille de grands bouleversements." It is difficult, since the film was presented after the events of May 68, not to see an allusion to them in the "grands bouleversements" that were predicted. But the tone could be interpreted as ironic, especially when the rest of the text is considered. Then was heard a conversation between two fishermen who were there to apparently represent the "France profonde," that is, the France untouched by industrialization and carrying on age-old traditions, and which signified, in conservative circles, the repository of what made France distinct and the force that preserved it from the invasion of the American way of life. The presumption that these two men would have an interest in discussing the revolutionary nature of art was in itself farcical, 65: "Y paraît que l'art devient révolutionnaire?" "Oh! Il y a longtemps!" Somebody was seen reading L'Express, 128 and a voice over was heard, obviously reciting lines printed in the magazine, 65: "Jamais art ne se voulut aussi social que celui d'aujourd'hui. Social en ceci qu'il vise à transformer le lien qui unit l'homme à la société pour lui rendre le monde moderne plus agréable à vivre." The simple repetition of unrealistic expectations for art as an agent for change were repeated again and again in this segment. Two people were then heard coming out of an H.L.M., that is, a subsidized housing complex, 65: "Il paraît que les artistes veulent changer notre environnement et transformer notre vision. Si c'était vrai, je suis sûr que ce serait beaucoup plus agréable d'être exploité."

Two women were seen in front of a store gossiping about its relative performance compared to the store on the other side of the street in an obvious metaphor for the fickleness of the star system in the art world, 66: "C'est incroyable la concurrence entre les magasins de gadgets, tiens celui-ci c'était le plus révolutionnaire il y a six mois, maintenant il s'est fait doubler par celui d'en face, viens voir." Again the reader of L'Express, 66: "Les trouvailles de l'art moderne ne sont pas toutes acceptables." Again the reader, 66: "L'art tend à apaiser l'effroi engendré par l'arrivée de l'ère technologique, à expliquer le monde et à le prolonger." Two museum guards were discussing, 66: "Je me demande pourquoi les artistes exposent dans la rue? Il paraît que c’est à cause des événements de mai." Then through the eyes of the reader, a utopian quote by Vasarely, 66: "Je cherche à intégrer le phénomène plastique dans la vie de tous les jours. Je voudrais que mon oeuvre soit avant tout sociale, déclare Vasarely." This quote was juxtaposed to the

127 The sixth segment is the one Buren chose to have reproduced in Les Écrits, 65. I have however noticed that the version reproduced by Buren does not coincide in many instances with the one I transcribed from the video copy.
128 L'Express is mostly center-right and espouses a pro-American, neo-liberal position.
a scene at the galerie Denise René, which brought Vasarely’s social
preoccupation down to a more realistic footing, 66: “T’as vu,
maintenant on peut avoir un multiple de Vasarely pour 500 000 balles,
c’est vachement bien.” This was followed by a scene of two persons
sitting on the terrasse of a café, 66: “Oui, mon vieux, la technologie
c’est l’art de demain, à la tienne.”

This segment, and the one near the beginning, listing the fantastical,
and derisory jobs opportunities for the young artist, represented in
fact the esthetic possibilities on display in the Parisian art scene,
positions all rejected, given the irony with which they are summarized,
by Buren. Thus, one more time, was trivialized both the idea of the
artist engagé (who works “in the streets”) and that of the artist
working within the parameters of technology. Victor Vasarely’s optic or
kinetic art was one of the most prominent exponents of the
“technological school,” proposing an art that suited modernist
architecture by offering decorative variations on simple, repeated
geometric shapes. The demand for an artist who could sell off garbage,
or embellish decrepitude referred most certainly to Jean Dubuffet’s use
of mundane, found materials. As for the artist engagé and the witness,
preferably also a poet, they referred to the two main options inherited
from the 1950s, either that of the abstract subjective artist, such as
Pierre Soulages or Jean Fautrier, that is, an abstract, informal (non
geometric) art which presented itself as the expression of an anguished
subjectivity, or the political, figurative or realist art, supported by
the Communist party up until the mid-1950s, whose most famous
representative was without a doubt André Fougeron. 129 Both of these
latter esthetic positions had lost legitimacy as a valid practice with
the advent of the 1960s, but the importance of the abstract subjective
artists still lingered, and in fact lingers up to this day, since Pierre
Soulages remains the best known French artist outside of France,
followed by… Buren. 130

A few scenes further on, a woman television commentator described, in
the manner of a horse race, the classification of artists at the Venice
Biennale: “On nous communique de Venise, 34e course: Arman le grand
favori est parti trop tôt. C’est Schöffer qui l’a emporté après avoir
mené sa course de façon très habile.” 131 And again the reader: “La
vitesse d’adaptation du tissu social interdit jusqu’alors au créateur
révolté de se maintenir longtemps en marge dès qu’il a du succès. Ce
succès est décidé par une cinquantaine d’individus placés à des postes
clés.” 132 The segment ended with the following violent diatribe: “La
panique s’est emparée d’un milieu qui n’avait pas besoin de ça pour être
ridicule. L’art est à la veille d’être mis à nu. C’est pourquoi on
cherche à la hâte des loques à lui mettre, afin de cacher ses tares. Le
circuit de l’art est méprisable. Pas davantage, cependant, que ceux qui,
après l’avoir créé, nourri, prolongé, cherchent à s’en défaire pour

129 Guilbaut, Serge, “Le Pouvoir de la décrépitude et la politique du
désengagement dans le Paris de l’après seconde guerre mondiale,” in
Voir, 52-99.
130 Michaud, Yves, La Crise de l’art contemporain (Paris: Presses
universitaires de France, 1997), 143.
131 Les Écrits, 67.
132 Same page.
porter ailleurs leur produits inadmissibles." In this rapid fire of lapidary sentences, the art milieu was described as being in a state of panic, fearing that the game would be uncovered and that the Emperor (le grand art révolutionnaire) would be seen as having no clothes. The circuit, i.e., the run of the galleries, institutions and events that make up the art world, was seen as despicable, but not as much as those that supported it and now were trying to take their "inadmissible" products out on the street.

Then comes the seventh segment, the most uncompromising depiction of the hopelessness of the art milieu, and which consisted in an imaginary card game where the cards were the actual "players" of the art world, that is, artists, past and present. Some of the artists were presented as cassures (those who break with tradition) and others as suiveurs (those who are followers), some as technocrates, amateurs, besogneux (industrious but without inspiration) and some as clowns. The cassures, it is important to notice, consisted of Matisse, Cézanne and Duchamp, (Yves Klein was momentarily proposed as a cassure, but was ultimately rejected) and the spectator was told that, depending on how they were distributed in the game, the rest of the artists that came after them were also redistributed in the game. All these artists were agitated as figures glued onto the cards, to be played in the art game: "paire de besogneux, paire de clowns, bibelotte et rebibelotte." Other comments heard during the card game were the rather cryptic: "Cassures. Rien à voir avec les suiveurs, au troisième degré, c'est la même chose," and the following pearl: "Un technocrate plus un ancien, ça n'a jamais fait une paire de modernes."

In Interruption, neither the themes nor the strategies typically associated with Buren were present, but, with mordant acuity, the targets of his activity were laid out, and, above all, the state of mind in which Buren was thinking about strategies for the distribution of his stripes are clarified. This state of mind, if one looks beyond the clownish fashion in which Buren laid out his ideas, was filled with discontent, and a desire to denounce. The strategy of using the strange invention that was the Scopitone (see Fig. 14) was in itself significant. The epitome of popular, consumer culture, the Scopitone, an early form of video clip presentation which combined the jukebox and Super-8 film, allowed café clients to see the pop singers of the time perform their hits or to see short extracts of movie stars such as Fernandel. By appropriating a device that was ubiquitous in the cafés and other public places in France, and by putting it in a gallery space, Buren intended to suggest the possibility for the artist to reach the general public outside of the traditional sites of exhibition. He also suggested the possibility of competing on the same level as the mass culture industry by borrowing its technology of distribution (however

---

133 This passage is not reproduced in the text Buren chose to include, and is thus quoted with the help of my notes.
134 "Bibelotte et rebibelotte" is a play of words based on the expression "belote et rebelote," used in the French game of cards called la belote, and the word bibelot, which means an object, usually kitsch, which has very little value. The whole play of words is meant to deride the art products of those who are merely industrious and without inspiration (the besogneux) and those who are just clowns.
crude a device the Scopitone may now appear to be), and to invade the consciousness of the individual through the same means favored by consumer culture, to fight off the “Martian invasion,” to borrow Smithson’s metaphor, by turning their exotic weapons against them. The fact that, in Interruption, it was the art world that was the object of derisive comments did not mean that Buren’s strategy was self-referential. Behind the art critics, the gallery system, the museum, and the various art world managers (gallery owners and critics) that were the obvious target one found constant references to the general public, museum guards, fishermen, bourgeoises, peasants, students, etc, and in the use of the Scopitone was visible the suggestion of a means to escape the sway of the art world managers in order to reach directly that elusive general public. What was pinpointed in the Scopitone scenes was the ritual of the art world, with its rules, its venues, its sites of consecration, its hierarchies, its fickleness akin to the world of fashion, but also the common folks, some of whom would, very healthily, stress with their ironic comments that they were not always buying the fluff.

With his stripes, Buren, as will be made clear in the next chapter, would enlarge his critique to the administered society as a whole, and on conventions as they affected urban space. But his critique of the various instances of the legitimation of the artist still played a crucial role. It was, in fact, intrinsic to the strategies of Buren that the realization of his projects necessitated close ties with the system of institutions that was put in place during the 1960s, developed during the 1970s, and which has continued to expand up to the present. Smithson, for his part, would seek collaboration with industry in ways that were to remain rarely exploited to this day, trying to establish for himself a role as artist consultant for industry. These facets of the strategies of Smithson and of Buren will be more fully explained in the next chapters. The model of the corporatist artist, who perpetuates a set of specialized, but traditional skills would disappear in favor of the expert consultant, meant to be included in an organizational structure that is implied by the public nature of their interventions. Buren and Smithson inhabited the image of the expert in very different ways. Buren claimed an expertise in the knowledge of how a given site speaks to us in historical, political and physical terms, while Smithson sought corporate involvement in large, technically imposing, public works type of projects. Both Smithson and Buren, in leaving the traditional, modernist occupation of tradespeople, had to adopt a form of organized production, managerial or bureaucratic in nature. Thus, while they pursued a critique of the effects of managerial capitalism and bureaucracy through their work, both artists, apparently ignoring their own critical attitude, would eventually take on the role of managers themselves.

Smithson and Buren both reflected upon the effects industry, particularly the combination of capitalism and industry, had had on humankind, subsuming human potentiality to the equation producer-product. In their work done in the sixties, Smithson and Buren directly engaged the question of how to pursue art making under such a regime. Their strategies for the pursuit of art were remarkable for the clarity with which they revealed how radical art making must become in order to address that central issue. However, they did not do this

---

alone, and their contributions have to be set inside the multiple movements and strategies that preceded or accompanied them, and this is the topic of the next chapter.
Fig. 8 Dan Graham, Row Housing Project, Bayonne, New Jersey, 1966.
Fig. 9 Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*, 1967, twenty-four black-and-white photographs from the original negatives taken with Instamatic camera, each 7.6 x 7.6cm. Clockwise from top left: a) "The Bridge Monument Showing Wooden Sidewalks," b) View of Piling of the Bridge, c) View of Highway Construction with Bulldozer, d) View of Concrete Abutment of Highway Construction, e) View of Concrete Abutment of Highway Construction, f) View of the Bridge.
Fig. 10  Robert Smithson, The Monuments of Passaic, 1967.
Clockwise from top left: a) View of White Edge from the
Highway Construction, b) "Monuments with Pontoons: The
Pumping Derrick," c) "The Fountain Monument: Bird's Eye
View," d) View of Graffitied Wall with "Passaic Boys are
Hell!," e) "The Fountain Monument: Side View," f) "The
Great Pipe Monument".
Fig. 11 Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*, 1967. Clockwise from top left: a) View of Manholes and Planks, b) View of Marker, c) View of Storage Tank, d) View of Shell Facade with Statue, e) View of Storage Tanks, f) View of Concrete Cube.
Fig. 12 Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic*, 1967. Clockwise from top left: a) View of Shell Facade with Statue, b) View of Pearl, c) View of Central Theater, d) "The Sand-Box Monument" or "The Desert," e) View of Parking Lot, f) View of Golden Coach Diner.
Fig. 13 Robert Smithson, *Negative Map Showing Region of the Monuments along the Passaic River*, 1967, negative photostat.
Fig. 14 Daniel Buren. Showing of **Interruption** at Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, 1969. In the middle is the Scopitone used.
Chapter 2 The Years 1966 and 1967

The Strange Materials of Smithson

To attempt even a simple listing of the vast selection of materials used by Smithson in his career would be a daunting task, and even more so if one were to try to accurately describe how they were used. To get an accurate evaluation of the vast range of materials envisaged by him, one has to take into account not only the materials used in realized works, but also those mentioned in projected works, in the making of models, and even the materials that have been the object of a simple listing. An early example of a simple listing, Pulverizations, 1966, (fig. 15) already offered a puzzling assortment of materials. The work consisted of a simple, standard size Photostat which listed the following raw materials as if the artist was eyeing a palette of textures: bituminous coal, tar, bog iron fragments, cement, blue coal, volcanic ash, sandstone fragments, glue, coarse sand, fine gravel. The explanatory legend that was included on the sheet informed the spectator that what was shown were five building foundation profiles, each using different materials in various proportions. Following the fashion of the time, the work appeared to be self-explanatory except for want of a clear motivation for showing five possible foundations of thirty feet square.

A model for an unrealized piece, identified by Robert Hobbs as the first proposal for an earthwork,¹ made the same year and now destroyed, Tar Pool and Gravel Pit (fig. 16) offered yet another combination of materials that could be used for a foundation. The piece repeated the same formal structure as Pulverizations. But whereas in Pulverizations the structure was represented abstractly as a profile cut traced with the help of symbols, Tar Pool and Gravel Pit was a three-dimensional model for one of the foundation profiles. In a rambling article entitled "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" published in 1968 in Artforum, Smithson commented upon Tar Pool and Gravel Pit, indicating that the work alluded to "the primal ooze," and that the tar evoked "a tertiary world of petroleum, asphalt, ozokerite, and bituminous agglomerations."² By "tertiary world" Smithson was alluding to the geological period that immediately precedes ours, but while that period can be characterized in many ways, for instance as the period of the rapid evolution of mammals or as when the Himalayas were formed, for Smithson it was remarkable for having contained four forms of oily hydrocarbons. As with Pulverizations, the reason for Smithson's interest in those particular materials is not readily understandable. It would be misleading, or rather mystifying since it does not explain anything, but adds an enigma to the mystery, to say that the novelty in the choice of materials by the artist consists in a turn toward the mineralogical in terms of materials, and the crystalline in terms of shapes, terms or themes which Smithson liked to use. It is more appropriate, in the context of this thesis, to see an early connection between those pieces and the theme of the highway infrastructure. The Photostat Pulverizations named a few hydrocarbons which were combined with rocks to form a foundation. In the same manner, the model Tar Pool and Gravel Pit offered another variant of foundations, but this time it was the

²Same page.
standard combination of materials used for road paving since the combination of tar and gravel constitutes most of the surface of NorthAmerican highways. While the tar pit in Smithson’s model can recall the trap in which prehistoric animals fell, its resemblance to mere road surfacing should not be ignored. In this sense, Smithson’s work took on a metaphorical extension that was unlike, in spirit, the work of his minimalist contemporaries who stressed literalness above all. That metaphorical extension meant that early in his career Smithson was already pinpointing an infrastructure, the highway system, which, it should be remembered, was at its apogee in the America of the 1960s.

The theme of transportation infrastructures was again present in the series of Proposals for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport (Tippetts, Abbott, McCarthy & Stratton, Architects and Engineers) made in 1966-67. In this unrealized work one could see prefigured not only the Nonsites which would appear in 1968 and which will be discussed in the next chapter, but also the later Earthworks. The project showed also how complex, multifarious and interrelated was Smithson’s conception of materials. Smithson was thinking of making a work which would be seen from airplanes only, as a distraction for those captive in the flow of air traffic. Smithson proposed various solutions to the problem of making this aerial artwork. It was first conceived as a pavement in the form of repeated square shapes similar to the shape of Tar Pool and Gravel Pit (with the exception that, in Tar Pool and Gravel Pit, the elements for paving remain unblended) and arranged in a minimalist fashion in an arithmetic progression. Then Smithson thought of a series of square shapes laid out in a grid pattern, made up of broken glass lit from underneath, and poetically entitled “Earth Windows.” Another version, of 1967, of the project consisted of an artificial pool forming a double spiral jetty, one made of earth and one of water, and titled “Clear Zone”: Spiral Reflecting Pool. It was, as its title suggests, an early use of the mirror to provoke an effect of displacement. Displacement is an effect for which Smithson would mostly use mirrors, but in this case and in the case of two of his three realized earthworks (two more jetties), water was chosen as a mirroring surface and as a means of displacement. Both water and mirror were meant to be a medium through which a transport of some kind - a displacement - was effectuated, turning the mirrors or the water into modes of “virtual transportation.” The interchangeability of water and mirror was shown with the last maquette for the project, Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport: Aerial Map, which was in fact a finished work executed in Smithson’s quasi-minimalist fashion which he had not yet abandoned. It was a mural work in the shape of a spiral constituted of identical triangular mirrors of decreasing size as the spiral “unfolded” inwardly. In this aerial map, the parallel between the displacement caused by the use of mirrors and the allusion to “real” transport was made clear when one realized that the spiral, while actually a mural work, was meant to be seen as if it were an aerial work: then the mirroring effect, in its metaphorical usage as a form of transport, “mirrored” the activity of the observer, which in this case consisted in the passengers of an airplane, themselves in the process of being “displaced” from one airport to another. There was in Smithson’s work a tendency to consider materials as interchangeable. This

---

3Same page.
4Gyrostatics, 1968, one of Smithson’s most awkward looking sculptures, is another example of a similarly conceived spiral.
This interchangeability of materials was exemplified in Aerial Map: Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, 1967 (fig. 17) by the fact that while the model was made of mirror, the realized piece consisted of triangles made of concrete. The paving, and even the broken glass because of its flat expanse in a grid structure, recalled the field of transportation and its infrastructures, especially since the aerial work was only meant to be seen from an airplane and not walked upon. Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, Wandering Earth Mounds and Gravel Paths, 1967 (fig. 18) shared with the other projects the characteristic of representing a mode of transportation, this time through the representation of paths made out of gravel, the simplest of foundations profiles and the most primitive infrastructure of transportation and circulation. Finally, the sheer size of the project meant to accompany landing strips of 11,000 and 14,000 feet long, accentuated the parallel between the various proposals of Smithson and the notion of an infrastructure of transportation.

Smithson commented on his participation in that project in a text entitled “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site” published in Artforum in June 1967. The text, among pretentious pronouncements such as “What is needed is an esthetic method that brings together anthropology and linguistics in terms of buildings” presented a series of musings on the new meaning of aircraft transportation inspired by his work with Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton as artist consultant in the Dallas-Fort Worth air terminal project. The enthusiasm with which Smithson named the firm for which he worked, the pride with which he displayed his new title of artist consultant to the point of putting it in brackets, indicated an early interest in collaborating with industry. This could be in turn interpreted as a young man’s desire to find a place in society, but it will be shown in conclusion that the temptation to work with industry and to be counted among its managerial structure is something Smithson felt throughout his career. Another indication of his desire to find a place in the world of industry could be found in the way Smithson gorged himself with technical details having to do with infrastructures and with the preliminary steps involved in mapping the terrain such as aerial surveying, boundary locations, measuring of elevations, and, above all, in his fascination for the gigantism of the project he was asked to participate in, and which he expressed by tediously compiling the square footage necessitated by various airline companies:

This terminal area of approximately 600 acres is enclosed by a two-way taxi system approximately 9000 feet in length by 3000 feet in width. This inscrutable terminal exceeds and rejects all termination. The following “spaces” have been engendered by the individual airlines:

5Hobbs, Robert Smithson: Sculpture, 77.
6For example Terminal: Plans for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, 1966, photostat. Ibid., 80.
7Writings of Robert Smithson, 41-46.
8Ibid., 46.
TERMINAL BUILDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIRLINES</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>61,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braniff</td>
<td>100,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>34,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>70,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>13,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexicana</td>
<td>3,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-Texas</td>
<td>17,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>13,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This litany of aerial transportation companies and their terminal, complete with the strange addition of all the square footage put together - 329,900 square feet - showed an enthusiastic reaction to the dizzying dimensions that had to be contemplated. As if drunk with technical wonder, Smithson would then mention the Secor surveying satellite,\(^9\) with which he was so taken, in fact, that his text turned into an advertisement sheet: “This 45-pound object enables surveyors to tie together land masses separated by more than 2000 miles of land or water, or roughly the distance between the US mainland and Hawaii. It increases the capability of the geodetic surveying program.”\(^10\) The mention of the Secor satellite, in the mid-1960s, had a significance of its own. It was in 1965 that the first communications satellite conceived exclusively for commercial use was launched in the United States.\(^11\) Was Smithson suggesting the birth of another infrastructure built, fantastically, in space?

In comparison to the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport project, a work like Terminal (fig. 19) executed in 1966 shows that, if Smithson’s contemporaneous, quasi-minimalist production was inspired by the same theme, the results were uninteresting and traditional. Sharing only part of the title and the time of its conception with the work on the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport project, and consisting in a bilateral diminuendo of the same polyhedral shape, Terminal was an amazingly incongruous object at a time that saw many incongruities. Despite his generosity as an interpreter of Smithson’s work, Hobbs, could not but qualify Terminal in the negative: “Terminal is a terminus, an end zone, a point of stasis. It is reductive art that is cool to the point of freezing. Built on crystalline ideas, it cloaks itself, turns inward, and assumes the role of deadpan repetitiveness.”\(^12\)

During the years 1966-1968, Smithson was gradually losing interest in making Minimalist sculptures and, in spurts and hesitations, was turning toward his first major works, the Nonsites (which will be dealt with in the next chapter). Smithson’s Minimalist production was not a

---

\(^9\)Ibid., 44, 45.
\(^10\)Ibid., 42.
\(^11\)Ibid., 42.
\(^12\)Evans, John V., “New Satellites for Personal Communications,” *Scientific American* 278, no. 4 (April 1998), 71.
\(^13\)Writings of Robert Smithson, 79.
successful one. This is the reason Hobbs talks in fact of Smithson’s “quasi-minimalist” works. The work often appeared gauche or melodramatic compared to the coolness of Judd or Flavin, mainly because it lacked, or to say it in a more neutral way, because it diverged from, the tendency towards symmetry and stasis characteristic of the style. Instead, Smithson offered a Minimalism with an excess, showing that he did not feel at home in the narrow parameters of that style. The minimalist works of Smithson are mostly interesting in hindsight, because they reveal at the same time what the artist was trying to escape as much as what he was trying to impose. Does the uneasiness displayed by Smithson in his pseudo Minimalist works imply a form of criticism? As Anna Chave said, Minimalism could be seen, by its borrowing of industrial materials and its very restrained vocabulary of simple, geometric and repetitive forms, as adopting, even celebrating the techno industrial ethics. The Minimalist artists would thus be inhabiting the dominant ideology of their time, the belief in the power of the techno industrial complex to affect positive changes in society, without critical distance. This lack of critical distance would be visible not only in the way the Minimalists’ objects could be interpreted as a celebration of the mass produced object, like Pop art only in a less flamboyant form, but also in the sheer muteness of the art that resulted from such a restrained vocabulary of forms. Minimal art was mute about the major political events that were taking place at the time: the Vietnam War, the Watts riots, and thus, for Chave, the deadpan character of the Minimalist object made it impossible to have a political stance except one of tacit approval.

Chave, after Rose and Lippard, regretted the negativism and the reductivism of the minimalists, and lamented the fact that minimalist art negated “everything the public associated with or expected from works of art, including a sense of moral or spiritual uplift.” Thus, according to Chave, Minimalism would be the negation of a critical voice and the manifestation of an authoritarian esthetics. In saying this Chave herself engaged in a dangerous, prescriptive and authoritarian esthetic. An inquiry into the theory of the Frankfurt School could have suggested a different interpretation of Minimalism than that proposed by Chave. This overview is surprising since Chave did quote the


15 Ibid., 129: “With Minimalism generally, the art’s political moment remains implicit largely in its act of negation; it negated, that is, almost everything the public associated with or expected from works of art, including a sense of moral and spiritual uplift. Some female critics, especially, pointed (though not in a censorious way) to the violence implicit in the Minimalists’ categorical refusal of the humanist mission of art: “a negative art of denial and renunciation” and a “rejective art,” Barbara Rose and Lucy Lippard, respectively, dubbed it in 1965, while Annette Michelson suggested in 1967 that negation was the “notion, philosophical in character, ... animating [this] contemporary esthetic.”
Theodore Adorno of the Aesthetic Theory in defense of the artists: "Disenfranchised by an independently evolving technology, the subject raises its disenfranchisement to the level of consciousness, one might almost say to the level of a programme for artistic production." The negation at work in Minimalism was not, as Chave interpreted it, a negation of the possibility of being critical, it was rather a negation of the false promises of an industrial, mass produced culture. The function of negation of autonomous art was formulated early on by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in Dialectic of Enlightenment. To negate industrial culture and its false promises of reconciliation with society, art had to take refuge in its autonomy. This is exactly what Minimalist art did when it showed objects involving industrial materials, but devoid of any use value. Chave herself intuited the (proper) workings of negation at work in the reception of minimalist works:

Whereas Pop Art initially caused a collective shudder of distaste within the intelligentsia while being rapidly embraced by the public at large, Minimalism (in the same period) generally garnered toleration, at the least, from the cognoscenti, and either deep skepticism or unmitigated loathing from the public at large. That very loathing could be construed as a sign of this art at work, however, for what disturbs viewers most about Minimalist art may be what disturbs them about their own lives and times, as the face it projects is the society's blankest, steeliest face; the impersonal face of technology, industry, and commerce.

The muteness that Chave perceived in Minimal art was perhaps also seen by Smithson, and would explain why his contemporaneous production did not respect the main tenets of the style. From the start of his artistic career, Smithson seemed to have been interested in injecting into his work content external to formal preoccupations. In 1962, he would present at the Richard Castellane Gallery in New York, under the collective title "Assemblages," a series of works (fig. 20) of which only photographs remain. Among several scientific diagrams, a stuffed pigeon and some paintings such as Blue Chemical, 1962, there was Ammonium Hydroxide, an assemblage incorporating comprising a painting with the words "ammonium hydroxide" which a shelf filled with of jars filled with the said liquid, a chemical mixture related to those used for domestic and industrial cleaning detergents, a series of jars titled Biological Specimens in which biological specimens were being preserved, sponges or plants labeled with fake Latin names such as "Acutiffrons Papillae, Arborea Dipus" or "Protolotos Terebellidae, Simythus Gouldii," and numbered: UX-92, UX-93, etc. Each jar carried the signature of Smithson as well as the year it was made, 1962. In this exhibition are found several premieres in the context of Smithson's own art. Only with the first Nonsites will Smithson reach again a similar level of innovation. These "works-in-a-jar" were radically new for

16Ibid., 119.
18Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 130.
19Professor O'Brian has brought to my attention the fact that these latin words are pure creations by Smithson, who would mimic the scientific tradition of giving latin names to natural specimens.
several reasons. Their content did not spring forth from the mind (or the unconscious) of Smithson in the classic gesture of the Abstract Expressionist artist, but, like the Pop artist or the Minimalist artist, content was "found," outside the studio. Unlike the works of the Pop and Minimalist artists, however, the specimens were not, or did not recall manufactured products. Contrary to the Pop art object, there seemed to be an aura of "naturalness" to the samples even if the medium in which they were enclosed - the chemical soup - was artificial. The specimens themselves were at the antipodes of the glistening and attractive Pop object. They were not serial, mass manufactured objects, the jars were meant on the contrary to contain singular objects even if, by being samples, they implied the multitude which they represented in its absence. Also, far from being a celebration of consumerism, those specimens talked about death in the most powerful manner possible. With these works, Smithson suggested for the first time the idea of transport, of a gathering of specimens to make an art piece, since the samples had to be collected from somewhere outside of the studio and brought back. As well, such a collection of specimens implied corollary activities that were to become a trademark of Smithson's work: a survey to find out where the samples were, their extraction from their natural habitat, and then their transportation to an urban - as opposed to a natural - world which the gallery was meant to represent. The works constituted in fact early earthworks, albeit very liquefied ones, since the environment in which the vegetal specimens were bathed was reminiscent of the marsh.

Finally, it was the first time that ecological concerns could be implied in a work of Smithson. In this association between botany and the chemical industry, it is difficult not to see echoes of the writings of Rachel Carson, who, probably more than any other ecologist, has contributed to making ecological concerns known to the American public at large. Carson's main concern was the dangerous effects of the use of artificial substances on the natural environment. Silent Spring was published the same year Smithson showed at Richard Castellane, and its publication had been preceded by numerous extracts in The New Yorker. The book contained a passage for which Smithson's work could be an illustration:

The poison may also be passed on from mother to offspring. Insecticide residues have been recovered from human milk in samples tested by Food and Drug Administration scientists. This means that the breastfed human infant is receiving small but regular additions to the load of toxic chemicals building up in his body. It is by no means his first exposure, however: there is good reason to believe this begins while he is still in the womb. In experimental animals the chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticides freely cross the barrier of the placenta, the traditional protective shield between the embryo and harmful substances in the mother's body.20

Was it this baby, bathing inside the maternal womb and already submitted to toxic artificial chemical substances, that Smithson wanted to represent metaphorically in a series of biological specimens floating in ammoniac rather than in amniotic liquid? Smithson, however, would not continue in this vein, and, after having done nothing much between the

20Carson, Silent Spring, 31.
years 1962-1965, showed at the Dwan Gallery in 1965-1966 works that were very different in nature, the start of an uncomfortable relationship with Minimalism.

The Strange Conventions of Buren

There could not be a greater contrast to Smithson's work in the mid-1960s than Buren's provocative attacks on the institutional theater of the Parisian art world of the time. While Smithson expressed his fascination with foundation profiles and the gigantism of airport terminals, Buren attempted to subvert the conventions of a rapidly developing institutional network destined to showcase a new generation of French artists.

Buren has qualified the years 1965 and 1966 in Paris as a cultural desert. This is only a partial truth. At the level of institutions, there were several outlets for artists, young and old, to show their works to a large public. The Salon de mai, founded in 1943, the Salon des réalités nouvelles, founded in 1946, the Salon de la jeune peinture, 1950, and the Salon des peintres témoins de leur temps, in 1951, provided an early network. In 1959, the ministère des Affaires culturelles was created, and in the same year the first Biennale de Paris, devoted exclusively to young artists, showed Rauschenberg, Tinguely, Agam and Klein. This Biennale marked the beginning of the end of the French fixation on the École de Paris. In 1961, the Biennale showed Arman and the Nouveaux Réalistes as well as English Pop art; in 1963, it showed a wrapped motorcycle by Christo and the painting of Nouvelle Figuration painter Gilles Aillaud; in 1965, it showed Titus-Carmel, Le Gac, Raynaud and awarded prizes to Velickovic and Buren; in 1967, a group composed of Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni made their first subversive gesture within the institutional frame of the Biennale.

The installments of the Biennale de Paris for the years 1965 and 1967 illuminate the institutional context in which Buren made his first interventions, and provide some explanations for his motives. These two Paris Biennales form a precise barometer of the mounting pressure exercised by a younger generation of artists on the French art scene and reveal not a hostile institution, but one more than willing to accommodate them. Far from receiving a hostile reception, these young artists, as the records from the Biennales show, succeeded in attracting the attention of State institutions who seemed eager to embrace anything modern, and which manifested a calculated will not to offend anyone, an attitude characteristic of such large endeavors. They reveal clearly the generational push of the baby boomers in the many categories of prizes they offered, obviously in order to accommodate the growing numbers of would-be professional artists. In the catalogue of the Quatrième Biennale de Paris held at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris in 1965, one could find in the introduction to the selection

21Buren, Propos délibérés, 36.
22Monnier, Des Beaux-Arts aux arts plastiques, 250.
23Ibid., 259.
24Ibid., 271.
25Same page.
26Ibid., 272-273.
representing French art, the frank admission that the selection of this year has as its principal goal to accept artists in their twenties, and not artists in their mid-1930s as had been the custom in the previous Biennales. The Fourth Biennale made sure everybody would have a voice and everybody would have a place. In the section entitled "Les jeunes critiques ont choisi," four art critics, all less than thirty-five years old, chose eight artists (including Pierre Buraglio and François Rouan); the section "Les jeunes artistes ont retenu," composed of a jury of twelve artists, chose more than a hundred artists showing nearly two hundred works. This generous selection was topped by additions from the Conseil d'Administration de la Biennale (which added 77 artists), by a selection from the Casinos involved in the Biennale (two dozen more artists), by artists who had been involved in the previous Biennale as jury members and who were thus automatically invited to show their work in this one, and through several smaller categories of selection. That many of those artists (in fact all those coming from the selection made by the young artists themselves) were to become the artists one now associates with the last three decades of French art production shows how significant was, in retrospect, that edition of the Biennale. At that Biennale, Buren showed Peinture no 3, 1965, (peinture Ripolin).

This opening to a younger generation of artists can be explained by at least two factors. First the political will of the de Gaulle regime to encourage creation, and the important influence of André Malraux, the first to head the ministère des Affaires culturelles, and who was particularly interested in the patronage of the visual arts and in contemporary experiments. In the early years of his mandate, there would be the creation of the Biennale de Paris (in 1959), the Centre national des arts plastiques, and an important increase in State sponsoring of the arts. The budget devoted to culture remained

27 Quatrième Biennale de Paris, Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des jeunes artistes (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1965), 129, the text is signed by Jacques Lassaigne: "Lors des premières expositions, on se penchait de préférence sur les peintres les plus proches de la limite fatidique des 35 ans. On s’appliquait à les exposer tant qu’il en était encore temps, et on trouvait cela rassurant. Maintenant on se passionne pour les plus jeunes, on admet sans vaines craintes les nouveautés qu’ils proposent."

28 Ibid., 131. These critics are: M. Jean-Jacques Leveque, Mlle Jeanine Lipsi, Mme Marie-Thérèse Maugis, M. Raoul-Jean Moulin, and all were “designés par le Syndicat Professionnel des Critiques d’Art” (same page).

29 Same page. The artists are: Bernard Alleaume, Eduardo Arroyo, Claude Beaujour, Pierre Blanchard, Jean Criton, Alain Dufour, Guy Fossier, Mlle Caroline Lee, Mme Delisle-Mollien, Pierre-Guy Moreels, Richard Prudhomme, Michel Vionnet.

30 Ibid., 148. Among those categories, the one titled “Travaux d’équipe” offered interesting and forward-looking proposals such as “Action sur un Bidonville,” which consisted in the organization of activities meant at helping the re-insertion of the marginals in French society.

31 Among the artists included were Boltanski, Buren, Kermarrec, Le Gac, Parmentier, Raynaud, Stampfli, Titus-Carmel, Toroni, Venet.

32 Monnier, Des Beaux-Arts aux arts plastiques, 261-264.

33 Ibid., 264.
nevertheless modest throughout the 1960s. The first Biennale de Paris had already offered a democratization of the selection process: twenty-three artists had been chosen by young critics, sixty more by a jury composed of ten young artists and a final fifty-five artists chosen by the conseil d'administration. In that first Biennale was developed the idea, which would remain a constant in the subsequent Biennales, of letting young critics and artists play an important role in the selection process. Opening the doors to young creators by an open process of selection would insure that the institution of the Biennale would be a huge popular success. In doing this, the government was trying to compensate for the absence of a private network of galleries willing to support the group of artists that will come to form the generation of the 1960s, and reaffirm French greatness both in terms of national pride and international recognition. The Biennale de Paris had been created right on the heels of the scandal of the 1958 edition of the Venice Biennale where, for the first time since 1946, it was not a French artist who had received the prize. This insult was to be followed, in the 1960 edition of the Venice Biennale, by a severe critique of the French selection by the Italian critics.

Buren's interventions in the institution of the Parisian art world had as his first targets the Salon de la jeune peinture and the Fifth edition of the Biennale de Paris. He was not alone, and intervened as part of a group of four artists: with him were Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni, a group that would later be nicknamed B.M.P.T. by the critics. The group's actions took place between January and September 1967. The fact that Buren chose to intervene as a member of a group does not single him out in the French art world of the period. In addition to other groups who had in previous years gained recognition, such as the Nouveaux Réalistes and the Nouvelle Figuration for example, there was, starting at least with the Cinquième Biennale de Paris, a veritable mania for group movements. In the Quatrième Biennale, groups had been dealt with in the section "Travaux d'équipes" and seemed more like spontaneous groupings of artists for a specific project than movements with a definite esthetic. In the Cinquième Biennale, the section devoted to groups was considerably more developed and included the group Automat, which offered a positive image of the machine; the group Figuration Narrative, which had first exhibited collectively with the title "Nouvelle Figuration" and was composed here of Arroyo, Buri, Geissler, Klasen, Malaval, Recalcati (the presentation

34 Ibid., 265.
36 Same page.
37 Monnier, Des Beaux-Arts aux arts plastiques, 264.
38 The group will exist for less than a year, from December 1966 to September 1967. The naming of the group only by the initials of the last name of the four artists is not the idea of the artists themselves. See on this the denegation of Daniel Buren and Michel Parmentier in Propos délibérés, 16-17.
40 Ibid., 174. In the statement for the catalogue the group says that it tries to "intégrer mouvement réel et figuration."
text, however, warned the reader that the group was in a dissociative phase);\textsuperscript{41} the Groupe Lettriste, already present at the last Biennale; the Groupe Cinétique; and Buren (now a two-timer at the Biennale), Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, all four being presented in the catalogue with a text by the critic Michel Claura. Buren presented 1967 (\textit{peinture, 250 x 250}), Mosset, 1967 (\textit{peinture, 250 x 250}), Parmentier 1967 (\textit{peinture, 250 x 250}), Toroni, 1967 (\textit{peinture, 250 x 250}), and Claura’s text emphasized the similarity between the works of the four artists: “Toutes les toiles de Buren - et il en est de même pour celles de Mosset, pour celles de Parmentier, pour celles de Toroni - sont identiques. Il n'y a plus de notion de perfectibilité.”\textsuperscript{42}

The group was active through four public Manifestations. The first two Manifestations took place in January 1967 in the context of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture. These manifestations revealed how the group subverted conventions and reacted to a highly charged political context. The political intention of the group at the time was to avoid siding with a particular political party, or militating in favor of a particular cause.\textsuperscript{43} The group’s refusal to carry a political message was also in reaction to the painters from the Nouvelle Figuration, in particular Aillaud, Arroyo, Cueco and Buraglio, who had strong affinities with the Communist party, and who had progressively taken control of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture since 1963,\textsuperscript{44} and, for that year’s edition, had come up with the idea of dedicating not only their works, but, in a prescriptive move affecting also the other artists, the whole room to the Vietcong.\textsuperscript{45} The room was called the “green room” since the bizarre requirement of this edition of the Salon was that all the works shown would use green. This imposition of a political theme was refused by Buren and the three other artists. Buren argued later that their gesture was not a refusal of that particular political theme but a refusal of art engaged in general since, at a time when the artists and the spectators for the contemporary arts were unanimously on the left and automatically against the war in Vietnam, all that such a political stance would do would be to give good conscience to all.\textsuperscript{46}

At the Salon, a tract by Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni was distributed to the spectators stressing the views of the group on political art in terms of a shocking refusal to “get involved” over such issues as the Vietnam war. Their indifference was motivated by the desire to appear neutral in their practice as artists (and thus to take their distance from the Nouvelle Figuration group). This neutrality called for the rejection of the category “painter,” too much associated with the idea of a trade, and also the refusal to refer to extraneous subject matter such as the daily experience of the artist, or the war in Vietnam. Emitted on January 1, 1967, the statement (fig. 21), which served as the invitation to their second manifestation to be held on January 3, 1967, under the institutional aegis of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, ended in the following manner: “Puisque peindre c’est peindre

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 176-177.  
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 175.  
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Propos délibérés}, 41.  
\textsuperscript{44}Millet, \textit{L'Art contemporain en France}, 68.  
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Propos délibérés}, 41-42.  
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 43.
en fonction de l'esthétisme, des fleurs, des femmes, de l'érotisme, de l'environnement quotidien, de l'art, de dada, de la psychanalyse, de la guerre au Viet-Nam. NOUS NE SOMMES PAS PEINTRES." 47 That they were not painters, was also to be interpreted, as has been already remarked, that they were not painters like the group from the Nouvelle Figuration.

The second manifestation (figs. 22 and 24 a) was held on the appointed date, and it was accompanied by an open letter, entitled "Lettre contre les salons," (fig. 23) which announced that at 6 PM exactly Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni would quit the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, a gesture not geared toward that particular Salon, but directed to all the Salons whichever they may be: "Cette 2e manifestation, bien qu'apparemment orientée contre ce Salon, n'en définit pas moins, de façon irréversible, notre attitude envers tous les Salons quels qu'ils soient." 48 Institutions such as the Salon were obsolete, says the letter, and recalled the nineteenth-century Salons, while the true Salons of the twentieth century were that of the automobile or of domestic appliances. They were obsolete since they showed painting, and painting was by vocation a reactionary enterprise. 49 So Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni announced through this letter that from now on they would dissociate themselves with all Parisian Salons. This condemnation of the very institution that made possible their manifestation was an early, and very critical form of "in situ" intervention which Buren was to exploit in his subsequent, personal works. The context of the intervention, the Salon itself as an institution, an art world ritual, situated the interventions of the four artists in the realm of conventions and rules, inside the social and political game of positioning that regulated the Parisian art world. In such actions, the sole purpose of the group was to disrupt the functioning of the event, a gesture of disruption very close in spirit to that of the Situationists. 50 It is difficult to determine the nature of the influence of the Situationists on the work done by Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni in the year 1967. There is in both "movements" the same desire to disrupt the "spectacle" and the same search for means to do so through provocative tactics. The year 1967 is of course the year of the publication of Guy Debord's La Société du spectacle, but it is difficult to measure the impact of such a publication, and there is very little sign that the two "groups" even met. 51 The main thesis of the Situationists could certainly find an echo in the gestures of disruption.

48 Ibid., 23.
49 Same page: "Parce que, surtout, ces Salons montrent de la Peinture et que la Peinture, jusqu'à preuve du contraire, est par vocation objectivement réactionnaire."
50 Ibid., 42.
51 They might have met, if we consider the following exchange between Anne Baldassari and Parmentier and Toroni in Propos délibérés, 43: "Anne Baldassari: Quels rapports avez-vous entretenus avec les Situationnistes? "Michel Parmentier: On ne connaissait que quelques textes d'eux; nous ne les fréquentions pas. On pense que la branche de Strasbourg a essayé de nous contacter au moment de notre équipé à quatre, mais ils ne se sont pas présentés... "Daniel Buren: Pas nommément. Ils se sont présentés comme des "étudiants de Strasbourg" mais leurs questions étaient très marquées. On a pu se tromper, cependant on était sûrs et certains qu'ils étaient Situs."
of the Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni group who were intent on refusing the neat packaging of "French creativity" that the events of the Salon and of the Biennale represented.

At their third manifestation, held on 2 June 1967 at the Musée des Arts décoratifs (fig. 24 b) spectators were invited to an event held at a theater, and where they had to pay to get in. Once inside, the spectators waited for about an hour while nothing happened. There was nothing to see except four unsigned paintings visible on the stage from the beginning. After a wait of forty-five minutes, a tract entitled "Il ne s’agissait évidemment que de regarder des toiles de Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni" (fig. 25) was distributed, explaining to the public that the event they had been waiting for had already happened since "it consisted evidently in the simple act of looking" at those paintings. Each member of the group had placed one painting executed in his "signature" style: Parmentier, horizontal bands of paint obtained through folding the fabric; Toroni, the imprint of a brush of a given size onto a canvas, in staggered rows; Mosset, a circle on canvas; and Buren who stretched his striped fabric onto a frame, and painted the two "white," bare canvas bands white. Each member of the group had made a painting of the same size as the others (two meters and a half squared). The painting by Buren had red stripes on a white background.

At the fourth manifestation, the last where all four would participate together, held at the Cinquième Biennale de Paris in September 1967, four big canvases were displayed near the bar, and were accompanied by a didactic text and a slide show of approximatively fifty slides showing an array of unrelated images - animals, pin-up models, the Pope - while a tape recorder played at high volume a text synchronized with images, and complete with a light show projected onto the paintings. The text was constituted of sentences such as: "L'art est illusion de dépaysement, illusion de liberté... illusion de sacré... Pas la peinture de Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni... L'art est distraction, l'art est faux. La peinture commence avec Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni." And also: "Buren, Mosset, Toroni, Parmentier vous conseillent de devenir intelligents." The group then took the work out of the exhibition, leaving a banner that said: "Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni n'exposent pas."

The artists then left the room empty for the rest of the exhibition, thus being at the same time there, but not there. For Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni, however, the aim was solely to intervene, as artists, inside the world of art. The strategy used by the group was to provoke through outrageous, spectacular gestures. If the strategy of Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni employed so readily the route of the "sucès de scandale," it was partly because there had been numerous successful precedents in France after the effort of Yves

---

52 Ibid., 42.
53 Details found in Baldassari, Daniel Buren, Entrevue, 22.
54 Millet, L'Art contemporain en France, 123. The quotations of the recorded statements of Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni are taken from Millet's book.
55 Baldassari, Daniel Buren, Entrevue, 21.
56 Same page.
57 Propos délibérés, 44.
58 Propos délibérés, 20.
Klein and other members of the Nouveaux Réalistes group to draw public attention to their works. Klein's search for publicity was especially shameless. His exhibition at the Gallery Iris Clert in 1958 of... nothing, entitled "Le Vide," attracted 2,000 people who had to pass through two Republican guards, and was finally closed by firemen and the police, revealing him as a master of the publicity stunt. The refusal of Buren, Moroni, Parmentier and Toroni to simply produce and present objects of art for contemplation and subsequently to use events as occasions to provoke fitted in the logic of Situationist theory. They refused to be considered as just another product to be consumed in a society that had transformed everything into an object of consumption - the position of the Situationists, as summarized by a sympathetic commentator, was the following: "The situationists argued that these alienated relations of production are now disseminated throughout capitalist society. Leisure, culture, art, information, entertainment, knowledge, the most personal and radical of gestures, and every conceivable aspect of life is reproduced as a commodity: packaged and sold back to the consumer." Other artists also refused to be producers of commodities at the Cinquième Biennale. For instance, in an extraordinary gesture, Pommereulle, Erro and Stämpfli, rather than exhibiting paintings, presented together films by Lang, Godard, Eisenstein and others under the title "La Peinture au complet." That a critical gaze toward the mass produced object of consumption was possible since the early 1960s is demonstrated by an exhibition entitled "L'Objet" presented in 1962 at the Musée des arts décoratifs where the mandate given to artists was to transform ordinary objects. The refusal of the commodity motivated the following affirmation by Buren that it was not the institution per se that he was criticizing in his work, but the conditions that allow such institutions as the museum to exist, that is, the commodity. Such a statement confirmed that his preoccupations at the time were close to that of the Situationists: "Ainsi, la mise en cause de l'institution muséale que l'on a associée à mon travail, est une interprétation de celui-ci parmi d'autres, et sans doute la plus superficielle. La mise en cause que je vise est celle, plus globale, du produit. Car c'est le produit qui fait que les choses évoluent ou se sclérosent, C'est le produit qui fait se perpéter les rouages d'un certain système muséal et c'est encore le produit qui peut les transformer. Le cadre spatial dans lequel tout ceci se place est secondaire. C'est le produit qui fait le Musée que je critique." In an exhibition held in December, 1967 at the Galerie J, three of the original four, Buren, Mosset, Toroni showed their paintings plus one each artist had painted in the manner of the other two artists, which they each signed under their own name. Thus Buren signed his work and

---

59 See Yves Klein (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1983), especially the text by Thomas McEvilley, "Yves Klein conquistador du vide."
61 Millet, Art en France, 120.
62 Ibid., 12.
63 Propos délibérés, 63.
one work painted in the style of Mosset and one in the style of Toroni, and vice versa. This dispossession of one’s own work accompanied by the assumption of the work of the other artists undermined radically the notion of author to the profit of the work itself, which thus gained autonomy from its author. For the occasion, Claura, a devoted supporter of the group, would write: “La peinture de Buren, Mosset, Toroni EST. Ne faisant qu’être, elle est totalement détachée de celui qui l’a créée. Ne faisant qu’être, n’importe qui la faisant peut la revendiquer.” In this gesture, the goal seemed to have been to undermine, after having undermined the institution, the other pole of the existence of the work of art, that is, the author. Ideas about the death of the author had already been emitted by French theorists such as Roland Barthes whose *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*, published in 1953, contained at least two themes that were present in the discourse of Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni: the neutrality of the text vis-à-vis its author and the context of reception, and the promotion of an active reader - to the detriment of the author considered as inessential - in the process of signification. Of all the authors associated with French theory, Barthes is perhaps the one most susceptible of having been “heard” by the artists of the group, not perhaps for *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*, a very specialized treatise, but for *Mythologies*, 1957, which had more of a popular impact since its approach was more sociological and less semiotic or psychoanalytic in spirit. *Mythologies* tried to analyze various facets of modernity, some linked to consumerism, as they reflected unacknowledged ideological beliefs. These ideas were certainly finding an echo in the texts produced by the “B.M.P.T.” group, however the connection has not been mentioned by them. The critique of the signature by Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni targeted abstract subjective art and its emphasis on expressivity as the authentic outpouring of the artist onto the canvas. After criticizing engagé art, the group also criticized intimate, subjective art, and was thus trying to negotiate for itself a very narrow path.

The environment that fed Buren’s strategic thinking was miles apart from Smithson’s. The conditions, physical or social, in which both artists developed their thinking had a profound, and quite distinctive, influence on them. They had not yet, however, “come out,” that is, they each had not yet left the inner space of the institution, gallery or museum, which they were nevertheless criticizing each according to their own terms. The outside, the suburbs of New Jersey and its numerous quarries for Smithson, the streets of Paris for Buren would be investigated in the next year, 1968. This will be the subject of the next chapter. It is also clear that by the year 1967 these two artists still did not know of each other’s work, nor, for that matter, were they aware of a commonality of critical interest among several artists from several parts of the Western world. This would come also in the year 1968 and become more and more an international reality as the Seventies took hold. Cross-Atlantic contacts did exist throughout the late 1950s and the 1960s, however, before the late 1960s and until 1968 and 1969 to be more precise, they were punctual, sporadic and witnessed by few. Those early contacts did not come to the knowledge of Smithson or Buren, who, in all probability, became conscious of an international movement, or sensibility, only late in the year 1968. This being said, Paris was,

---

64 An explanatory text by Michel Claura accompanied the exhibition and is reproduced in *Propos délibérés*, 152.
65 Same page.
by modernist tradition, the meeting place of artists from numerous countries who had come to bathe in the spirit of the École de Paris, and for the generation of younger artists to which Buren belonged that internationalist spirit was still alive and well. For example, of the artists that belonged to the style of cinétiqou art, Vasarely and Schöffer were Hungarian, Agam was born in Palestine; of the Nouveaux Réalistes group, Rotella was Italian, Spoerri, Rumanian, Christo, Bulgarian, Tinguey, Swiss.

The symbol of French-American contacts in the early 1960s, and the earliest American success of a French artist of the new generation, was Jean Tinguely. His Homage to New York, 1960, a self-destroying machine that would commit mechanical hara-kiri in front of the Museum of Modern Art, had an enormous popular success, but it remained an isolated case for the rest of the 1960s. Tinguely also played a crucial role in linking together several national variations of neo-dadaism into an international neo-dadaist phenomenon. Through Tinguely the American pre-Pop artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were in contact with neo-Dadaists in Europe such as Niki de Saint-Phalle, Alberto Spoerri, Arman and Christo. Such contacts allowed the critic Pierre Restany to mix together, in 1961 in an exhibition entitled “Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York” at the Galerie Rive Droite with the help of Jean Larcade, the following artists: Rauschenberg, Johns, Bontecou, Chryssa, Stankiewicz, Chamberlain, Klein, César, Arman, Hains, Tinguey and Niki de Saint-Phalle. César and Chamberlain, both “automobile compressors,” were symbolic of a commonality of views between artists of different countries. The Galerie Lawrence would show some American artists in the early 1960s such as Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell and Morris Louis. Jean Larcade would show Jasper Johns for the first time in Paris in 1959, and Daniel Cordier would show Johns and Rauschenberg in an international exhibition of Surrealist art organized by Breton and Duchamp. In the early 1960s, Ileana Sonnabend would show American Pop artists, while the Galerie Jean Fournier would present the younger generation of French artists such as Buraglio, Buren, Parmentier and Viallat while also showing the Americans Sam Francis, James Bishop and Joan Mitchell. The first edition of the Biennale de Paris in 1959 showed, besides Raymond Hains, three Combine paintings of Rauschenberg; “Art USA Now” at the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1964 would be the first group exhibition of American artists to be shown in an institution, while the first introduction to American art for many young French artists would come later with the exhibition “L’Art du

68 Millet, Art en France, 134.
70 Ibid., 20.
71 Millet, L’Art contemporain en France, 80.
72 Ibid., 12.
Réel, USA 1948-1968," at the Grand Palais, in Paris in 1968. 73 Magazines were also instrumental in making American art known to the French. For instance, in 1967, Marcelin Pleynet published a series of articles in Les Lettres françaises about Pollock, Gorky, Rothko, Louis, Stella. 74 Despite the early exhibitions of American art, it was only at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s that younger artists, such as Marc Devade of the Support-Surface group would discover American art, and then only in magazines illustrations, prompting Devade to say that seeing such art reproduced in minuscule format in magazines led him at first to produce works the size of postage stamps. 75

It is perhaps paradoxical that up to the late 1960s, only a few French artists would be aware of the artistic developments in the United States. The members of the Nouveaux Réalistes might have been an exception. Certainly for the generation of Minimalists and Conceptual artists in New York, and for the group of Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni as well as, for instance, the members of the group Support-Surface, there does not seem to have been an intimate knowledge of each other. The only exception of a French artist au courant of the earlier developments of Conceptual art was Bernard Venet, who was also the only French artist to belong to the first generation of the Conceptual artists only because he had established himself in New York starting in 1966. 76 As late as 1967, when commenting on European art, Donald Judd and Frank Stella would only mention Yves Klein, Vasarely and the Groupe de Recherche d’Art visuel, artists whose reputation was already made in the 1950s or early in the 1960s. 77 But what is of more crucial interest for this thesis is what knowledge Buren and Smithson had, in the mid-1960s, of the art that was being done on the other side of the Atlantic. That still in 1965 Buren probably did not know much about recent developments in American art is corroborated by the fact that he declared, for the benefit of a journalist, that up to the beginning of that year he had an admiration for the painters Willem de Kooning and Sam Francis. 78 Buren had probably encountered the works of Francis at the Galerie Jean Fournier which showed American artists, notably Francis and Joan Mitchell, and which showed his work in 1966 in a group exhibition. 79 Certainly, by his own admission, during the years 1965 to

73 Ibid., 12.
74 Ibid., 134.
75 Ibid., 133.
77 Judd’s commenting on Klein as the only interesting artist from Europe is commented upon by Buchloh, H.D., “Formalism and Historicity,” 91. The mention of the Groupe de Recherche en art visuel by Stella is mentioned by Baldassari, Propos délibérés, 32. The comments by the Minimalist artists are found in Glaser, Bruce, "Questions to Stella and Judd," first published in Art News, September, 1966 and reprinted in Battcock, Gregory, ed., Minimal Art, a Critical Anthology (New York:E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 148-164.
79 Grinfeder, Marie-Hélène, Les Années Supports Surfaces, (Herscher, 1991) 33. In note 32 on the same page, Grinfeder gives details on the group show: it was in three segments, from July to September 1966, and
1967, Buren did not know any artists associated with the Conceptual art movement, or the Earth art movement, whom he would discover only during the year 1968, when he met most of the artists belonging to those movements, or at least encountered their works as he started to be invited abroad. Buren did acknowledge, however, that he was aware of some Minimalist works in 1964-1965, such as Dan Flavin’s fluorescent fixtures and Donald Judd’s early boxes. According to Buren, he and one of the artists of the group, Parmentier, considered they were the only artists to have brought art making to such radical conclusions.

Parmentier, very close to Buren at the time, admits that they were practically ignorant of the work of Barnett Newman or Jackson Pollock. Buren, asked to comment on the work of Robert Ryman in the years 1967-1968, says that he had some thoughts about Kelly at the time that could apply to Ryman but that he did not know the work of Ryman. Smithson, for his part, would also start to show abroad only in the year 1968, very notably at the exhibition “L’Art du réel,” in Paris (which is the travelling exhibition first shown at the MOMA, with the title “Art of the Real”) where perhaps Buren saw his work for the first time. Smithson mentioned few French artists in his writings. In “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects,” published in *Artforum* in 1968, he mentioned briefly Yves Klein and Jean Dubuffet to point out the use of “topographic sedimentary notions” in their work. In an interview for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution conducted in 1972, Smithson again referred to Dubuffet and explained how he had encountered his works. His statement throws some light on how haphazard encounters with French art were for a New York artist in the late 1950s and in the 1960s. For example, to the question as to where Smithson had seen the work of Dubuffet, he answered: “Oh, I think he had a lot of things in the Museum of Modern Art. And I’d seen books. I think he was being shown at one of the galleries. I can’t remember exactly which one. I’m pretty sure I saw things of his in the Museum of Modern Art. I was around the first segment included Buren, Meurice, Parmentier, Hantaï, Riopelle, Tàpies.

80Propos délibérés, 40-41: “Je voudrais préciser qu’à partir de 1968, dès que j’ai commencé à être invité à l’étranger, j’ai été frappé par le travail de quelques artistes qui ont certainement joué un rôle décisif dans mon propre développement: ils étaient pour la plupart de mon âge ou à peine plus âgés que moi: Carl Andre, Bob Ryman, Lawrence Weiner, Michael Asher, Sol Lewitt, Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers, Palermo, Serra, Merz, Fabro, Anselmo, Prini, Boetti, Dan Graham, Long, Ian Wilson, On Kawara, Smithson, Nauman, Kounellis, Richter, Polke, Barry, Huebler, Ruscha” Buren had also been invited, with Toroni, in December 1967 to the Galerie Flaviana in Lugano. See Propos délibérés, 20, note 9.


82Propos délibérés, 41: “Avant 1968, seul Michel avait entretenu avec moi une telle relation, c’est pourquoi à cette époque nous ne nous reconnaissions aucun pair.”

83Propos délibérés, 40. Parmentier says that he had seen Pollock at the MOMA in 1961 and in 1965 in Venice at Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery, Newman at Galerie Lawrence, and Elsworth Kelly at the Venice Biennale.

84Ibid., 74.

twenty at the time." Later in the same interview, Smithson would mention that he was interested in Newman, Pollock, Dubuffet, Rauschenberg, de Kooning and Alan Davie, when he was... nineteen. To summarize Smithson's fascination with French art, it would be so enthralling that on a trip to Europe in 1961, Smithson will choose to visit... Rome, and be interested in Byzantine architecture and in labyrinths.

Up until 1968, Smithson and Buren would both be mostly ignorant of recent developments in art on the other side of the Atlantic. It was only in that year that both artists would be included together in several exhibitions. At "Prospekt' 68" at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in September, they would be shown together with other artists for the first time. The next encounter of the two artists in the same show was put together by pioneer organizer Seth Siegelaub in his "July, August, September, 1969" which included Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Richard Long, N.E. Thing Co. LTD., Lawrence Weiner, and Daniel Buren and Robert Smithson. The exhibition brought the artists together only in the catalogue. Buren acted in Paris, Smithson at Oxmal in the Yucatan. Buren used the billboards of Paris, giving the exact street location of each work, published as an advertisement in Les Lettres Françaises, under the heading "Notre Temps". The advertisement said: "You Can See Vertical Stripes in Pink and White at..." Smithson's work, for its part, could be found by travelling south from Oxmal, Yucatan on Highway 261 for 2 or 3 miles, until on the right hand side of the Highway a dirt road was reached. This dirt road led directly to a shallow, red earth quarry. There was again here a clear distinction between Smithson's rugged, wild universe, and the insistence on the infrastructure of transportation, and Buren's urban, semiotic universe, made up of a publication in a magazine, instructions, and interpellations on the streets through posters. This distinction will be further studied in the next chapter.

86Ibid., 275. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings on July 14 and 19, 1972.
87Ibid., 283.
88Ibid., 282.
89The mention of "Prospekt' 68" is found in Robert Smithson, Le Paysage entropique 1960/1973, 237. Mention of Buren's participation in that exhibition is made in a sheet given to me by an employee of the Musée de Villeurbannes, a sheet which has the note "Interdit à la publication ou à la reproduction entièrement ou partiellement" (no place, no date).
90The exhibition was "published" the 1st July, 1969, with the name Seth Siegelaub and the mention "printed in the United States of America."
Fig. 15 Robert Smithson, *Pulverizations*, 1967, photostat, 21.5 x 27.9cm.
PULVERIZATIONS

1. 

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Z & Z & X \\
BBBBBBBBBBBB & TTTTTTTTTT & BBCCBBB&B & B & \end{array}
\]

10' 10' 10'

B = Bituminous Coal  T = Tar (hot, left to cool)

2. 

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Z & Z & X \\
BBBBBBBBBB & CCCCCCCCCC & BB & \end{array}
\]

8' 14' 8'

B = Bog Iron Fragments  C = Cement (dry)

3. 

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Z & Z & X \\
BBBBBBBBBB & BB & VV & BBCCBBB&B & B & \end{array}
\]

14' 2' 14'

B = Blue Coal  V = Volcanic Ash

4. 

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Z & Z & X \\
SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS & GG & SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS & \end{array}
\]

14' 2' 14'

S = Sandstone Fragments  G = Glue

5. 

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Z & Z & X \\
CCC & FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF & CCC & \end{array}
\]

3' 24' 3'

C = Coarse Sand  F = Fine Gravel

Five profiles of foundations (on level ground, 2' deep, 1' below ground, 1' above) shown partitioning contents.

X = Outer Foundation  Z = Inner Foundation

X is always 30' sq., the size of Z is variable.

The widths of X and Z are variable according to materials used.
Fig. 16 Robert Smithson, *Tar Pool and Gravel Pit*, 1966, model destroyed.
Fig. 17 Robert Smithson, *Aerial Map: Proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport*, 1967, detail of center gelatin-silver print and photostat, 35.6 x 27.9cm.
Fig. 18 Robert Smithson, *Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, Wandering Earth Mounds and Gravel Paths*, 1967, blueprint, collage, pencil, 39.3 x 27.9cm.
Fig. 19 Robert Smithson, *Terminal*, 1966, painted steel, 133.3 x 91.4 x 143.5cm.
Fig. 20 Robert Smithson besides three works from the series "Assemblages," top to bottom: Ammonium Hydroxide, Biological Specimens, Blue Chemical, all destroyed, at Castellane Gallery, New York, 1962.
Fig. 21 “Puisque peindre c’est...” Text of the pamphlet distributed on 1 January 1967, signed by Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni.
Puisque peindre c'est...

Puisque peindre c'est un jeu.
Puisque peindre c'est accorder ou désaccorder des couleurs. 
Puisque peindre c'est appliquer (consciemment ou non) des règles de composition.
Puisque peindre c'est valoriser le geste. 
Puisque peindre c'est représenter l'extérieur (ou l'interprêter, ou se l'approprier, ou le contester, ou le présenter). 
Puisque peindre c'est proposer un tremplin pour l'imagination. 
Puisque peindre c'est illustrer l'intériorité. 
Puisque peindre c'est une justification. 
Puisque peindre sert à quelque chose. 
Puisque peindre c'est peindre en fonction de l'esthétisme, des fleurs, des femmes, de l'érotisme, de l'environnement quotidien, de l'art, de dada, de la psychanalyse, de la guerre au Viet-Nam.

NOUS NE SOMMES PAS PEINTRES.


Paris, le 1er janvier 1967
Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni
Fig. 22 Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni at the Salon de la jeune peinture, 2 and 3 January 1967.
Fig. 23 “Lettre contre les salons,” text of an open letter sent on 3 January 1967, signed by Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni.
Lettre contre les salons

Aujourd'hui, à 18 heures précises, nous avons quitté le Salon de la Jeune Peinture.

Cette 2e manifestation, bien qu'apparemment orientée contre ce Salon, n'en définit pas moins, de façon irréversible, notre attitude envers tous les Salons quels qu'ils soient (Salon de mai, Salon de la peinture à l'eau, Salon des réalités nouvelles, Salon des Indépendants, etc.).

Parce que ces Salons sont l'héritage des Salons du XIXe siècle (les véritables Salons du XXe siècle étant à la rigueur ceux des Arts ménagers, de l'Automobile, etc.).

Parce que ces Salons aggravent la paresse du public. Chacun est un lieu de pèlerinage où un public bien déterminé vient se réconforter; à date précise, on se scandalise et on se pâme, le gadget-culture devant servir au moins une fois par an.

Parce que, surtout, ces Salons montrent de la Peinture et que la Peinture, jusqu'à preuve du contraire, est par vocation objectivement réactionnaire.

Pour ces raisons, nous nous désolidarisons de façon définitive, de tous les Salons parisiens et de tous les Peintres qui y exposent.

Le 3 janvier 1967
Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni

P.-S. : Nous tenons à remercier les membres du comité du Salon de la Jeune Peinture qui nous ont permis de mener à bien notre 1re manifestation publique et de bénéficier ainsi de leur publicité, de leur local, etc.

Nous rendons hommage également à leur courtoisie qui nous permet de retirer nos toiles le jour même du vernissage.
Fig. 24 Top to bottom: a) Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni at the Salon de la jeune peinture, 2 and 3 January 1967. b) Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni at the Musée des Arts décoratifs, 2 June 1967.
Fig. 25 "Il ne s'agissait évidemment que de regarder des toiles de Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni," distributed on 2 June 1967, signed by Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, Niele Toroni.
Il ne s'agissait évidemment que de regarder des toiles de Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni.

Il faut y voir :
Une toile de 2,50 m x 2,50 m divisée en 29 bandes égales et verticales, rouges et blanches, dont les deux extrêmes sont recouvertes de blanc (Buren).
Un cercle noir au centre d'une toile blanche (Mosset).
Sur une toile de 2,50 m x 2,50 m des bandes horizontales alternées grises et blanches de 0,38 m x 2,50 m. Partielle, la septième (et dernière) bande mesure 0,22 m x 2,50 m (Parmentier).
85 empreintes bleues d'un pinceau plat (n° 50), à intervalles de 30 cm, sur une surface blanche de 2,50 m x 2,50 m (Toroni).
C'était Manifestation 3.

2 juin 1967
Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni

---

1. Diamètre intérieur 4,5 cm, diamètre extérieur 7,8 cm.
2. 2,50 m x 2,50 m.
Chapter 3 The Gathering and Distribution of Materials

Once Again The Strange Materials of Smithson

If Buren's thinking and actions were inseparable from the Parisian milieu, Smithson's ideas were formed in New York, or more precisely in a New York informed by New Jersey. If the text on Passaic revealed the fascination infrastructures of all kinds exerted on Smithson, New Jersey also had for him a supplementary appeal, its quarries. Smithson investigated the quarries of New Jersey during the year 1968 and developed an entirely new approach to art making, involving the gathering of materials found in the quarries and their subsequent exhibition in a gallery or museum site. The gathering of materials would in fact become his principal activity as an artist for the year 1968, and the works produced were grouped, by him, in the general category of "Nonsites." The Nonsites were strangely hybrid works which consisted generally of a certain quantity of matter stacked up in bins built in a geometrical design, accompanied by explanatory texts, maps and sometimes photographs of the outdoor site where the materials had been extracted. The map served to indicate the location of the outdoor site and, on several occasions, provided also the blue print for the form and the layout of the bins in which the matter was to be stacked since those bins often replicated the topographic contour lines that zeroed in onto the site. The containers were made of wood, aluminium or steel, vaguely reminiscent of the minimalist cube. With the series of Nonsites, the questions of transport and of transportation infrastructure received their most complete and complex formulation. The Nonsites stressed the fact that the materials gathered had been taken from an outdoor site and transported inside to a gallery, the latter part of the work constituting the nonsite properly speaking. In emphasizing, through its negative title, the absence of the site of origin of the materials, Smithson strongly suggested the notion of distance, of transportation and of an "elsewhere" to the place where the spectator actually experienced the work, or, rather, only part of the work.

Smithson had already made drawings representing quarries before the year 1968. In fact, the earliest representation of such a quarry happened in 1960 with a drawing entitled A Quarry in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, a drawing of a quarry situated in the suburbs of New Jersey. The early date of that drawing reveals that the theme of the quarry had long preoccupied Smithson. In 1968, for the execution of the first nonsite, A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, Smithson went to an airfield with the initial intention of setting up a "pavement system," but ultimately decided upon what would become the strategy for making a Nonsite. The Nonsites were pivotal works not only because they pursued Smithson's interest in infrastructures, but also because they prefigured the future

---

1 Smithson will nevertheless still be producing pseudo Minimalist sculptures in steel such as Gyrostasis, (1968) or Pointless Vanishing Point, (1968), all implying a receding form and with a strong metaphorical content (about perspectivist vision, for instance, with Pointless Vanishing Point) that set them apart from the literalness of Minimalist works like those of Don Judd, or of Robert Morris.

2 I follow here, as is customary in the literature on Smithson, the spelling of Smithson for this category of works.

3 Quoted in Hobbs, Robert Smithson: Sculpture, 104.
Earthworks, as is illustrated by the fact that Smithson subtitled A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey an “indoor earthwork.” The making of this Nonsite involved the following steps: on a quadrangle map (a map of a tract of country as they are published by the U.S. Geological Survey), Smithson drew a “crystalline structure” in the form of an hexagon, and noted, with a red dot, the place where he had extracted sand. The hexagonal shape also echoed the more or less hexagonal shape of the place which was in fact an airfield used by firemen and the government, where six runways radiated around an axis (fig. 26). He also built, for the specifically Nonsite part of the work, that is, the part that was to be in the gallery space, a mode of containment of the extracted materials composed of aluminum bins shaped to recall the concentric lines of the map (fig. 27). Smithson filled these thirty-one bins with sand collected at the site. There was a thematic continuity between Smithson’s choice of an airfield as his site and his previous work on the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, but there was also something new since the choice of Pine Barrens was also significant for being a “retired industrial site” which was exploited for “the production of glass, charcoal, and bog iron”. This first Nonsite marked the point where the previous interest in infrastructure of transportation was joined by a new interest in the extraction of primary matter.

It is unnecessary to go into details over each of the Nonsites produced by Smithson at the time, but a few remarks are in order. At first, all the sites used for the production of Nonsites were based in New Jersey: A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, 1968, which had bins containing sand; A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968 (fig. 28) which presented itself in the form of a segment of the previous A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey, and had bins containing limestone; Nonsite “Line of Wreckage,” Bayonne, New Jersey, 1968 (fig. 29) with bins of broken concrete; Nonsite (Palisades, Edgewater, New Jersey), 1968, with bins containing traprock. The fixation on New Jersey was certainly out of practicality since it offered a sufficient number of interesting sites close to where Smithson lived. But New Jersey, as Smithson’s relation of his trip to Passaic showed, was also for him the place where the urban and modernist dream collapsed. This was made clear in the multiple references to the deterioration of the suburban landscape in the text on Passaic, where the infrastructure of transportation (fig. 30) especially that pertaining to car culture was shown to create a nightmarish world. With the Nonsites, Smithson was alluding not to the transformation of urban and exurban landscapes, but to the natural one, and in doing so, he was making connections between infrastructure, the evolution of the modern corporation and the despoliation of the natural landscape, forging a remarkable synthesis of ideas.

New Jersey was, for Smithson, more than a place where the dream of the modern city turned into suburban ruins. The choice of Franklin as a site for A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey was interesting because there one

---

4 Ibid., 104-105.
5 Ibid., 105.
6 Same page.
7 Same page.
8 Ibid., 106. Hobbs is relying on an account by Nancy Holt.
found a surprisingly rich concentration of minerals rarely found elsewhere. The site took on mythical dimensions as a sort of wonderland of prospection, as is revealed by Hobbs' description of it:

Among areas of mineral deposits in the world, Franklin is famed for its number of unique ores. The only other place in the world comparable is Langbon, Sweden. At Franklin there are over two hundred minerals, from albite to zoisite. Supposedly forty-two different minerals were discovered there, among them franklinite (named after Benjamin Franklin) and zincite.

Before the rock hunting trip with Holt and Heizer, Smithson visited the mineral deposits around Franklin. The favorite spot was the rock dump at the old Franklin zinc mine, abandoned since the end of World War II but reopened in the sixties for rock hounds who paid a dollar to hunt and chip away.9

There was also an element of practicality that presided over the choice of the first site outside of New Jersey, Mono Lake Nonsite, (1968), from which pumice and cinders (of natural, volcanic origin) were collected, since Smithson could take advantage of friend and artist Michael Heizer's parents' cabin at Lake Tahoe.10

The materials collected by Smithson for his Nonsites included sand, limestone, broken concrete, trap rock, cinders, slag, cannel coal, obsidian, lava and plain gravel. But, more important than the materials themselves, were the steps involved in gathering them, because it is only when those steps are taken into consideration that the connection between the Nonsites and a certain stage in the evolution of the modern industrial world begins to appear. The connection is not readily discernable, and hence was not noticed by previous commentators of Smithson's work, nor even, for that matter, by the artist himself. The connection becomes visible only after careful examination of the process at work in making the Nonsites. The Nonsites necessitated for their realization all the steps that pertain to the industries of the primary sector which is concerned with the extraction and first transformation of raw matter. Thus, Smithson repeated the same process as, for example, a mining company;11 the making of a Nonsite involved the surveying of the site and the drawing of a map, the transportation to the site, the extraction - which usually meant Smithson shoveling the rocks onto the back of a pickup truck - (figs. 31 and 32) the transportation to the facilities for the processing of the collected raw matter (the studio of the artist), the processing of the raw matter (in this case, the esthetic transformation which consisted most of the time in the minimal gesture of stacking the matter in bins), and finally its presentation to the consumer (fig. 33 in background) (in this case, the display of the bins, the maps and the photographs in the art gallery). The Nonsites are usually commented upon following a formalist grid according to which

9 Same page.
10 Circumstances related by Hobbs, Ibid., 112.
11 This dimension of Smithson's works has been remarked by several commentators, the latest and most thorough is Graziani, Ron, "Robert Smithson: An Esthetic Prospector in the Mining Industry (Part 1: the 1960s)," in Art Criticism 10, no. 1 (1994), 1-28. Graziani comments on the prevalence of the twin themes of heavy industry and urbanization in the work of Smithson.
they are said to create a tension between the interior space of the gallery, and the exterior, "real" space situated outside of the aesthetic realm. For example Gary Shapiro, talking about the Nonsites, said: "One of the senses of the series of nonsites that Smithson produced was to contest the authority of the institutionalized centers of art in galleries and museums." They undeniably did that, but they did more since the whole set of processes of surveyance, extraction, transport, storage and transformation, and then presentation of the raw matter resembled closely the set of activities belonging to the primary industrial sector and seems more than a simple coincidence.

The materials collected by Smithson when working on the Nonsites, as well as the equipment he will later use in the production of his earthworks, coincide with the materials and products produced by the biggest U.S. corporations, the same corporations that have developed managerial capitalism to its fullest capacity. A list (table 1) offered by Alfred Chandler in a study of managerial capitalism, of the 200 largest manufacturing firms (ranked by assets) shows that by far the largest among them are concentrated in the production of five groups of products: chemicals, petroleum, primary metals, machinery and transportation equipment. This ranking will remain the same throughout the century, showing both the majesty and the ineluctability of the process. The machinery and transportation equipment will become more visible in the later earthworks, which are outside of the scope of this study, where large mounds will be formed using the equipment for gathering and carting away raw matter, but they were already hinted at, albeit very modestly, in the pickup truck Smithson used to transport the materials collected for the Nonsites. The only other group of materials that is, on the same standing as those already quoted in terms of importance of volume are food products, an area not touched upon by Smithson, and chemicals, which it is true, appeared only with the early Assemblages. This coincidence of interests was extraordinary in itself, but Smithson also copied the large managerial enterprises in a formal way. The work implied in the production of the Nonsites imitated a crucial development in the organizational structure of the enterprise which led to the development of the large corporation. To paraphrase Nesbit, the "industrial language" of a moment in the development of managerial capitalism seemed to permeate the practice of Smithson. It is important to understand how the evolution of the modern corporation led to the organization, refinement and amplification of the physical structure of the flow of materials in a constant manner through all stages of industrial processes. An example given by Chandler of an early form of throughput explains the reasons for the organization of such a flow of materials. The formation of the Standard Oil Trust in 1882 was meant to be an instrument to facilitate economies of scale in the oil industry, and the main form this rationalization took was, according to Chandler, to "coordinate the flow of materials... from the oil fields to


Chandler, "Emergence of Managerial Capitalism," 401-402. The tables show data up until 1973, right before the petroleum crash. To make the coincidence even spookier, even industries which produce stone and glass, two materials particularly favored by Smithson mostly for arcane reasons, do a comparatively modest but still sizeable showing. The tables are reproduced in table 1.

the refineries and from the refineries to the consumers."\(^{15}\) Throughput meant the coordination of the circulation of materials from its extraction (the primary sector) to its transformation (the secondary or manufacturing sector) to its distribution as a commodity (the tertiary or service sector). Smithson followed the same processes in the constitution of his Nonsites, that is, not only those of the industries of the primary sector, mapping, extracting, transporting, but also of the secondary sector, transforming, and the tertiary sector, presenting the finished product for “consumption,” or the delectation of the “client,” the spectator at the gallery. Smithson imitated the throughput characteristic of that stage - a long stage which took decades to unfold - in the evolution of the modern enterprise.

There were fundamental differences between Smithson’s art and Pop Art and Minimalism which can be explained by referring to the industrial sectors to which each of these forms of art making belong. Pop Art focused exclusively on the move forward into distribution, that is, direct branding and packaging of products, and their display to the client, that is, the third sector. The packaging of the materials in the Nonsites remained on the contrary crude, kept to a minimum, and serving only to contain the materials as if to emphasize their raw origins.\(^{16}\)

The raw nature of the materials also marked Smithson’s distance from Minimalism since that movement had already exploited the high finish of industrial manufacturing processes, the secondary sector. Smithson paid little attention to those two sections of the throughput of the large managerial enterprise, and focused instead on the extraction, transportation and first transformation of raw matter, that is, the primary industrial sector, situated at the beginning of the throughput. Smithson was after a particular mix of metaphors about industry and infrastructures in which brand packaging and the processes of manufacturing played a negligible role. But both had to be somehow minimally evoked since it was the throughput in its entirety and its relation with the infrastructures that the series of Nonsites meant to reflect.

Smithson’s “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” and his work for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport were already hinting in the direction of the Nonsites. “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” had revealed how Smithson saw the despoliation of the suburban environment in its relation to car culture, how he had early on focused on the extraordinary expansion of the infrastructure necessary for the car culture to bloom, and how he saw the correlation between the building of the highway infrastructure and the partnership between the State and private enterprise. The work around the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport had already sensitized him to view the question of infrastructures in terms of vast dimensions, and of large expenditure in terms of materials. With the Nonsites, Smithson’s interest in the question of infrastructure came to full maturity.

The infrastructural development in the United States is closely linked to the evolution of managerial capitalism for, as Chandler explains: “Only with the completion of the modern transportation and communication networks - those of the railroad, telegraph, steamship, and cable - could materials flow into a factory or processing plant and the finished

\(^{15}\) Imitation and representation.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 410.
goods move out at a rate of speed and volume required to achieve substantial economies of throughput. Transportation that depended on the power of animals, wind, and current was too slow, too irregular, and too uncertain to maintain a level of throughput necessary to achieve modern economies of scale. ¹⁷

Though Smithson’s later works are not the subject of this thesis, some remarks about them seem in order here because they reveal that Smithson’s singularity of interest in infrastructure lasted up to the end of his short career. The later Earthworks by Smithson, starting with Asphalt Rundown (fig. 34) and Concrete Pour (fig. 35), both of 1969, all remained within the theme of public works.¹⁸ The Earthworks were in fact like an illustration of the basic construction elements involved in public works engineering. These included a jetty, Spiral Jetty, 1970 (fig. 36) a dike, Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, 1971 (fig. 37) and, finally, a levee, Amarillo Ramp, 1973¹⁹ (fig. 38). Asphalt Rundown, executed in Rome in 1969,²⁰ where one truck poured its asphalt load over the side of a quarry, is perhaps Smithson’s quintessential “public works” work. By pouring asphalt into an abandoned quarry that was used to extract gravel and sand – the two elements which, added to the tar, make asphalt, that is, the pavement of the road infrastructure – Smithson reversed the usual process that leads to the surfacing of roads. Tar, a residue of the refining of crude oil, was poured back into the site where the essential materials for road surfacing had been extracted in the first place. In other words, the road was metaphorically returned to the quarry from whence it had come, as if Smithson tried to undo the road infrastructure. If the relatively modest dimensions of a work such as Asphalt Pour seemed not to warrant such an interpretation, it is useful to recall that a drawing executed in the same year (fig. 39) a sort of landscape study entitled 1000 Tons of Asphalt, c. 1969, represented four giant trucks pouring, as the title indicated, a thousand tons of asphalt.²¹ It is not inconsequential that

¹⁷Ibid., 408.
¹⁸The major exception to this list is Partially Buried Woodshed, (1970), where a building is partially crushed by piling on earth with the help of earth moving equipment typical of public works. Its location, the campus of Kent University, Ohio, and the events that happened later in the same year and that led to the shooting to death of four students by State troopers, have contributed to the singling out of that particular work by Smithson as having a more pointed political content. An early version of the idea of burying a building, the project in pencil drawing titled Partially Buried Two Story Building, (1969) reinforces the idea that the connection is circumstantial at best.
²⁰Amarillo Ramp was completed six weeks after the artist died by Nancy Holt, Richard Serra and Tony Shafrazi.
²¹1000 Tons of Asphalt also shows a warrior’s helmet hovering over the quarry. The antiquated helmet does not signify a neoclassical turn on the part of Smithson. If it has an allegorical meaning, I think it is that of homo oeconomicus triumphing over nature. The meaning of the Asphalt Pour is somewhat falsified by its modest dimensions. The photographs which document the experiment try to correct this lack of proper scale by making us imagine vast dimensions through tricks such as the use of low camera angles.
three of Smithson large earthworks, The Spiral Jetty, 1970, Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, 1971, Amarillo Ramp, 1973. Spiral Jetty, Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, and Amarillo Ramp as Jones has remarked, involved for their building "basic earth-moving technology of the 1940s and 1950s, which in turn hearkened back to the steam engines of the nineteenth century."22 It has already been said that the building of the road infrastructure would reach its peak in the United States in the late 1960s, representing a vast "public works" project that would involve the government for its funding and its elaboration, and be a symbol of the evolution of industrial organizations from family businesses to huge corporations. Tar, the glue linking the other extracted minerals (gravel and sand) to make road surfacing, came itself from the extraction of another huge mineral resource, crude oil, where one found the largest corporations with the most complex organization charts of any such enterprise. The reason for the complexity of the organizational structure of the large petroleum and petrochemical corporations was due to the diversity of the types of products that could be extracted from crude oil. The multiplicity was due to the process of refinement which resulted, if one discounts gasoline, in five by-products: a) gasoline, a cheap product up until 1973-1974 that fed the explosion of the car culture, and jet fuel that did the same for airplane traffic, gasoline was also used in the production of various petrochemical products; b) kerosene was used for the production of solvents, thinners, stove oil and lamp oil; c) heavy gasoline, for the production of diesel oil for locomotives, heating oil for the home; d) fuel oil which, in combination with heavy oil, produced heavy bunker oil for industries and diesel fuel for ships; e) the muck at the bottom of the refining tower which produced four different kinds of products: grease and lubricating oils, paraffin and, finally, asphalt. These by-products provided airplanes, cars and trucks, trains and ships with their fuel, they provided heat to homes and energy to industries, and they branched out in an ever widening, technologically dizzying array of products destined for use in both industrial and domestic environments.

An earlier account of the possibilities physical infrastructures offered for an artist was Tony Smith's famous description of his experience, in the mid-1950s, of a drive at night through the technological landscape of the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike: "It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights."23 What Smith saw was the road reduced to its purely physical manifestation, without its semiotic system of lines, markers, and signal lights. Smith's experience of the highway system as pure physical expanse, signified for him without a doubt the end of art,24 which, as with any statement about the end of art, really means the end of one kind of art. While Smith hinted that a new vocabulary of forms, a new scale was needed to respond to the modern experience, Smithson, with

22Jones, Machine, 332.
24Same pages.
the Nonsites, showed how complex a reflection on the modern experience influenced by the reality of infrastructures could become, collecting various different threads linking the infrastructures to not only mining but also the development of the large corporations.

The mining industry loomed large as a point of reference. In their gallery component, the Nonsites were a miniaturized version of commercial mining bins of raw materials, ready to be crushed either to extract minerals or to be used as paving material. According to Jones:

Both binned and heaped nonsite aesthetics are deliberately inelegant, flat-footed and workmanlike... What the nonsites resemble most of all are the anti-aesthetics of commercial mining, the miniaturized suggestion of tons of rock gouged out of a mountain, heaped and ready to crush for hidden minerals or gems. From this vantage point, the binned nonsites fit right in with the broader industrial aesthetic at play in the art of the 1960s: they look like bulk samples, crated or loaded in open slatted railroad cars, en route to a bench scale test that will determine the exact technique for getting the mineral out of each unique and specific ore.

The Nonsites revealed Smithson's attraction for the “the corporate miners and immense earthmoving tools of industrial geology.” Smithson's interests in mining also meant, according to Jones, a return to earlier forms of technology than that exploited by the Pop artists: “Smithson began his “conscious” career with highly finished industrial objects, well in keeping with Stella’s aluminum canvases and Warhol’s celebrity icons. By the end of the decade, however, Smithson reverted to an earlier stage in the manufacturing process, fascinated with... slag heaps and bins of ore.”

Once Again the Strange Conventions of Buren

The bulky, raw and uncoded nature of Smithson’s materials contrasted strongly with the lightness of Buren’s striped pattern, but this should not obfuscate the fact that the striped pattern also recalled a form of infrastructure, though of a different kind than the physical infrastructures of Smithson. While Smithson’s work involved matter in its crudest form, as well as the physical infrastructures put in place to facilitate the transportation of that matter, Buren’s pattern referred to the infrastructure of the distribution of signs in space. This was not yet very evident in the work Buren did with Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni in 1967, but in the following year Buren took his stripes outside of the institutional framework of official events and museums. While Smithson, during the same period, went “outside” to pick up raw materials which he then introduced into an art world that had never seen anything like it, Buren took his stripes “outside” of the art

---

26 Jones, Machine, 328-329.
27 Ibid., 328.
28 Same page.
world to put them in the streets of Paris which had never seen anything like it.

What was Buren’s “mental universe” at the time of the conception of the stripes that would become his signature work? An early article cum interview published in *Arts* in 1965 shows us that, while still a newcomer in the world of art, Buren had started with somewhat of a splash, since by that time he already had accumulated the honors of being the “lauréat de la 5ᵉ Biennale de Paris,” and recipient of the prix Lefranc the year before.29 The writer of the article, Sarane Alexandrian went on to say that: “Cette année [1965] est celle de ses véritables débuts puisqu’elle lui a permis de montrer au public quelques œuvres qu’il ne considère plus comme des essais.”30 So Buren, already in 1965, distinguished clearly between formative and mature periods, and marked the works presented in 1965 as the first mature works. In the same article, it was revealed that Buren, who was quoted as saying “J’ai eu besoin de peindre pour éliminer ce que je voulais plus voir : chez moi et chez les autres”31 had his first exhibition in 1964 since an opportunity to exhibit came with the prix Lefranc, but, as soon as he saw his paintings reunited, Buren took them off the wall and destroyed them.32 The work shown in 1965 was in Buren’s eyes, the first mature work, and it had all been done in that year, or in the later part of the previous year. The 1965 work also marked a complete break with his previous efforts. The interview provided some insights into how Buren saw this break. The artist revealed, without using names, various influences, and one thinks especially of the Décollagistes and the Abstract Expressionists: “D’abord, j’ai cherché à éliminer la peinture de mon esprit. J’ai fait des toiles avec des papiers collés déchirés, des coulures. À la fin, cela ressemblait à une belle peinture. Ce n’était donc pas la peine de continuer.”33 Buren revealed in this passage the desire to be seen as an artist devoted to research in his medium, and not given to political gesturing. Alexandrian told us that he disapproved of any reference to esthetic or to political activism, quoting Buren: “Un peintre n’est pas là pour faire de belles toiles, ni pour choquer.”34

This last statement was strange considering what Buren would do in the next three years, that is to shock and provoke the public in a strategic move which had been proven to work already in the Parisian milieu, since it was the same tactic that won Yves Klein his celebrity. In this article Buren is a young, naive artist, not the careful, subtle and sometimes ponderous thinker he would become later. His claim, reported in the interview, to have painted at the time only to “eliminate what I did not want to see: in myself and in others”35 is both romantic and profound. The “non-desire” it invoked was a renunciation of the subjectivism of French postwar painting of the late 1940s and 1950s, and

30 Same page.
31 Same page.
32 Same page: “Dès qu’il a vu ses tableaux rassemblés, il en a été violemment mécontent; il les a retirés pour les détruire.”
33 Same page.
34 Same page.
35 Same page.
would remain an ongoing principle for his work throughout his career. It was also in this article that something was revealed about the origins of the idea for the stripes and about a trip Buren had made to the Caribbean Sea, to the Ile Sainte-Croix, where he was "commissioned," in unknown circumstances, to do a large-scale mural mosaic. The ideas behind Buren's strategy had their genesis in Paris, but via the Virgin Islands. Buren himself had in the interview an enigmatic, and rather negative way of evaluating the Virgin Islands experience: "Au paravant, j'avais fait beaucoup de choses seul, sans rapport avec le monde extérieur; par exemple, ce travail de mosaïques, quand j'étais aux Iles Vierges. Je travaillais beaucoup, mais c'était dans un tout autre esprit."

That Buren said of the mosaic that it was not really important is suspicious. Was it that Buren did not want the reader to see how mundane was the "trigger" not only for his stripes, but also for his signature site-specific strategy? Later on, he acknowledged that his serious thinking about art started on the island, on a first visit in 1960-1961, when he did large scale paintings on wood for a hotel. On his second visit to the island in 1965, he executed several mosaics with figurative motifs, including this one (fig. 40) at Grapetree Bay. The mosaic Buren executed on the side of a nondescript building presented him with the occasion to work on an already existing site, and not on a canvas tucked away in a studio. The mosaic, on a whitewash of stucco, already showed the striped pattern, probably inspired by the striped fabric that he had bought in Paris. Buren in fact was playing around with the striped pattern, and even directly with striped fabric already by 1963. The mosaic was basically composed of embedded segments of stones, embellished with commercial plates, and punctuated by some large areas of stripes, all glued or painted on the white background of the stucco. While not offering the regularity and the ready-made nature of the shapes that the industrially made fabric offered, the striped areas still gave off the impression of repetitive, mechanical work, and revealed an indifference on the part of the artist toward the problem of designing shapes on a background. The choice of a site to exhibit was also dictated by the nature itself of the invitation to work, and thus constituted in fact an early in situ intervention. (During the same period, Buren did another work in situ: he painted some rocks found at the beach and put them back where he found them.) The mosaic, by covering the building like a mantle or a pre-Christo gesture, was eminently site specific by the principle itself of its application. The main quality of site specificity, whatever the strategy may be, is to metaphorically and literally stick to the reality of the place. Stucco drying onto the side of the walls of a building in the Virgin Islands was Buren's first, true in situ work. The repetitive, ready-made nature of the pattern on the mural, and its site specificity were both to become essential characteristics of his mature style.

---

36 Same page: "Au début de cette année, Buren est parti pour les Caraïbes, et a séjourné dans l'Ile Sainte-Croix, où on lui avait commandé une grande mosaique."
37 Propos délibérés, 97.
38 Baldassari, Daniel Buren: Entrevue, 9.
39 Same page.
40 Same page.
The use of a striped fabric similarly freed him from the responsibility of deciding what forms to put on the white background, since form and background were already furnished. The striped pattern where form and background have a more or less equal presence offered the added advantage of having the subject - background problem evacuated. It also ensured that the same pattern would continually be used. The idea to use commercially made fabric with a pattern of regular stripes came to Buren in 1965, and was closely related to his stay in the Ile Sainte-Croix. On a short trip back to Paris to receive the Prix de la Biennale des Jeunes de Paris, and before going back to the Virgin Islands, Buren bought a selection of fabrics at the Marché Saint-Pierre, took them back with him to the Ile Sainte-Croix and experimented with them during the last three months of 1965.1 The striped fabric profoundly influenced his manner of painting during that year. The works Buren did not destroy and was showing were painted in a manner that hid all evidence of the artist’s touch, the choice of color was made without thinking, Buren, said the interviewer, “veut s’effacer de son oeuvre”42 adding that “ses toiles récentes, toujours de même dimension - elles sont peintes sur des draps de lit - présentent des surfaces monochromes rose, jaune ou argent, coupées de stries disposées en îlots ou en bandes, à l’encontre de tout graphisme.”43

The idea of using common storefront awning striped fabric (figs. 41 and 42) in a gesture of desacralization of traditional art materials in favor of an appropriation of industrially made materials came to him at the end of 1965,44 and its systematic use began in 1967.45 The stripes

41 Propos délibérés, 35 and note 12.
43 Same page.
44 In Propos délibérés, a note helps confirm the precise dating of the “origine” of the stripes, 35, note 12: “Daniel Buren précise qu’il était revenu une dizaine de jours à Paris pour rapatrier des travaux réalisés aux Iles Vierges durant les dix mois précédents et recevoir le Prix de la Biennale des Jeunes de Paris. C’est durant cette période qu’il acheta au Marché Saint-Pierre avant son retour aux Iles Vierges des tissus rayés de différents types parmi lesquels se trouvait celui qu’il devait utiliser par la suite. Il fit ses premières expériences sur ce tissu pendant les trois derniers mois de l’année 1965.” A precise dating of this moment is important because it situates the moment when Buren’s idea takes form, but also because it implies a placement, of which Buren himself is surely conscious, inside the Conceptual art movement. There is inside the movement something like “the myth of the year 1965,” because it is the year of its birth. The principle is simple: to have the idea for one’s first Conceptual work in 1965 labels one as a pioneer of the movement, to have it later renders one susceptible to being stigmatized a follower. This date is so sensitive to artists links with early manifestations of Conceptual art that it has led to at least one notorious debate between proponents of the style. The debate involved Joseph Kosuth and an interpreter of the movement, Benjamin Buchloh in the pages of a catalogue devoted to the Conceptual art movement. While himself insisting on the importance of the date 1965 as when the generation that draws the proper lessons of Minimalism starts, Buchloh rejected the claims made by Kosuth that he had already had the idea for his first conceptual art pieces in 1965. Kosuth would have had made his pieces not before 1967, and there is no proof of a
were not considered as an art work in the traditional sense by Buren, who explained in an interview in the early 1990s that the striped pattern was rather to be seen as a marker, a sign, even a tool: "Mais ce signe, effectivement, joue en tant que repère, il peut même jouer en tant que signature. À l'heure actuelle, cela ne me gêne absolument pas. Au contraire, ça permet de se passer de mots." 46 And: "Ce que l'on voit est toujours un ensemble, dans lequel se dessine, par endroit, cette marque, ce signe visuel, qui aide à lire... Ce signe visuel permet aussi de mesurer et c'est pour cela que je l'appelle un outil." 47 "Signe," "outil," Buren has encouraged the second label to stick, and his admission that his stripes belong also to the domain of signs and sign systems was a rare one. If Buren was hesitant to call his stripes a sign, it was because they do not stand for anything. A sign is present to remedy the absence of what it points to, and in this sense, Buren's stripes were not a sign, since they did not evoke anything for which they would stand. They were a tool in the sense that they made it possible to see something about the conditions, physical and institutional, in which they were exhibited. To understand how the stripes functioned in a manner completely unlike a "traditional" art work, one needs to go back to the third manifestation held in June, 1967 at the théâtre du Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Paris. The event was organized to let the stripes, as well as the works of his other colleagues, point to something which the artists left to the spectators to see:

Ce qui était mis en jeu était surtout de faire porter l'attention sur quelque chose d'ordre pictural réduit à son strict minimum. Contrairement à la façon dont on aurait vu ces mêmes œuvres dans une galerie, ici, faire asseoir les gens en face d'elles, c'était leur donner presque comme obligation de se trouver confrontés à un travail, qui, autre part, n'aurait pas demandé pas (sic) autant de temps pour être vu. D'où la surprise, effectivement, puisque au bout de quarante-cinq minutes environ, quand les gens dans la salle ont commencé à s'agiter puisqu'ils ne voyaient pas de spectacle, on leur a dit: mais le spectacle, si spectacle il y avait, était ce que vous venez de voir. Par la suite, quand j'ai refait, c'était cette même idée, plus celle de retourner la galerie comme une sorte de gant. La galerie, à sa façon, est une

Conceptual gestation before that year. See Buchloh, Benjamin, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique," in L'Art conceptuel, une perspective (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2e édition, 22 November 1989 – 18 February 1990), especially 42, 46, note 18. In his answer, Kosuth did not spare his words, proving the extreme importance (symbolically and financially one may presume) of this date. Suffice to say that he qualified Buchloh's analysis of the conceptual movement as a "press release for a gang of pals," 61. By 1966, many artists will be simultaneously working with more or less the same attitude, which makes the insistence on the part of some artists on the year 1965 seem trivial. This is perhaps why Lucy Lippard judiciously chose her coverage of the movement toward dematerialization to start at that year 1966.

45Propos délibérés, 35, 97.
sorte de petit théâtre. Ce qui est une critique, non pas de ce que l'on y montre, mais du fait que, de façon voulue ou non, inconsciente ou non, ce qui est montré comme spectacle dans une galerie, c'est l'oeuvre. Cela veut-il dire que toute œuvre d'art devient une forme de spectacle? Je ne le crois pas. Mais il faut vraiment faire attention à ce que ça ne le soit pas, à moins de le désirer, car tout est là pour dire le contraire. Et quand ça ne l'est pas, pour quelle raison est-ce? Dans la mesure où la galerie est elle-même un lieu de spectacle, un lieu qui montre et qui en même temps fait en sorte de ne pas toujours montrer. Alors que la salle de spectacle, par sa disposition, met celui qui regarde en face de quelque chose de très précis à regarder. Dans la galerie, qui est faite pour voir, on peut traverser sans ne rien regarder. D'un côté cela veut dire que celui qui passe dans la galerie est très libre, de l'autre côté, cela veut dire aussi que l'on fait semblant de ne pas donner à voir. Il m'intéressait, à ce moment là, de retourner la proposition en disant: maintenant, vous ne faites pas semblant d'être là, vous voyez ou vous ne voyez pas. Vous venez, exprès, pour voir ça et vous êtes alors dans la position idéale, vous vous asseyez, vous pouvez discuter et vous pouvez, après, vous en aller.48

What Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni appropriated was thus a site, not an object or a series of objects. Furthermore, in their gesture of appropriation, they, in true Situationist fashion, "détournaient," subverted the conventional function of the site appropriated, the theater, or the gallery, and subverted in the same movement the institutional rules of the event that framed their intervention as well as the architectural site itself. The sheer possibility of such actions, Buren points out judiciously in the same interview, shows that the Parisian art scene had already achieved a certain degree of radicality: "Déjà à cette époque là, faire venir des gens dans un théâtre prouvait que le contexte entier avait changé."49

The in situ nature of the stripes in the event at the théâtre du Musée des Arts Décoratifs was not clear, however, since it took as site a theater stage, where, by definition, things shown had a transitional relation to the site of exhibition and were of the order of expressivity. However they were, in a sense, in situ, since they used the context of an official event to throw light upon its meaning. The ambiguity disappeared in the next year, when Buren decided upon an entirely different strategy for the exhibition of his stripes. Instead of exhibiting the stripes inside an institutional frame which contributed to bringing attention to them, and in fact "theatricalized" their presence by making them part of an event, Buren chose to post them, in the form of the anonymous poster, haphazardly in the streets of Paris.

The year 1968 was as important in the development of the work of Buren as it was in the work of Smithson. Buren would develop several new artistic strategies: the Affichage sauvage, 1968, which consisted in the partial covering over of two hundred billboards with white and green stripes, without legal authorization and without invitation from a gallery or other institution; the production of a pseudo legalistic

48Ibid., 13-14.
49Ibid., 14.
document called *Certificat d'acquisition*, specifying the rules for the transmission of ownership of an art work from Buren's hands to the buyer; the sending of anonymous postal invoices of striped paper, begun in 1967, and the circulation in the street of Paris of two sandwich men, entitled *Hommes sandwiches*, carrying on their shoulders the stripes of the artist, a work meant to be the opposite of the postal invoices. To the postal invoices and the *Hommes Sandwiches* was associated, also, the presence of a five meter high and 18 meter long surface of striped paper at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. These very different strategies all opened up in a radical fashion both the question of the materials Buren employed and the context in which he laid them out.

Of these several strategies, three in particular will be discussed at length. From the *Certificat d'acquisition* can be deduced the fact that Buren's work also belonged to what could be called the domain of formalities, conventions or rules, and that these formalities were also another "material" form, or institutional medium, in which Buren chose to intervene. With his use of the *Hommes Sandwiches*, Buren disrupted traditional forms of exhibition by copying the circulation of information in a city. In so doing, he established a relation between the art and the public that was entirely different than the one that takes place inside the traditional sites of exhibition, that is, the gallery and the museum. He also left those traditional sites of presentation of art in order to compete with other, more powerful, more insidious and more omnipresent modes of public address. In his most important work of that year, *Affichage sauvage* (fig. 43) he distributed his artworks directly into the urban landscape by gluing them onto posts or walls in the manner of advertising posters, implying an equalization of his art with other advertisements, and establishing a competition for visibility on the same level as advertisement. Through this gesture, Buren also exploited the space situated outside the art institution since his gesture was not presented in a gallery or a museum, and did not happen in conjunction with any art world event. It was a gesture that signified an entirely new direction in Buren's art.

The *Affichage* of Buren recalled early appropriation gestures in France, especially the work of Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Villeglé who, already by 1949, unglued posters as they were found in the streets of Paris which they, in a Duchampian gesture of nomination, declared to be works of art. Hains first exhibited at Colette Allendy in 1957, and organized, more importantly, an event entitled "La Palissade des emplacements réservés," an early form of installation consisting of a room covered with appropriated posters.50 Hains and Villeglé explored the city streets looking for damaged posters whose lacerations uncovered previously glued posters which they then unglued and showed, as found, in galleries. The chance encounters of disparate posters, revealed through an act of anonymous vandalism (the "lacerator," who was not Hains or Villeglé), suggested strange juxtapositions of images and texts akin to the Surrealist strategy. The presence of the posters as authentic relics from the city, and the activity of meandering through the streets which they suggested brought the Décollagistes' productions close in spirit to the universe of the Situationists.51 Buren has said that he knew Hains and Villeglé in the early 1960s, had even practiced déchirure himself, but that even by 1967, he had not established a

50 See Restany, "Nouveau Réalisme," 17.  
conscious relation between what the Décollagistes did, and what he was doing. Buren did with his Affichage sauvage the reverse of what Hains and Villeglé had done. Buren did not take from the streets the materials to make an art destined for the gallery, instead, he brought to the streets a material which he had not destined to end in a gallery. He used the walls of the streets not as a source of found materials, but as a place to exhibit his own. Since the 1930s, and after the work of the Mexican muralists, of several major figures of the École de Paris such as Picasso, Léger and Matisse, and of the abstract geometric painters, the theme of the wall as site for public and political discourse in France had become a stale cliché of the politically concerned artist. By the 1950s only Antoni Tàpies and Jean Dubuffet could still instill some vitality in the metaphor of the wall by exploiting the violence of graffiti, and the memory of the use of the wall as a site to voice protests during the occupation of France by Germany. In April 1968, when Buren glued over already existing posters more than 200 of his own posters composed of the simple motif of repeated stripes, he invested the theme of the wall with an entirely different kind of content.

Buren effectuated another kind of appropriation than that of the Décollagistes Hains and Villeglé. Instead of appropriating posters as they were found in the streets, he glued his own posters in various places, and thus appropriated the spaces themselves. In so doing he appropriated a portion of the ambulatory corridor where the poster was glued, a corridor in the city, which people took, some regularly, some occasionally, some in extraordinary circumstances, but in all likelihood a place where hundreds if not thousands of people would pass. It was a site both in the sense of a particular area and in the sense of a brief moment of advertisement for the ambulant spectator. By soliciting the attention of the passersby with his posters, Buren finally appropriated also their time, in the instant these people took to glance, however cursorily, at the posters. Even if they remained indifferent, Buren appropriated their indifference. Affichage sauvage was only an in situ intervention to the extent that the stripes were placed in areas where people would be crisscrossing continuously. Moreover, since Buren was also targeting the attention of these individuals, it was also a work "in-visu."

Buren reinvested the wall as a site for public expression, but what he exhibited seemed to counter the intention of a public art since the stripes remained mute, refusing to deliver any message. The nature of those stripes, and the effect they were producing are questions that need to be analyzed. Buren's self-labeled outil visuel, the simple repetition of stripes on a white background, is an extremely light kind of material compared to the massive physicality of Smithson's materials. While the striped fabric that Buren chose as the original material was already lightweight enough, the real "material" that Buren extracted from the commercial fabric consisted in the patterning itself. The

52 Baldassari, Daniel Buren: Entrevue, 13.
53 Buren claims he met Siqueiros in 1956-1957 when on a trip to Mexico, at the age of eighteen, and Picasso in 1955. See Baldassari, Daniel Buren: Entrevue, 31, 46.
surface on which the stripes lay was interchangeable because the pattern was always identical, always recognizable, no matter what its material support might be. To put it in linguistic, Saussurean terms which were becoming fashionable at the time, the pattern was the “signifier” and the “signified,” that is, the corresponding idea the viewer should have in mind when perceiving the pattern was... “Buren’s work”. This is true now because Buren’s work has become a recognizable cultural commodity (only for the cognoscenti however), but then, when Buren was still unknown, his stripes said nothing at all, they had no signified that could be decipherable. It was at that moment, perhaps the last moment, that Buren’s stripes were at their most significant, that they had the full power to disrupt.

Buren’s stripes had thus almost no material existence since their materiality consisted solely in their regular pattern, and they had almost no meaning. The nature of that pattern, and its surprising link to the notion of infrastructure needs now to be investigated. The stripes, while they do take on different modes of association depending on the context in which they are used, are above all, or underneath it all, a norm, in the sense that they represent the minimal requirements for a sign. In the same way that the numbers one and zero form, in computer language, the minimal elements for transmission of information, or that, in Saussurean linguistics, the minimal requirement for a sign is that there be a shape distinguishable from its background, Buren’s stripes, the alternating absence of a mark and the presence of a mark (with absence and presence occupying an equal amount of space), meet but doesn’t exceed the minimal elements for a sign. The restriction that the work should have the minimum conditions to be a sign while in actuality restraining itself from saying anything, means more than the fact that the stripes are the “raw matter” for signs. The outil visuel is the degree zero of a sign in the sense that its function is not that of signification nor of representation: in its formal reduction, it exists at a level that prevents the establishment of a syntax that would carry meaning and transform the stripes into a message. Unlike the barcode one finds on products at the grocery store, Buren’s bands are all identical in width and in spacing, they “say” nothing, and the spectator, like a barcode reader at the cashier, draws a blank.

The Affichaqe sauvaqe had no message to convey except to point to the sheer fact of conveyance. The stripes simply stated the brut fact of their presence and their distribution over a portion of Parisian space. In Affichaqe sauvaqe, Buren’s stripes acted not as discrete objects, but essentially as a system of distribution. What was being distributed was not a sign, let alone a message, but, more basically, an infrastructure or a norm. Buren’s stripes were at the same time an infrastructure and a norm. They were an infrastructure because of their distribution in space, which imitated the various infrastructure of signs, advertisements, signalization, etc, that abound in the city. They did

56Les Écrits, Vol. II, 71: “Une œuvre, donc, au sens traditionnel et avant-gardiste du terme, ne peut subvertir un accrochage, même en s’intercalant entre deux œuvres comme nous venons de le voir, puisqu’il s’agirait alors ni plus ni moins qu’une œuvre de plus à regarder.” Pour s’ “intercaler” – au sens où je l’entends – il faut, d’une part “un outil” visuel qui le permette techniquement et d’autre part que cet outil une fois en place par son dire ou plutôt son non dire (comparé au bavardage des œuvres) soit en contradiction avec tout le reste.”
not advertise or signal anything, however, since their main “message” was to point to an infrastructure of spatial, and urban distribution. But they were also a norm or a standard. The use of the standard was an already familiar gesture in the art world since Duchamp had used it in his Standard Stoppages of 1913-1914, but unlike the Duchampian use of the standard, which emphasized its arbitrariness, Buren’s standard was not a fantastical one. Norms or standards are very closely related to infrastructures. Infrastructures are intimately linked to standardization, since the proper functioning of an infrastructure depends on an agreement on various standards. One can better grasp the essential connection between standardization and infrastructure by imagining what would happen if cars were allowed to be three times the normal or standard width, and what havoc this would cause for the highway infrastructure. The relation between infrastructure and standard is one of mutual dependence.

With Affichage sauvage, Buren borrowed from his urban environment not only its materials, the posters, but also one of the many communications mediums that crisscross its space. Buren not only made posters, but he planned, however casually, their distribution in space, going over other sign distributions. The medium was crude, but posting is nevertheless an efficient means of conveyance of information through the urban fabric. By focusing on information distribution, Buren rejected the manufactured object, opting, like many of his contemporaries, for a “semiotic” mode of inquiry, concerned exclusively with systems of signs. By laying out his posters here and there in a neighborhood of Paris, Buren was establishing a physical infrastructure of signs, even if there was no sign, only “aborted” signs. What was important was the infrastructure, not what circulated on it. Buren had put up a grid for the distribution of information, incitements or orders, but without transmitting any of the sort.

The infrastructure built by Buren’s strategy of deployment of his posters took an added signification by the extraordinary timing of their distribution in the month of April, 1968, right before the social explosion of May 1968. For all their apparent neutrality, the stripes absorbed some of the political tension of the place where they were distributed. This was especially visible in one “photo-souvenir” (fig. 44) one of the innumerable photographs Buren has taken to keep a record of his in situ works. On the photograph, there is one of Buren’s striped posters covering other posters, one of which consists in a call to a meeting of the students of the university of Nanterre. On what remains visible of the poster, can be read this moving call to arms: “Les étudiants se sont révoltés contre l’université pourrie de la bourgeoisie. Depuis le 22 mars ils ont fait des locaux de l’université les lieux d’expression la plus libre de leurs idées. Les murs sont couverts d’affiches, les amphis reçoivent des meetings chaque jour.” Underwritten by the poster of the students of Nanterre Buren’s stripes took on another, dramatic dimension. At the time, Nanterre was not just

---

59 We can see the photo in Francblin, *Daniel Buren*, 25, 29.
60 See figure.
any university. The first student occupation that led eventually to the
events of May 68 was organized by the students of Nanterre, where
Lefebvre, the single most important intellectual influence on the
students who led the uprising, taught sociology. The analysis of the
origin of the events of May, and of the role the university of Nanterre
played, explains how the context created by May could inform Buren’s
work. David Caute, a historian of these events, gave a description of
the newly built Nanterre campus that showed how the conception of the
building itself was a demonstration that something had gone awry with
modern life, and a proof of Lefebvre’s pertinence:

The Nanterre campus of the University of Paris, opened in 1964,
consisted of ultramodern, ultrafunctional buildings of steel and
glass set in the midst of tar-paper-hut slums and raw, unfinished
low-cost housing, crammed with immigrant Algerians. By 1968 the
campus accommodated 12,000 students, many of them suffering from
acute alienation. Dancing once a week, ciné club twice a week, and
television every night were no substitute for the warmth and
pulsing life of the Latin Quarter. Furniture could neither be
added to nor changed; no cooking was allowed; and boys were
forbidden to visit girls in their rooms.61

It was thus a boy-cannot-meet-girl story that fired off the Nanterre
students with Daniel Cohn-Bendit at their head, the most celebrated of
all the May 68 youth leaders, to begin occupying the front steps of the
women’s dormitories (!) in April 67, an action degenerating into a
general “strike” of the student population of Nanterre.62 The hostility
of the students, some of them forming the group of the Enragés, which
lead the revolt of May, went as far as to associate the content of the
 teachings of the university, especially in sociology, to the
requirements of the American capitalist system.63 The May 68 movement
was fired off by the closing of the campus of Nanterre on order of the
rector of the University of Paris, a gesture which started the
solidarity movement, beginning with the Sorbonne, on the day following...

61Caute, David, The Year of the Barricades, A Journey Through 1968 (New
York: Harper & Row, Publishers), 86. It is interesting to note that, on
the other side of the Atlantic, the University of Berkeley, another
hotbed of student agitation, presented the same kind of modernization
that singled it out as a dehumanizing institution: “At Berkeley, like
many other big state schools, students were crammed into classrooms,
dorm rooms, and cafeterias. Some students had to watch their professors
on closed-circuit television. Senior professors had little time for
undergraduates. Most undergraduate teaching, in fact, was done by poorly
paid graduate assistants, often in their early twenties. University
administrators, dealing with tens of thousands of students, acted less
like nurturing educators and more like corporate systems managers. To
manage the herd, the university insisted on maintaining a host of
anachronistic in loco parentis rules, from parietals that restricted
student visiting hours to regulations that limited student’s freedom of
expression. In order to keep track of the tens of thousands of
matriculants, Berkeley became the nation’s first computerized campus:
students were numbered, registered by computer, and issued a punch card.
Many students (in those distant days) found this computerized
information dehumanizing.” Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 195.
62Same page. 10,000 to 12,000 students stopped attending the lectures.
63Ibid., 87.
the closing of Nanterre. There, on a poster at the entrance hall of the university, one could find an attack on both capitalism and industrial society: "The revolution which is beginning will call in question not only capitalist society but industrial society. The consumer society is bound for a violent death. Social alienation must vanish from history. We are inventing a new and original world. Imagination is seizing power." The distribution of posters throughout the city was an essential characteristic of the May uprising, and their production and distribution a tactical way to counteract the production and dissemination of information by the magazines, newspapers, radio and television. Furthermore it was a way of symbolically taking over the streets of Paris. The École des Beaux-Arts soon joined the strike and an atelier populaire (fig. 45) was formed to produce posters.

By placing his poster against the one from Nanterre, Buren let some of the political energy that pervaded the student poster rub off onto his own. It was a measure of Buren's apparent lack of political involvement (at least in his practice as artist) that his stripes did not confirm, deny, endorse nor approve in any way the message literally subjacent to his stripes. Was Buren taking advantage or responding to a particular social climate, and if he was making a gesture of sympathy towards the rebellious students, why did he cover their posters? The link between Buren and the Nanterre students uprising was inevitable but difficult to evaluate. One thing remains sure: the poster of Nanterre served to point out the fact that the infrastructure of signs that traversed the city could also be a site for a political struggle for meaning. The poster of the rebellious students also indicated a desire to inhabit the city differently, and hence could also be seen as a claim to territory.

Buren's attitude during "les événements" contrasted strongly with that of the artists associated with the Nouvelle Figuration such as Aillaud, Arroyo, Buraglio, Fromanger, Le Parc, Rancillac, Tisserand, who joined the students of the École des Beaux-Arts in the making of political posters. Still, Buren's work did present a political dimension in that period, and this dimension is perhaps best explicated by looking at the analysis of May 1968 by the philosopher Claude Lefort. To Lefort, there was no revolution nor insurrection in May because it was essentially a student phenomenon, and when May evolved into a general strike, the workers' demands were modest, centering around issues that did not endanger the power of the State. What motivated above all the events of May 1968 was an hostility to the institutions and to the destructive effects of modernization. May 68 was the search for a new type of public space where common answers could be sought to common problems. Here Lefort touched on an essential characteristic of May 68. During May 68, this new public space will be tested by what Lefort called, after Althusser, the practice of "interpellation," i.e., public interventions of the kind that the Situationists were practicing since the 1950s.

---

64 Ibid., 222.
65 Ibid., 225-227.
66 Ibid., 226.
67 Lefort, Claude, "Relecture," 203-204.
68 Ibid., 205.
69 Ibid., 209.
Lefort's notion of interpellation was a modified version of Louis Althusser's similarly named concept. For Althusser, interpellation was the process by which ideology transforms individuals into subjects, ideology amounting to the act of hailing individuals as subjects.\textsuperscript{70} Lefort transformed the notion to signify the questioning of ideology by the individual, and not his or her subjection to ideology. The posters of Buren, interestingly, addressed both notions since they imitated "normal" signage that the passersby took for granted, thus expressing their subjection to ideology, but, by their muteness, those same posters questioned that normalcy. Interpellation is a key concept when considering the work of Buren in that period. In fact, Lefort, more than anyone else, is the philosopher closest in spirit to the practice of Buren. It is more than a play of words on Buren's beloved notion of in situ to say that the posters in Affichage Sauvage had the passersby "in visu." That effect of the posters was the application of the practice of interpellation. In fact Lefort's notion of interpellation explains what made Buren's use of his stripes an exceptional artistic gesture: they ceased to be works of art concerned with questions of representation to become signs (or almost-signs since they were mute) that acted on passersby by calling attention to themselves and their distribution.

Once his art was on the street, as with the Affichage sauvage, Buren's strategy could not but be interpreted through the intellectual and political atmosphere of the moment. But the silence of his stripes, in the midst of the cacophony of the May 68 posters, must have been impressive. Their muteness, however, did not mean that they were inactive. According to Lefort, May 68, acted as a "révélateur," a photographic developer, that allowed one to have an image of the social power which usually remains anonymous. This "developer" was a new language of action, the practice of interpellation - which meant to interrupt the order of the day in jurisdictional language - and provocation, the aim of which was to "faire apparaître ce que dissimule le discours convenu et la croyance en l'ordre qui le soutient."\textsuperscript{71} Buren's stripes, and especially their repetition and distribution in an urban space, forced the walker to think about the rationale behind their presence. To paraphrase Lefort, the walker, confronted by the muteness of Buren's stripes, would reflect not on the rationale for the presence of the stripes (since it was not accessible), but on the fact that s/he was surrounded by such systems of signs and automatically assumed a rationale behind each of those systems.

There was in Affichage sauvage an application of the theory and the actions of the Situationists on the theater of modernity as it unfolded in an urban space. The spectacle of modernity, as Guy Debord explained in the Society of the Spectacle, existed with the help of such an assumption of normalcy: "In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the permanent presence of this justification,

\textsuperscript{71}Lefort, "Relecture," 206-209.
since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.” Since, in their own way, the stripes of Buren, as much as the student posters, disrupted the spectacle.

Two other works also done in 1968 complemented Affichage sauvage: the circulation of stripes by sandwich men, and the production of legalistic documents pertaining to the right of ownership of his works. The Hommes sandwiches (fig. 46) which happened more or less at the same time as the Affichage sauvage was meant to be its opposite. The circulation of the stripes through the streets of Paris was the reverse of pedestrians circulating in front of his posters. It introduced an additional factor in the fact that Buren hired men, and put himself in the position of a manager of a company comprising of two itinerant employees. The circulation of stripes was done in conjunction to an intervention at the Salon de Mai inside the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (fig. 47) where his stripes paper, of the same color as the one being circulated by the sandwich men, covered a wall of the museum.

Buren also redefined his status as an artist by extending his reach into legal territory by producing, also in 1968, a few documents that were legalistic in nature, and were meant to formalize the terms by which Buren would accept the transmission of ownership of one of his works to a collector. The first of such legalistic documents was the Certificat d’acquisition, a Description formelle de l’oeuvre acquise, and a Bordereau de transfert (figs. 48 and 49) all written in 1968. In 1969, Buren produced Avertissement, also consisting of a set of rules for the ownership of a Buren, with again a Description formelle de l’oeuvre, and a short text, without title but with the following indication: Coupon détachable à ne pas détacher par le possesseur de l’avertissement et de l’oeuvre qui y est décrite. The fastidious detailing of Buren’s conditions as they were laid out in these documents is less important than the fact that through this legalistic manoeuver, Buren was investigating the rules, conventions and norms in the legal field, after having done the same for the institutions, rules and conventions of the exhibiting of art, attempting to keep control of his work after its transmission. Buren was also taking on the role of a legal expert or a galerist in dealing with commercial transactions between the artist and the buyer. This was very different in nature from the clowning of Yves Klein, who in 1957-1959 had sold the rights to the Cession d’un volume de sensibilité picturale immatérielle transférable (fig. 50); Marcel Duchamp’s Monte Carlo Bond, 1924 (fig. 51) was also a predecessor to Buren’s legal incursion. The Monte Carlo Bonds consisted of thirty shares from a stock company which Duchamp had formed, and where he assumed the position of Président du Conseil d’administration simultaneously with that of an anonymous administrator, under the subterfuge that, for the more prestigious position, he would use the

73All these texts are reproduced in Buren’s Écrits, 31-35 for the texts of the year 1968, 61-64 for the texts of the year 1969.
pseudonym Rose Sélavy. The "Tzanck Check," 1919 (fig. 52) was an enlarged check that Duchamp made in payment for the services of his dentist, Daniel Tzanck, a "work" that he then bought back from the dentist. Duchamp's early investigations into the relationship between art and managerialism is striking, but, of course, the money was to finance some future playing time for Duchamp at the Monte Carlo casino.75

The text Buren concocted functioned as a legal performative since they bound the legitimate reader of the text, that is, the buyer, into a legal contract with the artist. They were certainly not meant to function as works of art themselves, but by setting conditions to the ownership of a work, they allowed Buren to enter into another conventional site that defined the context of a work of art. Mostly written in an atrocious "legalese," they painted a portrait of an artist intent on extending his authority far beyond the production cycle. The legal documents would not be so charged with meaning if Buren had been content to use them when the situation of a purchase occurred, but by publishing those texts, Buren gives them the added dimension of being a statement on how he views his role as an artist. These questions are treated in the conclusion.

To compare the Affichage sauvage of Buren to the Nonsites of Smithson does not seem at first sight to be productive since the two bodies of works seem so distant in both their form and the conceptual universes they spring forth. It is however possible to find some points of entry into the problem. The first is to consider that both these artists, in the year 1968, developed a strategy to show art works outside of the institutional network of galleries and museums, even if Smithson's strategy achieved that only partially. The second and most important point is that they both investigated forms of infrastructures in their work. Smithson dealt with transportation infrastructures, Buren with infrastructures for the circulation of information. With Smithson's Nonsites, the collection of materials, their transformation, their exhibition in a City gallery consisted in personal, private actions self-imposed by Smithson and acted on on desolate quarry sites in suburbia, which represented raw, despoliated nature to the artist. The quarries were meant to be seen as "the natural landscape" despoliated by industrial processes, which Smithson's actions were imitating. The infrastructures served as a support for Smithson's actions, just as they did for the large corporation. For Buren, the infrastructures for the circulation and the distribution of signs underlined a spectacular society where the network of signs expressed the ideology of consumerism, while being also an instrument in the hands of a bureaucratic organization intent on shaping society through rules, conventions, official events and venues.

Buren's actions in Affichage sauvage were illegal, performed in public, densely populated spaces situated outside of any institutional context. Smithson's actions were also executed outside of an institutional context - even if they ended up in one, that is, the gallery - and they were legal to the extent that the quarries were really abandoned sites.

75Such was the explanation for the rationale for Duchamp's company given in an article on the bonds in The Little Review, X, no. 2 (Autumn and Winter, 1924-1925), 17-22. Mentioned in Schwarz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, 491.
Smithson's actions recalled also exploring and mining, while Buren's recalled the political activism of the period which sometimes found expression on the walls of Paris, in a battle for signification and affirmation fought on the streets. The universes of both artists could not have appeared to be further apart, yet they each presented a critique of the role technology, whose effects was multiplied through its various infrastructures, and the development of huge organizations devoted to mass production, had had in shaping modernity as they experienced it. They both showed contempt as well as fascination for their environment, whether this environment was the desolate suburban landscape eaten up by the infrastructure of the consumer age, the highway, or the administered, semiotized space of the urban core.
Fig. 26 Robert Smithson, *Pine Barrens*, 1968, Gelatin-silver print, 20.3 x 25.4cm. One of several views of the airfield.
Fig. 27 Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*, 1968, aluminium with sand, 30.4 x 166.3 x 166.3cm.
Fig. 28 Robert Smithson, A Nonsite, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968, photographs, wood, limestone, 41.9 x 208.3 x 279.4.
Fig. 29 Robert Smithson, Nonsite “Line of Wreckage,” Bayonne, New Jersey, 1968, detail, chromogenic development prints and photostat, 4 frames, 8.9 x 109.2cm each. (Image is standing on its left side.)
Fig. 30 Robert Smithson, *New Jersey, New York*, 1967, gelatin-silver prints, ink and graphite on paper 55.9 x 43.8 cm. Detail of center.
Fig. 31 Robert Smithson, Snap Shot Notes - Pertaining to “Double Nonsite” California & Nevada near Baker Cinder Cones/Rock Collected at Site (Lava)/and “Death Valley Nonsite” Rock Collected at Site (Chalk), 1968, gelatin-silver contact prints and ink, 50.8 x 20cm. Detail of bottom half showing “Death Valley Nonsite” Rock Collected at Site (Chalk), approx. 25.4 x 20cm.
Fig. 32 Robert Smithson collecting obsidian for Double Nonsite, California and Nevada, 1968 near Montgomery Pass, Nevada, in Mineral County, July 26 and 27, 1968. Photograph by Virginia Dwan (or Nancy Holt).
Fig. 33 Installation view of Robert Smithson exhibition at Dwan Galley, New York, February 1969. In foreground Gravel Mirror with Cracks and Dust, 1968, mirror and gravel, 91.4 x 548.6 x 91.4cm; in background Double Nonsite, California and Nevada, 1968, steel, obsidian and lava, 30.5 x 180.3 x 180.3cm.
Table 1 Table from Chandler, Alfred Jr, "The Emergence of Managerial Capitalism," in Chandler, Alfred and Richard Tedlow, eds, The Coming of Managerial Capitalism (Homewood, Ill.: R.D. Irwin, 1985), p. 401.
### TABLE 1

The Distribution of the Largest Manufacturing Enterprises with More than 20,000 Employees, by Industry and Nationality, 1973

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.I.C.</th>
<th>Outside of the U.S.</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Apparel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lumber</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Printing and Publishing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Chemical</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Petroleum</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Leather</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Stone, Clay, and Glass</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Primary Metal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Fabricated Metal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Machinery</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Electrical Machinery</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Transportation Equipment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Measuring Instrument</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversified/Conglomerate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1970, the 100 largest industrials accounted for more than a third of net manufacturing output in the United States and over 45 percent in the United Kingdom. In 1980, the top 100 accounted for about 25 percent of total net output in both countries.

Fig. 34 Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Pour*, Rome, 1969. Photograph by Robert Smithson.
Fig. 35 Robert Smithson, Concrete Pour, Chicago, 1969, gelatin-silver print, image 19 x 19cm on 20.3 x 25.4cm paper.
Fig. 36 Robert Smithson, The Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970, mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, water, coil 457m long x 4.5m wide.
Fig. 37 Robert Smithson, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, Emmen, Holland, 1971, Broken Circle: green water, white and yellow sand flats, 42m in diameter.
Fig. 38 Robert Smithson, *Amarillo Ramp*, Texas, 1973, 48m in diameter.
Fig. 39 Robert Smithson, *1000 Tons of Asphalt*, c. 1969, ink, pencil and crayon on paper, 45.7 x 60.9cm.
Fig. 40 View of Daniel Buren's mosaic at Grapetree Bay, Ile Ste-Croix, 1965.
Fig. 41 Common Parisian store-front fabric.
Fig. 42 Daniel Buren, *Peinture sur toile*, 1968. Detail, view of back of painting with mention on the canvas “Fait par Buren, Milan, octobre 1968” and on the wood frame “Milan 1968 octobre, fait par Buren.”
Fig. 43 Daniel Buren, Untitled, 1968, photo-souvenir of Affichage sauvage, Paris, April 1968.
Fig. 44 Daniel Buren, *Untitled*, 1968, photo-souvenir of *Affichage sauvage*, Paris, April 1968, with the "Nanterre poster" underneath.
Fig. 45 Atelier populaire des Beaux-Arts, Mai 1968.
Fig. 46 Daniel Buren, *Untitled*, 1968, photo-souvenir with *Hommes sandwiches*, green-and-white paper, Paris.
Fig. 47 Daniel Buren, Papier rayé de bandes verticales blanches et vertes, 1969, reconstituted en 1989, two views of the installation, 5 x 18m.
Fig. 48 Daniel Buren, *Certificat d’acquisition*, followed by *Description formelle de l’oeuvre acquise*, and *Bordereau de transfert*, 1968, printed in Paris.
Certificat d'acquisition n° 

M. __________________________________________ demeurant à __________________________________________

ci-après dénommé « l’acquéreur », signataire du présent certificat, reconnait tout d’abord que les deux conditions suivantes doivent être remplies :

– l’original du certificat signé par l’acquéreur doit avoir été transmis à Daniel Buren et déposé par celui-ci auprès de M. Hugues-Michel Durand, avocat à la cour, ci-après dénommé « le dépositaire »;
– l’acquéreur doit être en possession d’une photocopie de l’original signé du certificat accompagné d’un procès-verbal de dépôt dressé par le dépositaire.

Seule la réalisation de ces deux conditions permet de dire que l’œuvre décrite ci-dessous, ci-après dénommée « l’œuvre acquise », provient/est le fait de Daniel Buren.

Ceci étant admis, M. __________________________________________, a signé le présent certificat reconnaissant que seul Daniel Buren est en mesure de vérifier que l’œuvre acquise est bien de lui.

Considérant que le but du présent certificat est de préserver tout abus du nom de l’auteur de l’œuvre à laquelle il est attaché en tant que responsable et que d’autre part l’œuvre décrite au présent certificat n’a que la valeur que l’acquéreur a voulu lui donner en signant ledit certificat, l’acquéreur reconnaît que :

– l’œuvre en question peut être donnée et ne prend une valeur marchande que par la réalisation des deux conditions préliminaires ci-dessus énoncées;
seul le présent certificat après réalisation des conditions ci-dessus l'autorise à dire que l'œuvre qui y est décrite provient de Daniel Buren;

en conséquence, toute œuvre similaire en tout point à laquelle ne serait pas attaché un certificat similaire n'aura ni plus ni moins de « qualité » mais le nom de Daniel Buren ne pourra pas y être accollé;

de même, au cas où l'acquéreur manquerait au respect de l'une quelconque des obligations qu'il prend par les présentes, il s'interdit dès à présent de prétendre encore dès lors à attribuer l'œuvre acquise à Daniel Buren.

Sur ce dernier point, l'acquéreur comprend et admet en effet que la nature de l'œuvre acquise ne permet pas à son auteur d'en conserver la responsabilité aussitôt qu'il en a perdu le contrôle ou que ce contrôle lui a été retiré, par manquement aux obligations justement souscrites.

Autrement dit, la provenance de l'œuvre, établie tout d'abord par le présent certificat comme indiqué ci-dessus, ne peut continuer à être proclamée par l'acquéreur que dans la mesure où celui-ci se conforme aux conditions obligatoires énoncées dans ledit certificat.

L'acquéreur convient en effet qu'en signant le présent certificat, afin de se préserver la preuve que l'œuvre qui y est décrite provient d'un auteur déterminé, il entend donner, par la même, une valeur marchande à l'œuvre acquise, à laquelle l'œuvre acquise reste principalement étrangère.

Par conséquent, souhaitant s'assurer du fait que l'œuvre acquise provient de Daniel Buren, il reconnaît comme indéniable que ce dernier doit pouvoir conserver le contrôle de l'usage qui peut être fait de son nom, dans la mesure où plus le travail est impersonnel, plus la responsabilité de son auteur est primordiale. Encore une fois, donc, il est admis que toute infraction au présent certificat dont l'acquéreur se rendrait coupable aurait pour sanction immédiate, en dehors de la réparation éventuelle du préjudice subi, la perte du bénéfice du dit certificat.

Ces points essentiels étant admis par l'acquéreur, celui-ci s'engage à observer et exécuter les obligations suivantes :

1. L'acquéreur s'interdit de reproduire ou laisser reproduire par tout moyen photographique, cinématographique ou autre, l'œuvre acquise, sauf autorisation préalable et écrite de Daniel Buren.
2. Toute exposition publique de l’œuvre acquise, dans quelque contexte ou but que ce soit, est interdite, sauf autorisation préalable et écrite de Daniel Buren.

3. Étant donné qu’il importe avant tout que les obligations et leurs motifs inclus dans le présent certificat se transmettent en quelque main que passent ledit certificat ainsi que l’œuvre acquise, par quelque voie que ce soit, pour quelque raison que ce soit, l’acquéreur devra faire adhérer son cessionnaire au présent certificat.

4. En cas de cession, comme il est dit ci-dessus au paragraphe 3, l’acquéreur se chargera de faire parvenir à Daniel Buren le présent certificat, après avoir pris soin de remplir et faire signer par son cessionnaire le « bordereau de transfert » qui fait partie intégrante du présent certificat. Daniel Buren devant se charger, quant à lui, de faire signer un nouvel original au cessionnaire ainsi déclaré.

5. En cas de cession, les frais de dépôt seront à la charge du cessionnaire, qui devra s’engager à les régler sur justificatif.

6. L’acquéreur reconnaît que seul le procès-verbal dressé par le dépositaire accompagné d’une photocopie du certificat, ce dernier correspondant à l’œuvre qui y est décrite, permet de dire que ladite œuvre est le fait de Daniel Buren.

7. Si l’œuvre est cédée sans qu’une telle cession ne soit déclarée à Daniel Buren ni, en conséquence, que le cessionnaire ait adhéré aux termes et conditions du présent certificat, ladite œuvre n’est plus déterminable ni revendicable comme étant le fait de Daniel Buren.

8. L’acquéreur s’interdit de reproduire ou laisser reproduire le certificat original, ou sa photocopie, ou le procès-verbal de dépôt dressé par le dépositaire, ainsi que d’exposer ces mêmes documents dans quel que lieu que ce soit, avec ou sans l’œuvre à laquelle il appartient, sauf accord préalable et écrit de Daniel Buren.


10. Il ne sera délivré qu’une seule et unique copie, comme dit ci-dessus, du procès-verbal de dépôt du dépositaire.

11. Les obligations contenues dans le présent certificat resteront en vigueur jusqu’à 50 ans après le décès de Daniel Buren. Les successeurs en ligne directe de ce dernier auront vocation à connaître la juste exécution des obligations inscrites au certificat. Ce terme ne saurait toutefois en aucun cas constituer une restriction par rapport
aux droits reconnus par la loi, les règlements ou la coutume.

12. Le présent certificat est soumis au droit français et tout litige survenant quant à son interprétation ou exécution devra être porté devant les tribunaux du ressort de la cour d'appel de Paris.

***

Description formelle de l’œuvre acquise:

A. Peinture sur toile.
Support : tissu rayé de bandes blanches et alternées et verticales, de 8,7 cm (± 0,3) chacune.
Travail : les deux bandes sont recouvertes de peinture blanche acrylique recto.
Hauteur : __________________ Largeur : __________________
Date de réalisation : ____________________
Si cette œuvre a été faite spécialement et doit se trouver exclusivement à une place définie, le mentionner explicitement ci-dessous :

B. Papiers collés.
Support : description la plus exacte possible de l’endroit où se trouvent collés les papiers (éventuellement schéma + dimension de la pièce)
Travail : nombre de papiers collés approximativement ________
Papiers blancs et __________ rayés verticalement de 8,7 cm (± 0,3 cm) chacun.
Fait le __________________
Emplacement choisi par : ____________________________
Collage réalisé par : ____________________________

***
Bordereau de transfert

Je soussigné ____________________________________________
ai acquis l’œuvre décrite au certificat d’acquisition n° __________
œuvre qui était en possession de M. ____________________________

En conséquence, j’ai pris connaissance des termes et conditions
énumérés audit certificat et déclare les approuver entièrement.

Je m’engage notamment à régler les frais de dépôt à première
demande, sur justificatif.

Le certificat sus-énoncé sera transmis à Daniel Buren par
M. ____________________________ , cédant, de telle sorte que me soit
transmis par Daniel Buren un nouvel original du certificat d’acqui-
sition que je m’engage d’ores et déjà à signer, étant entendu que mon
adhésion aux termes et conditions du certificat correspondant à
l’œuvre acquise est dès à présent valable et définitive.

Il m’a été remis par M. ____________________________, cédant,
une copie du certificat comportant le bordereau de transfert dûment
rempli et signé, cette copie n’ayant de valeur qu’entre le cédant et
le cessionnaire mais ne prouvant en rien la provenance de l’œuvre
acquise.

Fait à ____________________________, le ____________________________
Le cessionnaire, nom : ____________________________
prénoms : ____________________________
adresse : ____________________________
Signature précédée de la mention « lu et approuvé » :

Je soussigné, M. ____________________________________________,
cédant,
certifie la signature de M. ____________________________,
cessionnaire.

Fait à ____________________________, le ____________________________
Le cédant, ____________________________

***

Fait le ____________________________ à ____________________________
Signature de l’acquéreur,
précédée de la mention « lu et approuvé » :
Fig. 49 Daniel Buren, Two exemplars of Description formelle de l'œuvre acquise, top description reads: “Tissu rayé de bandes blanches et oranges. Les deux bandes blanches extrêmes sont recouvertes de peinture blanche recto-verso. Mars 1974, 103 x 141 cm” and bottom: “Tissu rayé de bandes blanches et rouges extrêmes sont recouvertes de peinture blanche recto-verso. Juin 1980 150 x 141 cm.”
DESCRIPTION FORMELLE DE L'ŒUVRE

A1. peinture sur toile
Support : toile tendue de tissu blanc et matériau.
Tissu : blanc, étoffe fine et légère, de 0,5 cm d'épaisseur.
Hauteur : 100 cm
Largueur : 150 cm
Poids : 15 kg

La toile est tendue sur une structure en bois et est fixée à l'aide de clous. La peinture est réalisée à la main par un artiste professionnel.

Peinture Acrylique sur tissu Kaye
Auteur : Lucato Amello Napoli - Italy
Pièce jumelle (n°4)

DESCRIPTION FORMELLE DE L'ŒUVRE

A2. peinture sur toile
Support : toile tendue de tissu blanc et matériau.
Tissu : blanc, étoffe fine et légère, de 0,5 cm d'épaisseur.
Hauteur : 150 cm
Largueur : 150 cm
Poids : 15 kg

La toile est tendue sur une structure en bois et est fixée à l'aide de clous. La peinture est réalisée à la main par un artiste professionnel.

Dimension : 150 cm x 150 cm
Taille du tableau :

Dimensions : 150 cm x 150 cm
Taille du tableau :

Dimensions : 150 cm x 150 cm
Fig. 50 Yves Klein, two versions of *Maquette de chèque*, both of 1959, ink and gold paint, with image standing on its left side, top: 15,50 x 37cm, bottom: 9,7 x 31cm.
CERTIFICAT N° 1

CESSON D'UN VOLUME DE SENSIBILITE PICTURALE IMMATERIELLE TRANSFERABLE

YVES KLEIN, 1961

SERIE A CERTIN'1

CÈDE A M. 
POUR EN VALEUR DE 75 GRAMMES D'OR. FIN.

DATE: 

SERIE A CERTIN'1

CERTIFICAT N° 1

CESSON D'UN VOLUME DE
SENSIBILITE PICTURALE IM-
MATERIELLE TRANSFERABLE

YVES KLEIN, 1961
Fig. 51 Marcel Duchamp, *Monte-Carlo Bond*, 1924, colored litograph with original photo by Man Ray of Marcel Duchamp, in a flat cardboard holder, 31.5 x 19.5cm. Signed, lower left, Rrose Sélavy and right, M. Duchamp. 30 proof with a handstamp 1 to 30, most of them lost.
Fig. 52 Marcel Duchamp, “Tzanck Check,” 1919, Pencil, black and red ink on paper, 37.7 x 53cm.
Paris, December 3rd, 1919

The Teeth's Loan & Trust Company, Consolidated
2 Wall Street,
New York.

Pay to the Order of: Daniel Tzarick
one hundred fifteen and 0/100 Dollars

$115 0/100

Maurice Duchamp
Chapter 4 Conclusion: The Managerialist Regime

In the Marxist interpretation,1 the passage, in the nineteenth century, from the traditional workshop to the factory represents a fundamental change in human history. The factory is a big industrial enterprise based on the exploitation of salaried workers and using machines to produce commodities. The factory requires one continuous process, an impersonal, objective process to which human labor must adapt, and which dictates the specific tasks to perform, independent of any previously acquired traditional skills. In contrast the traditional workshop divided labor into different specialized skills, the individual being still recognized as "unique" in his or her specialty. The factory creates a sharper division between manual and intellectual workers than the workshop system since a stratum of managers must be put in place to supervise the operations of the workers who for their part see the intellectual, or skilled, component of their labor disappear. The passage from the traditional workshop to the factory represents a complete technological and social revolution which has meant the disappearance of the master worker, the master carpenter, the master builder, etc. It has provoked the collapse of the traditional social relations of production that had prevailed for centuries, and in the process has meant the collectivization of huge masses of workers into an anonymous, unskilled labor pool.

But the machine age, which characterized the nineteenth century (and whose influence still persists), should not be taken for the totality of technology.2 Technology knows a prodigious development in the twentieth century, branching out in a multitude of practices and knowledges that are meant to make the transition to a technological universe less painful for humanity than in the savage nineteenth century. Technology is a collection of refined behaviors in various domains of human reality, social, economical and administrative, all with the aim of adapting human society to a rational, standardized system. By rationalizing the operations of large organizations such as the corporation, the technology of human management is one form of such adaptative evolution. The major evolution of technology as it advances in the twentieth century is the emphasis on organizations and the coordination of the machines between themselves.3 This phenomenon is what Smithson investigated as industrial throughput with the Nonsites. But technology is also the adaptive measures developed to make the passage into the technological age easier for human society. From a purely mechanical, machinelike reality in the nineteenth century, technologies develop throughout the twentieth century in multifarious ways: there are organization technologies for production, management and planning in economic fields, as well as technologies in medicine, genetics, pedagogy, orientation and publicity to smooth out the adaptation of human needs to the requirements of the technological age.4

Consumerism has further increased technology's influence on populations by opening a channel between the logical operations of technology and the desires of the individual as client, the mass consumer. By

1Ellul, Jacques, La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle, 1-4. I summarize Ellul's interpretation of the Marxist position.
2Ibid., 9-10.
3Ibid., 11.
4Same page.
exploiting the imaginary of the mass consumer, technology has adapted its products to his or her collective wishes, but at the same time has started to shape that collective imaginary, through, for example, publicity. Individualism loses ground to the absolute power of capitalism.  

There are two conflicting views on how to evaluate the impact of technology on human society. One is optimistic, and believes that technology is value neutral and that its effects depend on how it is used. This view includes both those who believe that technological progress, combined with the virtues of the free enterprise, cannot but contribute to humankind’s wellness, as well as those who believe that the implementation of the machine age onto human societies unprepared for their impact had nefarious effects leading ultimately to class warfare. For the latter, technology’s impact will become positive once the division of labor created by the industrial age between those who decide and those who execute orders has been abolished. The pessimistic view sees technological progress as an autonomous process that has taken control of the course of human development with devastating consequences for humanity. Smithson and Buren belong, alternatively, to both pessimistic and optimistic views, both critical of some forms of the landscape of modernity, and tempted to join the managerial regime.

One way to clarify the differences in the way Smithson and Buren look at the question of infrastructures would be to see their fields of inquiry in Althusserian terms of “infrastructure” and “superstructure.” Those two concepts were meant to describe the “totality” of society, with the infrastructure being concerned with the production forces, and the superstructure concerned with the reproduction of the forces of production, that is, the maintaining of certain political and jurisdictional rules, and the maintaining of a certain set of ideologies. In this theoretical framework, Smithson could be seen as investigating the infrastructure by looking at the various “infrastructures” built for the highway system and for the extraction and transport of raw matter, all associated with the “production forces.” Buren, more preoccupied by rules and conventions, by legal matters, and by institutions and the signs that they generate and distribute over the social, public space, can be seen as investigating the superstructure. It is however essential to keep in mind Ellul’s argument, already stated at the beginning of this chapter, that technology takes on many forms in its effort to adapt human society to the requirements of a rationalized organization, and to consider that Buren and Smithson were investigating some of its manifestations. Both

---

5Adorno, Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 120: “Even now the older houses just outside the concrete city centers look like slums, and the new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world fairs in their praise of technical progress and their built-in demand to be discarded after a short while like empty food cans. Yet the city housing projects designed to perpetuate the individual as a supposedly independent unit in a small hygienic dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary - the absolute power of capitalism.”


Buren and Smithson dealt with the question of infrastructure as physical expression, Smithson through the public works, and Buren through the physical distribution of his stripes throughout the city, either as posters, or as signs circulating in the streets, on the backs of human carriers. Both artists equally dealt with the superstructure, Buren, quite evidently because of his interest in conventions, rules and institutions devoted to culture, Smithson because his interventions remain in the field of art, but also because, when the entire set of characteristics of his works is considered, it reveals an interest in the managerial system, itself a field devoted to the reproduction of the conditions of production.

However, Smithson’s actions, performed by him with the help of some friends lacked the fundamental element of the modern managerial structure, that is, the great number of individuals involved in a hierarchical structure that requires new managerial techniques of organization. Smithson’s work, in this sense, remained well within the limits of the classical role of the artist as sole executor of his work. It could be imagined then that the only art form that could “answer” a large corporation like GM for example, would be an equally large organization of artists, separated into top-level and mid-level management, orienting the efforts of a large mass of worker artists. In the visual arts such an art form has never been proposed, artists remaining stubbornly attached to the view of themselves as unique creators.

Smithson was attempting to collaborate directly with private industry in the hope of mobilizing its funding, equipment, and sites of extractions in order to “redeem them.” Smithson wanted to collaborate as an “equal” with industry experts, at first in the series of Proposals for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport (Tippetts, Abbett, McCarthy & Stratton, Architects and Engineers), 1966-67, which were discussed in the first chapter, and where he was consultant to an architect firm. In his later projects, executed on a vast scale, and especially in his reclamation pieces, he would be courting industry again, as a promoter looking for investors. From the outset, Smithson did seem to have been predisposed to working from the inside, that is, to collaborate with the industry whose shapes and infrastructures he was fascinated with. Buren’s involvement with large organizational structures was (and still is) through the bureaucracy of the various artworld events he participated in. Buren’s defiance of the “règles du jeu” legislating the Parisian artworld echoed the targets of the student uprisings of May 1968, a rejection of the rules legislating French society in the name of individual freedom. In the case of Buren, through what could be called an early critique of that institution called “artworld,” there was also a critique of institutions in general. The interventions of Buren at the beginning of his career took place inside the tight, densely populated urban environment of Paris, the center of France, an environment quite unlike that of Smithson’s Passaic, situated beside the center of the United States, New York. Unlike the desolate, instantaneous and empty environment of Passaic, Paris is an old, historically charged and dense environment which was also, in the mid-1960s, anything but desolate.

---

8 Though the managerial regime has for a long time dominated other forms of art such as hollywood-type cinema or music, especially the organizations required by the more extravagant rock concerts.
being in fact the object of a battle for expression and territory fought on its streets.

Another way of looking at Buren’s bureaucratic temptation is to consider his observations on the artist’s studio and a photograph he took of his “studio.” Buren analyzed the concept of the studio in 1971, comparing, among other things, the typical Parisian studio with the New York one. The French, or European style studio was a nineteenth-century creation, big and very high with a maximum of natural light, the American studio, of more recent invention, was lower in ceiling but much bigger in horizontal proportions, and it used electrical lighting. Buren also noticed that the American style studio had already started to gain popularity in Europe. The respective styles of the studios in the two countries seemed to inform the respective styles of their exhibition halls. The photograph chosen by Buren, of his place of work (fig. 53) – a desk placed in a corner – showed the minimum, a chair, a phone, a mess of papers, and displayed Buren’s wish to be considered as just any other middle manager. The photograph stressed exiguity and emphasized the fact that Buren was allocating, to himself, the tiny private space reserved for a low- to mid-rank manager in a big corporation. Buren’s humble office, far from earlier images of the traditional artist’s studio, signalled his abandonment of the studio, the traditional site from which the artist would produce art objects. Only big enough to fill out forms to participate in exhibitions, it suggested the artist’s pre-ference for working in the open, in situ, in the socially, historically, and artistically charged space of the (now) ubiquitous “exhibition event.” The corner office was a fitting representation of the site of art production since the fate of the artist had been to be embraced by a well-administered, international art system of official and semiofficial institutions.

The Certificat d’acquisition, 1968 the Description formelle de l’œuvre acquise, 1968, the Bordereau de transfert, 1968, and Avertissement, 1969, Description formelle de l’œuvre, 1969 and Coupon détachable à ne pas détacher par le possesseur de l’avertissement et de l’œuvre qui y est décrite, 1969, bear witness to the fact that Buren’s assessment of the conditions surrounding a work of art included the legal field, and that the artist had to take on another professional occupation, that of notary. This incursion on the part of Buren into a different professional field was both a supplementary sign that he was more interested in rules and behaviors rather than physical production, but also an expression of his desire to define his own status in terms that are closer to other professional occupations, extending in the process certain areas of his occupation to include the bureaucratic, legal domain. These texts too, in a way, represented another intervention in situ, but the site in question was occupational, and not physical.

With the Hommes sandwiches action, Buren seemed to readily adopt the position of a middle manager. In so doing, he crossed a new boundary in art making: the artist was no longer contracting out the fabrication of his work to a specialized firm, like the Minimalist Judd, but hiring out unskilled labor to perform a task.

The evolution in the New York art scene from the figure of the artist as introspective genius creating in solitude in the studio, typical of

American postwar subjective abstraction represented famously by the Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt among others, to that of an industrial worker or of a manager can be traced, as already mentioned in the introduction, in the career of Frank Stella. The hard edge style of Stella resembles the gestures of the industrial worker in the application of the paint, transforming the artist's task into that reserved for the anonymous worker, while Stella represented himself as a manager.\(^{10}\) Andy Warhol who transformed the artist's studio into a factory, and ultimately took on the role of manager, even if a rather indifferent one, was another precursor of an investigation into the managerial system. During the 1960s, the role of the solitary genius creating alone in his/her studio, the last individual of the industrial era whose task would still allow him/her to produce in isolation, shifted to the position of manager of "decentered and dispersed "post-studio" production."\(^{11}\) Stella's first solo exhibition at the Galerie Lawrence in Paris, in 1961, represented both American hegemony over world affairs, and the postwar shift in the American industrial landscape from an international corporation which exploits the natural resources of foreign countries, to a multinational corporation with branches, distribution points, brand names, and even factories situated within another country. He presented The Benjamin Moore series, from the name of the huge American manufacturer's line of enamels.\(^{12}\) The artist in the 1960s flirted with management, and even if like Andy Warhol, he took on a casual, irresponsible attitude during the process of decision making, he did it nevertheless "as the manager" of the factory. The artist no longer did the work, he managed its production. The evident wish of Buren and Smithson to join the rank of the managers in their practice prefigured the actual evolution of the role, and the situation, of the artist during the 1970s and in the subsequent decades. Buren responded to those new conditions of exhibiting, which he integrated into his work. Smithson had been, until his death, soliciting funding for his large-scale projects.

Of course the hiring of two sandwich men hardly compared with the organization chart of General Motors. Neither did Smithson's calling up some friends to go into the desert to collect rocks and bring them back to town like a crazy Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers' trip\(^{13}\) compare seriously with the same corporation's flow chart. As with Buren, Smithson's work did not involve large numbers of people and, in this sense, both remain well within the limits of the classical role of the artist as sole executor (with the help of a few friends or disciples) of his work. However, in the case of Smithson, the temptation to belong to a large organizational structure was present at the beginning of his career and reoccurred at the later stages in planned, but never realized, gigantic projects. For the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport project, he readily accepted to act as consultant to an architectural firm and to be involved with a team of professionals as a colleague, as somebody possessing a certain kind of expertise. For all their involvement with


\(^{11}\)Ibid., 2, 7-9.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 172-173, 175.

\(^{13}\)The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers are the creation of American comic strip artist Gilbert Sheldon and a real gem of (late) counter cultural creation.
real materials, real transportation, real sites, etc., Smithson’s Nonsites remained within the field of representation. They represented only a congealed snapshot of the process of throughput, without a real flow of materials, because each Nonsite remained a static piece once it was exhibited in the gallery space. It was the throughput fixed in an eternal instant for the purpose of representing it, just like the photograph of the outpourings of the sewer in the Passaic promenade. The limitations in scale of the Nonsites also lacked one fundamental characteristic of the large managerial enterprise, that is, the vastness of the modern corporation. Smithson’s projects from 1969 on will often be drafted in gigantic terms even if they receive in reality a more modest execution. This was already evident in the most famous works of that year, the Asphalt Rundown, Concrete Pour, and Glue Pour, all of 1969, but becomes more so with the Reclamation projects (fig. 54). For these projects, Smithson will place himself in the position of redeemer of the industrial world, no longer simply a partner of industry, but the instrument of its salvation by proposing to solve the differences between ecologists and the industry:

Actually there’s the conflict of interests. On one side you have the idealistic ecologist and on the other side you have the profit desiring miner and you get all kinds of strange twists of landscape consciousness from such people... The ecologist says flatly that strip mines are just ugly and the miner says that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So you have this stalemate and I would say that’s part of the clashing aspects of the entropic tendency, in other words two irreconcilable situations hopelessly going over the same waterfall. It seems that one would have to recognize this entropic condition rather than try to reverse it.14

An offer of collaboration was presented under the form of a “site reclamation.” In 1971, in his first proposal for land reclamation, Smithson proposed the following:

Across the country there are many mining areas, disused quarries, and polluted lakes and rivers. One practical solution for the utilization of such devastated places would be land and water recycling in terms of “earth art”... The world needs coal and highways, but we do not need the results of strip mining or highway trusts. Economics, when abstracted from the world, is blind to natural processes. Art can become a resource, that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist. Ecology and industry are not one-way streets, rather they should be crossroads. Art can help to provide the needed dialectic between them.15

An abreviated form of the same text was used in a second proposal in 1972, where the guilty party was named: “The Peabody Coal, Atlantic Richfield, Garland Coal and Mining, Pacific Power and Light and Consolidated Coal companies must become aware of art and nature, or else they will leave pollution and ruin in their wake.”16 Then, the same

---

14Writings of Robert Smithson, 194.
15Ibid., 220.
16Same page.
year, a third text, "Proposal, 1972 (for Reclamation of a Strip Mine in terms of Earth Art)" offered to transform part of a strip mine:

Our ecological awareness indicates that industrial production can no longer remain blind to the visual landscape. The artist, ecologist, and industrialist must develop in relation to each other, rather than to continue to work and to produce in isolation... Art on this scale should be supported directly by industry, not only private art sponsorship. Art would then become a necessary resource, and not an isolated luxury. The artist must overcome the inequities that come in the wake of blind progress... Those in economic power should not thwart such necessary enterprises. I am therefore requesting that you endorse my proposal. Artists should not be cheated out of doing their work, or forced to exist in the isolation of "art worlds." There should be artist-consultants in every major industry in America.18

"I am therefore requesting." This militant tone of Smithson was strange for somebody who is offering his collaboration. While in the two first proposals, he was offering his collaboration to industry, in this last one, he requests the collaboration of industry. This request indicates that Smithson’s ecological passions were still present, even if one cannot help but be more impressed by the intensity of his desire to work with industry, than of his desire to salvage the environment. In any case the results of his collaboration would have been at best ambivalent. Robert Morris would later see this danger with lucidity. In an article published in 1980, he stated the following: “Smithson envisioned the possibility of the artist acting as a “mediator” between ecological and industrial interests. While 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 resources policies, it would seem that art’s cooperation could only function to disguise and abet misguided and disastrous policies.”19

The positions of Smithson toward technology and ecology can be elucidated by paying close attention to the notion of entropy. Entropy is an irreversible process. The second principle of thermodynamics states that for any isolated system, there is a variable that never decreases, entropy. This condition imposes on time an irreversible direction toward maximum entropy, where there will be a “thermic death” due to the stage of perfect thermodynamic equilibrium reached. The fact that time does not have a symmetrical character distinguishes it from other phenomena studied by the natural sciences, which all present the character of symmetry. So the irreversibility of time, an asymmetric character, must be explained.20 Smithson’s notion of entropy was conceived as a critical notion to oppose to the notion of economic cycles, with their succession of upswings and downswings, and promise of

17Ibid., 221.
18Same page.
19Morris, Robert, “Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation”, October, 12 (Spring, 1980), 102.
never ending growth. Entropy had a definitive “going down all the way” quality for Smithson, and was meant to express concern over the depletion of natural resources by industry:

Economics seem to be isolated and self-contained and conceived of as cycles, so as to exclude the whole entropic process. There’s very little consideration of natural resources in terms of what the landscape looks like after the mining operations of farming operations are completed. So that a kind of blindness ensues. I guess it’s what we call blind profit making. And then suddenly they find themselves within a range of desolation and wonder how they got there. So it’s a rather static way of looking at things. I don’t think things go in cycles. I think things just change from one situation to the next, there’s really no return.21

The notion of entropy was for Smithson also opposed to the notion of time that prevailed in the technological world: “Technological ideology has no sense of time other than its immediate “supply and demand,” and its laboratories function as blinders to the rest of the world. Like the refined “paints” of the studio, the refined “metals” of the laboratory exist within an “ideal system.” Such enclosed “pure” systems make it impossible to perceive any other kinds of processes other than the ones of differentiated technology.”22 The notion of entropy was closely linked to the ecological thesis because ecology also talked about ideas of exhaustion, albeit of natural resources, especially as the exhaustion was supposed to be the outcome of the explosion of world population, in its neo-Malthusian scenario. The notion of limiting what had until now been a continuous acceleration in population growth gained credency at the beginning of the 1970s with the model of exponential growth brought forward by Jay Forrester in World Dynamics published 1971.23 That model and its dire predictions for the future of humanity become the official thesis of the ecological movement with the publication in the following year of The Limits to Growth, A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind, which presented the state of research in the domain of population growth since the 1950s and 1960s.24 This thesis

24Meadows, Donella H., Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, William Behrens III, The Limits to Growth, A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind, second edition (New York: The New American Library, 1972), 152: The report took care to present its views as being in opposition to the optimistic belief in technological progress: “The hopes of the technological optimists center on the ability of technology to remove or extend the limits to growth of population and capital. We have shown that... the application of technology to apparent problems of resources depletion or pollution or food shortage has no impact on the essential problem, which is exponential growth in a finite and complex system. Our attempts to use even the most optimistic estimates of the benefits of technology in the model did not prevent the ultimate decline of population and industry,
rejected the optimistic belief in an ever increasing comfort brought by
an ever increasing scientific and technological expertise. The thesis
was the work of a team of seventeen experts from the Massachusetts
Institute of Technology and it was sponsored by the Club of Rome (with
financing, among others, from Volkswagen). The Club of Rome was an
informal international association of seventy-five or so members from
twenty-five countries, which brought together expertise in various
scientific and administrative domains. The association had met first in
Rome in 1968 at the instigation of Dr. Aurelio Peccei, an Italian
economist closely affiliated with Fiat and Olivetti. The ideas voiced in
the report did not originate in the 1970s, but in the 1960s, when
ecological ideas did not have the political importance they were to have in
the 1970s, especially with the impact of the report for the Club of
Rome. It is however in the 1960s that the first ecological best sellers
brought the ecological theses to the attention of the greater public. It
has already been mentioned how the first effort at popularising the
ecological theses, Rachel Carson’s 1962 Silent Spring found an echo in
an early collection of assemblages made by Smithson in the same year. In
1968, four years before the report for the Club of Rome, there appeared
another major publication, the immensely popular book by Paul Erlich,
The Population Bomb, which, in the space of two years, from May 1968
to February 1970, was the object of thirteen successive reprints in
pocket book format. While gaining more ground politically, it is only in
the 1980s that the ecological theses will reach official status.

The dream of a technologically engineered, “great” society was rapidly
coming to an end under the pressure of several factors other than
ecology. Economically, while the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s
marked the height of corporate power in the United States, both the
U.S.’s world economic dominance and the model of Fordism and
Keynesianism were in decline from the mid-sixties up to the radical
readjustment imposed by the petroleum crisis of 1973. In the mid-1970s,
the extraordinary increase in wealth that the industrially advanced
countries of the Western world had known since the end of the Second
World War came almost to a halt under the shock of successive oil
crises. The early signs of falterings in productivity showed up by the
mid-1960s, and were only intensified with the energy price increases of
1973–1976 which accounts for half of the economic slowdown. Among
those early signs were the increase in importance of the technical
component in the manufacturing sector, as could be seen in the domain of
consumer electronics, which signified a loss in productivity gains (this
is the thesis of the exhaustion of Fordism); and the end of the

and in fact did not in any case postpone the collapse beyond the year
2100.”

26Porter, Gareth et Welsh Brown, Janet, Global Environmental Politics,
27Harvey, David, The Condition of postmodernity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell
Ltd, 1990), 141.
28Hughes, Katherine, “The Challenge Ahead: Economic Growth, Global
Interdependence, and the New Competition," in Chandler, Coming of
Managerial Capitalism, 806ff.
29Lipietz, André, “Derrière la crise: la tendance à la baisse du taux de
postwar Bretton-Wood agreement in 1971, which used gold as the world standard, and signalled America’s weakening position on the world markets.\(^3\) In fact, already at the beginning of the 1970s, both Fordism and Keynesianism would be increasingly unable to maintain the level of prosperity that Americans had come to be accustomed to.\(^3\) This was in part due to the fact that, after 1973, the large American corporations, faced with the new globalization of business and competition from Japan and Europe, and weakened by their own successes at offshore manufacturing, would cease to possess the complete control they had come to hold on all aspects of production and consumption in the United States.\(^3\)

On the ideological level also, the myth of a technologically engineered happiness soured during those years. Daniel Bell pointed out how suddenly euphoria shifted to uneasiness:

> For one thing, the cybernetic revolution quickly proved to be illusory... The image of a completely automated production economy - with an endless capacity to turn out goods - was simply a social-science fiction of the early 1960s. Paradoxically, the vision of Utopia was suddenly replaced by the spectre of Doomsday. In place of the early-sixties theme of endless plenty, the picture by the end of the decade was one of a fragile planet of limited sources whose finite stocks were being rapidly depleted, and whose wastes from soaring industrial production were polluting the air and waters. Now the only way of saving the world was zero growth. What is striking in this change is the shift in attention from machinery to resources, from man's mastery of nature to his dependence upon its bounty.\(^3\)

Other than ecology, there were several other critical discourses that came into greater prominence during the 1970s including consumer protection,\(^3\) feminism and human rights.

The hostility to technology and the “administered world” was found among the student populations on both sides of the Atlantic during those same years. It was shown how the campus of the University of Nanterre was the mirror of that of the University of Berkeley in terms of generating hostile feelings from the students. It was certainly present during the May events, where, as Castoriadis said, the students expressed through their rebellion, an hostility vis-à-vis all bureaucratic systems.\(^3\) The same hostility was visible in the students in the United States who saw

\(^{30}\)Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 137.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 141-142.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 191.

\(^{33}\)Bell, *Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, 463.

\(^{34}\)Especially the efforts of Ralph Nader, who, in *Unsafe at any Speed*, published in 1965, made the most influential consumer protection plea of the 1960s. Because Mr. Nader has dealt with the most desirable consumer object ever made but also the most dangerous - the car - his individual impact on society (solely in terms of protecting lives) puts him, by himself, almost on a par with the other major movements of social change.

\(^{35}\)Castoriadis, “Mouvement des années soixante,” 41-42.
in the university an institution devoted to "producing for society's needs as defined by government and the large corporations." Instead of bureaucratie, the name the American students focused on was "corporate liberalism." The Students for a Democratic Society, which had authored the Port Huron Statement, did also in their subsequent 1963 statement, America and the New Era, which dealt with the Kennedy administration as the main political culprit for the malaise in society, mention corporate liberalism as the doctrine governing his administration. The SDS accused it of being, as Gitlin summarizes "mired in what... SDS called "corporate liberalism," meaning that Kennedy was tinkering with the corporate economy in order to maintain it. His Keynesian economics was mixed with "faith in the essential genius of the American corporate system." Kennedy was skimpy with jobs, health, and antipoverty action. Central economic planning was necessary, but the New Frontier was inching, if anything, toward an "elitist" brand of national planning under corporate aegis."

By 1968, a member of the Art Workers' Coalition, Smithson made the connection between technology and the military-industrial complex behind the Vietnam war effort in an explanation for his refusal written in 1968 to participate in the United States section of the Sao Paulo Biennal. Smithson's solution to the problem of the artist's relation to technology and industry, the offering of expertise in "reclaiming" the land, will not be followed by others and remains a curiosity in terms of artistic strategies. Buren's involvement with official artistic events such as the Salons and the Biennale will be much more premonitory of the direction toward which contemporary art practice will go in the 1970s and 1980s. It brings up the question of the involvement of artists in the take over of the artistic world by a stratum of rapidly developing artworld managers. State sponsoring of the arts knows a rapid increase starting in the 1950s. The intent is to assist in forming a national patrimony. This assistance has something in common with the pacification of social conflicts by the welfare State, and is an expression of the doctrine of growth liberalism in the United States and of benevolent State interventionism in France. This has the advantage for political power of diffusing any potential for a questioning of its authority, while at the same time giving to the State the appearance of a benevolent, and liberal entity. This situation is different from what

37Gitlin, Years of Hope, 130.
38300 New York artists and observers will meet at the School of Visual Arts in 1969 for a forum titled "open Public Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of The Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform, and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers' Coalition." In a gesture similar to Buren's own legal papers, there were suggestions of reforms in artists' rights on the legal, legislative and loosely political levels offered by the Art Workers' Coalition. See Lippard, Lucy, R., "The Art Worker’s Coalition: Not a History," in Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), 10ff.
39Jones, Machine, 330. The letter was addressed to Gyorgy Kepes.
40Rochlitz, Subversion, 12.
41Ibid., 180: "En désamorçant un potentiel de contestation et en l'accueillant dans le patrimoine national, elle confère à l'État à la
prevailed in the modern period, at the time of the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s, which had a program to change the world through art and were faced with a hostile institution. The institutionalization of the art world since the late 1960s had meant that, rather than attempts at changing the world, there is a concerted will to manage the creation and the exhibition of art through the different channels of funding and exhibiting.

In North America and in Western European countries, public funding for the arts was developed during the 1960s, while at the same time was developed a desire, on the part of the state, to promote a national contemporary art scene. It was also in the 1960s that the international, contemporary art scene as we now know it came to be constituted. The contemporary art movement as such started with the beginning of the 1960s, got known in the second half of the 1960s, and lasted up until the contemporary art market crash of 1974 to 1978, following the petroleum crisis. Public support for the arts was perhaps the single most important factor behind the greater artistic freedom and the radical nature of the artistic propositions offered in the 1960s and early 1970s.

In France, the managerial turn in the arts was and still remains unique, amongst industrially advanced countries, for the scope and the intensity with which it carried on the institutionalization of art practice and art exhibiting: now it has a ministère de la culture, a Délégation générale aux arts plastiques, which takes its money from the Centre national des arts plastiques, and whose power is decentralized through the Directions régionales des affaires culturelles aided by the conseillers artistiques régionaux; the State collects works of art through the Fonds régionaux d’art contemporain, the Fonds national d’art contemporain and a Fonds d’incitation à la création artistique, and the Musée national d’art moderne; the system is closely surveyed, as it should be in the country of Michel Foucault, with the help of inspecteurs à la création. This bureaucratization of art will be intensified at the beginning of the 1980s, when the financial involvement of the State will be doubled in quantity.

fois le prestige du mécène et l’aura du pouvoir démocratique généreux, ouvert aux critiques les plus subversives.”
42Ibid., 13.
43Ibid., 176: “La volonté de changer le monde par l’art s’est insensiblement transformée en projet de gérer la création et la présentation de l’art.”
47Michaud, Yves, L’Artiste et les commissaires, quatre essais non pas sur l’art contemporain mais sur ceux qui s’en occupent (Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1989), 18 and 19; and Crise de l’art contemporain, 42.
48Michaud, Crise de l’art contemporain, 42.
has meant the creation of a new category of cultural bureaucrats, the agents culturels of all kinds, as well as the many directors for the numerous new centers built. This system favors the apparition of a new type of cultural bureaucrat, up to date, a member of the international jet set, and a mid-level manager: "On voit alors apparaitre un type de fonctionnaire/ commissaire new look, qui tient à la fois du fonctionnaire et du cadre branché, ce qu'on pourrait appeler des apparatchiks cool. Ils ont l'assurance que donne la sécurité d'emploi, l'arrogance de ceux qui fréquentent les allées du pouvoir et l'indépendance tranquille du manager culturel qui ne manage pas son propre argent." At this point, it is perhaps interesting to remember that one of the benefits of incorporation is that the management does not have a personal monetary interest in the running of the entreprise. In this sense, to be an agent culturel in France or a curator in the United States, or a sales manager at GM amounts to the same. The intimate relation that art entertains with the institution creates an "image problem" for the artists in the eyes of their public. To the difficulty in understanding what are sometimes very difficult artistic propositions, is added the suspicion that what is offered to the public is the product of a collusion between the artist and their managers, in a closed circuit, without consideration for the public, despite the usual claims to democratizing access to the arts. That the artist now must necessarily receive a university education, and very often ends up teaching in an institution is a mark of his or her growing assimilation into the structure of management of art.

Smithson, and such will be the prerogative of heroic figures, will die early, and his work remains safely within the period begun in the 1960s and ending with the first petroleum shocks of 1973 and 1976. Buren has gone on. Buchloh has analyzed a work by Buren made during the period of economic restrictions that followed the oil crisis of 1973. At such moments, economic restrictions typically provoke a switch to the right in ideology, expressed in the search for a national identity in cultural terms. This comes when, ironically, the national bourgeoisie, because

49Ibid., 43.
50Ibid., 20.
51Rochlitz, Subversion, 187: "Dans la mesure où le rapport entre l'artiste et les musées s'est inversé, la radicalisation étant désormais gérée et par là neutralisée aussi bien par le marché que par les pouvoirs, le public a l'impression d'être la dupe de l'art contemporain. À ses yeux, l'artiste, que déjà il ne comprenait pas, n'est même plus moralement de son côté en tant qu'adversaire des pouvoirs, mais semble se liguer avec eux pour organiser le déplaisir public."
52Michaud, Crise de l'art contemporain, 40: "Le repli sur la carrière d'enseignement n'a pas seulement une signification économique: il implique une fonctionnarisation de l'artiste et une académisation de sa position."
54For Raymonde Moulin and Rainer Rochlitz after her, the same desire to build on a national culture is present already in the 1960s at the
of the crisis, is selling out national resources to multinationals. The artists themselves develop personal modes for expressing an esthetic of regionalism, a preservation of national cultural identity-heritage to keep receiving funding from cultural civil servants. Buchloh is speaking of the various national schools that sprung up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially in Germany as Neo-Expressionism, and in Italy, as the Trans-Avant-garde. Esthetic, says Buchloh, will end up as a form of cultural civil service, whose function it is to maintain the myth of individual creativity when creativity and individuality are actually denied.

The work by Buren that Buchloh is commenting upon, Les Couleurs: Sculptures, 1975-77 (fig. 55) is destined to be in the permanent collection of the Musée Beaubourg in Paris. To Buchloh, Buren is playing on those themes of nationalism and official expression. The colors of the stripes chosen by Buren refer to the national flag, and the work in general speaks of monumentality and of official public signs and buildings. The signs Buren has installed are flaglike, and are put on top of public and commercial buildings that represent enforced identity and governmental power, or corporate power. There they cease to be mere aesthetic objects, and become semi-functional objects, of common usage by their shape and position. The ambiguous position of the flaglike objects between artistic reification and public use value is the most crucial problem in twentieth-century art, according to Buchloh, and was expressed in all relevant artistic achievements such as Russian Constructivism and Productivism, and "its capitalist complement," Duchamp's Ready Made. The artist cannot compete with the production of mass produced goods, so he borrows from them. Buren's work is decoration, because art itself is bound to the superstructure and must manifest itself as decoration and fashion. This presents a paradoxical situation since the work of art, to be avant-garde, should challenge present social and political conditions, but ends up reaffirming present social and political conditions as part of the present "superstructure."

The remarks made by Enteman on the ideology of managerialism might apply to its art world equivalent. Managerialism is an ideology that has replaced capitalism and socialism as the shaping force in modern society. Capitalism can be described in its essential moral basis as the system for consumers, and a system which considers all equal as consumers, and in such a situation owners of firms have to please the consumers because if not, the market forces, that is, consumers' demand, will drive them out of business. This moral principle is however

beginning of the State involvement in funding and sponsoring art production and exhibition, thus in a period that corresponds to an economic boom. The art however is more internationalist in terms of esthetics.

56Ibid., 10.
57Ibid., 13.
58Ibid., 14-15.
59Ibid., 22
60Enteman, Managerialism, 192, and chapters 3 and 4.
61Ibid., 54.
weakened by the development of corporations and especially by the legal tool of incorporation which produces a cleavage between managers, who are no longer owners, and stockholders who are no longer managers. Managers are not responsible, personally, for the economic performance of their firm. Freed from the risk of personally losing money if their company does not perform well at a given period, they can, in their decision making process, have only the interests of their organization in mind, and not those of the consumers. The same is also true for the stockholders, who are not personally responsible for the management decisions taken by the firms they invest in, since incorporation frees them from the risk of personal bankruptcy, and have no personal interest in whether the corporation does accomplish its mandate to serve the consumers well. The development of the corporation has not only contributed to the weakening of consumer power, but also of government influence in daily affairs. Corporations that operate on a global, international level are losing a sense of national identity. The government is left without organic property, and can no longer function as an ideology. Nationalism is replaced by managerialism, the ideology created for and by the managers. However managerialism, unlike capitalism (or socialism), cannot be justified on moral grounds. Managerialism impedes the democratic process since it is not put in place to express the views of the citizens of a given country, nor of the State, but that of the decision making process that arises out of the interactions between various teams of managers from different organizations, as they engage in transactions aimed solely at the benefits of their respective corporations. Those managers are not accountable to the public nor to the State because they do not take the interests of these political entities in mind when making their decisions.

The situation decried by Buchloh has also been analyzed by Rainer Rochlitz. Rochlitz singles out the installation as the typical example of an art that pretends to be subversive, but that in fact could not exist without the support of the institution. An art that expresses "le modèle du rapport de force entre artiste et institution dans le cadre de cette dernière." What the interventions of Smithson and Buren revealed early on is certainly the inescapable character of managerialism. Just as, as has been shown in the introduction, the attempt, by Duchamp, at controlling the industrial culture of his time by borrowing from its vocabulary of forms and objects leads ultimately to failure, with Duchamp reduced to making copies of his own works and thus aping the serial, mass production of identical objects he had at first attempted to criticize and subvert with his ready-mades, the two artists here discussed will likewise be swallowed up by industry. Buren's and Smithson's parallel attempts at coming to grips with the evolution of that same industrial culture in the mid-1960s will lead them to different results, partly because of Smithson's untimely death, that will lead however to the same end. Smithson's claims to redeem the mining industry will in fact mean a proposal to collaborate to improve its corporate citizen's image as an environmentally conscious organization; Buren's in situ analysis of

---

62 Ibid., 65.
63 Ibid., 183-192.
64 Ibid., 154-155.
65 Rochlitz, Subversion, 206.
institutional events will only, and increasingly, signify a confirmation of the institutional sway over the contemporary art world, and the influence of managerialism on contemporary art practice.
Fig. 53 View of Daniel Buren's office, Paris, 1987.
Fig. 54 Robert Smithson, *Bingham Copper Mining Pit-Utah Reclamation Project*, 1973, photostat with wax and graphite, 52.1 x 35.6cm.
Fig. 55 Daniel Buren, “Les couleurs: sculpture,” June, 1977. A view of one of fifteen flags installed on Parisian buildings, visible from the southern terrace of the centre Georges-Pompidou and displayed at the occasion of the acquiring of the work by the M.N.A.M. as well as “Les formes: peintures.” Buren’s flag is visible at the bottom of the image.
Bibliography


"Buren : pourquoi?," *Art Vivant*, no. 3 (July 1969).


Estienne, Charles, "La Fin des "ismes"", Combat-Art, no. 59 (1 June 1959).


Gitlin, Todd, Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam revised trade edition, 1993).


Lefort, Claude, *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979)


Morris, Robert, "Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation", *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980).


Rochlitz, Rainer, Subversion et Subvention (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).


Yves Klein (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1983).

Yves Klein, 1928-1962, Selected Writings (London: The Tate Gallery, 1974).